

Take Up the Cross of Jesus

Scripture: Matthew 26:36 – 56

Second Sunday of Lent 2024

During this season of Lent, we will be referring the 'Stations of the Cross'. The Stations of the Cross are 15 stations that are located around the inside of all Catholic Churches. I spent many a Wednesday night doing the Stations of the Cross during Lent with my brothers and my father. I could do the Stations of the Cross in 30 minutes, but my father would usually take TWO HOURS!

The first station of the Cross is 'Jesus is Condemned'. At this station we are supposed to remember Jesus' time in the Garden praying to his Father so that this cup of torture and death will pass from him, but Jesus ends with the words – 'But *Let your will be done.*'

Jesus' prayer in the Garden of the Olive Press is like a coin. Every coin has two sides. The front is called 'Heads' which comes from Roman times. Usually on Roman coins the head of the Roman head of state was printed on the coin. The back of the coin is called 'Tails' because the British ten pence depicted the raised tail of a lion. 'Heads' for Roman Head of State and 'Tails' for a British lion's tail.

Like a coin, Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane possesses two sides. In the deepest hours of His life; on the night before Jesus will die on a cross, Jesus prayed – *Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.*

When Christ says – *Take this cup* – that is the raw honesty of prayer. Jesus reveals His personal desire. This is what I want done.

Then Jesus turns the coin by praying – *yet not my will but yours be done.* That is the side of abandoning ones will in favor of God's will. Abandoning ourselves to God begins when we simply say – But do what you want God!

This two sided prayer by Jesus in the Garden of the Olive Press has both sides of prayer – *take the cup from me* which is what we want God to do; and *yet not my will* which is what God will do.

Yes, there are two sides of Jesus and two sides of prayer. So what might we learn if we prayed honestly and with complete abandon as Jesus did? What situation are we facing right now where we can pray honestly yet abandon ourselves to God?

This story of Jesus' time in the Garden of the Olive Press is one of the stories that I can most relate to the disciples. Jesus tells his disciples: Peter, James, and John - to stay awake on pray for him as he goes off by himself in the garden. The disciples build a fire and sit around the fire.

Have you ever sat around a fire and watched the fire – boy, does a campfire make you sleepy! After praying for some time, Jesus returns to his disciples and finds them asleep.

After praying and finding his disciples asleep several times, Jesus hears a noise coming. It is Judas leading some soldiers to arrest Jesus. Jesus is captured that night. Judas tells the soldiers that he will identify Jesus by kissing him on the cheek which becomes a sign in the mafia that you are going to be killed when the mafia boss kisses you on the cheek!

During his capture, Peter takes a sword from one of the soldier and strikes him, cutting off his ear. But Jesus tells Peter to put the sword away and Jesus heals the soldier. Jesus heals one of those who are coming to do harm to him!

Jesus is taken away by the soldiers. Jesus is stripped of his garments and interrogated and tortured. They even put a crown of thorns upon his head. Jesus is finally taken before Pontius Pilate to be tried.

The result of all this is that Jesus is condemned to die on a cross. Jesus is unjustly condemned by those who do not understand him and those who are frightened by what Jesus said and did.

Perhaps they sensed that Jesus could make a difference? Perhaps they thought Jesus could turn their world upside down?

Are we condemning people unjustly? Do we continue to condemn people because of the color of their skin, their gender, their beliefs, and their choices? Do we condemn people because of their disability or because they do not conform to our way of thinking?

The list of ways we condemn people is endless!

Do we believe in forgiveness? Does society really forgive? Do we believe that people can really change or do we continue to condemn people over and over again?

Let us take up the cross of Jesus! Let us not condemn people but forgive people!

So on this second Sunday of Lent, let us remember that Jesus was arrested and condemned to die on a cross unjustly.

For the next three Sunday of Lent, we will look at Jesus falling three times as he carries his cross to Calvary.

Let us pray:

We adore you O Christ and we praise you because you have redeemed the world.

What a terrible injustice was done to you. Your own people and Roman judges and the soldiers did not recognize that you were the Son of God. Give us the grace to see, respect, and love you in all people both innocent and guilty. Change our hearts so that we may see with new eyes those we might otherwise condemn. AMEN.