

A Lenten Story – Good Friday Afternoon

by
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The time, late Good Friday afternoon, two citizens of Jerusalem meet on the street. One says to the other,

“Where were you this morning?”

“Why what happened?”

“Didn’t you hear? They killed Jesus this morning!”

“You’re kidding they did what?”

“You got it, they crucified Him this morning.”

“How do you know?”

“Well you know me, I don’t like to get involved, but my curiosity got the better of me. It all started last night about 9 p.m. I was passing the Mount of Olives, you know, the garden on the road to the Kidran valley.”

“Yes, I know the place. That was one of Jesus’ favorite spots.”

“You got that right. Well, any way, as I was passing, some soldiers and priests had Jesus tied up and were leading Him away. You know me, I don’t like to get involved; but my curiosity got the better of me so I followed, at a good distance of course. I don’t like to get too close. They took Jesus to the High Priest, Annus.”

“They did! How come Annus got involved?”

“I don’t know, I was too far away to hear. But you know Annus, he likes to get involved with everything; he’s up for reelection as High Priest next year. Maybe he saw some votes in it. Well anyway, they took Jesus to the

Governor's courtyard.”

“Then what happened?”

“Again I can't tell you, I was too far away and I wasn't going to get involved; but I heard others talking, something about being the Son of God.”

“That's ridiculous; they wouldn't kill Him for that! Everyone knows Jesus is a little off-base with His love talk, with His repentance routine, but come on! They wouldn't kill Him for that.”

“Well any way, it was about midnight and I was tired so I went home. I really thought they were making a mountain out of a mole hill. But this morning around 8:30 I heard all this commotion right outside my door. Well, you know me, my curiosity got the better of me, so I went to the window to see. Right there in front of my door, right in front of my door mind you, the soldiers were making Jesus carry this big heavy cross. I was amazed, I couldn't believe my eyes! Jesus must have had a really rough night. He was all bloody and sweaty and staggering. Do you remember that young woman radical who lives in the next street?”

“You mean Veronica?”

“Yes, that's her, Veronica. Well, she ran out and wiped Jesus' face with a towel. Do you know, a soldier pushed her away and she fell and scraped her hands and knees! I keep telling everyone, don't get involved it doesn't pay, you just get hurt. Well anyway, right after that Jesus fell down and couldn't get up so a soldier grabbed your neighbor, what's his name?”

“Simon!”

“Oh yes, Simon. Well, he grabbed Simon and made him carry the cross the rest of the way to Golgotha.”

“He did! What did Simon say?”

“Nothing, he was too scared. He just carried the cross and Jesus followed.”

“Oh that’s terrible, that’s terrible.”

“Well wait; you didn’t hear the worse part yet.”

“What’s that?”

“They nailed Jesus to the cross.”

“Oh my God, you mean they really used a nail? The Romans always tied their prisoners to the cross. How come they nailed Him?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know. Those Romans really know how to be cruel.”

“God, I’m glad I wasn’t there; I might have done something stupid and got myself involved.”

“Anyway, it’s over, Jesus died at noon time. It’s too bad; you know, Jesus wasn’t really such a bad fellow. As a matter of fact, I sort of liked Him. He was different. I never understood what He said, but He was likeable. He never hurt anyone. In fact He helped a lot of people.”

“Yes, I know what you mean.”

“Remember the time He changed water into wine over at Cana?”

“Yes, and the time He cured the 10 lepers?”

“Remember the time He restored the blind beggar’s sight; and the time He made the cripple walk?”

“Remember when He fed the 5000 people with two fish and a couple of loaves of bread.?”

“Yes, I was there. I never understood how He did that.”

“You know, I met Him one time.”

“You did! What did He say?”

“He told me to sell all my possessions and give the

money to the poor, and then to follow Him. You know I almost did it. I'm glad now that I didn't do it because He's dead and where would I be now? Even His close friends ran away, and now they have nothing, no fishing boats, no leader, nothing."

"See, I keep telling you that's what getting involved gets you - nothing!"

"Well, it's over now; it's going to be a long time before anyone like Him comes along again."

"Yes, I know what you mean."

"Well, keep your eyes open and let's see what Annus and Pilot get out of this."

During Lent we sing a very daunting song. ["Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"] I wonder what your answer might be. If we recognize that the nail that holds Jesus to the cross represents our sins of commission, our sins of omission, our sins of indifference, then yes, we were there. If we recognize the Gospel of the Passion of our Lord as the acts of commission and the story of the two citizens of Jerusalem as the acts of omission and indifference, then yes, we were there. You and I will continue to be there because Jesus is nailed to the cross every day. Day after day, over and over in an endless line from the first sin of Adam to the last sin at the end of the world. In this we can see the magnitude of the ONE act of redemption by Jesus. The question is not whether sin exists, but whether sin exist for me in my life. Isn't sin what Good Friday is all about; isn't sin what the crucifixion is all about?

The world likes to tell us that the concept of sin is old fashioned, that sin does not exist. Why do they say this? They say this because if we agree, then the crucifixion never takes place, then or now. If sin does not exist, then we are guiltless and who is so foolish as to say this. Some will say “I didn’t do anything wrong.” It’s always the other person who is wrong or we say the other person made me do it. Isn’t that what Adam said: “Eve made me eat the apple.” Isn’t that what Eve said: “The serpent tricked me, so I am not responsible.” And that, my friends, is the biggest sin of all, the biggest nail of all that holds Christ on the cross: OUR PRIDE. To think that we sinners think we are so guiltless. To think that we think we are so perfect. To think that we sinners are saints! Only those who acknowledge their sinfulness are saints in heaven. Wasn’t it pride that put Lucifer in hell?

The curse of mankind, the curse of society is to avoid responsibility, to avoid being guilty of anything; so we do nothing and we are still guilty of omission and indifference and non-involvement. The fear of guilt drives us in all directions; some even to suicide like Judas. It takes courage to ask for forgiveness, it takes courage to be humble. It is weakness to run from ourselves and the reality of what we are; the reality of what we could be. For where can we hide? Our pride cannot hide us; it only covers us with a transparent mask. If we do not want guilt then let us be humble. If we do not want guilt then let us be sinless by asking for forgiveness by and confessing our sins.

We have one advantage over the two citizens of

Jerusalem; we know the outcome of the Good Friday tragedy. We know that Christ's power is strong enough to overcome death. It is strong enough to endure our weaknesses. It is strong enough to remove our guilt and it is strong enough to forgive our sins, even the biggest sin if we only ask; if we only overcome our indifference.

It is our acceptance of guilt; it is our sorrow for our sins in our resolution to forgive others that we remove the nails from Christ's hand and feet. We free Him from the immobility of the cross; we free Him to work through us; we free Him to be mobile through us; we free Him to work through us. It is our humility that makes us an instrument of His peace. It is through a freed Christ, in us and within us that we are able to enjoy the true promise of a joyful and happy resurrection; that we are able to enjoy the true promise of Easter.