

# “Caiaphas”

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Romans 8:1-11; John 11:47-53

This portion of John’s Gospel contains one of the most important prophecies from one of the most unusual sources. Caiaphas, the high priest was not interested in finding out whether or not Jesus was the true Messiah, and was far more concerned with maintaining his comfortable lifestyle than seeking the truth or striving to live according to the will of God. Yet, he speaks these words of truth: “it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish!” In these words, Caiaphas expresses the heart and soul of the Gospel. This has been God’s plan since He spoke to Adam in the garden.

As we heard in our OT reading, it was the Lord’s will to crush the Suffering Servant – the Christ; the Messiah. Adam and all of his children could be saved from the sting of death because God sent one man to die – the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of Satan.

As heartless as it seems for these so-called religious leaders to plot and kill an innocent man, we do not see the fullness of their allegiance to Satan until we look at the context surrounding this meeting of the Council. This meeting was called because some people had come and told the leaders of the Pharisees what

Jesus had just done.

What was the terrible thing that Jesus had done that made it necessary that He be killed? He had just raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus rising from the dead is what caused them to say: “If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

The chief priests and Pharisees had always known that Jesus was performing miraculous signs, but they could explain to the people that either He did them by the power of Satan [Mt. 9:34], or that it was some sort of trickery [Mt. 27:64]. However, their opposition to Jesus was wearing thin with many, and with Lazarus being dead and buried for four days before Jesus even came to the city of Bethany (which is only a couple miles outside of Jerusalem), there was no way for Caiaphas to explain away this miracle – which is especially troubling for Caiaphas. He is a Sadducee, so he does not believe in angels or life after death (when you are dead, you are dead).

Problem is: Lazarus is no longer dead. And even a Sadducee would have to admit that no one but God has the power to raise someone from the dead. Rejoice that God has the power to raise you from the dead. No one but God’s Holy Spirit can breathe life into dead bones. Either Jesus was a true prophet of God, or He was the Son of God Himself. Either way, Caiaphas could not let Him live if he was going to maintain his social status and power over the people.

Once again, we see clearly that people who have their minds made up to oppose Christ and His teaching will continue to oppose Him no matter what evidence or miracles are witnessed by them. The miracles did not convince Caiaphas or the majority of the Council. But that should not surprise us. We

know that it is only through the gift of faith, brought by the Holy Spirit through God's Word and Sacraments, that any of us are saved.

And some of these members of the Sanhedrin were saved. It was Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea who prepared Christ's body for burial and provided the tomb [Jn. 19:38-39]. Later on, after Christ's resurrection, we know that many of the priests and Pharisees did come to faith. You can say that it was because of miracles that they came to faith – in particular, the miracle of Jesus' resurrection. There is an empty tomb in Jerusalem, and everybody knows about it. The only question is, "How did it get empty?" Luke records, as the Good News of Jesus spread through Jerusalem, "a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" [Acts 6:7]. Many of them could only deny God's Word for so long.

Those priests witnessed the Temple curtain being torn in two. No one could deny this event occurring at the time Jesus died. Also, many priests heard the prophecy of Caiaphas and perhaps recognized that it was fulfilled in a way that the chief priest had not planned. After Christ's resurrection, perhaps the prophecy of Caiaphas, when fulfilled, was what finally opened the eyes of some of the priests, and they realized that it was indeed better for them that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. The Lord does work in mysterious ways.

It was a great injustice that Jesus Christ was arrested, beaten, and crucified. Those who planned this death knew it was a great injustice. Caiaphas was being a cynical, heartless politician who ordered the death of an innocent man in order to maintain the political status quo.

But for the believers in Jesus' day, and for us, we can see beyond the

politics of what Caiaphas meant to say. We understand what the Holy Spirit meant for us to hear. It was better for one man to die than for all of us to perish on account of the guilt of our sins. Christ's death was totally unjust, and there was no guilt found in Jesus except the guilt He took from us. We are the ones who deserve what He suffered, but that is the reason we give thanks to God.

God had a plan. The Law, which demands punishment for sin (and the wages of sin is death), that Law had to be fulfilled. Justice had to prevail. And God's justice did prevail. As Paul says in our Epistle reading, in Christ you have been set free from the Law of sin and death. One man died so that we can live. As Jesus says, there is no greater love than this.

Which is why we continually return and give thanks to God that He is not merely a God of justice, but rather, He is a God of mercy, grace, and forgiveness who brings resurrection and life. The message of the Gospel is not merely a message of justice, but it is a message of love. Justice did prevail. The Law was satisfied.

God "sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (as St. Paul says) as a sacrifice for our sins, because He loved us; there is no other reason for what He did.

We give thanks to God that He has the power to raise the dead, as He raised Lazarus, and as Christ was raised. We know that through our Baptism, the dry bones of our sinful nature have been raised to a new life in Christ. And we greet each day confident of the future – confident in the words of Caiaphas, "it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish!" Amen.