

“I Am the Resurrection and the Life”

John 11:17-27, 38-53

This passage contains one of the most important prophecies from one of the most unusual sources. Caiaphas, the high priest who hated everything about Christ and was far more concerned with maintaining his comfortable lifestyle than obeying the will of God, 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, the Good News of Jesus Christ, and does not even know it. He is totally blind to the things of God.

However, 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 Sanhedrin. 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. This 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, there was no way for the chief priests or Pharisees to explain away this miracle.

No one but God has the power to give life. 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, the chief priests and Pharisees could not let Him live if they were going to maintain their social status and their 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 these men. 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 anyone is 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 religious leaders of the Jews received the Good News of salvation in Christ. 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 Christ died. Also, many priests heard the prophecy of Caiaphas and 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. He believed the Jewish tradition that when the Messiah came, the Messiah would rally the people and overthrow the Gentiles occupying the Holy Land -- namely the Romans. This would not be good for Caiaphas because the Romans allowed the chief priests to have a great deal of power and influence. If there were a revolution, Caiaphas knew that the Romans would come and take away the chief priests place and nation (which the Roman General Titus did in 70 A.D., when he destroyed the city of Jerusalem after the Zealots tried to throw out the Romans).

But for the believers in Jesus' day, and for us, we can see beyond the political aspects 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 Christ 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.

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 lesson, in Christ you have been set free from the Law of sin and death. And it is better that one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation perish.

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. The message of the Gospel is not a message of justice, but it is a message of love. God offered His Son 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 Jesus, "I am the Resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die" [Jn. 11:25-26]. Amen.