

+ J. M. J.

In the Gospel according to John we get a very different portrait of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. John makes it clear right from the beginning of the Gospel that Jesus is God, coeternal with the Father. So, the evangelist gives us a different perspective of the passion, one in which Jesus is in full control and lays down his life (cf. John 10:18). We see this when Jesus confronted with soldiers and guards proclaims "I am" at which they fall to the ground. We see this when seemingly it is Pilate on trial. There is no mention of Simon of Cyrene. "Jesus carries the cross himself" (John 19:17).

Jesus' intent was to establish his Church. Consider Jesus' words from the cross as related by John.

"Woman, behold, you son," and to the disciple "Behold, your mother." Jesus gives to the Church, us, the Body of Christ, his mother. She is the one conceived sinless who stood beside him even to the cross. She is our intercessor and our model as we strive to be Christians.

"I thirst." After giving over his sinless mother, Jesus addresses us, sinners. Recall the story of the woman at the well. Jesus says "Give me a drink." As that story continued we know that it was not Jesus who received a drink but it was he who gave the woman living water. This was only possible because he was able to help her realize her sinfulness and come to realize that he was the Christ, the one come to break the bondage of sin. And so our stories of the Lenten season went. Jesus forgives a woman caught in adultery. He gives us the image of the reconciliation of a son with his father. Then he raises Lazarus from the dead showing us that he reverses death, which was the consequence of sin.

Jesus thirsts because he thirsts for us. He wants to give freedom. Sin is the opposite of freedom because when we routinely return to the same sins we recognize that we are enslaved to something of which we feel much guilt about. Today Jesus frees us from that bondage. Sin always represents darkness. We are embarrassed because of our sins and we want to keep our faults hidden. Jesus takes away darkness and brings light. Three times today we will hold up the wood of the cross. Fittingly tomorrow at the Easter Vigil three times we will hold up the Easter candle and proclaim "Christ our light." Finally Jesus changes

death to life. If we let him, Jesus will nail our sins to that tree. United with Jesus and freed from our sinfulness gives us the certain hope that we too will rise with him.

Jesus' final words from the cross are "It is finished." Then Jesus hands over his spirit, meaning he establishes the Church and gives us the Holy Spirit. He meant to do it exactly this way. It was Jesus' intent that his mission of forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life would perpetuate through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We of course receive the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the sacraments and St. John rightly notes that blood and water come flowing from the side of Jesus. Of course blood and water are symbols of the holy Eucharist and baptism.

And if we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit we know that there is no good gift that God will hold back from us. Jesus in his final discourse reminded us that whatever we ask in the Father's name will be given. That is the power of the cross. It is the source of all graces. Part of our celebration then is to pray in length for all good things. As we are praying the one theme that permeates all our intercessions is that unity among all people that Christ fervently prayed for in the garden. It is by the grace of the cross that, that unity will we pray in this life and we with expectant hope long for in the life to come.

Then let us today, stand by our mother, Our Lady of Sorrows so that she may aid us as we stand next to the cross. We acknowledge our sinfulness so that we may be made free through that victory the Christ won for us, and let us remember that it is through Jesus' redemptive work that no good thing will be withheld from us. We shed a tear today so that tomorrow night we may rejoice exceedingly.

May God bless you.