

# Good Friday

John 18-19

April 10, 2020

We are not men, but shadows of men. Like wisps of smoke, our lives show only a sign of a fire God once kindled. Like vapor, our days pass away. **“Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.”** Everything in this world is but dust and ashes. God did not create it that way. We made it thus—by selfish greed, our lust, our inability to stay awake and watch and pray one hour; because of our inability to speak kind things about our neighbors, yet so quick to point out their faults. The more we seek the things of this fallen world, the more we lose them. We are not men, but shadows of men.

Jesus is not a shadow. He is no phantom. Jesus is no mythical hero. *Jesus is true MAN.* Not only “fully human,” although He is both God and Man in one Person. The Son of God was made Man, the Word became flesh. He is truly a Man, the Man God created man to be in the beginning. That man, Adam, fell. But here stands the Second Adam, the one who is true Man – He is not merely made in the image of God; this Man is the image of God. This is the deep meaning in Pilate’s words, **“Behold, the Man!”** For fallen creatures, the all-powerful Creator entered His own creation. For us slaves to sin and death, He became our servant, that by flesh He might free our flesh from its bondage to wickedness and mortality.

Pilate says to the crowd, and He says to you, **“Behold, the Man!”** He stands before you; what is your verdict? Is this the Man you want? Is His kingdom the one you want? Is this the Man whom you will follow, bearing your cross? **“Behold the Man!”** Listen to St. Paul: **“Because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man,”** Adam. But **“much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one Man Jesus Christ”** (Rom. 5.17). Because of that first man, we are not men, not as God created us to be. But this Man Jesus became Man to restore our fallen humanity.

**“Behold, the Man!”** Is this the Man you want? The deeds of our life, and the lusts of our heart, say different. **“Not this Man, but Barabbas!”** Barabbas means “son of the father.” And Barabbas, like all men, is like his father. Barabbas is no petty thief; our English Bibles call him a robber, but he is really an insurrectionist, a notorious murderer who took part in a riotous revolt. Jesus said, **“If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I came from God.... You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him”** [Jn 8.42, 44]. So the crowds reject the true Son of God the Father, choosing instead in Barabbas a son of Adam, the father of sinners.

**“Behold, the Man!”** Is this the Man you want? **“Not this Man, but Barabbas!”** Has that been your choice? Every deceptive word, every ugly thought, every unchaste glance, every greedy obsession, every lazy dismissal of prayer, every setting aside of the least of God’s commands, and you again make the choice – **“Not this Man, but Barabbas!”** Yet still: *“The Shepherd dies for sheep who loved to wander.”*

Have you wandered far from your Shepherd this Lent? Have you never followed Him at all? Then this Gospel is for you. Good Friday declares that He desires your life and your salvation; He has come for lost and wandering sheep.

**“Behold, the Man!”** is the first of a pair: **“Behold, your King!”** Back comes the reply, **“We have no king but Caesar!”** When He gave the people bread and healed the sick, they desired to seize Him and force Him to be King.

But Jesus said, **“My kingdom is not of this world.”** Is yours? What kingdom do you want? What sort of king do you want? One who fills your belly, fills your bank account, and satisfies your quest for pleasure? Which kingdom have you been seeking? Which king do you want? **“Behold, your King!”** **“We have no king but Caesar!”**

In the haunting *Reproaches*, we will soon hear the Lord's lament to us who choose the Caesars and Barabbases of this world: *O My people! "I have fed you with My Word and refreshed you with living water, and you have given me gall and vinegar to drink.... My people, is this how you thank your God?" "Behold, your King!" "We have no king but Caesar!"* Thus they nail their true King to the cross.

**"Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS."** Where is the title placed? *On the cross.* Precisely there, on the instrument of suffering and death, is He shown to be King. That's how He reigns – in self-giving death. He is the Servant-King, the King who loves us to the end, the King who seeks out His lost subjects – not to rule you with an iron fist, but to take on your sufferings, your guilt, your fear, your hopelessness, your despair, your sins, your death. Here He is King—*on the cross.* **"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulders."** His government, His kingship and rule is on His shoulders as He bears His cross. The instrument of His execution becomes His kingly scepter.

We have not lived as men, not as the men God made us to be. We have followed other kings, even wanted to be king ourself. But tonight, behold anew the Man, behold your King who dies that we might become men again. We are the criminals, the innocent Man is convicted. We plundered, He makes amends. We are the sinners, He is punished. Our King is put to death, that we the prisoners might be set free. **"Behold, the Man! Behold, your King!"** By His cross, joy has come into the world. ✠INJ✠