

Good Friday Tenebrae, A ✕ D 2010
John 18-19

In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 How can you call this Friday good? How can you call the day on which the Church commemorates the death the second Person of the Holy Trinity good? How can you call the day on which the Incarnate God was nailed to a cross and hung to die like the vilest criminal good? For whom is this day good? Seemingly not for Jesus, as He hangs thirsting, bleeding, suffering, and dying. Seemingly not for spineless Pilate who will be remembered as the one unwilling—or unable—to stand up to the crowds. Seemingly not for the bloodthirsty crowds; what profit do they have in the death of Jesus?

2 The only one who seems to benefit from the death sentence delivered and carried out on Jesus is Barabbas. A murderer they save; the Prince of Life they slay. Barabbas was accused and justly convicted of insurrection and murder. His crimes were notorious, and his sentence was fair. But when offered the alternatives Jesus or Barabbas, the crowd shouted for the murderer, that he be set free. For Barabbas, this Friday is good indeed. He left the cell, the imprisonment, the death sentence, the looming execution, and simply walked away. Lucky Barabbas.

3 But what about you? How can you call this day good? Because Barabbas goes free. Don't presume yourself unlike the murdering rebel. While your hands have never shed blood, your heart has. He who takes Barabbas' sentence is He who preached, "You have heard it said 'You shall not murder,' but I say to you whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment." Hate and anger and murder, while affecting your neighbor differently, have the same guilty verdict and the same corporal sentence in the divine courtroom. Just keeping your hand from shedding blood is not enough to keep the fifth commandment. We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need. Even if you were able to claim that you've never been angry or hateful, you cannot contend that you have never neglected the need of another. Repent, Barabbas. Your blood-stained thoughts betray your innocent ruse.

4 This is not mere murder Barabbas is convicted of. It's murder in rebellion against the authorities. In rebellion, you have the most in common with Barabbas. What commandment have you broken and not at the same time broken the first commandment. You shall have no other gods. We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Your rebellion is worse than Barabbas' because you have no noble cause. Your cause is yourself. All sin is self-worship, selfishness, self-interest. Even your most righteous seeming works are motivated more by love of yourself than love of your neighbor, which is why you prefer those good works that will be noticed over those that might go without recognition. Repent, Barabbas. Your refusal to submit to the authority of Holy Scripture, your self-love, your tolerance of gods of all sorts are all the rebellion that has earned you this death sentence. The wages of sin is death. Repent, Barabbas, for today is Good Friday.

5 Repent and rejoice, Barabbas. Rejoice murders and seditionists, adulterers and divorcees, men of vile thoughts and women of wicked intentions, gossipers and blasphemers, lazy men and workaholics. Barabbas goes free. The Son of God bears his punishment instead.

6 The list of your sins stops at the death of Jesus on the cross. Barabbas went free, and so do you. Jesus was completely human so that He could redeem fallen humanity. And He was fully divine so that His death would pay the full price for all of humanity's sinfulness. Those who trust in Jesus to deliver them from sin and damnation have no list of sins. St. Paul tells the Colossians, "you who were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the Cross" (Col 2:13-14). That's how God dealt with your sin. He gave it to Jesus, who drank the cup of the wrath of God. Jesus was the biggest sinner that ever lived. Not that He had any sins of His own, but that he took all of your sin as His own.

7 So go with Barabbas into the crowd of sinners set free. Join the cacophony of voices crying "Let His Blood be upon us and upon our children." The crowd hardly knew for what they asked, but it is exactly what they need. Let His Blood be upon us and upon our children. It is the Blood of Jesus, after all, that cleanses us from all sin and guilt.

8 The answer to the question asked by the hymn "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" obviously is "no." You weren't there. But you don't need to be. Let His Blood be upon you and upon your children. If you want the forgiveness of sins, don't go to Calvary. There, the forgiveness of sins was won, but it is not delivered there. If you want to forgiveness of sins, go where the Blood and water from the side of the Crucified Savior still flow. The water pools in the font, and the blood pools in the chalice. Let His Blood be upon you and upon your children. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. And, "Take, drink, the very Blood of Jesus, poured out for you." Let His Blood be upon you and upon your children.

9 Let Your blood be our daily dress, having been clothed with your righteousness through the waters of Holy Baptism, you are they who have washed your robes in the Lamb's blood and made them white. Let Your blood be upon our lips and upon the lips of our children, as you give us Your precious blood to drink for the forgiveness of our sins. Let Your blood be upon us in Your Holy Absolution, as you deliver the benefits of the death of Jesus through the mouths of His ministers. Indeed, let His blood be upon you and upon your children. Let His blood be upon you, Barabbas, and upon your children, that you may go free and live. His Blood forgives your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Jeff Hemmer