

Free Will and Divine Providence Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord/C April 14, 2019 Lk 19:28-40; Phil 2:6-11; **Lk 22:14—23:56** (So fully embodied in Christ, God chose to demonstrate and live out the infinite nature of his love and the power of forgiveness by surrendering completely and absolutely to the cruelty and the malice of his enemies.)

The passion of Christ is a lens through which we can see **the intertwining of human free will with divine care and providence.** It's very important that we understand this intertwining because we live in a world that is victimized by human evil and affected by the ravages of nature, none of which is the providential will of God. But **the providential will of God works through and around all of the choices of humanity, even the most evil.** Now if you listen to yourself, and if you listen to others, you will hear all kinds of statements about God, or questions: why did God do this, or why did God not do that? which are completely irrelevant questions if you understand the intertwining of divine providence and human freedom.

Jesus was a minor problem for the Romans, and a bigger one for the chief priests. The reason was that **the chief priests knew that there was zero chance that a rebellion in Judea could possibly overcome Roman legions.** However once long ago at the time of the first Passover, God had miraculously overcome the forces of the king of Egypt. There were many in Israel at this time, **fanatical zealots, who believed that once again God would intervene miraculously to overcome the power of the Roman Empire.** And so they were willing to risk, to dare, to begin something they couldn't finish. The chief priests, on their part, did not believe that God was going to intervene to overthrow the power of the Roman army, and therefore they were concerned, I would say rightly so, with what was seething in the people. The firm hope of the fanatical zealots really created a real possibility for the kind of mayhem and disorder and conflict that can only happen in the Middle East. So the chief priests wanted to play it safe. They wanted to neutralize the problem, or to put it in modern idiom, **they wanted to rendition Jesus.**

Now the question for believers today: how can God respond to this kind of situation? **How can God work his saving purpose amid this obviously free reign of human will? Jesus himself had taught the infinity of divine love, the need to practice forgiveness, the godly quality of mercy, but people remained basically unchanged and unmotivated.** Jesus came to the end of his life basically having failed to convince and to motivate people to change. After all, words are rather weak motivators and the fact is people are emotionally chained to what they know, to life as they know it. And **most people are not willing to risk something really different. So fully embodied in Christ, God chose to demonstrate and live out the infinite nature of his love and the power of forgiveness by surrendering completely and absolutely to the cruelty and the malice of his enemies.**

Two things are at work here. First an example we can all see, but second, much more important, **the pouring out of divine energy into the human nature and human experience of Jesus. We believe, it is the faith of the Church, that we all can share through the humanity of Jesus in that divine energy and that divine power.** It is the very meaning of our sacramental life. It is the very meaning of our Baptism in which we become, not new individuals but **members of the humanity of Christ.** In the **Eucharist** we are about to celebrate, Jesus' own body and blood and soul and divinity **feed us with this very divine energy and power.** The goal is clearly the transformation of our lowly human nature into a nature like Christ's, into a nature that is fully human and yet divinized and electrified with the Holy Spirit of God.

This week, **Holy Week, is a gift given to us each year to walk with Jesus through his passion and death so that we can grow in gratitude and celebrate with joy the resurrection, which is an anticipation of our own rising to life.**