



Wednesday 25th August 2021

Twenty-first week in Ordinary Time Year 1

Gospel

Mt 23:27-32

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

You are the children of those who murdered the prophets.

Jesus said, 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of corruption. In the same way you appear to people on the outside like good honest men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who build the sepulchres of the prophets and decorate the tombs of holy men, saying, "We would never have joined in shedding the blood of the prophets, had we lived in our fathers' day." So! Your own evidence tells against you! You are the sons of those who murdered the prophets! Very well then, finish off the work that your fathers began.'

Reflection By Fr Graham Fullick

What is it that nails Jesus to the Cross? It is our sins, our sinning, our actual sin. Yes, they are performed positively by commission, enticement and incitement and passively or negatively by neglect, omission, negligence and indifference. Yes, they are performed against Jesus by both Jew and Roman: Scribes, Pharisees, Sanhedrin, Chief Priest, King Herod, Zealot (Judas), Temple Guard, Roman Procurator Pilate, Emperor Caesar and occupying army. The sins, all of them are urged by the false ego of fallen self in all of these people and especially in the "crowd" and "official bystander". There is that crowd and Pharisee and scribe in all of us. That is the point. Not one of these principals would have acted to the extent they did if not for the insecurity of pride, power and influence they felt in the face of Jesus and in the crowds who caused them to entertain and undertake the sins which led to our Lord's seeming worldly downfall. *Jesus the Ego sum, the I am Who Am, the true self, the new Adam, the perfected humanity of all of us was nailed to the Cross firstly by fallen free will. It is Original Sin writ large in and by actual sin that nails Jesus to the Cross. His Messianic mission is indeed to overcome the effects of the Fall by accepting for our sake (we the crowd, the scribe and Pharisee in all of us) to overcome our fallenness in his humanity and to do so by his divinity. Only God on fallen earth, as a child of the fall but not fallen (human but sinless) can re-open the gates of Heaven for us. This the Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity does in spite of the Pharisee and scribe in all of us. That is the beauty of our salvation that Jesus does it even while we are sinners and he is being sinned against grievously.*

Chapter 23 of St. Matthew's Gospel is a prelude to Jesus proceeding to his passion. It is in today's Gospel that Jesus proclaims "Woes" 6 and 7, 7 being the last. Woe 6 to them and us if we have the fake whitewash of the tomb on the outside, looking clean and honest while the dirty bones and corruption are on the inside (Mt 23:27-28). Woe 7 to them and us who beat our breasts and build the tomb of the prophets seemingly honouring their memory, but we are the ones who would kill them (Mt 23:29-32). "Surely not I Lord?" says the Judas or the Peter in us all. But Peter repented. We allow the spirit of evil, the devil to deceive us if we think we have no guile or deceit in us (cf. St. Nathanael/St. Bartholomew's name from Jesus yesterday). Our fallen will deceives us. It is our sins arising out of our collective fallen wills that nail Jesus to the Cross. He says to the scribes and Pharisees and by extension to us if we are prideful and self-righteous: "You are the sons of those who murdered the prophets! Very well then, finish off the work that your fathers began."

This could cause us to lose hope, to think that we are beyond redemption, that our sins are irredeemable, that we commit the unforgiveable sin. It is only human unforgiveness of the pride of false ego which seeks to set ourselves above others that *we say some sins are unforgiveable. In our sin, with the beautiful fear and awe at the judgment of God and seeing clearly in wisdom and knowledge that we have offended Him, we see the gap, a chasm between the Good we want to be and become and the fall, the failure in actual sin. We, created and redeemed by God are not failures. God does not create failures. We fall. We fail, but Christ has come into the world to make us whole and wholesome again. That is what holiness means. The lord is our sole sanctification and justification. We seek falsely like the scribes and Pharisees to justify ourselves. No one can purchase their own salvation. The Lord saves. Our deceitful self causes our Godly self to fall by the glamour of evil, which false good, "glamour" evaporates the instant the sin is committed. We see the bad.*

Our greatest joy, consolation and hope is that despite all of this, we are forgiven. Forgiven! Even as Jesus berates them, he has come into the world to save them, deeming them and all of us worthy of eternal life. Therein is our hope and peace. But how to appropriate the opening of the gates of heaven back on earth in this day? Our life is the time given to us in Eternity to accept to change, to forgive as we have been forgiven ourselves. We are to change and say and do Thy (God's) will on earth as it is in Heaven.

Have you ever noticed children or politicians? If you point out their wrongs they will point out the wrongs of their opponents: the opposing party, the opposing child. As a parent or elector we feel let down and disappointed. Why? Because we see the pathos of the fallen human condition, from where we have the adjective pathetic. There is *neither logic nor virtue in saying "Look at my opponent, they sin too, so I am righteous and justified"*. Or worse, *we have competing identity victimhood. I am wronged more against than I wrong. Kane and Abel: "Am I my brother's keeper?" even after fratricide, murdering your brother. No. In all the examples, they are unjustified, unrighteous and sinners all. And that is all of us before the Lord. "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone."* (Jn 8:7) *Jesus weeps for Jerusalem in Matthew's next chapter. Jerusalem is us. He weeps over the pathos of our fallen free will. Human freedom looks glamorous to us in our fallen Original sin free will. Our true Freedom and lasting sanctification is to conform our will to God's will. Our soul has an intellect, called conscience. With the Lord we can habituate it to virtue not vice. In the Grace flowing from the side of Christ we can stand under the Cross and be washed clean. In God's light we can see light and move from darkness to light. Eventually the shadow of death will not overshadow our bodies, but the Lord will make us holy and radiant in his love, he who is Love itself, Himself in the Son. The greatest love of God is to save us from the hypocrisy of a fallen will which leads us into sin. If we do that and each day little by little stand more upright under the Cross which lightens our yoke, because Jesus takes the weight of hypocrisy, and thereby accept God's loving hesed (Hebrew) deep mercy, then we will become Resurrection people.*

In all the tumult and crowd rabble Jesus knows he will undergo in his Passion, Cross and death, he is at peace as he reclines with his band of Apostles, knowing even that he will be betrayed. He calls them lovingly, "little children". Unless we become innocent in our hearts like little children, we will not have this same peace. After his glorious Resurrection, again on the shores of Lake Galilee (Tiberius) he calls them "my little children". Children are so free and uninhibited by the cares and, we note, "woes" of this world that they have the freedom of the Children of God. In the safe mantle of wonderful parents and a caring village of love, children have the freedom to prosper. Our true Freedom under God is the same. Christ gives us the mantle in his blood, the radiance of his love shed for us. Oh, to be a child of God, to have the virtue of innocent intent and pure saving love at the end. Let us forgive as we are forgiven. Let us look not at others' faults, but at the faultless God who heals all our cracks, especially a fallen free will. We pray: "Lord, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, especially in my will. Make my will Your will. Let me bless your name and worship you in Spirit and in Truth. Let me be a child of the *Our Father, Amen.*"