

Thursday Thoughts

April 3, 2020

Most likely many readers know from the Holy Week liturgy, normally celebrated next week, the Gospel narratives of the Passion of Our Lord, but they may not have thought about how many of the various moments of the Passion can be applied to the situation of Catholics today. Take for example the captivity of Our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. He said many things, each of which is a world in interpretation.

On the Thursday evening Jerusalem is full of pilgrims from Judaea, Galilee and the Diaspora, and there is an electric tension throughout the city because everybody that is anybody is there for the great Feast of the Passover, and the tension centres around Jesus. He is dearly loved by his Apostles and disciples and the large number of people that he has taught and healed and consoled and helped over the last three years of his earthly ministry. On the other hand it seems that the religious authorities of the Temple, the chief priests and the scribes and pharisees, disapprove of him severely, and want him absolutely out of the way. What has he done wrong? And what are they going to do to him? The whole city is abuzz with Jesus.

In this tense atmosphere He has held the Last Supper with His Apostles, adding strange but immensely serious ceremonies to those of the Old Testament, and speaking as though He is about to leave them. He sends Judas Iscariot on his way, and then He leads the others out to the Garden of Gethsemane. The Apostles are frightened and uneasy, but Peter is ready to fight, having brought a sword with him. Eight out of the eleven Jesus leaves behind, taking Peter, James and John still deeper into the olive grove, where He asks them to pray, warning them that if they do not pray, temptation may catch them. Then he leaves them too behind, and He prays alone His terrible Agony in three parts, finding them asleep each time He rejoins them.

Finally Judas Iscariot brings on the Temple Guard to arrest Our Lord, away from the people who risked protecting Him, and betrays Him with a kiss. Peter is furious, whips out his sword, and in defence of his beloved Master slashes off the ear of a servant of the High Priest, only to be told by Jesus to put up his sword. Jesus gives three reasons.

Firstly, "All who take the sword will perish by the sword." Our Lord needs to be not the Knave of Clubs, but the King of Hearts, in the essentially spiritual struggle for the eternal salvation of souls. This He can never do by means of violence which will beget only counter-violence. Secondly, similarly, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" Obviously, the Creator of the universe has ample physical force to overthrow whole armies of enemies of His Son, but that is not how They would win souls, on the contrary. Superior force would merely alienate souls physically crushed by God. And thirdly, "How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" The plan of God, consigned to Holy Scripture, has been from all eternity that Jesus will get through to souls (a minority) by Himself being crushed! Jesus will win by being, as we say today, at least to all appearances, a "loser"! At this point Peter is the one who "loses it," and in total incomprehension of his beloved Master, he runs away, followed by the ten other Apostles.

Like many a male Traditionalist today, Peter is a men's man. He is "macho." He lacks nothing in faith or courage or devotion to his divine Master, but he has slept instead of praying in the Garden. Had he prayed instead of sleeping, his thoughts could have been divine instead of human, all too human, and he might have understood that Jesus was marching to a far higher drum than Peter's, however courageous and devoted Peter may have been. By liberalism or sedevacantism, Catholics today slice off not only an ear of one of the High Priest's servants, they slice off the High Priest's very own head by

soft quasi-heresy or hard quasi-schism. But has not Our Lord Himself warned us that His Church too will win by losing? At world's end (Lk. XVIII, 8), will it not almost have disappeared? Mystery . . .

Kyrie eleison.