

Matthew 26:1-27:66 - “Beneficial Reflections on Christ’s Passion”

Pr. Kurt A. VanFossan (via Martin Luther) - Palm/Passion-A 2023

As we, today and throughout the Holy Week ahead, reflect on Christ’s suffering and death, let me summarize some of what Martin Luther referred to as “true” and “false” ways of reflecting on some of the events of this week in the life of Jesus Christ. I’ll be referring to these true and false ways as beneficial and un-beneficial ways of reflecting on Christ’s passion.

It’s un-beneficial to reflect on Jesus’ suffering and death by simply being angry with the Jews, Judas and the Romans for their part in killing Jesus. This is like us complaining about the sins of others and ignoring our own sins.

Instead, we should be terror-stricken at the thought of what Jesus went through in payment for your sins and mine. For it’s in Jesus death that we see the unchangeable wrath of God with regard to our sins. He was unwilling to spare His beloved Son when He *“laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:6).

Instead of looking at the sins of others who killed Christ, consider that it was your sins and mine that crucified Him. The nails that pierced Jesus’ hands and feet, and the gaping wound in Jesus side were put there by our sins! Consider Peter’s words to the people during Pentecost, when he spoke of Jesus’ death, as also being spoken to you, *“this Jesus whom **you** crucified”* (Acts 2:36). May God enable these words to strike you and me with terror, as it did in the hearts of those who first heard these words.

This is when Christ’s suffering becomes beneficial for us, when it exposes the unbearable weight of each and every one of our sins of thought, word or deed. That weight was placed upon God’s Son, and was not lifted until He was fully dead, forsaken by His Father. *“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”*

Second, when we consider our sins in this light, and are terror-stricken in our conscience, we must then be on guard that our sins do not remain on our conscience.

Instead, trust in God’s promise that your sins were taken out of you and place on Jesus Christ, to make you righteous in His sight. Jesus *“bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed”* (1Peter 2:24). When we see and believe that our sins were laid on Jesus Christ and that He not only suffered and died for them, but also overpowered them by His resurrection, then the freedom from our sins, death and the devil, which Jesus won for us on the cross becomes our freedom. Thanks be to God!

Consider next, in reflecting on Jesus’ Passion, that He went through all this simply because of His love for us sinners. It was His love for you and me that held Him to the cross until He was dead, despite the shame and suffering. *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

Finally, it is of little benefit if we reflect on Jesus’ Passion and His resurrection only during this Holy Week and Easter. Instead, we rightly reflect on Jesus’ death and resurrection when it’s at the center of our lives on a daily basis, slaying the old Adam in us, and raising up our new life of faith in Jesus Christ.

When we have reflected rightly on Jesus’ Passion, it will be evident in our lives by what we do when we confession our sins, rejoice in God’s forgiveness, and love our neighbor. All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[Children's Sermon] One of the reasons the people stopped waving their palm branches after Jesus was arrested by the Romans, was because it didn't look like Jesus was going to be able to help them with whatever troubles they were going through at the time. When they nailed Jesus to a cross, He looked weak, didn't He?

Why, then, did Jesus let the people at that time do such terrible things to Him? So that our sins wouldn't do the same to us. Instead Jesus promises, through His death and resurrection, that when we die believing in Him, we will go to heaven.

Why doesn't Jesus take us to heaven right now? Because He wants to work through us to share His love and the Good News of His salvation with others.

While we are in this world, will we at times get sick, or have some bad things happen to us? Yes, like Jesus, who had bad things happen to Him. But He was willing to go through bad things so that He could save us.

That's one of the reasons we fold our palm branches into crosses. It reminds us of the good things that God bring about even through the bad things in this world, especially when we tell others about Jesus death and resurrection for our salvation.