

Good Friday Tenebrae  
2 April, Anno Domini 2021  
St. John 19:1-42  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

The truth is finally on the table. The Jews unapologetically before God and before man rejected God and confessed their idolatry. "The devil is our father and his Caesar is our king!" They were oh so careful to stay out of the governor's headquarters so they could eat the Passover in remembrance of God's great deliverance of Israel from Egypt. But they had no qualms about crucifying an innocent man, the Lamb of God. They were completely comfortable scorning the Lord who had led them out of slavery, given them the Passover, and brought them to the Promised Land. "We have no king but Caesar." It is probably one of the most evil, vile, and blasphemous things the Jews could have uttered. It was also, sadly, absolutely true. They wanted no king but the sick, perverse, pagan Tiberius Caesar, who had declared himself to be the son of God.

Having once rejected God as God and Creator, man's sinful heart is forever rejecting God's kingdom of truth and righteousness. We willingly enslave ourselves to our passions and the thrill of now. We blindly stumble along inventing works that we think will save us and make us holy, all the while despising the One who created and redeemed us. We refuse His Word and despise the One He sent to rescue us from death. We pay lip service to God but wag our heads in derision at the prospect of walking the cruciform road of humility and piety. Those words that we find so atrocious as we hear them uttered by the Jews, some of the worst blasphemies ever uttered, fill our own hearts every day. We pledge our devotion to governments, to wealth and health, to fun, to convenience, to power and the news cycle, to people's approval and opinion, and to every other false god our hearts can imagine. Isaiah was absolutely right when he said "We all, like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way..." (Is. 53:6) We have chosen gods of our own making, gods who bless and praise the selfish and twisted desires of our flesh. To keep peace with Caesar we have declared God and His Word our enemies.

Repent. Turn away from your idolatry. Cast into the fire all your false caesars who would have the trust and allegiance of your heart. It is this idolatrous rejection of God, the abject and daily rebellion of our sinful flesh against the First Commandment that brought the true and rightful King from His heavenly throne into the womb of the Virgin Mary. It is this despising of our heavenly king that drove the Son of God into the Jordan River to be baptized and then into the

wilderness to endure the temptation of idolatry as we do. Because of our refusal of God and His Word, Jesus now stands with a thorn-pierced brow, a back filled with the stripes of the Roman flagellum, wearing in mockery the violet of royalty.

And what does Jesus say of all this. "Amen, dear Father. Send me to the cross. Let me be found guilty of their rejection and idolatry. Hold their guilt against me. Punish me for their rebellion and treachery. Forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing. Cut me off out of the land of the living so that they may be healed. Strike me down for their transgressions that they may be heirs of Your gracious kingdom." The very thing that man and Satan meant to destroy the King of heaven and earth is the very thing that has overthrown Satan and the wicked world. "By His stripes we are healed. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace."

Dearly beloved, behold the Man! See the flowing garments of His crimson, life-giving Blood. Bow your hearts and bend your knees in humble homage to your merciful King who has ascended the hill of Golgotha to take His seat upon the throne of the cross. This is the King who loves you, who offers His life for you, who forgives your rebellion and your rejection and invites you sit at His table to feast upon the saving food of His Body and Blood. Good Friday indeed! By His death, our King has conquered sin and death. He has endured the full judgment of the divine Law against our idolatry so that none remains for us. He reigns in mercy and grace through His Church, spreading the kingdom of God as the news of His victory is proclaimed to sinners everywhere, snatching them out of Satan's kingdom of death by His Word and precious Sacraments.

Praise be to our King this night, who completed the long, dark work of our salvation that He might burst open the gates of hell rise in triumph again on the third day. We have no King except the Jesus who hung from Calvary's cross!

In the Name of +Jesus.