

Good Friday

April 2, 2010

“THAT THE SCRIPTURE MIGHT BE FULFILLED”

“Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (Jn.19:30). Yet even after his death he preached from the cross.

After speaking of his death, St. John continues the account of the crucifixion by noting that it occurred on the eve of the Passover (19:31). The Passover plays a key role throughout John’s Gospel, and it is to be noted in close connection with this that in John chapter one, almost immediately after the Prologue, the author introduces John the Baptist, who points to Jesus repeatedly, saying, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world’ (Jn. 1: 29, 36).

The significance of the Passover and that of Christ as the Lamb of God are brought even more dramatically together toward the end of John’s Gospel. In the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus is pictured as celebrating Passover with his disciples at the Last Supper, that is on Maundy Thursday evening. Given that chronology the Passover lambs would have been ritually slain by the priests before the Temple earlier that day, thus at midday Thursday, the eve of the Passover according to Jewish reckoning, Passover beginning at sunset. John, however, to make an important theological point, alters this chronology so that Jesus is slain not on the Passover, as in the Synoptics, but on the *eve* of the Passover, as we just read, and thus at the very time the Passover lambs were being slain before the Temple. According to the Synoptics, Jesus is slain on Passover, which would have lasted from sunset Thursday to sunset Friday. In John that day is the eve of the Passover, the day of preparation when the lambs were actually killed and prepared. The meaning is unmistakable. John wants to show that Jesus is himself the Passover Lamb that was slain, so that, as in ancient Israel, those who were marked with his blood might be delivered. He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

The point is emphasized even more clearly when the soldiers, who were in the process of breaking the legs of the malefactors who were crucified with our Lord so that no one would remain dying on a cross when Passover began at sunset, came upon Jesus and found that he had already given up the ghost and therefore did not break his leg, but rather pierced his side with a

spear, from whence there then flowed the water and blood that is for our redemption. St. John Chrysostom sees this as the water of our baptism and the blood of the Holy Eucharist,

In the last two verses of his account, John writes that these things were done that two prophecies of Scripture might be fulfilled: (1) that “No bone of his shall be broken,” a quotation from the instructions in the account of the original Passover (Exod. 12:49; cf. Num. 9:12 & Ps. 34:20) where the children of Israel were told not to break a bone of the Passover lambs, and (2) that “They shall look on him whom they pierced,” a quotation from the prophecy of Zechariah (12:10), which John will quote again in the Book of the Revelation when he says of our Lord’s Second Coming, “Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him; and they also which pierced him; and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him” (Rev. 1:7). These two verses serve to place our Lord’s death in the center of God’s whole plan of redemption, the ground for which we laid in the Old Testament, especially in the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, and the completion of which will come at the end of time when the crucified and risen Lord shall return.

Not a single verse only but the whole of the Old Testament revelation was fulfilled in him, as was richly described in a wonderful Easter sermon by the Church Father, St. Melito of Sardis,

[Jesus] was led forth like a lamb; he was slaughtered like a sheep. He ransomed us from our servitude to the world, as he had ransomed Israel from the land of Egypt; he freed us from our slavery to the devil, as he had freed Israel from the hand of Pharaoh. He sealed our souls with his own Spirit, and the members of our body with his own blood.

He is the One who covered death with shame and cast the devil into mourning, as Moses cast Pharaoh into mourning. He is the One who smote sin and robbed iniquity of offspring, as Moses robbed the Egyptians of their offspring. He is the One who brought us out of slavery into freedom, out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of tyranny into an eternal kingdom; who made us a new priesthood, a people chosen to be his own forever. He is the Passover that is our salvation.

It is he who endured every kind of suffering in all those who foreshadowed him. In Abel he was slain, in Isaac bound, in Jacob exiled, in Joseph sold, in Moses exposed to die. He was sacrificed in the Passover lamb, persecuted in David, dishonored in the prophets.

It is he who was made man of the Virgin, he who was hung on the tree; it is he who was buried in the earth, raised from the dead, and taken up to the heights of heaven. He is the mute lamb, the slain lamb, the lamb born of Mary, the fair ewe. He was seized from the flock, dragged off to be slaughtered, sacrificed in the evening, and buried at night. On the tree no bone of his was broken; in the earth his body knew no decay. He is the One who rose from the dead, and who raised man from the depths of the tomb.¹

We stand today and behold afresh the death of our Lord as set forth in the Passion according to St. John. He who opened his Gospel by showing us its ultimate origin in the eternal Word of God who was with God at the beginning and who was God, shows us that this death is that for which the foundations were laid of old in the instructions for the first Passover in Egypt, and that this death shall never be forgotten, even at the end of time when the crucified and risen Lord shall come again and every eye shall behold him, and they shall look on him whom they have pierced. May we this day behold with sorrowful and penitent and believing and grateful and adoring hearts the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world and whose side was pierced so that we might be cleansed in the waters of Baptism and partake of his blood in the blessed Eucharist. Behold the Lamb of God; behold him who is our salvation.

Sermon preached by the Rev'd Fr. Voris G. Brookshire at the Anglican Catholic Church of Saint John the Theologian, Pompano Beach, FL, on Good Friday, April 2, 2010. Copyright © 2010.

¹ *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. II (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1976), p. 459.