

Palm Sunday 2019
LK 22:40

The prayer of Our Blessed Lord in the Agony in the Garden comes to us in five versions:

- ✓ In (each of the synoptic Gospels) Matthew, Mark and Luke
- ✓ A shorter account in John, and
- ✓ An all - encompassing account in Hebrews

A consideration of all five texts will help us to approach, as close as we can, to the mystery of this first holy hour, the hour of His agony.

After the Apostles sang from the Psalms on their way from the Upper Room to Gethsemane, Our Blessed Lord prayed alone, as He did on so many other nights. Yet close by is the group of the chosen three: Peter, James and John, known from other occasions, most notably the Transfiguration. These three, are given the warning to keep watch, and to witness Jesus' hour of anguish.

This summons to "keep watch," this summons to vigilance, had already been a major theme in the teaching of Our Blessed Lord. He addressed this sobriety and vigilance in a series of parables:

- ✓ the parable of wise and foolish virgins (and)

- ✓ the parable of the talents, (both in MT 25)
- ✓ the parable of the watchful doorkeeper (in MK 13,) and
- ✓ the parable of the servants (in LK 12)

And now, this summons to be vigilant emerges with great urgency. It refers immediately to Gethsemane, in the hour at hand, but eventually, it also points ahead to the later history of the Church.

Across the centuries it is the drowsiness of the disciples that opens up possibilities for the power of the Devil. Such drowsiness deadens the soul, so that it remains undisturbed by the power of the Devil at work in the world and by all the injustice and suffering ravaging the earth. In its state of numbness, the soul prefers not to see this; it is easily persuaded that things cannot be so bad, so to continue in the self satisfaction of its own comfortable existence.

Yet this deadening of the soul, this lack of vigilance regarding both God's closeness and the looming forces of darkness, is what gives the Devil power in the world. Seeing the drowsy disciples, so disinclined to rouse themselves, Our Blessed Lord says, "My soul is sorrowful, even to death." I'm so sad, I could die. Why? Because the Devil is alive and well and he's right under your noses.

After this admonition to vigilance, Our Blessed Lord goes a short distance away, a stone's throw says Luke. And this is where the agony actually begins.

Matthew tells us Jesus falls on his face;

Mark tells us Jesus falls to the ground;

Luke says He prays so intently he sweat blood.

Why? Because Jesus is the Son of God, and He sees in the chalice, with total clarity, what He is about to drink, from the beginning until the end of time:

- ✓ the whole foul flood of evil,
- ✓ all the power of lies and pride,
- ✓ all the wiles and cruelty of the evil that masks itself as life yet constantly serves to destroy, debase, and crush life.

Because Jesus is Son of God, He experiences deeply all the horror, filth, and baseness He must drink from the chalice prepared for Him: the vast power of sin and death. All this He must take into Himself, so that it can be defeated in Him.

On a social level, in 2019, the current crisis of 40 years ago in the Church, all its filth, all its horror, all its unspeakable pain, were in that chalice. And all the drowsiness of those who knew or should have known 40 years ago, were in that chalice.

In and of itself, that would have made what was in the chalice for Jesus to drink, poison. And He drank it.

So lest we cast our gaze to 40 years ago and think we have been vigilant enough, we haven't. Because, on a personal level, in 2019, all of my own sins, and all of your own sins, were present in that terrifying chalice as well.

We will become justified by this week's passion, death and resurrection when we stop pointing to, or hiding behind the sins of others and admit that our sins were in that chalice too.

St. Paul became normal when he said, "I persecuted and killed your disciples." (GAL 1:13, 1TIM 1:13) Every man reaches a degree of normalcy when he can say, "I refused to give You a cup of water when You were thirsty and I nailed Your hand to the beam of the cross." Real justification begins when we are brave enough to come from the behind the bushes, from behind the sins of others, be honest with himself and say, "I am the man."