

Good Friday 2019  
JN 18:1-19:42

Those of us my age and older will recall the famous 1977 mini-series “Roots,” which traced the family heritage of Alex Haley, back to his ancestor, Kunta Kinte, who was abducted from his African village, sold into slavery and taken to America. How Alex found out which African village was the village of his ancestors was a phenomenal task. Mr. Haley went from village to village and stayed with that village as the chief taught his tribe their history. Each night, the tribesmen and women, along with their children, would sit by the fire and listen to the chief tell the history of the tribe in story form. And when the chief finished telling the tribe’s history, from its origin until the present day, the chief would start over again. Every man, woman and child in the tribe knew the history of their tribe by heart, because it was learned in rote. The great events of the tribe’s history were spoken of year after year after year. So Alex Haley spent years going from tribe to tribe, listening to each chief tell their history. Those of us who watched the mini-series “Roots” can recall the scene as Alex Haley sat among the tribe and heard the chief speak of how Kunta Kinte was captured, sold into slavery and taken to the other side. We sat

in our living rooms and cried with Alex Haley when he found his ancestral tribe, when he heard the chief speak of his great, great, great, great grandfather.

This very same method of telling the story, over and over again, is quite familiar to us as Catholics. On every Palm Sunday and every Good Friday, every Catholic Church throughout the world tells the story, over and over again, of the sacred events of the passion and death of our Lord and Savior. On Palm Sunday, the passion narrative is taken from either Matthew, Mark or Luke. But Good Friday, the passion narrative is always taken from John. **What is so striking about Jesus in John's Passion Narrative is John's Jesus is in complete control.** A mini quick tour through John's passion will prove beyond any shadow of a doubt how "in control" Jesus was.

1. The Agony in the Garden: In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus undergoes an agony in the garden. "Jesus fell on his face and prayed, 'Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me.' And his sweat became like drops of blood' . . . an intense emotional suffering.

John, on the other hand, makes no mention of an agony. Rather, Jesus, in complete control:

- ✓ confronts his betrayer,

- ✓ the entire cohort
- ✓ and the guards

with a dignified calmness. “Who is it you want?” And when Jesus tells them “I AM,” (and notice he uses God’s name “I AM”) the guards are the ones who fall to the ground, not Jesus. Jesus is in complete control.

2. They take Jesus to Pilate. Now because the high priests would not enter the Roman praetorium, Pilate scurries back and forth, between the Jews and Jesus.

- ✓ Pilate goes out to the chief priests.
- ✓ Pilate goes back in to ask if Jesus is king of the Jews.
- ✓ Pilate goes back out, tells the chief priests he finds no wrong in Jesus and they demand Barabbas.
- ✓ Pilate goes back in to Jesus and has Him scourged.
- ✓ Pilate goes back out the crowd,

Like a trapped rat, Pilate scurries back and forth between the frenzied crowd filled with hate, more and more the political power, and Jesus, who remains majestic, tranquil and calm, more and more confirming Pilate of Jesus’ innocence.

3. At the trial, it’s ironic how the tables are turned. Jesus is the one on trial, but by the time the trial is all said and done, those convicted are Pilate and the Jews.

- I. Pilate is convinced of Jesus' innocence and tries over and over again to have Jesus released:
  - I find no guilt in him.
  - Let me release the prisoner.
  - But they shout for Barabbas.
  - I find no guilt in him. You crucify him.
  - Let me show this man to you. Look at him. This man is innocent.
  - Behold your king.
- II. Then the question. Pilate asks, "Where are you from?" And Jesus makes no answer. So Pilate says, "Don't you realize I have the power to crucify you?" And Jesus is in complete control. "You have no power over me."
- III. Then the lies. "We have no king but Caesar." What a lie! The Jews hated Caesar. Caesar was the Roman king, and the Romans persecuted and mistreated the Jews: any Roman soldier could grab any Jew at any time and make him carry his armor for a mile, because that was the law. The Romans created "taxation without representation" The Jews showing loyalty to Caesar was the ultimate blasphemy. And Jesus, in complete control,

just stood there, and watched them incriminate themselves.

4. The carrying of the cross: John very clearly states that Jesus carried the cross by himself. No Simon of Cyrene in John's Passion. Why? Because Jesus is in complete control.

5. In his final moments on the cross, Jesus remains in complete control. Despite the suffering, the whipping, the loss of blood, carrying the cross with the help of no one, the immobility of a crucifixion, the insects, Jesus is fully aware of what is happening.

- ✓ Realizing that everything was now finished, Jesus initiates a command to fulfill the scriptures. "I thirst."
- ✓ Jesus determines the moment of his death. He drank some wine and said, "Now it is finished."
- ✓ He bowed His head and He delivered over His spirit."

Jesus was in complete control.

Jesus being in complete control does not for a minute suggest that He suffered any less, that His suffering was not real. If anything, that God suffered as a man is:

- ✓ so much more intense,
- ✓ so much more encompassing,
- ✓ so much more complete.

Yet as God, Jesus reigned from that cross He was so in control.

When you deal with death, whether it be your own or someone you hold close to our hearts, you feel so helpless. My family never felt so helpless as we did keeping vigil at the deathbed of my three year old nephew Geoff. We cried, we hugged, we whispered to Geoff, pleaded with God and asked questions that have no right answer. We felt so out of control.

Today, Good Friday, Jesus suffered and died. And He suffered and died while remaining in complete control. Take comfort in that. When the doctors did the first test on my nephew and the doctors told us his brain was dead, Jesus was there with a dignified calmness. Jesus was in control. We were not in control, but Jesus was. When we scurried back and forth between Geoff's bedside and his mother's bedside, between the doctors and the representatives of the organ donors and trauma counselors, Jesus was there, majestic, tranquil and calm. So when Geoff died, and my family felt like we were losing him, and losing our minds and losing our faith, Jesus was in complete control. He realized Geoff's work on earth was finished. Jesus bowed Geoff's head and delivered over his spirit. I thank God this Good Friday, that during the darkest and

lowest times of my life, that in the face of death, I have faith in Jesus, faith in Jesus who is always in complete control.

For those who let the current crisis in the Church lead them to an unknown place, because they think the spire on the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris is a visual of the Church going down for the last time . . . the only one delighting in that stinking thinking is the Devil. So if you are to do the devil's bidding and are ready to deny our Blessed Lord and walk away, as did Judas, because of the grave sins of a few wolves dressed in sheep's clothing, be assured Jesus is in complete control. Be assured of the words spoken by Our Blessed Lord at Caesarea Phillippi, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against this Church." Yes, Our Blessed Lord was indeed crucified 2000 years ago, and He is being crucified all over again in 2019, but know that after every Good Friday in the Church, after every Good Friday in our personal lives, there always, always follows an Easter Sunday.

Why? Because Jesus is always in complete control!