

## **Palm Sunday**

**April 14, 2019**

**Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass  
of**

**St. Thomas More Catholic Parish  
celebrated at**

**St. Joseph Catholic Church**

**116 Theodore St.**

**Scranton, PA 18508**

**Luke 22:14-23:56**

The Passion account we just heard recounts a succession of persons seeking to avoid the consequences of the choices they have made, capped finally by a sinner who accepts responsibility for what he has done. Luke makes clear whom we are to emulate.

The first figure who tries to avoid consequences is St. Peter. We see him deny our Lord three times, just as Jesus had promised he would. The wrong here, of course, is that St. Peter didn't try to avoid the consequences of wrong-doing, but of having made the right choice. As an obedient disciple he had heard the Lord's summons and followed Jesus when He called. But when it became clear that the consequence of such obedience is to share in the suffering of our Lord, he was no longer so obedient. Thus, the first consequence the Passion asks us to embrace is that of the choice we've made to follow Jesus. When it is obvious to others that we are followers of Jesus, as it was obvious in the case of St. Peter, we are to affirm our discipleship, whatever the consequence may be.

The second person doesn't so much seek to avoid consequences as others seek to do so for him. Barabbas, who was guilty of murder, was presented to the crowd as one who might be released instead of the innocent Christ. Throughout the Passion narrative Barabbas himself is silent. He does not utter one word, not only in St. Luke's account but in any of the four Gospels. But the crowd speaks on his behalf, indicating another way we seek to avoid consequences. Barabbas is the sign that we often seek to help others avoid the consequences of what they have done. We enable them in their sin, either because we don't want to confront it or because we have derived some benefit from the sin itself. Perhaps we even think the sin is justified. Whatever the case, we often try to get people out of what they have done, so they must not pay the price for their misdeeds. What St. Luke shows us in this incident is that when we try to avoid justice for our friends, the innocent end up in the dock. It is better that the guilty answer than the innocent suffer.

In the third person we at last have someone who seeks to avoid the consequence of his own sins. The bad thief, crucified next to Jesus, asks that Jesus, whom he recognizes as the Christ, use His divine power to help him avoid consequences. He says, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" His words are more a demand that God do his bidding than they are a humble supplication, indicating his lack of remorse for what he had done to get himself on a cross in the first place. We see here the folly of asking God to get us out of predicaments that we ourselves have designed and implemented. How foolish it is to do something wrong and then pray that God will take away what naturally follows our rebellion. This is the denial of God's majesty, the refusal to conform our lives to God, demanding that God conform Himself to us.

The counterpoint to all these who would avoid consequences is the good thief. He recognizes the relationship between what he has done and what he must suffer, accepting peacefully the consequence of the poor choice he made, while imploring his brother in arms that he do the same. Here is our example: one who is sorry for his sins, is willing readily to pay the price for them, and even in the hour of his death encourages others to do the same. With some of his last breaths he used what energy he had to call others to repentance. His reward is some of the most famous words in the whole Bible: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

We are blessed to have as the Patron of our Parish a man who followed this example, as well as avoided the pitfalls with which we began. St. Thomas More accepted that Christian discipleship may well mean going to prison for fourteen months with the threat of death hanging continually over his head. When others tried to remove the consequences of his choice for him, even when it was his own wife, he gently reminded them that his soul was at stake, while telling them he was ready to pay the price of his commitments. And finally, when he knew death was imminent, he did not wallow in self-pity but in letters to his daughter, written from the Tower of London, he made clear he was happy to accept what was coming. How did he so readily approach the scaffold? How could an innocent man be so good-humored on the day of his execution, even hugging the headsman and paying him? Very simply, he knew that his suffering and his death were his own reparation for the sins of his past life. For while he knew he was not guilty of treason, he also knew he was not innocent. St. Thomas More, pray for us, that we have the wisdom, courage, and charity to accept consequences as readily as did you.