

Passion Sunday- EF 2013
John 8: 46-59
Dcn. Pat Hall

This Passion Sunday begins Passiontide, the last two weeks of Lent. This is noticed most visibly by the crosses, statues and images being covered in purple, the exceptions being pictures of the Way of the Cross and a St. Joseph statue outside the sanctuary during March, the month of St. Joseph.

The hiding of the crosses, statues and images is connected to the last line of our Gospel proclaimed today: *but Jesus hid himself.*

He hid himself at the moment they were going to stone him.

Now, there was nothing unusual about Jews of the 1st Century being contentious about religious matters. One can say that for better or worse that 21st Century Christians can be just as contentious with each other on religious issues. But to stone someone because of a religious disagreement is a pretty extreme reaction.

The argument had progressed along the lines of contention and accusation:

"I tell you the truth; you don't listen.
If you belonged to God, you would listen to God's words.
You don't listen to me because you do not belong to God."

"Oh, yeah?
Well, you are one of *those* people. You're possessed."

And the argument continued back and forth. What led to the attempted stoning was something that triggered anger and fear. It was something that, if true, could undermine everything that those self-righteous antagonists built their lives upon.

This itinerant preacher positioned himself before their great patriarch, Abraham, in echoing the statement of the great Tetragrammaton, when God in the burning bush shared his name with Moses, "I am who am". This alluded to the timelessness of Jesus' existence. "I am" exists, now, from all time, into all time. This is the personification of the great *logos*, the Word that was in the beginning with God. That is what is proclaimed in the last Gospel of this Mass.

Jesus said that the one who is true to his word will never see death.

Jesus was proclaiming the immanent presence of God and life eternal. Many of the Pharisees with whom Jesus was arguing would rather keep God at a pious distance. They could bask in the light of their own self-righteousness and religiosity, but still be free to treat their neighbor in a way that served their own self-interest. But if they had to acknowledge that the divine one was immanently present, the poor

would be cared for, the marginalized would have a voice, blessings would be shared and all decisions would be based on the common good.

These ideas are dangerous to those who maintain power through self-service and oppression. One could understand why they wanted to stone the herald of such a message. In their mind, one could kill the message by killing the messenger. Easter exposed that lie.

Since that first Easter morning we have embraced that message of eternal life. We prayerfully strive to be up to the task. We honor others who model how to embrace the eternal Word.

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Patrick. We honor all things Irish, even if here at St. Mary's we do so with a Polish accent. We are indeed indebted to the Irish for the preservation of our faith and civilization through dark times. We honor St. Patrick himself for embracing the eternal Word and evangelizing those pagans who had once held him in bondage.

We also honor one who has just recently and very publically embraced the *logos*. We honor our new pope, Francis. As we learn more and more about the man, we certainly find his life being true to the Word. He exemplifies that through his concern for the poor. He calls us to be a poor Church.

Bishop Bradley has sent a letter to all of us concerning Pope Francis. Copies can be picked up in the narthex. In the letter Bishop Bradley asks for prayers for Pope Francis. He encourages us to contribute to a special Spiritual Bouquet of rosaries, prayers and Eucharistic Adoration hours that he can present to our Holy Father.

Through our prayers, may we support Pope Francis as everyday, on our behalf, he remains true to Jesus' word.

May we be inspired by his message as he proclaims Jesus' word in support of the poor.

May we embrace the Word, the *logos*, through whom all things were made and through whom we find eternal life.

May we come to this altar to receive his immanent presence and go forth from here to share the word of everlasting life.