

Peter rashly reaches out to cutoff the ear of the high priest's slave. Roman soldiers ridicule and humiliate Jesus. The crowds eagerly join in the chant "Crucify him, Crucify him." Violence and injustice are all around us:

- An Asian woman is struck without provocation by a man who condemns her and punches her in the face. Unlike most victims, she fights back leaving him bloodied.
- Two Montgomery County Police berate a 5 year old who had left school grounds and threaten him with a beating.
- An unruly spring break crowd gathers by the thousands, fighting in the streets and destroying property. Authorities called in the SWAT team to try to restore order.

Has the world gone mad?

Jesus Christ responds to violence with non-violence. He does not take an eye for an eye. He rejects anger and chooses redemptive suffering. "It was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed" (Isa 53:4-5).

A world beset by violence is very unsettling. This year, many have taken out their anger and frustration over the pandemic and indiscriminately attacked Asians. There is anger and frustration on the US border with Mexico while the vulnerable are subject to injustice and exploitation. In Myanmar, people cry for freedom and they are met with death and intimidation by the powerful military. China is exerting a heavy hand in Hong Kong with mass arrests of people trying to protect the freedoms they have known all their lives. 20 Roman Catholics were injured in the Palm Sunday bombing in Indonesia. How do we respond to the chaos?

We must look to Christ for an answer. When Jesus entered Jerusalem to cries of Hosanna to the Son of David, many hoped for a powerful liberator at Passover. They wanted to throw off the yoke of oppression from Roman occupation. Many welcomed a violent uprising. Caiaphas the high priest was particularly concerned about violence. He and others felt that if they could sacrifice Jesus, they would keep an even more violent counter response from the Romans in check while continuing to maintain their own political privileges and prestige.

Jesus came in peace to liberate us from sin and death. He triumphs through the cross. Good Friday is a stark reminder of the depth of God's love for humanity. We behold the wood of the cross and must ask ourselves am I willing to follow Christ?

- "Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth" (Isa 53:7) Am I willing to hold my tongue long enough to discern from God the correct course of action?
- "Struck for the sin of his people, a grave was assigned him among the wicked and a burial place with evildoers, though he had done no wrong nor spoken any falsehood" (Isa 53: 8c-9). Am I willing to embrace redemptive suffering that hardened hearts may be converted?
- "He surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses" (Isa 53:12). Am I willing to love my enemy and turn the other cheek?

"What is most amazing about the Lord and his Passover? It is the fact that he achieves glory through humiliation. He triumphs by accepting suffering and death, things that we, in our quest for admiration and success, would rather avoid."<sup>1</sup>

The world crucified an innocent man. Jesus accepts death as his Father's plan.

Violence escalates and there is no peace. Jesus is the Passover Lamb shorn of his fleece.

The world insults and beats. Wherever we are, Jesus encounters and meets.

The world uses violence. From the height of the cross, Jesus responds in silence.  
In the world, might makes right. The way of the cross is truth and light.  
The world conquers with chaos and fear. In every affliction, Jesus is with us ever near.  
With every evil man is lured. With Jesus, no sin will ever have the final word.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Palm Sunday Homily 2021