

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

4th Sunday of Easter | For Sunday, April 25, 2021

A Willing Sacrifice

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa

Acts 4:8-12

1 John 3:1-2

John 10:11-18



My favorite scene from [CS Lewis' "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe"](#) is the one where Aslan is sacrificed by the White Witch. The Christological themes are ripe, worthy of much discussion. What strikes me most poignantly during the Easter season is how Aslan describes to Lucy and Susan his miraculous resurrection from the dead. "... though the White Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know ... when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward."

A willing victim. That's Jesus in today's Gospel about the Good Shepherd. "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down on my own." Jesus' intrinsic freedom is the shining quality here. He was not "compelled" or "obligated" or "coerced" into the path that led to Calvary: he chose it and would not permit alternatives to even be considered ([cf. Mt 16:23](#)). He embraced a direct path that would lead to his demise, but also to his victory.

The Church recognizes the sublime quality of interior freedom, which is certainly connected to the notion of salvation from sin which we continue to celebrate during the Easter season. When a couple gets married in the church, they are asked in public if they have come of their own free will. When religious and monastic men and women make their lifelong commitment to their communities, they make the profession of evangelical poverty, chastity, and obedience. These vows must be made in freedom lest the choice lack this shimmering quality of Jesus' self-offering which we are all invited to imitate.

[St. Bonaventure](#) extolls, for example, this virtue of poverty in the life [St. Francis](#): “Among the supernatural gifts which Francis received from God, the Generous Giver, his love for absolute poverty constituted a special privilege which enabled him to grow rich in spiritual wealth. He saw that it was the constant companion of Jesus, but now that [poverty] was being scorned by the whole world, so he espoused it in undying love. ‘Gospel poverty is the special way to salvation. It is the source of humility and the root of all perfection; its fruit is manifold, though unseen. This is the treasure hidden in the field of the Gospel to buy which we must sell all, and anything that cannot be sold should be abandoned for love of it.’” Our community describes it this way: “Gospel poverty cannot be a willing self-sacrifice without love, and love cannot be Christian without the self-sacrifice of poverty. It is an ascetical discipline that protects our life in God. The logic of poverty is found in love, and the highest expression of love is found in the Cross. Therefore, evangelical poverty makes ultimate sense only in light of the cross of Jesus.” We might describe this as a “radical frugality and simplicity” in the face of modern consumerism and materialism.

The willing self-offering of love for the sake of love touched so deeply the tender hearts of Susan and Lucy when they witnessed their beloved friend’s demise. To a greater intensity, the same response of gratitude and awe gripped the heart of the Blessed Mother as she stood on Calvary’s Hill that day. The same admiration is given to those religious who are brave enough to willingly make a sacrifice of their lives for the sake of love, in imitation of Jesus, who has become their love’s choice. It is not the exclusive choice of a few, but the royal path for all who wish to be a follower of Jesus: voluntary renunciation of self is not its obliteration, but a discovery of and transcendence of a self recreated in the image and likeness of God Himself. It cannot be done all at once, nor is it a one-time deal: it is a daily decision, motivated by love as a response to Love’s invitations.

St. Francis knew a secret: whatever he laid down willingly, the Father would honor and bless abundantly. During this Easter season, let’s set our hearts to discover that secret as well!

Br. John-Marmion Villa

PRAYER

Take, Lord, receive all my liberty
My memory, understanding,
my whole will, all that I have and possess.
You gave it all to me, Lord;
I give it all back to you.
Give me only your love and your grace;
With these, I will be rich enough,
and will desire nothing more.