

GOOD FRIDAY

April 10, 2009 – Year B

Steve Domienik

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Jesus had preached that God's Kingdom would be realized most readily when human beings acknowledged their dependence on God. The model for this Kingdom was not power over others but the helplessness of the little child. We humans come most clearly to terms with our helplessness when we face death. Did Jesus, the proclaimer of the Kingdom, himself have to experience the vulnerability of dying before the Kingdom could be achieved in and through him?

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

The Jesus portrayed in the Gospel of John is a different person than the Jesus of the Synoptic passion narratives. This Jesus is conscious of his pre-existence. Through death, therefore, he is returning to a state he has temporarily left during his stay in this world. The Satanic prince of this world has no power over Jesus and he cannot be caught off guard by what will happen in this passion account. In fact, Jesus had chosen Judas from the beginning knowing full well that Judas was going to betray him on this night.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Jesus had not been praying in Gethsemane that this hour, this cup would pass him as he does in the other three Gospels. This Jesus had come specifically for this hour and he was ready to face it. Jesus was not surprised when Judas and the guards came out to arrest him, in fact, he was expecting them and he goes out to meet them.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

In the passion narrative of John's Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as an eloquent spokesman, a sovereign king, the confident Son of God. He defiantly announces, "I lay down my life and I take it up again; no one takes it from me" (10:17-18). Jesus does not cry out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me", like he does in the other Gospels. This Jesus knows that God is always with him and that they are one. His final words on the cross reflect a solemn decision – "It is finished". His burial is not unprepared as in the other Gospels, rather, Jesus is buried as befits a king, with a staggering amount of myrrh and aloes, bound in cloth wrappings and infused with aromatic oils.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

When the different passion narratives are read side-by-side, we should not be upset by the differences or ask which view of Jesus is more correct. The Marcan Jesus fully embraces abandonment and the Lucan Jesus worries about others situations and forgives them while the Jesus in John's Gospel reigns victoriously throughout all that happens. None of these images of the crucified one exhausts the full meaning of Jesus. A truer, more whole picture of him emerges only when there are contrasting stories.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

By giving us different accounts of the passion, the Church is making it possible for people with very different spiritual needs to find meaning in the cross. There are moments in all of our lives when we need desperately to cry out with the Jesus of Mark or Matthew; "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" In this we may find as Jesus did that despite our fear and sense of abandonment that God is in fact listening and can redeem us. At other moments, we may need to forgive those who hurt us or who want to destroy us, just as Jesus did in the Gospel of Luke – "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And there are other times that we may want to call upon the power and might of the Johannine Jesus in order to have the faith we need to see and know that the suffering and evil in this world have no real power or control over us.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

To choose one portrayal of the crucified Jesus in a manner that would exclude the other's or to harmonize all the Gospel accounts of Jesus' passion into one would deprive the cross of much of its meaning. It is important that we have the option to see Jesus with his head bowed down, rejected and abandoned, or with his arms outstretched in forgiveness, or to have the sure knowledge that God is with us in all things, even death and that we will be carried and cared for by an all loving and present God.

Which Jesus do you need today?

AMEN.