

Mid-week Lent IV

The Passion According to St. Luke: Jesus Before the Council and Pilate
St. Luke 22:63–23:25

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:7)
This passage from Isaiah was fulfilled in what you heard from tonight’s Gospel.

The Lamb of God was being led to the slaughter, and on the way, He stood before the council and Pontius Pilate. Every time a false accusation was leveled against Him, He remained silent. Only when He was questioned about the truth of who He is did He ever speak:

- “If you are the Christ, tell us.” But he said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”
- So they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?” And he said to them, “You say that I am.”
- And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.”

His answers almost seem indirect, but He did reveal why He doesn’t directly answer in the affirmative to these questions: “If I tell you, you will not believe...” So, while His answers are affirmative, He doesn’t come right out and say, “Yes,” to any of them. It was enough to be accused of blasphemy for saying, “But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”

To everything else, however, He remained silent. Even as He was mocked and beaten and blasphemed, He didn’t open His mouth. What exactly the men who were holding Jesus said isn’t recorded; none of the Evangelists do so. Matthew and Mark wrote that the chief priests and council were seeking false testimony against Jesus, and that all that they could find did not agree; many falsely testified against Jesus, but their testimonies weren’t recorded, and none of it agreed. It was enough for Luke to have Jesus respond only to the true statement about Jesus. Anything about the false testimony isn’t there—spare a quick blurb about misleading the people and stirring up the people—and Jesus was otherwise silent, too.

Why?

Well, remember that this is the Passion of the Lord. It’s not simply that He is there to suffer, but that He is there to suffer for you. His Passion is for you because He is passionate for you. His love compels Him to do this for you—suffer, die, and rise again—so that you may live and have it to the fullest, which is in eternity with Him.

In order to do so, He must bear the full brunt of the punishment you deserve. He has taken your sin into the flesh and suffers the consequences for it, which includes the mockings and beatings. But for what was He being mocked and beaten? For what was He suffering the consequences? Was it not anything more than the false accusations, in all of their breadth, uttered falsely for His sake, but would be spoken in truth about you?

St James wrote, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.” (James 2:10) It is for this reason that when Luther taught the Ten Commandments, He began by explaining the First when he said, “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things,” then began the explanations to the rest with, “We should fear and love God so that...” Or, think of it this way: God is the giver of the Law; so, when you transgress it at any point, you do not fear and love God in that point, which means that you do not fear, love, or trust in God, which means that you have declared the entirety of God’s Law inconsequential. And given the depth with which Jesus taught the Law—for instance, merely calling someone a name is tantamount to murdering

them—then the slightest breach of the Law is entirely an affront to God. You have failed in one point, if only in one point; therefore, you are accountable for all of it!

So, you may not have taken another's life, but you are a murderer, and you do not fear, love and trust in God above all things. You may not have cheated on your spouse, even if you don't have one, but you are nonetheless an adulterer, and you do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things. You may never utter a word in contempt against God, yet you are most certainly in thought and deed a blasphemer, and you do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things. And since you do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things, you worship an idol—the idol of self. Sure enough, the accusations were uttered against Jesus, and He did not say a word in rebuttal, though they were false for His sake, because He received the accusations for your sake.

Your sin is in His flesh, the accusations against you were received by the Lamb of God, and He silently went to the cross for you.

And isn't it interesting how this all works. Since Jesus received the accusations made against you, you do not. Furthermore, since He bore your sin in His flesh to the cross, He also bore the consequences of that as He suffered, died, and was buried. He suffered the full wrath of God for your sin, exacted against Him by wicked men, acting according to God's will and plan...for you!

Jesus suffered the wrath of God due you. Therefore, you do not have to. Jesus died the death due you for sin. Therefore, you do not have to. Suffering and death now, for one who is in Christ—for you, dear Baptized—is transitory. You suffer in this Vale of Tears in order that you might be reminded and turned again and again to the grace of God, who is preparing a place for you in the world to come. You die in this Valley of Death in order to pass from here and into the life of the world to come—the eternal life. All of this for you, for the sake of Christ.

The Lamb before the shearers was silent. He opened not His mouth in objection to the false accusations. Jesus, the Lamb of God, received them all for you. This is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ for you.

Jesus was incarnate, was born, was mocked, beaten, and falsely accused, was crucified, and was buried for you. His death for sin is your death to sin. The forgiveness He won on the cross as He spilled His blood covers your sin, even the sin of...breaking His Law. To you, the blood of the Lamb was applied for life and you were declared righteous as you were washed in the water and the Word, and it is your daily sign and seal of a life redeemed and gathered from the breaking of the Law that your Old Man prefers. For by that water, blood, and Word, you are the righteousness of God. You are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.