

The Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday)
St. Matthew 26:1–27:66 (specifically 27:11-54)

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

YHWH met with Moses on the mountain where He gave him the Ten Commandments. Moses could have taken the dictation in several ways. He could have written it on a papyrus scroll; after all, he just came from the land of papyrus, so the Israelites could have possibly had some. He could have written on clay tablets; clay isn't a difficult resource to come by. He could have even written it in the sand as a means of helping him to memorize what God had said. But he didn't record the Ten Commandments on paper or clay or even in the sand; they were carved in stone.

That phrase "carved in stone," should give you pause. It conveys a kind of permanence. Stone represents endurance, so something written in stone—carved in stone—is longer-lasting than something written on paper, clay tablets, and sand. Something carved in stone is supposed to last. That's what Job was saying when he spoke about his redeemer living:

Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock
forever! (Job 19:23-24)

Consequently, when you carve something in stone, it conveys an importance because of its permanence. The Ten Commandments are carved in stone.

This is God's everlasting covenant with His people. His people will obey His will and keep these commandments. These laws are not only for His people, however, but for all mankind, as they are all His creation.

When Moses came down from the mountain, He found the Hebrews worshipping an idol. He dashed the stone tablets in their presence, an object lesson in the people's brazen denial of God's Law—they had broken God's everlasting Law. No, that didn't mean that the Law wasn't permanent; it was, and it is—Moses would get a second set of stone tablets. First or second, it doesn't matter, the Word of the Lord endures forever (VDMA), whether it is actually carved in stone or not, and that includes His Law.

The Law was given, and God expects you to follow it. God expects you to stand upon these stone tablets as your own will—this you will do and not do. You are to stand on these stone tablets because they are important—they are the will of God—much like you should build your house on a stone foundation, and not sand. (cf. Matthew 7:24-27) Do you, though?

Well, not really. Instead you write your will on lifeless and fragile paper, you take your finger to sand and write one thing while you say another and do yet something else. The winds change, and so does your will except for one point: that which God had carved in stone is to be avoided. This is your bound will: enslaved to sin and bound in chains.

So, what would you expect God to do? He who is greater than you, mightier than you, holier than you, reveals His will to you and you would rather do something else. What's God to do? Well, right along with revealing His will, He also reveals what He will do: "...I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me..." (Exodus 20:5) Throughout the Word of God, you can find God speaking of His wrath, and even showing it, to those who sin against Him, and the result is always the same: death.

Jesus stood on a stone pavement—Gabbatha, it was called in St. John's Gospel (19:13). He stood there before the Roman governor. As He stood there, He was bound and bloodied, having been captured the night before as He prayed in the garden. That night, He stood before the Sanhedrin whereat He was accused of all manner of evil. The next day found Him before the governor, where

accusations were made against Him again. He stood on stone, being accused of not standing on the stone tablets which came down from Sinai. The chief priests and elders, speaking on behalf of the people—on behalf of you—accused the Son of God of sinning, and He didn't respond one word, just as it was before the Sanhedrin, just as it was prophesied of Him: "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)

Oh yes, you were right there along with those despicable priests and elders. Remember, your will is bound—that which God declares as holy, that which He tells you is His will, you are at work to contradict and countermand. God's Law says, "Do this," and your will says, "Hell no!" And your bound will delights in accusing the Son of God of lies—just as is the will the father of lies, the devil. (cf. John 8:44) Your sinful life—your sinful nature—is in contention with God, and it is that which was standing with the crowd before Pilate accusing innocent Jesus, standing on Stone Pavement, of breaking the Law carved into stone tablets.

So, you see, while you accuse Jesus of sinning through the voices of the priests and elders, they were speaking your evil against Him. And Jesus' silence spoke volumes! He received the guilt and the shame—your guilt and shame—without a word. He received it because He was becoming your substitute. He who became one with you in His conception and birth—a man in every respect as you are, except without sin—stood before the Sanhedrin and Pilate and received your sins and the sins of all into His perfect flesh. He who once stood in your place in the Jordan River, to fulfill all righteousness with John (cf. Matthew 3:15), has also stood in your place before the Sanhedrin, receiving the sinful accusations due you.

Listen closely to His silence, dear hearers, because the Great Exchange is happening right before your ears!

Or, as St. Paul put it, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) He stood at Gabbatha becoming your sin for you, but He wouldn't remain at Stone Pavement for long. Later that day, He would be led to Place of a Skull—Golgotha—and there become the sacrifice for sin. Like the goats at the Temple on Yom Kippur, He would shed His blood as a propitiation for many—as your propitiation—and die with your sins for your atonement.

At Sinai, the Law was given on stone tablets. At Gabbatha, the accusations were made and the guilty verdict pronounced. At Golgotha, the sentence was carried out. Jesus, with every one of your sins and every bit of your sinfulness, gave His life, crucified in your place, your substitute, died the death that the Law demanded for sins. And for His sake, you live.

Gloriously, however, His stay in death did not last long. His agony and forsaken-ness lasted only three hours; his death spanned across only three days. Dead and buried, on the third day, He rose again from the grave. Jesus is victorious over death, and as much as His death is for you, He gives you the victory too. Death is swallowed up in victory! (cf. Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54)

There was another goat present on Yom Kippur—the scapegoat. Here is the goat upon which the sins were confessed, and, despite that confession, it is allowed to live. Yes, in the Yom Kippur ritual, it was led out into the wilderness and abandoned. In so doing, the sins of the people were removed from them as the scapegoat was led out of the camp and into the wilderness. Yet it lives for the sake of the sacrificial goat.

In one sense, Jesus is the fulfillment of the scapegoat as He removes sin from you as far as east is from the west. (cf. Psalm 103:12) But there is another sense in which to understand the scapegoat: it lives, despite its sinfulness, because of the goat that is sacrificed for sins.

That day before Pilate, Jesus stood on Stone Pavement as the sacrificial goat, but there was another goat, too. Jesus stood before the governor, having done no wrong, and accepts all guilt and blame on your behalf. But, as was the custom of Pilate, he presented a criminal to the people, one he thought would surely be considered a worse offender than Jesus, in order to release Jesus, for His custom was to release a man of the people's choosing at this time of year. But, Old Adam's hatred for the Son of God won the day, and Barabbas was set free.

He was allowed to live for the sake of Jesus. He was cast back out into the wilderness while Jesus was sacrificed in His place. Jesus' cross might have been meant for Barabbas, to be crucified right between his compatriots. Dear Baptized, you are Barabbas! For the sake of Jesus and His sacrifice, you are allowed to live, despite having committed the sins. Jesus died for Barabbas, and He was redeemed. Jesus has died for you, and you are redeemed.

And this, by grace, you believe and receive. Therefore, as St. John wrote, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..." (John 1:12) You are Barabbas, the Son of the Father as His name means, spared death and given life for the sake of the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ. From the manger to the cross, to Gabbatha and Golgotha, to the grave and the right hand of the Father, Jesus Christ is your atonement, standing on the Stone Tablets and Stone Pavement, hanging on the cross, and seated in glory for you; therefore, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.