

**Homily offered by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Good Friday, March 30, 2018.**

One of the most interesting figures during Holy Week is Pontius Pilate. He is a featured character in today's lesson. While it is challenging for us to identify with what Jesus goes through, it is interesting for us, I think, to identify with what Pilate goes through. See if he doesn't sound a bit like you and me.

As a civic official, Pilate has a duty to perform. Part of that duty is to enforce regulations. It is in fulfilling this duty that he orders Jesus flogged. But he doesn't feel good about this order.

Jesus has already declined to back off of his claim that he is doing God's will. So Pilate turns to the crowd, giving the crowd its chance to persuade Jesus to give up his outrageous claim. The crowd is not interested in Pilate's offer. Rather than saying, "Okay, let us have one more conversation with him," the chief priests shout "Crucify him!"

To the crowd, Jesus was an embarrassment and a threat. The majority did not believe that He was the Son of God. And they certainly didn't want an uprising that would cause them harm. In short, they were eager to silence Jesus. He was a trouble-maker, and, if he was allowed to live, life for the Jews would be even more difficult than it already was.

Yet Pilate was still bothered. He went back to Jesus, and asked him "Where do you come from? Don't you realize that I have the power to free you?" Jesus declines again, this time claiming that the power of God was greater than the power of the State. Pilate, frustrated, goes back to the people, and instead of telling the people that he, Pilate, would move ahead with the crucifixion, Pilate puts that responsibility on the people.

The people even threatened Pilate for his delay. "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar." Well, Pilate doesn't free Jesus. Tired of the whole mess, he simply turns Jesus over to the crowd. "Here is your king."

We see Pilate's reluctance even in the notice that Pilate prepares to nail to the cross. The Jews argue that the notice is too soft because it reads simply "King of the Jews" rather than "claims to be King of the Jews." Pilate refuses, saying in effect "Get on with it."

I mention Pilate's turmoil only to remind us that this Holy Week is rich in material for us to ponder. We've been in Pilate's shoes. We've tried to soften the blow. And we've been over-ruled. Or, more accurately, we've allowed things to happen that we didn't want to happen. We've done this in the workplace and in our homes and in relationships of all sorts. Certainly not with the impact of the crucifixion, but with substantial unease.

Out of unease, however, growth can occur. Rather than thinking that we could never be Pilate, we realize that, yes, we could be Pilate. And, if we were, what would we do with an angry crowd with the potential to damage our reputation?

It's worth thinking about. That's why we gather on Good Friday. And that's why this day is so moving. If we give ourselves a chance, we can be part of this day and learn from this day and deepen our commitment to this Jesus, whose decision to die on a cross for us is a blessing, to some extent beyond our comprehension, but not beyond our appreciation.

So, thanks be to God for the strength of Jesus to invite and accept the crucifixion decision, confident that His Father, our Father, would transform Bad Friday into Good Friday. It's a tough day to be sure, but again, growth can occur if we give that growth a chance, which we do this very hour.

Amen.