

### **March 20, 2016 The Passion of Christ Homily:**

Brothers and sisters, One of the most popular tourist attractions in our nation's capital, Washington D.C., is the Supreme Court building. It is known as the court of final appeal. The appointed justices are called upon to render a decision on each of the cases brought before them. Outside the courtroom is a magnificent statue of a woman dressed in a resplendent robe and seated on a throne. In one hand she holds a scale while in the other hand she carries a sword. She is known as "Lady Justice". Inspired by the Roman goddess of Justice, she is a symbol of judicial integrity. The Supreme Court justices are reminded that in rendering a decision, they must always be fair and impartial. The scales of justice must never be tilted in favor of the wealthy and powerful. If justice is to be served, all must be treated equally. A "fixed" trial is an abomination of justice. A biased opinion is a scandal.

In St. Luke's account of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the evangelist, wishes to make clear that there has been a miscarriage of justice in the trials of Jesus. The righteous man, Jesus, is condemned to death. Just recall the words of Pontius Pilate "I find this man not guilty" (Lk. 23:4) and "I find no guilt in him". (Lk. 23:14) Still, he condemns him to death. Pilate also states that King Herod found him innocent of the charges brought against him. (Lk. 23:15) While dying on the cross, the so-called Good Thief spoke plainly to his fellow thief, "This man (Jesus) has done nothing criminal". (Lk. 23:41)

An eminent scripture scholar, Fr. Raymond Brown singles out the guilty parties in Luke's Passion narrative. The ones who "handed over" Jesus, an innocent man, were the true criminals. Judas handed Jesus over to the religious authorities, the religious leaders handed Jesus over to the procurator, Pontius Pilate; and Pilate handed him over to Christ's executioners. ("hand over" is a key phrase in the passion narrative). It is clear that a prophecy foretold by Isaiah is fulfilled in the person of Jesus: "He was counted among the wicked (Is. 53:12)... though he had done no wrong nor spoken any falsehood". (Is. 53:9)

Let us reflect on the following; At the time Luke wrote his gospel, innocent people were arrested and some were even executed simply because of their faith in Jesus. Bear in mind that the first Christian Martyr, St. Stephen, was stoned to death for defending his faith in Our Lord. Today, we can point to the four Missionaries of Charity who were brutally killed in Yemen or The Coptic Christians who were beheaded in a Middle East country. What was their "crime"? And why did their crime merit capital punishment? They witnessed to their faith in Jesus!

Also noteworthy is that in the darkest moments of his life, Jesus was healing and forgiving. Even to his dying breath, Jesus, the innocently suffering righteous one, extended God's mercy to sinners. Fr. Brown maintains that death itself can be healing. Think of families who, for the sake of the dying family member, bury the hatchet and are reconciled. Such "deathbed reconciliations" are not unknown to ministers of the gospel.

Finally, let us be mindful that all of us are in some way implicated in the death of Jesus. After all, it was our sins that were nailed to the cross. In Mel Gibson's classic film, *The Passion of the Christ*, the only time the filmmaker appears in the film is in the scene of our Lord's crucifixion. We see only his hands. He is driving a nail into Our Lord's feet. Gibson is making a point about his own sins! Those very sins brought Christ to the cross!

But keep in mind that the final verdict of Christ's "guilt" is not the final word. The just man, Our Divine Lord, will be vindicated on Easter Sunday.

Amen!