

March 25, 2018 Blind Justice Homily: In 1943 the American actor Henry Fonda was the featured player in a motion picture directed by the noted filmmaker, William Wellman: "The Ox-bow incident" This critically acclaimed film carries a message. It is a searing indictment of mob rule, mass hysteria, senseless violence and groupthink. Mr. Fonda plays the role of a drifter with a social conscience. He enters a town that is in turmoil. A rancher is rumored to be murdered. A posse is formed, and the character he plays joins them in their pursuit of those responsible for the crime. A short time later they apprehend three suspects and are determined to lynch them without a fair hearing. Fonda's character attempts to stop the lynching. His loud protests are ignored. The three men are hanged on trumped up charges. Late in the film we learn of their innocence. The rumor of the rancher's murder was unfounded.

In the Apostle's creed we utter the words, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate" In Mark's account of Our Lord's passion and death, Pilate asks the mob a simple, forthright question. "What evil has he done? And he heard the angry response, "Crucify him!" The procurator did not find Jesus guilty of a crime meriting death. He was fully aware that the religious authorities had given Jesus up to him out of sheer spite and hatred. Recall the words from Mark's gospel: "The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death but found none". (Mk.14:55) Nevertheless, Pilate attempted to release Jesus, but without success. He had Jesus crucified not because he was guilty but because the High Priest through the mob put pressure on him. "Wishing to satisfy the crowd" (Mk15:15), Pilate cravenly condemns Jesus to death by crucifixion. It was a cruel punishment, and one normally reserved for rebels and slaves.

In Luke's account of the passion and death of Christ, the so-called Good Thief boldly proclaims the innocence of Jesus. In his words to the unrepentant thief, he said, "We have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal". (Lk.23:41)

Throughout the passion narrative, Jesus, the suffering servant, remains almost entirely silent. He willingly submits to His Father's will in his suffering and death. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' prayer was that He be spared the cup of suffering, but He still prayed, "But not what I will but what you will". (Mk.14:36). He faced death alone. All his disciples abandoned him and fled.

The first of many lessons we can derive from today's gospel is that Jesus is always on the side of those who suffer injustice. In the words of the retired Pontiff, Pope Benedict, "Ever since Jesus submitted to violence, it has been the wounded, the victims of violence, who have been the image of God, who chose to suffer for us. So Jesus, in the throes of his passion is an image of hope: God is on the side of those who suffer."

Second, Let us ask ourselves if we are prone to rash judgment. Have we ever assumed the role of judge and jury in rendering a guilty verdict to those we hold in contempt? Do we turn a blind eye on injustice and fail to speak up in defense of those who are victims of bigotry, malice and blind hatred?

In her reflection on the first station of the cross, Jesus is condemned to death, the English mystic Caryl Houselander writes, "It is significant that everything contributing to that condemnation (of Jesus) is parallel with everything that contributes to the passion of the martyrs of our own times: the intrigues

and the fears of politicians, the hatred of fanatics, mass hysteria; the unstable crowds swayed by paid agitators, the popular craving for sensation... and those many Pilates of our day who wash their hands of the responsibility of knowing "What is truth? Who shut their eyes to Christ in (human beings) and try to escape from their own uneasiness by evasions."

In closing, I repeat a prayer composed by Ms. Houselander. "Let me know You in the outcast, the humiliated, the ridiculed, the shamed; in the sinner who weeps for his sins. Give me even the courage to look at your Holy Face, almost obliterated, bruised and lacerated, by my own guilt and see myself".

Amen!