

Words from John

April 10, 2020

Every Good Friday the church presents us with the “Passion of Jesus,” according to St. John. There are significant stylistic changes between John and the other Passion accounts. In the other accounts, things happen to Jesus. In John’s account, Jesus is in charge. He controls the action. He orchestrates the events. This is the HOUR for which Jesus has come. It is why he is here.

There is no display of weakness or doubt in the Jesus of John. The scene in the garden is of his arrest. There is no agony, no asking to be let off of what he has come for. No one can arrest him until he gives himself over to the arresters. He is not quiet and docile in his various trials. He answers and challenges both Anna’s and Pilate. There is no Simon of Cyrene in this gospel to help carry the cross and no cries of abandonment coming from him while hanging on the cross. None of these features from the other gospels fit the Johannine theology of the hour for Jesus to be lifted up is the hour of his passion and death. So what does Jesus say in the Passion of John. He will say three things;

1. He takes care of his mother
2. He admits to being thirsty
3. He announces that his work is finished

At the simplest level these are the three things that Jesus said in the moment of his dying. For a long time until the Middle Ages they were accepted at face value with no deeper meaning entrusted to his words. Scholars then began to reflect more deeply on all the imagery of John’s gospel. The first word which entrusted his mother to the care of the beloved disciple is significant as more than just the last act of a dying son to see to the protection of his mother. At the crucifixion scene, the disciples are standing below the cross. They are near to him unlike in the other accounts which all place them far away. Mary is close at this time which is also significant because she is close to him at the start of his mission in Cana when she helps move him forward on his journey to this hour. His protest to her, “my hour has not yet come.” She ignores that and sends him on his way or that hour. It is only appropriate that she should be with him when he comes to realize the fulfillment of that hour. But as he fulfills that hour, he also lets her know that her work is not done. She is entrusted to this disciple who represents all faithful disciples. She goes from having one son to having generation upon generation of sons and daughters down through the ages. She is the Mother of all Beloved Disciples, i.e. the mother of the church.

The last two words from John I will conclude tomorrow.

Fr. Marty