



"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah

53:7).

Our Lord Jesus Christ accepted His Holy Crucifixion and its agonizing sufferings. He was unjustly led to the tomb without having committed any lawlessness. Though our Lord was falsely accused of blasphemy against God by the Jews and of political corruption by the Romans, He did not mount a defense of Who He was and what His teachings were. Our Lord did not campaign against the leadership of the Sanhedrin nor convene a great army against the Roman Empire such as man would have never seen.

The sacrificial wounds to His hands, feet, and side were traumatic and agonizing on the Holy Cross. Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died in the supportive presence of perhaps three courageous women and the youngest of the apostles from among His closest followers.

"Then they all forsook Him and fled" (Mark 14:50).

What could have instilled so much fear in the hearts of His followers that made them ready to forsake our Lord Jesus Christ at a time when His sufferings were so great for a crime they knew quite well He was innocent of? The sting of thorns embedded into His head, the torn flesh of His back from scourging, the punctured wounds because of the nails having pierced his bones, muscles and tissues, and his chest having been so deeply penetrated through with the spear that blood and water were about to gush out pronouncing His death. All of that should have surely brought forth compassion from the hardest of hearts. However, the wounds were courageously bore in self-sacrifice and as an attribute to His death as well as His risen new nature in the flesh.

"When our Lord was suffering upon the cross, the tombs were burst open, exposing Hades. The souls leaped forth, the dead returned to life and many of them were seen in Jerusalem...You see, therefore how great the effect of Christ's death was. For no creature endured the demise with equal mind nor did the elements His Passion. Furthermore the earth did not retain his body, not Hades His spirit" (Alexander of Alexandria, c. 324).

But why would those closest to our Lord fearfully flee from acknowledging association with Him? Those who could attest to His innocence had

abandoned Him in His time of great suffering. What did they innately fear and flee from?

Jerusalem's State of Oppression

The first century Jerusalem was culturally fraught with political and religious corruption. During that era, lack of common sense, spiritual insight, sound judgment, and absence of problem solving skills combined within that society lead to and heightened emotional responses. In addition, consequences of political and societal domination made men carry out uncharacterized and incomprehensible actions. Fight or flight responses became commonplace.

Nepotism and condescension were the religious platforms of qualifications for political and religious leaders underneath the Emperor Tiberius of Rome. His prefect, Pontius Pilate, ruled Judea. Caiaphas was the religious Jewish leader located in Jerusalem. Apparently Jerusalem preferred a ruler from another country rather than a ruler from among their culture and faith.

The High Priests prior to the appointment of Herod the Great belonged to the Jewish families of priests that traced their paternal familial line back to the priesthood of Aaron, the first Biblical High Priest and the elder brother of Moses. Since the time of Herod the Great, the High Priests of Jerusalem

received their appointments from Rome. Rome was not of Jewish belief. The paradox of Roman selection of High Priests did not end with the unfamiliarity of Jewish religion but the Roman leaders would often select the High Priest based on their ability to keep Jews oppressed.

With the corruption and brutality of the Roman leaders, in particular Pilate's known executions without trial and exceeding grievous cruelty; those residents of Jerusalem of non-Roman descent lived in a constant state of fear.

While the leaders of the Sanhedrin accused our Lord Jesus Christ of blasphemy according to Roman law, they did not possess the authority to execute Him. Desiring His death with wanton injustice, they delivered Him to the Roman officers declaring our Lord Jesus Christ to have proclaimed Himself King. A falsely contrived declaration such as this was a crime of treason under Roman law in which the Romans could execute our Lord for. To have someone crucified was not a difficult task at all with little to no evidence of guilt.

This should not be surprising. Following His Holy birth hundreds of innocent Jewish newborn males were ruthlessly slaughtered in search of only One. An individual could have no doubt what that same

primal instinctive brutality of the governmental rulers were capable of and what the wealthy Jewish leaders would concede to in conservation of their standing among them.

Such was the rampant collective state of fear deeply ingrained within those who abided in Jerusalem.

Fear was dispersed among the actions of individuals in response to the collective implications of government and religious dictates.

Fear of Men

Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy prominent leader of the Jewish Sanhedrin, who secretly believed in the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, had neither the courage nor the conviction to make his belief public for fear of reprisal by those among whom he dwelled. However, he was compassionately moved by the wounds inflicted upon our Lord on the Holy Cross that he boldly approached Pilate, whom he most likely knew as a personal acquaintance, for the departed body of our Lord. By then, the wounds of our Lord had already conquered his fears.

"After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus" (John 19:38).

Nicodemus, also a member of the Sanhedrin and a Pharisee, and taught by our Lord at night through the veil of darkness, out of fear of recompense had no desire to proclaim the teachings he had learnt from our Lord. Nevertheless, strengthened by the sufferings and the wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the Holy Cross, he accompanied Joseph of Arimathea to prepare the Holy body of the departed Jesus.

"And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds" (John 19:39).

A "hundred pounds" of myrrh and aloe were Nicodemus way of acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ as a king. Thus, he anointed His departed and Holy Body in such a royal manner.

"Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby" (John 19:40-42).

Where were the disciples while Joseph and Nicodemus were preparing the Holy Body of our

Lord? They had scattered in fear. Ironically, it was the ones who sought Him in fear who acknowledged Him at the most politically and religiously dangerous time in His life. The wounds of the Lord Jesus Christ had touched their heart and they were no longer fearful.

"Listen to Me, My people who know judgment, in whose heart is My law. Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be overcome by their contempt. For as a garment will be devoured by time, and as wool will be devoured by a moth, so shall they be devoured. But My righteousness shall be forever, and My salvation from generation to generation" (Isaiah 51:7-8 OSB).

It took some time for the wounds of the Lord Jesus Christ to impact His apostles. St. Peter, who had been known for his courage, exhibited his fear in a vile manner uncharacteristic for his strong and resilient personality. Consequently, he vehemently denied our Lord Jesus Christ to a servant girl with curses and swearing. St. Peter was not able to contain his denials and denied our Lord three times only to later, bitterly regret his unchecked denials with immense tears.

"Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, 'Peace to

you.' But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.'" (Luke 24:36-39).

To convince the apostles that He has risen in the flesh, Jesus resorted to eating fish and honeycomb with them although His glorified body was in no need of nourishment. He had to follow up with their need for sustenance of belief. At this point His Holy wounds were not enough to convince people that He had risen in the flesh.

The doubt of St. Thomas' faith and his need to see the imprints of the nails and put his hand into Jesus' side to believe transpired into our Lord directing him to do so days later.

"Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" (John 20:27-28).

St. Thomas' doubt of ardently seeking the absolute truth led to his faithfulness. St. Thomas did not need further identification of our Lord Jesus Christ but

this may have been due to his fellow disciples constantly telling him of the risen Lord bearing His wounds -- as he was not present at the Lord's appearance to them eight days earlier.

Revelation of His Sacrificial Wounds

The wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ would eventually unite the despondent apostles, preserve the past, unite the present, and open the doors to eternity for the future of Christianity.

The Lord Jesus Christ is perhaps the only One God Who through His death defeated death, and now lives an eternal life. Our Lord Jesus Christ was not buried; His body is not decaying in a grave. The Lord left behind an empty tomb and grave clothes but took with Him His wounds of the Holy Cross.

"who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (I Peter 2:24).

His Holy wounds did not only gather together the scattered disciples but provided them with purpose once again -- of preaching and teaching salvation. His Holy wounds confirmed His Glorious Resurrection to those who were in need of reassurance and joy.

"The Lord should fill us with joy, we who have been redeemed from corruption by the blood of the Lord" (Clement of Alexandria, c.195).

The Lord Jesus Christ's perfection would be exemplified through His Holy wounds. The imprint of His suffering would take on new meaning.

Those wounds would teach men not to fear. They would display for all eternity not what was taken but what was given; not what was lost but what was found.

May we all, when fear approaches, reflect upon the Holy wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ, embrace His strength of endurance in order to give nourishment and growth to our courage. Let us all remember that our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed Himself the true Passover and offered Himself as a sacrifice; a sacrifice in which wounds will be identified eternally as emerging from a victorious rather than an embittered battle.

Peace be to you all,

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