

In the Face of Evil

Many of you know that my parents had started the restaurant business almost 15 years ago. It was a tough beginning but eventually we started to build up our clientele. Business was doing good so we decided to take a family vacation—the first one in four or five years—and we decided to go to Vietnam for a month as a family for the first time. The beginning of the trip was exciting, thinking about what it would be like to return to my home country, my roots. We had to transfer through Taipei and after a few more hours we finally arrived in Vietnam and were just getting settled until we received the call.

The next day my parents received a call from my aunt; I could hear the silence of my father, I could hear the distress of my mother and I knew something was wrong. Less than 48 hours after we had left before our house sitter could come, our house had been robbed. My brothers and sisters' designer clothes were all taken, my mother's irreplaceable jewelry were taken, both cars were taken and destroyed and the house was in shambles. The wind was knocked out of our sails, our vacation seemed to be ruined and throughout the trip I kept thinking:

Why? We worked so hard for these last years and this is the first time we have a family vacation and what happens? We go to Church and we are not bad people but this happens? Jesus you said that a father feeds his children bread and fish so why does it feel like he is feeding us rocks and snakes instead? What kind of Father is he?

When we are confronted with greater or lesser evils, we cannot help but wonder in our heart of hearts where is God in all of this. We begin to wonder what kind of Father he is.

If in our everyday experience of life we encounter evils that seem to have no meaning, that can rip or tear at the fabric of our lives, we can be tempted to wonder if God really cares at all. And so we develop a mentality whereby we need to be in control, we need to take care of the situation because if I don't nobody will, if I don't take care of myself, nobody can. We develop the heart of a Pilate.

In Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, we get an interesting interpretation of the predicament that Pilate is in. Pilate is in his fortress and he is speaking to his wife Claudia about Jesus and he is conveying the burden that is on his heart. He knows that if he does not acquiesce to the demands of the High Priest, Caiaphas, then he could start a rebellion, and if he crucifies Jesus, his followers could potentially start a riot as well. Regardless of who starts the riot, it will be his head on the platter for not preventing it:

Do you want to know what my truth is Claudia? I've been putting down rebellions in this rotten outpost for eleven years...Caesar has warned me, Claudia. Warned me twice. He swore that the next time would be my blood. That is my truth!

So we can see the heart of Pilate manifested in his interactions with Jesus. He is trying to be in control, he believes he is in control of the situation, acting sly with the Jews and with Jesus. And when Jesus does not respond to his question about where he is from he gets angry and tries to reassert his power over Jesus by claiming to have power to release him and to crucify him. But in reality, the great irony is that Pilate is not in control at all, the passage reveals that Caesar and the Jewish leaders are in control and he has none. Power and control were illusions that vanished to reveal fear and cowardice.

If this is the heart of a Pilate, look how drastically different the heart of Christ is. The One who seems to be in no control at all, whose body has just been brutally scourged with his flesh rent and ripped, who has just been mocked wearing a crown with two inch thorns digging into his skull, this One IS free. When Pilate threatened him with crucifixion, Jesus was able to look him straight in the eyes and say:

You have no power over me unless it had been given to you from above.

Ah so we see that it is not Pilate, nor Caesar nor the Jewish leaders who are in control. In other words, "you would have no power over unless the Father and I had given it to you because 'No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again (Jn 10:18).'" Jesus truly has freedom through abandon, freedom by abandoning himself to the Father's plan, know that he is truly has a Father and that he will pull through, that he will be faithful.

Indeed, Jesus did go through the agony in the garden, but he was able to transcend it, to see beyond it into the heart of the Father and this gave him the confidence to endure all that Satan could throw at him.

Even in the midst of his agonizing pain on the cross Jesus has absolute trust in the Father. Did you know that the words 'My God, my God why have you forsaken me?' are words of absolute trust? What Jesus is doing is that he is quoting the first words of a Psalm, Psalm 22 and when he quotes it he evokes not just the first line, but the entire meaning of the song, it was the title of the song.

When you hear 'Don't stop believing' you think of trains, city boys and living in a lonely world or when you hear 'O Canada' you think of patriotism, standing on guard, God keeping us free. So when you hear the words 'My God, my God why have you forsaken me?' what meaning is associated with it? Trust. Absolute trust.

Indeed, the first words of the psalm talks about how it feels like God has forsaken him, how it feels like God doesn't hear his cry. But it continues with the psalmist recalling the past and how God revealed himself to be trustworthy back then and how he had delivered the Jewish people and how he will deliver him despite being mocked, despite having his body pierced and his clothes divided (prophecies of what Jesus would endure). But despite all the suffering that the psalmist endures, listen to how he begins to conclude:

I will tell of thy name to my brethren;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee

He ends with praise because he knows that God has not abandoned him, has not been deaf to his cry but in fact through him, God will bring about the salvation and deliverance of the whole world:

All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.

Men shall tell of the Lord to the coming generation,
³¹and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
that he has wrought it.

So when Jesus utters “Why have you forsaken me?” on the cross, he fulfills what Psalm 22 had foretold: even when it seems like God has abandoned me, even though I am enduring the most horrific torture ever known on the face of this earth, I know that my Father hears my prayer, I know that he will deliver me, and I know that through me he will free all the families of the nations to worship at his throne forever.

I don't know why God allowed for that robbery to happen 10 years ago. I wish I could tell you that the story had a nice ending and that there was a moment of revelation where I saw the plan of God clearly but I can't. Sometimes we do receive that insight but maybe the evils in your life are obscure like mine too. But I don't think that is the point Jesus is trying to convey.

He showing us that instead of having the heart of Pilate seeking to grasp after the illusion of control, we can have the heart of Christ grounded in trust, that despite the darkest of nights or the cacophony of discord screeching in our lives, we know that he is painting on a bigger canvas, we know that he is composing a greater song, we know through his Son that he WAS faithful, he IS faithful and he WILL BE faithful to us. Instead of seeking control, let us seek freedom through abandon, to abandon ourselves to our Father who redeemed Jesus from the grave and whose love is stronger than death, stronger than any evil that Satan can muster up.

Which of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Mt 7:9-11).