

By arguments they want to destroy your life (Luke 23:1-49)

* Dear Friends on this last Sunday of Lent our lectionary suggests to follow the Liturgy of the Passion instead of the Liturgy of the Palm. The lesson for today pictures the three crosses instead of palm branches. The Word of God continues to rivet our attention towards essential things instead of non-essential. Although the joyful celebration of Jesus' kingship may seem important, however, it is still a farce in view of upcoming Judah's betrayal, the arrest, the inhuman treatment, the mockery, and the execution of the King. It is not Jesus' triumphant entry in Jerusalem shaped the apostolic message; it is Christ's passion became the first and foremost important part of the Gospel offered to Jews and Greeks alike, (1Co 1:21-23). That is why instead of *Hosanna to the Son of David!*, today we've heard *Crucify, crucify him!* (Joh 12:13; Luk 23:21).

* When I thought of Luke's passion narrative in terms of how to use it for a practical purpose, I asked myself: *Paul, what is the matter of death and life for you?* Friends, are you with me in centering your personal salvation in the first place? If it is so, we can run together for good ideas for the sake of your and my salvation. At the beginning we look for a good idea throughout the lesson from (Luke 23:1-49). Here we came across with the four direct usages of the word "to save" that in Greek reads "σώζω." Referring to a Greek lexicon, the basic meaning of the verb "to save" is to rescue from peril, to protect, to keep alive. It involves the preservation of life, either physical or spiritual. This verb and its derivations connect to Jesus' acts and his sayings of himself throughout all the Gospels. According to the traditional apostolic message, Christ suffered on a cross and on the third day he rose from the dead in order to grant salvation to those who will believe in him, (Act 10:43).

* But before taking the next step forward, we will ask the God of our salvation for grace to be led into all truth. We pray, enlighten our minds, we beseech You, O God, by the Spirit that proceeds from You, that, as Your Son has promised, we may be led into all truth regarding the salvation of our bodies and souls; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

* Friends, I believe we are of the same mind regarding the following statement that if a certain group of people found themselves in a life-threatening situation they will look for ideas and leaders. Bearing this in mind, I recall a talk with a friend who had experienced a hard time trying to make up her mind with considerable decision, "to go down stairs or not," on the occasion of the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center in New York in 1993. She said, after the explosion the airspace in the tower was filled with smoke that made it difficult to breathe. Some people suggested remaining in their offices,

some decided to go down. On that occasion a radio didn't work because the explosion damaged the local network. So, being influenced by my friend's story, I look for another idea.

* The next story was told by Brian Clark. On September 11, 2001 he was on the south tower's 84th floor when the hijacked jetliner slammed into the skyscraper. He said, "It felt like the building was going to fall," the tower twisted. In short, the company of six coworkers including Brian entered Stairway A. "Let's go down," said Clark. At the 81st floor, they met an obese woman and a frail man walking up. "You can't go down," the woman said. *"The floors are in flames! We have to get above the smoke and fire."* Brian shined his flashlight on the face of the person speaking. *"The woman carried the argument,"* Brian recalls. Then four of his colleagues decided to climb up, but Brian and his friend Ronald continued down through smoke and debris. Dozens, possibly hundreds decided to follow the "wise advice" to go up in view of the smoke and their lack of knowledge. By the way, the heavy smoke lasted only two or three floors; meanwhile a helicopter rescue was not possible and the rooftop doors were locked. Only four people survived above the 78th floor in the south tower. They did it by acting against the advice of others and going down the stairs through smoke and debris. In the course of this and other remarks we found the good idea about "reasonable" arguments; they are like a deadly weapon that can destroy person's life, if to follow after them. For the benefits of many the survivor Brian concludes, "I can still see my friends helping that woman up the stairs. They were heroes who made an unfortunate decision."

* Friends, some of you like to hear examples from our daily life, some of you like stories from the Bible. So in order to have balance the next story was taken from (1king 21). There was a king named Ahab who built a summerhouse in the little city of Jezreel. That house was surrounded by beautiful flowers and trees. The king had spent much time to make his garden a paradise. Once while walking through his garden, Ahab discovered that just across the fence was a fine vineyard owned by his neighbor Naboth. So the king decided to buy this land from Naboth, but Naboth didn't care to sell his vineyard. The king was very frustrated; he wouldn't even eat and talk with anyone. However, later on he told his wife Jezebel the matter of his depression. After hearing the king she said, *Aren't you the king of Israel? Can you not do whatever pleases you? Have you not the power to oblige a subject to obey your command and especially in such a trivial matter as parting with a vineyard?* She might even quote the Scripture where it says, *"you now shall prosper in your kingdom over Israel."* Then she concluded, *"Get up and eat some food, stop thinking about your troubles, I will get that vineyard for you."* Jezebel's arguments sounded pleasantly and the king decided to take advantage of that opportunity.

* Soon the story about a king and beautiful flowers turned into a drama when two worthless men in the presence of many people testified falsely that Naboth had spoken wickedly of God and of king Ahab, and people believed. According to the Law of Moses a blasphemy against God considered as a crime and such a man had to be put to death. Being misled, the people stoned poor Naboth. This evil was designed and put into operation under the control Jezebel, the king's wife. Now look, how many evil things were made by means of reasonable arguments. Now, did God show mercy to the people who performed and supported the execution of the innocent man Naboth? Did God accept their excuses in view of their incompetence? I think God may have accepted their excuses if we take into consideration the following repentance of the king (1Ki 21:27-29), and the next story, (Luk 23:34-48).

* It is incredible, on the cross, while being under the pressure of great pain and humiliation, Jesus continued to save his people. However, priests, scribes and other Jewish leaders forced people to believe that it is impossible. They set out credible arguments. If Jesus saved others, why didn't he save himself? And, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One, why didn't God save him? By offering these arguments, Jewish leaders convinced a public to belief that Jesus was a blasphemer, false Messiah and unqualified liar.

* Just imagine that the two criminals who were crucified along with Jesus were acting on behalf of all the human race. After hearing hundreds of reasonable arguments against Jesus and his disciples, a half of mankind accepted them and believed the false teachers as the first criminal did. After all, where do you think that foolish man and a half of humankind were later found? Woe, woe, woe ... in a little while they shall all be in hell, (Luk 23:29-31).

* However, it was impossible for a High Priest and his court to prevent God from saving his people. Despite the pain, humiliation and abandoning, Jesus continued to save his people from their sins and hell. The powerful counterarguments flew from Jesus' mouth as he said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." To one criminal from right side who repented his guilt and asked forgiveness, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." After all, there were many in attendance whom the Father preached repentance. "*... and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, ... and the earth shook, and the rocks were split,* (Mat 27:51). The next person who rejected the "reasonable" arguments and believed in Jesus was a leader of 100 soldiers; he praised God, saying, "*Certainly this man was innocent!*" After the centurion some people proceeded through a stage of shame and distress; they were beating their breasts until they had heard the Good news from Peter; they repented and were baptized, (Act 2:41).

* Now, taking on the account the examples we've heard today, let's say some words in conclusion.

This world have reasonable arguments against humiliation, self-denying and total subjection to Christ, but they are false arguments. Friends, pray the Lord for help to see difference between false and truth arguments, and don't allow people to deceive you, doing so you will be very well. And the peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

Beloved, peace and grace be with you,

Amen

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