The Political Controversies of Jesus

We have only 20 pages that tell us about Jesus life and teachings. Of those 20 pages, 13 of them deal specifically with the last week of his life. And if you separate it still further, you will discover that one-**third of those 13 pages** took place on Tuesday of Holy Week. Thus, in terms of sheer volume, we know far more on **this day in his life than any other day**. The events of that day represent a significant percentage of what we know about the man Jesus.

We know that Jesus spent Monday evening in Bethany, probably in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, since that is where he spent Sunday evening. He arose early on Tuesday morning and he and his disciples returned to Jerusalem. If you will then let your mind drift back through the pages of history, let us assume for a moment that you are living in First Century Palestine. It is the Season of the Passover and you and your family are among the thousands of religious pilgrims who have migrated to the ancient walled city of Jerusalem to participate in the religious celebration. You were there on Monday when Jesus took whip in hand and radically ran the moneychangers from the temple. It had been an eventful day.

But now it is Monday and it has come time to retire with your family. As you walk down the Villa de la Rosa you pass by the palace of the high priest, the residence of Caiaphas. You notice that a light is burning in the upper floor of this exquisite mansion. You comment to your family that Caiaphas must be working long hours to see that all of the religious festivities go on as scheduled. Yet, if you only knew what was really going on in that palace that evening. If you only knew what was taking place in that smoke filled room.

Gathered around the table that evening in the palace was one of the strangest combinations of political and religious factions that anyone could possibly imagine. Yet, politics makes strange bedfellows. It is interesting to me to see how fundamentalist **Protestant** denominations find a partner in the Roman **Catholic** Church on the issue of **abortion**. It is interesting to me to see how **fundamentalist Protestants** and **Jews** are brought together because they have similar views on the protection of Israel.
Groups that would normally not have communication are sometimes strangely brought together for a temporary goal. That is what happened that night in Jerusalem. Here is the background.

The three groups conspired together that evening: the Herodians, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. Their common goal was to discredit Jesus of Nazareth in front of his constituency, the common people. It was probably not their intent to assassinate Jesus, which is what eventually happened, but rather to discredit him. They did not want a martyr on their hands. They would much prefer to make him a fool. Let's give him enough rope and he may just hang himself. Thus, each group would in turn ask him a question, not because they thought that they could learn from him, but because they wished to trick him. They were hoping for that one slip of the tongue. Each group would ask him a question that would be dear to their cause:
1. The first question asked was from the Herodians. Taxes
2. The next question was asked by Sadducees. Marriage
3. The third question came from a Pharisee. Authority
4. The fourth question came from Jesus. Baptism of John: Heaven or human

Sign of the cross by Brezhnev's wife:

As Vice-President, George H. W. Bush represented the U.S. at the 1982 funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev who had been the president of the USSR for 18 years. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow, Mrs. Natalia. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: she reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.

There, in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband. [Gary Thomas, Christian Times (October 3, 1994), p. 26.]

A Theological Curveball

A certain minister has made it a policy for many years to refer "six-year-old theology questions" to his wife. Since she has taught very young children for many years, he says, she has a much better grasp than he does of how to address the questions which little kids ask.

The other day, a first-grader brought a drawing of a skeleton into class where she teaches English as a second language. The titled across the top of the drawing read "Inside of Me." It was designed to teach children that everyone has a skeleton inside of them. He unfolded it proudly and showed it to the class. One little girl from India was astounded at the thought that she and others had this scary-looking skeleton inside them, and so she pressed the issue a bit farther. "Even you got one of these inside you, Mrs. K?" The teacher replied, "Yes, I have one, too."

The next question was the theological one. "Even God got one inside him?" Now in a class made up of children from many different countries, cultures, and religious backgrounds (most of them not Christians), you can imagine that this question had the potential for major theological debate.

I doubt if I'd have had the presence of mind to give the answer the teacher did; but, as usual, her expertise in six-year-old theology saved the day.

"If God needs a skeleton, I'm sure he has one," she replied. "God has everything he needs." This apparently satisfied the theological curiosity of the class, and they got on with the lesson.
(by Larry R. Kalajainen from *Extraordinary Faith for Ordinary Time*, CSS Publishing Company)

Doubt is not the opposite of faith, fear is. (Anglican theologian, Verna Dozier)