

Good Friday 2017  
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA  
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If you were paying attention to the chanting of Saint John's Passion, you may have noticed how often Pontius Pilate says to the crowd: *I find no guilt in him.*

In John's Gospel, the trial of Jesus before Pilate is presented almost like an opera.

There is Pilate, arguing with the crowd: *What has Jesus done? I find no guilt in him.*

The crowd shouts back, *Crucify him!*

Pilate runs inside and pleads with Jesus, "*What is truth. Where are you from? Don't you realize that I have power over you?*"

Pilate rushes back outside. *He's not guilty. How about if I just have him beaten up a bit, then I'll release him to you!*

The 'chorus' of the crowd shouts again, *Give us Barabbas. Crucify him!*

*But I find no guilt in him!* Says, Pilate, almost pleading.

Back and forth. Time and again. And Pilate keeps repeating, "*I find no guilt in him.*"

And in Matthew's Gospel, as Pilate sends this innocent human being to the most gruesome death that humanity had invented, he washes his hands, and says, "this isn't my fault!"

Isn't Pilate trying to do the same thing in John's Gospel?

Each time he says, "I find no guilt in him," isn't he really saying, "I told you he was innocent. We'll kill him anyway. But it's *not my fault.*"

An innocent human being was suffering, and the person with the power to stop it kept repeating, “it’s not my fault. I told you he’s innocent. I’ve washed my hands.”

An innocent human being was suffering, and the crowd was shouting, ‘he deserves it.’

An innocent human being was suffering, and the soldiers were amusing themselves with a dice game, entertaining themselves so that they did not have to look too closely at the blood.

An innocent human being was suffering, and people passed by, busy with *important* things, a few of them upset about the legal explanation for the blood. *Pilate shouldn’t have written this, he should have written that.*

An innocent human being was dying. Only a few of his loved ones were close enough to notice. And they were powerless to stop it.

*I find no guilt in him*, Pilate said. But he turned his back on the murder, and washed his hands.

I’m sure he told himself, “Well, at least *I tried.*” And so do *we*.

On a certain Friday afternoon, in a backwater province of the vast Roman empire, a Galilean rabbi was crucified. They put him in a tomb. And they thought that was the end of it, and the end of *him*.

On a certain Friday afternoon, numerous “god fearing” people saw an innocent man suffer. How did they respond to that suffering?

Some wanted him to suffer. *Crucify him!*

Some explained that he deserved it. *He is no friend of Caesar!*

Some tried to distract themselves with entertainment, so that they didn’t have to see what was real. *Just keep playing dice.*

And Pilate kept telling himself that *he was just fine*. “I told them he was innocent. I washed my hands of the matter.”

Really?

Do you remember that conversation between Pilate and Jesus? As Pilate, the politician, tries to find a way out of a tough decision, he says to Jesus: “Don’t you understand that I have power over you?”

And on one level, Pilate really does have power. No one could be crucified in a Roman province without the approval of the Governor. Pilate had the power to say, “this innocent suffering must stop.”

He has the power... but he won't take responsibility. If Pilate pardoned Jesus, he'd have to take responsibility, and explain to the crowd, “I will not stand by while an innocent person suffers.”

He has the power, but he won't take responsibility. So he washes his hands and pretends that there was nothing he could do.

Do we wash our hands?

Innocent people still suffer. How do we respond? What do we do when we see it?

Innocent ones are suffering.

Yet sometimes, we tell ourselves that they deserve it. “It's their own dumb fault. They've made bad choices. This is what you get.”

Sometimes, we rejoice in the suffering of others. “God is on our side. Bomb them. Make them pay. Send them to jail. Crucify them.”

Sometimes, we try to entertain ourselves so completely that we just won't have to notice the stench and the suffering that is nearby. “If I just watch enough TV, play enough with my smart phone, I won't have to see the hunger over here, the suffering over there, the injustice, the heartaches and loneliness in front of me.”

Sometimes we have the power to do something, even something small, but we don't want the responsibility. So we wash our hands, and tell ourselves, “There was nothing I could do.”

God's children are suffering. And how do the rest of God's children react? We often react by moving away, turning away, explaining it away.

But today... we cannot turn away. We must look, and see.

Because the “innocent one” is not just a human being... the innocent one is God's Son.

The one who “had no guilt” could NOT be guilty. He was God!

And yet - the guiltless one goes to the worst possible place, and experiences the worst possible thing. Why?

Well, perhaps because the God of the universe refuses to turn away from human heartbreak. The God of the universe refuses to wash his hands of human hurt. The God of the universe takes responsibility.

The God of the universe saw what happened when human being choose to sin. We refuse to listen to God's life-giving word and commandments. We refuse to live the vocation which is ours as people of the covenant.

We sin. And we keep making the choices that so often lead to suffering.

We lose our way. But God does not wash his hands and turn away.

Rather, the Lord of Creation is humble enough to do what needs to be done. God does not wash his hands of us, telling us that our suffering is our own dumb fault.

Our God does not move away from our suffering – rather, God enters fully into it. God does not wash his hands of human pain. God allows human pain to wash over him.

Is there anything more horrible than innocent suffering? Is there anything more horrible than isolation, physical suffering, pain, death?

And yet – God chooses to *go there*, and embrace that, in order to heal us, and forgive us. God does not move away from our suffering – God enters into it, so that when we suffer, we will discover *in our suffering* the one who never abandons us.

And when we lose this life and enter the tomb, we will discover the one who went there first. He went there first, to lead us through, to the life that doesn't end.

Jesus, goes into the place of human suffering, while so many around him were turning away, paying no heed, washing their hands.

And we, who follow this Crucified Savior, we who find our forgiveness in him, must ask ourselves a stark Good Friday question: *where would he want me to be... today, and tomorrow?*

Where is innocent suffering still happening? And where am I?

Where are the innocents still being harmed? Am I paying attention? Am I, are *we*, calling for

some to suffer? Are we saying that they deserve it? Are we entertaining ourselves into inaction?  
Are we convincing ourselves that we are not responsible?

Are we *washing* our hands? Or *getting our hands dirty*, doing the work of the one whose hands  
were pierced in order to make us whole?

I find not guilt in him.

But I find guilt in *me*.

That's why I *need him*, and need to be *near* him and his cross. There is nowhere else we can go  
to find forgiveness, meaning and life.

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