



Theology Corner

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

The Creed: “He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried and rose again on the third day in accordance with the scriptures...”

The meaning of the first part of these lines are less nuanced than the rest of it. That is, the reality of Christ’s crucifixion being ordered under Pontius Pilate. We profess this as a historical reality as Pontius Pilate ordered that Christ be crucified at the continuous request of the people and a threatening of his position. But we should consider that while this was a grave matter, Pilate did not want Christ to be crucified, but cared more about his status, while fearing that he would lose popularity and therefore be released from his position a short time after. As the Catechism states, the personal sins of Pontius Pilate are known to God alone, as there is an element of ignorance to take into consideration, not knowing who Christ truly was (CCC 597).

We then profess that Christ suffered death. This is not a minor statement. Christ’s death is just as important as the Incarnation itself because to be born and take on human flesh would mean very little were it not for his suffering, death, and resurrection (which was the whole point of the Incarnation!). It must be understood though, that this death of Christ does not impact the Godhead. In other words, God himself does not die, but only Christ’s human nature. Some people may ask, “How is this possible, if Christ is both God and man, doesn’t that mean that to kill Christ is to kill God?” Not exactly, because while they crucified Christ who is fully God and fully man, what *died* must have only been his human nature since what is divine is eternal and immutable (unchanging).

One may now ask, “Well, why did Christ have to suffer?” There was no necessity on God’s part to suffer, but I would say that he suffered for two reasons, 1) Because it was fitting as a remedy against sin, and 2) As a divine pedagogy to teach us what true love is and what real holiness is. Why was this fitting as a remedy against sin? Because when we sin, it is because man is choosing the attraction of the flesh over an attraction to the spirit. This is not to say that material things are evil, but simply to say that to give priority to the things of the flesh is a cause to man’s sin. Now, Christ’s suffering and death made satisfaction to God for sin. In other words, through his suffering and death, he redeemed man (which only God can do) in order to merit this satisfaction through a suffering which is “greater than the sin and disobedience of the first man.” (*On the Creed*).

When I say that it is pedagogical, what I mean is that through Christ’s example in the passion, we are taught how we are to follow Christ. We can learn that sometimes we have to make sacrifices for the greater good, and even more, we witness all of the things which we must despise in order to reach a Christian beatitude. For anyone who has seen the Catholicism series by Bishop Barron, he mentions that St. Thomas shows us that if we are to be happy, we must despise what Christ despised on the cross and love what he loved on the cross. To be clear, this is hyperbolic. It is meant to show that we must subordinate our desire for wealth, pleasure, power, and honor to the will of God. This is what makes us happy because it puts things into proper perspective. While God has all of these things to a maximum degree, he shows us himself on the cross without any of it so as to teach us that what is important for us is to do the will of God and desire this above all things.

Lastly, his Resurrection on the third day brought the possibility of salvation to the world since while our humanity was freed from sin through his death, making satisfaction for the sins of the world, our humanity needed to be restored to grace. The only fitting way this occurs is to resurrect and ascend into heaven so as to rise our humanity into a union with God.