

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME. 2026.

In today's second reading, from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:6-10), St. Paul observes that the rulers of this age would not have crucified the Lord of Glory, had they known God's hidden Wisdom. Paradoxically, God's hidden Wisdom included their ignorance of His plan of Salvation. Through the Crucifixion of the Lord of Glory, the sins of erring humanity would be atoned. Through the Lord of Glory's subsequent Resurrection, the way to Eternal Life would be opened to mortal humanity. Behind the human failure of Good Friday and Calvary, divine Mercy worked divine victory.

As we get ready for Lent, I consider it vital to state that we need God, as revealed to and acting among us through Jesus Christ. We human beings are capable of true greatness, but our greatness is both corruptible and mortal. It corrodes and it breaks down. There is strength in men, but not strength to defeat sin and death. There is wisdom in men, but not wisdom enough to evade sin and death.

God had to come to our rescue, and He did so as Man, in Jesus Christ. On Good Friday, only Jesus Christ succeeded. Everyone else failed, in varying degrees, ranging from the treachery of Judas to the helplessness of Mary. Human strength and human wisdom both failed. God's hidden Wisdom and strength prevailed.

Human strength failed. So grand and heroic was Roman strength, that, it seems to me, the Sacred Scriptures use it to stand for all human strength. On Good Friday, Roman strength failed and, symbolically, all human strength failed with it.

I just finished reading a few books about Rome's early enemy, Carthage. The authors try hard to be sympathetic to Carthage, but they are normal human beings, and normal human beings find it difficult to be too sympathetic to a realm whose most solemn form of religious worship was burning babies alive. Rome and Carthage were both aggressive, and their part of the world was not big enough for the two of them. They were bound to fight to the finish. Now, the extraordinary thing about the fight is not that Rome won it, but that, on points, Rome lost it. Battered and bloodied again and again, the Romans were crushed, except that they were the sort of people who don't accept getting crushed. Normal people would have submitted to Carthage after getting beat more than half to death, but the Romans weren't normal. Rome was capable of producing a man like Publius Cornelius Scipio who, after the army he served in was completely destroyed in the bloody mess of Cannae, rounded up some other surviving young officers and made them swear never to surrender and to keep fighting until Carthage gave in. And so it happened. Incredibly, Rome kept fighting until Carthage gave in. It must be said that Rome turned strength and courage into idols, but humanity has had worse idols. Let Rome stand for human strength.

And human strength failed. There is a sad change from young Scipio swearing to fight a hopeless war until incredible victory, to old Pilate washing his hands of justice, and sending an innocent Man to a painful death because he was afraid of some political inconvenience. Strength that stoops to the cynicism of Pilate's "Truth? What's that?" is no longer strong. Rome was no longer strong. Symbolically, human strength faded away on Good Friday. Eventually, human strength always does.

Let Ancient Israel stand for human wisdom. Indeed, Ancient Israel had been touched by God Himself through Moses and the Prophets, and its wisdom was not merely human wisdom. Still, it was far from being the hidden Wisdom of God. Though touched by God, there was much

that Ancient Israel did not know, but it would not admit that it did not know. Ancient Israel was the wisest of human things, but its wisdom also failed on Good Friday. Ancient Israel understood that behind the elaborate myths, sometimes beautiful and sometimes grotesque (usually both) of other nations, was the reality of One Creator God. Ancient Israel followed a Law inspired by that Creator God, and worshipped the Creator God. Over time, however, Ancient Israel had fallen from the Wisdom of the Prophets into the folly of putting God into a box. The Pharisees put Him into the Box of the Law, as though God were not willing and able to operate beyond the confines of the Law. The Sadducees put Him into the Box of the Temple, as though He were not to be worshiped and experienced beyond the confines of the Temple. The Romans had made an idol of two good things, strength and courage, and those idols did not keep them from eventually becoming fools. Ancient Israel also made an idol of two good things, the Law and the Temple. Blinded by that paradoxical idolatry, the leaders of ancient Israel reacted against Jesus of Nazareth, who taught of a God wonderful and glorious far beyond what the Law imagined or the Temple could serve. The leaders of Ancient Israel did not discern the hidden Wisdom of God.

Thus, on Good Friday, the leaders of Ancient Israel and the representative of mighty Rome collaborated to kill the Lord of Glory.

It was not the worst of humanity that killed the Lord of Glory, but the best. Neither the perversions of Carthage nor the bestiality of the Canaanites killed the Lord of Glory. The strongest and the wisest that humanity had to offer collaborated to do that. The representative of mighty Rome and the leaders of wise Israel failed on that day.

And God's hidden wisdom put that failure at the service of His saving plan.

The leaders failed. I will add that the common people failed too. Jesus of Nazareth definitely preferred the common people to their leaders, because the leaders, taking their position as proof of their inherent greatness, were well armored against humility, and only by a miracle could "become like little children." Jesus preferred the common people, but they failed too on Good Friday. Jesus of Nazareth ran in one election, and He lost it badly. "Not this one - we want Barabbas!" The common people could sometimes be like children in a good way, but they could also be like children in a bad way, impulsive and prone to group think and mass hysteria. For a day, they could be furiously against someone, only later to wonder why they had been so mad. Without too much effort, clever people got them furiously angry for a day against Jesus of Nazareth. In our age of internet scares and conspiracy tales, we dare not look down on them. The common people failed as badly as the leaders. Neither human strength, nor human wisdom, nor human democracy, can accomplish human salvation.

And so it happened that the soldiers and judge of Rome worked with the priests of moralists of Ancient Israel to reject and destroy the Son of Man, with the common people fully approving.

We know, of course, that He did not stay destroyed. On the third day, as the sun rose in the sky, the Son of Man walked the earth again, free and happy in the world He had redeemed. During Lent, we prepare to celebrate His great and eternal victory over sin and death.

As we do so, we do penance to make ourselves fully aware that it is not human strength and courage, not law and not even acts of worship, and not democracy either, that finally and eternally save us, but only the Hidden Wisdom of God, at work in us through Faith in the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ, to Whom be praise and thanksgiving now and for ages unending. Amen.

