

Good Friday: A Mother's Son

A popular Good Friday devotion consists of reflections on Jesus' seven words from the cross. Today, we ponder, not seven but one. John reports three words from the cross. They leave no doubt about the speaker's full humanity.

Earlier John portrays Jesus as such a powerful figure that we might easily forget the seminal affirmation of chapter 1: "The Word became flesh" Some scholars have accused John of naïvely falling into Docetism. That early heresy held that Jesus only seems to be human. Another scholar has written that John's Jesus looks like "God striding across the earth."

These scholars have a point. John's Jesus often seems superhuman. He is the Word, who was in the beginning, the Word who was with God, who was God, through whom all things were made. He takes away the sin of the world. He gives living water. To see him is to see the Father. John tells no story of Jesus' birth. He just says, "The Word became flesh...."

Perhaps John recognizes the risk of minimizing Jesus' humanity as he affirms Jesus' divinity. Perhaps that is why he reports words from the cross that affirm his humanity. Jesus' last word from the cross, "It is finished," announces his death, which manifests genuine humanity. The second reminds us that he who gives the water of life thirsts, just like we do. Today, we ponder the first word.

Up to this moment, John has told the story of Jesus' passion largely in terms of characters who are looking out for themselves: Judas, who takes Jesus' bread and betrays him; Peter, who lets Jesus wash his feet and denies him; the High Priest, the chief priests, and Pilate, whose only interests are to hold onto power; the executioners, who care only for the spoils.

As death nears, we see a small group at the foot of the cross, some women and a young man, companions of Jesus who risk all to be there. The text focuses on a son, a mother, and a beloved friend. "When Jesus sees his mother and the disciple whom he loves standing beside her, he says to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he says to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'"

This word from the cross is only the second time Jesus speaks to his mother in John. The other is when he turns water to wine. On each occasion, we see Jesus as the son of a Jewish mother. At the wedding, this proud mother desires that others know her son. On the cross, this dying son desires to provide for his mother.

These vignettes bracket Jesus' ministry, declaring that the one on the cross is one of us. The Word incarnate is one of us. The Lamb of God is one of us. The Bread of Life is one of us. He who commands us to love one another as he has loved us is one of us. He is a mother's son. He thirsts. He dies.

Lord, have mercy. *Christ, have mercy.* Lord, have mercy. Amen.

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