



April 5, 2020

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

*One of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said,
"What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?"—Matthew 26:14*

Dear Friends;

What is one life worth? What are tens of thousands or even a million lives worth? Is opening the markets in the midst of a pandemic worth those lives? This Sunday we need to contemplate the value of every single life. If we are pro-life, that has to mean more than saying that I am only for the lives of the unborn. Either every life is sacred or no life is sacred. Jesus teaches that all life is inherently valuable. Lives are valuable not because of what they contribute to the Gross Domestic Product, but because they are a gift that comes from God.

The problem with our system of vulture capitalism is that the only measure of value is money. What is the assigned monetary value of a person or thing? Whether a person or thing, what matters to this system is the bottom line. And we merely accept this system as if it was divinely instituted rather than a human fabrication. Like all things human, capitalism has inherent flaws that are in serious need of correcting.

Capitalism is born from empire. Jesus was crucified because he dared to oppose the forces of empire. Empire is based on a hierarchy. Empire says some have more value than others: the rich over the poor, the powerful over the powerless, adults over children, men over women, the young over the old, the able-bodied over the disabled, the free over the incarcerated, the born over the unborn, the healthy over the ill, whites over people of color, the religiously observant over the irreligious. Empire demands people serve the system. Jesus tells us we must serve people. Jesus announces the Kingdom which exists not to serve the privileged but the least and lowest.

Jesus is crucified because he dares to declare that God does not approve of our systems of valuation. Jesus proclaims true leaders are servants of the least and lowest. We must focus first on the poor. We must put others first and ourselves last. We are all equally sinners and all are offered the mercy of God. *"The last shall be first, and the first will be last."* By his teaching and actions Jesus undermines the imperial system. So he was executed for sedition—undermining the moral order of empire.

I have always felt that Judas thought he could game the system to his benefit. He thought he could control things. Judas was a radical. He thought that maybe if he got Jesus arrested then he could trigger the violent overthrow of the Roman Empire. Then they could establish a new Jewish empire. But it backfired. Rather than see things from the perspective of Jesus—the empire (kingdom) of God's mercy—he despairs and kills himself.

The vision of the reign of God is what drives Jesus. Everything belongs to God. God values all lives. If we are disciples of Jesus and servants of the kingdom, we must put people first. We must press our leaders as they consider relief from our pandemic crisis to think first of the needs of people: the poor, the unemployed, the elderly, the sick; NOT markets or corporations, or those who defend the system to protect their personal wealth.

The uber-rich and corporations have had huge tax breaks. Now we must ensure the little ones are cared for. It was for these little ones that Jesus died. They have a special place in the heart of God. Empires have come and gone. But Jesus is risen; and the enduring dream of the Kingdom of Divine Love lives in the hearts of all who long for justice.

Peace,

Fr Ron