

Fr. John's Homily for Good Friday 2023

JMJ CHS

Aside from that bombastic last episode of season three, I have had a favorite episode from *The Chosen* for quite some time now. It's called *Thunder* and it gets its title from the nickname given to the two fisherman brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Remember that Jesus gave them that special name because of their rambunctious personalities. "Sons of Thunder". That's what He called them, and it was not a compliment. There was some great creativity in that episode. The opening and closing scenes show an older John, in a house somewhere, fulfilling his role as the new adoptive son of Mary. And along with a little help from his new adoptive mother, he's actually beginning to compose his Gospel. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*"

From the opening scene, however, we flashback to those earlier days when Jesus was still with them. If you saw that episode, you may remember that Jesus gave an assignment to the two brothers. Plow this overgrown, barren field. Plant seeds. It was very hard work yet they were happy to oblige, but later when they found out that they had just plowed a field of a Samaritan, well, they were not amused. As you know, the Jews and Samaritans didn't get along.

But the true genius of this episode is that the owner of the field is a disabled farmer whose family is starving because of his condition. He's not able to support them because of his leg. And as we would soon find out, his leg was injuredwhile committing a robbery. The farmer was one of two men that assaulted and robbed a man, leaving him to die on the side of the road. Is this beginning to sound familiar? The interesting part is that the director, again, using artistic license, took one of the fictional stories of Jesus, and made it into a true story. It's the parable of *The Good Samaritan*.

In that fictional tale, we typically talk about the good man from Samaria who rescued the wounded Jewish man on the road and arranged for his care. The story is really all about him, and his love of neighbor. Preachers throughout the years may have added some commentary to spice things up a little bit. How about those people who passed the man on the side of the road which included a priest and a Levite? Or maybe even the injured man was mentioned. But who could have ever imagined preaching about a criminal who committed a crime.

Well, again, amazing, creative, and clever directing from the folks at *The Chosen*. And a great means by which the Divine Mercy of Jesus was exhibited even to the lowly criminal of the parable. Mercy, again, God's greatest attribute.

There are many actors in the play that took place at the foot of the Cross on Good Friday. Of course, Jesus has the lead role. But there are others at the foot of the Cross including His mother Mary, and there are several others with her, including Mary Magdalen and others. With them is John, the beloved Disciple. The other Disciples cowering off at a distance. Is Simon of Cyrene

still there, looking on, trying to make some sense of it all? Perhaps Veronica is there watching, clutching in her hand the veil that now bears the image of the face of Christ. And Peter is there somewhere, weeping bitterly, shamed by his weakness. Then, of course, there are the Roman soldiers, including some who have come to believe that they have just crucified a prophet. Or even more, a king. The sign above the crucified's head after all, says that this is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. And lastly, there was Joseph of Ariamathia who, along with Nicodemus, would soon take Jesus down from the Cross and place Him in the tomb. I'm sure we could weave together some inspiring words about any one of these individuals. But did we miss anybody?

Well, the first part of the homily should serve as a hint. We are talking about criminals today. There were two robbers who assaulted the man on the road and there were two thieves that were crucified with Jesus. One on His right, and the other on His left. So let's do as Dallas Jenkins did and focus on the one thief, and his place in the Good Friday story, and even in salvation history. Tradition has given him a name and by default, we call him a saint. Dismas is his name, and by virtue of Jesus's promise to him, he is in heaven, and that is the definition of a saint. St. Dismas. His feastday is March 25. Patron saint of prisoners and funeral directors. In the last moments of his life, the thief, repentant, acknowledges Jesus as being unjustly accused and asked to be remembered whenever he enters into His kingdom. So Dismas recognizes Jesus as a king. He serves his purgatory on the cross, and before the day is over, he will join Jesus in paradise.

For a long time, I thought that Peter was the best representative of us here on Good Friday. Blustery, arrogant, confident but ultimately a weak man, and a coward. And he did weep bitterly after he heard the rooster crow. He is still a very fine candidate to represent us in our weaknesses, but I've changed my tune a little bit. I now think that the good thief is yet a better representative of us and who we are. He had a life of crime and paid the price. But Jesus knew him. He knit him together in his mothers womb. And he was there through all the events of his life. The abuses he may have endured, or the bad choices that he surely made. Jesus knew him inside out. And He loved him despite all those sinful deeds he did along the way. Yet He was still ready to forgive the thief.

The Lord certainly knows us in the same way. He knows us through and through and loves us for the same reasons he loved a good thief. All that was necessary was for the man to repent, which he did. And God was merciful.

On this Good Friday, despite our sad and sinful lives, and crying out just a few moments ago, "Crucify him. Crucify him", we are reminded that the Lord is merciful. May we resolve to continue to conduct our lives in such a way as to be deserving to meet the Lord, and Dismas, someday in paradise. Along with many others who were on the stage there at the foot of the Cross on that first Good Friday.

~Fr. John