

Ten After Ten Session 30: Jesus Died Crucified

595 Among the religious authorities of Jerusalem, not only were the Pharisee Nicodemus and the prominent Joseph of Arimathea both secret disciples of Jesus, but there was also long-standing dissension about him, so much so that St. John says of these authorities on the very eve of Christ's Passion, "many... believed in him," though very imperfectly.

596 The religious authorities in Jerusalem were not unanimous about what stance to take toward Jesus... The Sanhedrin, having declared Jesus deserving of death as a blasphemer but having lost the right to put anyone to death, hands him over to the Romans, accusing him of political revolt, a charge that puts him in the same category as Barabbas who had been accused of sedition. The high priests also threatened Pilate politically so that he would condemn Jesus to death.

597 The historical complexity of Jesus' trial is apparent in the Gospel accounts. The personal sin of the participants (Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate) is known to God alone. Hence we cannot lay responsibility for the trial on the Jews in Jerusalem as a whole, despite the outcry of a manipulated crowd and the global reproaches contained in the apostles' calls to conversion after Pentecost.

598 The Church has never forgotten that "sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured." Taking into account the fact that our sins affect Christ himself, the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone.

599 Jesus' violent death was not the result of chance in an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, but is part of the mystery of God's plan.

600 To God, all moments of time are present in their immediacy. When therefore he establishes his eternal plan of "predestination," he includes in it each person's free response to his grace... For the sake of accomplishing his plan of salvation, God permitted the acts that flowed from their blindness.

601 The Scriptures had foretold this divine plan of salvation through the putting to death of "the righteous one, my Servant" as a mystery of universal redemption, that is, as the ransom that would free men from the slavery of sin... St. Paul professes that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures."

602 Man's sins, following on original sin, are punishable by death. By sending his own Son in the form of a slave, in the form of a fallen humanity, on account of sin, God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

603 Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he himself had sinned. But in the redeeming love that always united him to the Father, he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, to the point that he could say in our name from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Having thus established him in solidarity with us sinners, God “did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all,” so that we might be “reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”

604 By giving up his own Son for our sins, God manifests that his plan for us is one of benevolent love, prior to any merit on our part.

605 Jesus affirms that he came “to give his life as a ransom for many”; this last term is not restrictive, but contrasts the whole of humanity with the unique person of the redeemer who hands himself over to save us. The Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all men without exception: “There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer.”

606 From the first moment of his Incarnation the Son embraces the Father’s plan of divine salvation in his redemptive mission: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.” The sacrifice of Jesus “for the sins of the whole world”⁴¹⁶ expresses his loving communion with the Father.

607 The desire to embrace his Father’s plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus’ whole life, for his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation.

608 After agreeing to baptize him along with the sinners, John the Baptist looked at Jesus and pointed him out as the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” By doing so, he reveals that Jesus is at the same time the suffering Servant who silently allows himself to be led to the slaughter and who bears the sin of the multitudes, and also the Paschal Lamb, the symbol of Israel’s redemption at the first Passover. Christ’s whole life expresses his mission: “to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

609 By embracing in his human heart the Father’s love for men, Jesus “loved them to the end,” for “greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” In suffering and death his humanity became the free and perfect instrument of his divine love which desires the salvation of men. Indeed, out of love for his Father and for men, whom the Father wants to save, Jesus freely accepted his Passion and death: “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” Hence the sovereign freedom of God’s Son as he went out to his death.