

The Passion of Our Lord: Gethsemane

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Betrayal and denial...watchwords for Gethsemane. Jesus and His disciples had just finished what we call the Last Supper, and, "When they had sung a hymn, he went out, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him." From there, they retreat to Gethsemane, where Jesus will pray in anguish, while His disciples, out of exhaustion, sleep what would be a sleep of betrayal.

"Wait here, and watch with me," Jesus instructs His disciples. But they fall asleep. They do not heed His word. Of course, it was only moments before that Jesus tells Peter that this night, he would deny Him three times before the cock crows twice. So, it only makes sense that he and James and John would defy Jesus' instruction and fall asleep.

"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Oh, how you can identify with those words. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. "The good that I will to do," Paul says, "I do not do; but the evil that I will not to do, that I practice." (Romans 7:19) The spirit is willing; it wants to do good. The flesh is weak; it does not do good, but the evil that the spirit wills not to do. And this is not merely a one-time occurrence; as St. Paul put it, it is a practice—this is what your corrupt flesh always does, and this not merely habitually, but by nature. You are by nature sinful and unclean, you confess.

"Watch and pray," Jesus says, and you fall asleep and ignore Him. "Keep my word," Jesus implores, and you turn right around and do whatever your fallen flesh desires—gratifying your lusts, speaking evil against your neighbor, abusing the gifts which your Father gives you to support this body and life. You reject the authorities placed over you. You kill your neighbor in thought, word, and deed. You look at your neighbor with lust. You take what belongs to your neighbor or don't help him to keep and improve it. You speak all kinds of lies and bear false witness against your neighbor. You desire to have that which your neighbor has, even to the point of enticing those things and people away in ways that only seem right.

And that, dear friends, is only the second table of the Law. This is how you deal with your neighbor; do not think to yourselves that you keep the first table any better. For when you seek the demise of your neighbor to your benefit, then you have made a god out of yourself—you show that you fear, love, trust in yourself above all things. This, of course, manifests itself in the misuse of God's holy name or non-use of His name when you should call upon Him. It manifests itself in despising the Word of God and preaching of the same. Essentially, you deny God and betray yourself to Him. And do not begin to think to yourselves that such denial is in secret, for what you do to your neighbor is a demonstration in public of your private denial and betrayal of God.

"But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:33) The Law of God is a heavy burden here. Jesus warns you that your denial of Him before men is just cause for His denial of you before the Father. Is it any wonder, then, that we see Jesus in the Garden praying, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup from me... O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." Peter does and speaks on your behalf. Here is your fleshy representative, sleeping in defiance of God's Word, denying Jesus in the courtyard—Peter is doing exactly what you would do...exactly what you are doing.

"O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, your will be done." Jesus and the Father and one, and their will is one, and the will of God is that Jesus go to the cross in your stead. He is to drink from the cup for your salvation, so that you may take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of YHWH, that you may pay your vows to YHWH in the presence of all His people. (cf. Psalm 116:13-14)

Dear baptized, while the inclination of your flesh is to betray and deny the Son, the Son still saw to your salvation. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss into the hands of the captains and chief priests. But this is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ for you from before the foundation of the world. For the Son of Man had to "be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again." (Matthew 20:18-19) Jesus was betrayed for you, dear hearers, and so you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.