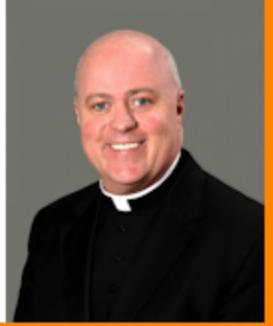


Father Chapin's Homily



November 25, 2018 – TRUTH

So we are fast approaching the end of the earthly ministry of Jesus.

Theologians estimate Jesus as 32 or 33 years old.

He is with his band of disciples.

They are holed up in a Garden called Gethsemane.

And Jesus is unable to sleep.

As fate would have it, he will never sleep again.

Until his very LIFE flows out of his body with nails in his hands and feet and a spear piercing his very heart.

And he knows it.

And I have to say it is a rare thing for a man to know the exact HOUR and

MANNER of his death.

Which is probably a good thing.

I guess it is one thing to know you have a terminal disease and that death is closing in fast.

Or maybe you are a soldier at war and chances of survival are getting bleak.

But really, ONLY the man on death row for a capital crime would truly know the HOUR and MANNER of his own death.

And one COULD say that Jesus, from the time he was born, was on death row for a capital crime he did not commit.

Divine law teaches us that the WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH.

Jesus was TRIED and CONVICTED for a crime he never committed.

Which, when you think about it, does not make sense.

Divine justice being brought onto an innocent man.

Imagine if someone was convicted of a capital offense.

Let's say it was some heinous crime.

Some awful murder and the jury returned a verdict of guilty and sentenced him to death.

And then later at the sentencing phase the judge comes out and while looking at the condemned man says, "You are free to go."

And then the judge scans the courtroom and finds a young boy.

A mere child.

And he declares that the sentence will be carried out on the child and he is condemned to death.

Now I guess in the world of a Nazi Concentration Camp that might make sense but in God's world?

We know that the HUMANITY of Jesus struggled with this.

We see him begging his father 3 times to take this Cup of Wrath away from him.

And each time he is met with SILENCE.

And then of course comes the perfect prayer rising out of this anxiety and uncertainty.

Not MY will Lord, but THY will be done.

Kind of sums it all up doesn't it?

Now of course we can pray for all kinds of things ... and we do.

We can pray for health. We can pray for prosperity. We can pray for a relationship. Maybe for a work situation.

But if we REALLY believe that ALL things work for the good of those who love God.

If we TRULY believe that.

Then there really is only ONE prayer that make sense.

Not MY will Lord, but THY will be done.

Now one issue that comes out of the Garden of Gethsemane, and I think it is often glossed over, is the stark reality that it becomes pretty clear that at least in the ONE instance, and it could be the ONLY time this ever happened, the WILL of Jesus was DIFFERENT than the will of the Father.

Which, if He and the Father are one is difficult to understand.

And ALL of this raises a question.

When my world starts to fly apart and things don't make sense anymore can I trust that God is in control and is going to see me through this storm?

Can I take what is known as the GREAT LEAP OF FAITH and say NOT MY WILL LORD, BUT THY WILL BE DONE?

Might not understand it.

Might not like it.

But, can I trust God with my life and turn my WILL over to his care?

Can I really do that?

So, let's get back to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus is with his disciples.

He stands up and here comes Judas with a band of soldiers.

And as they are sneaking around the corner and Jesus comes out to meet them face to face.

He says, "Who are you looking for?" and they say Jesus of Nazareth and he says I AM.

Peter jumps to his defense and draws a sword and chops off one of the soldier's ears.

Jesus turns to Peter and says, "Shall I not drink of the cup that the Father gave me?"

In other words, "Peter let's get on with it."

It is one thing to know both the HOUR and MANNER of one's death.

It is quite another to freely walk INTO that death.

So, they drag Jesus before ANANIAS, the Patriarch of High Priests.

He has an interesting history.

He WAS for many years the High Priest.

But for political reason he was removed from that position.

But he continued to maintain the power of the office by having his SON-IN-LAWS and BROTHERS appointed to the position.

So, he was power behind the curtain pulling all the strings.

After ANANIUS, in the middle of the night, they bring Jesus to Caiaphas.

They are desperately trying to catch him in some blasphemous statement. Something they can use to TWIST their laws in such a way that would justify killing him.

And in the middle of the night Caiaphas the High Priest found his reason.

By claiming to be a King he is guilty of SEDITION against Rome.

And this was so PERFECT.

They KNEW they themselves could not get to him because of the crowds.

If they take Jesus out the crowds would surely revolt.

But if ROME kills Jesus well ... it is out of their hands.

So, as morning breaks they bring Jesus to the Pretorian.

Now the Pretorian was an open courtyard courthouse.

It was the seat of power for Rome.

It was where the Governor's chair was.

And the Governor's name was Pontius Pilate.

A name that would go down in infamy.

Now when they arrive at the Pretorian they don't go in.

They don't go in because according to their own traditions the Gentiles were so filthy that if they DID they would render themselves ritually unclean.

And, of course, that would require over a week of ritual cleansing and it being Passover and all this would cause a great inconvenience.

And they will not go in.

Now let's just pause the tape for a moment and consider the irony in all of this.

Fueled by hate they have twisted the laws of Moses to kill an innocent man, yet they will not enter the courthouse for fear of ritual uncleanness.

You can't make this stuff up.

So, Pilate, the governor of Judea, comes out to them.

Let me introduce you to PILATE

He was the 5th Governor of Judea.

He was appointed by Tiberius Cesar in 26 AD.

Pilate reigned as Governor for ten years.

But even though he represented Rome, truth be told, he himself was not Roman.

He was Spanish.

Born in Saville Spain, he joined the Roman Army and from an early age distinguished himself as an accomplished soldier and leader of men.

Consequently, he quickly rose through the ranks.

But then he had the great fortune of marrying the granddaughter of Tiberius Caesar.

So, he was elevated to Governor of an outlying territory of the Roman Empire called Israel that had a long reputation for being a stubborn and difficult people to manage.

So, it did not help matters that Pilate HATED Judea and resented being sent there and consequently he resented the Jews.

So, he gets there and the FIRST thing he does is plant a pole in the middle of the temple with a Roman Eagle proclaiming the power Rome.

As you might imagine this did not go over well with the Judeans.

They begged him to take it down but he refused.

Which was NOT a good way to start a relationship.

But then the Judeans committed the cardinal sin of GOING OVER HIS HEAD and appealing directly to Caesar.

And Caesar, who had a long-standing policy of allowing conquered territories to keep their perspective cultures, told Pilate to take it down.

And they made him look bad.

And Pilate never forgot it

Both Josephus and Tacitus, who were ancient historians, describes Pilate as CRUEL and STUBBORN and GREEDY.

In time Pilate mistook a group of pilgrims as a revolt, which happened fairly often, and slaughtered them all.

Eventually other Roman Governors surrounding Judea were so disturbed by reports that they were hearing that they appealed to Rome and he was removed for CRUELTY.

And that WOULD have been the end for Pilate.

He would have been a long, forgotten footnote in history had it not been for this encounter with this obscure preacher out of Nazareth.

Through the centuries Easter plays have portrayed Pilate as a sympathetic character begging for the life of Jesus.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Pilate could care less about this insignificant man brought before him.

He believed in TWO things; Roman Power and his own advancement.

So Pilate come out to meet this angry mob stoked by the religious leadership of Israel.

What charges do you bring against this man?

The mob responds “If he were not a criminal would we have handed him over to you?”

Kind of a sassy answer.

Pilate says “Take him yourself. Judge him according to your own law.”

In other words, get out of my face.

But they answer him “We do not have the right to EXECUTE anyone.”

Really? And let me tell you THIS gets his attention.

Suddenly, Pilate begins to feel the manipulation as ONCE AGAIN they have him in a corner.

They have made him look bad before, but this?

What has this man done to deserve death?

The Gospel of John does not record this part of the conversation but the synoptic Gospels do.

He is making himself a KING.

Not Just of Judea but of all of Israel and THAT is sedition.

This was NOT about the fact that he is claiming that Yahweh is his father.

Even though Tiberius Caesar was making the same claim.

No, this was sedition which is entirely different matter. .

And the High Priest knew that.

And I imagine he had a big old smirk on his face about now.

GOTCHA!

This I am sure infuriated Pilate as once again he is being manipulated by these HYPOCRITICAL POMPOUS ROBE WEARING CLOWNS.

They won't step into his house.

But they will hand a man over to death ... and for what?

So, Pilate goes back inside to talk to this strange looking man from Nazareth.

He certainly did not look like any warrior much less a king.

So, Pilate cuts to the chase and asks the question "Are you a King?"

And I love the response Jesus gives ...

"Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?"

In other words, are you asking this question because YOU want to know?

Is my Father pricking your heart?

Is he quietly drawing you to me?

Or are you asking because of those clowns outside?

You can see this kind of throws Pilate for a moment and he says, “What am I, a Jew now?”

He then basically says your people want you dead.

What have you done?

Do you have an army?

Are you trying to start a revolt?

You see Pilate is interested in just ONE thing.

Is this man a threat to Roman authority?

That is ALL he wants to know.

With this in mind listen to what Jesus says ...

My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world my attendants would be fighting for me to keep me from the Jews. But as it is my kingdom is not here.

Now part of the problem with scripture is that we grow up hearing this all our lives.

Of course, we all KNOW that His Kingdom does not belong to this world.

This is not a stretch.

But try to forget all you know about Jesus and listen to these words with fresh ears.

Try to put yourself in Pilate’s shoes right now.

My Kingdom is not of this world.

I seriously doubt heaven came to mind right here.

Pilate is sufficiently AMUSED to know that this man has NO army and is NO threat.

Delusional perhaps.

But dangerous ... NO.

And SEDITION ... PLEASE.

So, for a while Pilate plays along ...

So, you ARE a King. At least in your OWN MIND.

Jesus responds,

For this I was born and for this I came into the world. To testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the TRUTH listen to my voice.

And of course, this is where we get the famous retort from Pilate.

A question that in a world that has reduced TRUTH to an opinion is as relevant today as the day it was first asked.

TRUTH, what is truth?

For this I was born, for this I came into the world to testify to the truth, whoever belongs to the truth hears my voice.

The WORD made flesh.

Born into this world.

Just like every one of us.

Divinity born into humanity

He entered human history.

He was sent.

WHY?

TO TESTIFY TO THE TRUTH!

And those who are mine will hear my voice.

Now remember how Jesus has just asked Pilate ...

Are you asking me this because you want to know?

And Pilate's answer was clearly NO.

He had the LOGOS standing right in front of him.

ONE STEP AWAY.

But he cannot see him.

He cannot hear him.

And he is certainly not listening to him now.

Truth. What is truth?

He was THAT close.

But he missed it.

He had lived his whole life as an ANGRY, CYNICAL, AGNOSTIC man.

He was obviously a highly motivated person to have moved through the ranks of the Roman Army so quickly.

But there was NO Joy.

What went wrong?

Well we can trace it back to the Garden of Eden.

Before the fall there was utter perfection.

Before the fall there was TRUTH.

This truth created the earth in which we continue to live today.

Perfect truth with no flaws.

We see evidence of this truth all around us.

Whether we are staring into a telescope or into a microscope.

Whether we look upon a beautiful sun set or the perfect hand of a new born baby.

We see a perfect balance that allows life to live and flourish.

And then came the BIG LIE.

Oh, surely you will not die. God knows full well that if you eat of that fruit you will be as God knowing the difference between good and evil.

In other words you don't NEED divine truth.

You can make up your own truth.

You don't need some God to guide you.

You can make yourself your own god.

And what does that look like?

Well it looks very much like the world we find ourselves living.

I'm not religious but I'm very spiritual.

There is NOTHING unusual about Pontius Pilate.

Truth? What is truth?

He had bought into the BIG LIE as he made himself his own god.

He had REJECTED the truth.

A truth that brings clarity and purpose and meaning.

Consequently, he was living a life with NO clarity and NO purpose.

He had reached the pinnacle of power and yet found his life as tedious and without meaning.

He was ANXIOUS, IRRITATED, and FULL OF DISCONTENT.

And what does that look like?

Again, consider the world in which we find ourselves living.

WE are anxious irritated and full of discontent.

As we wrestle with the existential dilemma of ...

Who am I?

Why am I here?

Does my life have any purpose?

Jesus said,

Everyone who belongs to the truth, listens to my voice.

And what is his voice?

The Holy Spirit.

The LOGOS

What we call the QUIET VOICE around here.

REAL TRUTH.

THE TRUTH.

It is a TRUTH that will bring your life purpose.

Remember when Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you a King?” and Jesus responded, “Are you asking because something deep inside of YOU wants to know?”

It seemed at the time, kind of a silly question, but I think Jesus was getting to the deeper point.

And that point is this.

You will not find out who Jesus truly is because somebody ELSE told you about him.

No one can come to the Father unless the spirit draws him.

My friend, WE don't go find Jesus.

Jesus finds us.

And I imagine he found YOU a long time ago.

He was just waiting on you to turn around.

There are TWO prayers that Jesus always hears.

Number ONE, the cry of those who are suffering.

Number TWO, those who are authentically seeking him.

Not because their mamma told them.

Not because their Sunday school teacher told them.

No.

Because he has put his finger on your heart long ago and you are making a decision.

You are turning to him.

And like the Father in the Prodigal Son, he is standing on the front porch keeping an eye out for you.

And if you recall when he spotted him still far off, he did not wait for him.

He did not meet him half way.

This isn't a 50 50 situation.

No.

He's just waiting on YOU to make a move.

Let us rise and return to our Father.