

AND PILATE AGAIN SAID TO THEM, "THEN WHAT SHALL I DO WITH THE MAN YOU CALL THE KING OF THE JEWS?" AND THEY CRIED OUT AGAIN, "CRUCIFY HIM." AND PILATE SAID TO THEM, "WHY? WHAT EVIL HAS HE DONE?" BUT THEY SHOUTED ALL THE MORE, "CRUCIFY HIM."

Palm Sunday and Jesus rides into Jerusalem. "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (Jn 12:13). Wow, the crowds were ecstatic! But today is also called the "Sunday of the Passion," because by the end of the week the crowds are shouting, "Crucify him!" (Mk 15:14). Have you ever wondered why the crowd changed its tune? I really pondered that question as I was writing the sermon for today. The Bible doesn't explicitly tell us, but based upon the context, we can make several intelligent guesses. One reason may be that these were two largely different crowds. Another reason, and I'm pretty confident about this one, was that the religious leaders stirred up the crowd. We know that the Jewish religious establishment were upset by all the fanfare when Jesus rode into town. Jesus and His adoring crowds were threatening their power and position among the people. And, they couldn't have that! So, they may well have planted their goons in the crowd. They may even have gone so far as to pay rabble rousers to cause trouble; they had no qualms about paying off Judas Iscariot, after all. And so it is that the crowd cries "Crucify Him!" and their voices carried the day.

As I thought about that throughout the week, the part of it that keep troubling me is this – How easy it is to sway people! Why should I think that I couldn't be easily swayed by the crowd? You know what peer pressure is. Why should you think that you couldn't be swayed by

the crowd and do something that is wrong, something that is unfaithful to your God and Savior? In just a few short weeks, Concordia will be confirming our young people. **Confirmation** is a church ceremony that gives young people the opportunity to reaffirm the faith that was given to them when they were baptized. Do you remember your confirmation and the vows you made that day? Confirmation is a great day, but we know what can happen. The “hosannas” sung on confirmation day fade as time goes on. Young people meet real life and, sadly, many of them depart from their baptismal faith. Hosannas become indifference, and indifference crucifies Jesus.

And, it’s not just young people. You and I can be swayed. We can be swayed by strong voices. We can be swayed by peer pressure. We want to be popular. Let’s be honest, we far more often fear what people think of us, than we fear God. Remember Peter, Peter the adult, not Peter the kid, Peter in the court yard of the High Priest? He caved. He was ashamed of Jesus. Yes, it can happen to you, too. The crowd can make us forget our Savior.

Consider our friend Nicodemus. John tells us, “Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night” (Jn 3:1–2). Why did Nicodemus come by night? He wanted to be popular with his fellow Pharisees. He didn’t want to get crucified on Facebook or Twitter. So, he came under the cover of darkness to ask Jesus his questions. Part of Jesus’ answer is the Gospel in a nutshell, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Those words made their way into Nicodemus’ heart and created faith. Listen to what St. John tells us happened after Jesus had died, “Joseph of

Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews . . .” There’s your peer pressure again! “Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes . . . So they took the body of Jesus . . .” (Jn 19:38–40). Nicodemus first went to Jesus in the dark and now he comes for the body of Jesus in the light. St. John is telling us that Nicodemus came to faith in Jesus and that faith showed itself in providing a fitting burial for His Savior.

Here’s my point: Nicodemus left behind the clamor of the crowds. He may have been in the crowd when Jesus rode into town. If Nicodemus wasn’t there, he certainly heard all about it. When he actually talked to Jesus, he had big time questions.

And when the crowds clamored for Jesus’s crucifixion, Nicodemus wasn’t swayed. Nicodemus wasn’t swayed because he had come to understand why Jesus had come to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and what the Sunday of the Passion was truly about. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life,” is how Jesus Himself said it (Jn 3:14–15). Nicodemus left behind the clamor of the crowds behind and followed Jesus.

That’s the way you and I have to do it as well. **Leave the clamor behind!** We’re on our way not only to Good Friday but to the eternal Easter. “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19). God is calling us to our true home, our heavenly home with Him. Focus on that; leave the clamor behind. Don’t be swayed by the crowd’s clamor for more money or

for bigger, better homes and cars and stuff. Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. Such noise is all around us; we can't shut it out. But, hear the voice of Jesus and follow Him. Leave the clamor behind.

Listen to this quotation from the German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer on following Jesus:

One extreme thing must be said. To forego self-conceit and to associate with the lowly means, in all soberness and without mincing the matter, to consider oneself the greatest of sinners. This arouses all the resistance of the natural man, but also that of the self-confident Christian. It sounds like an exaggeration, like an untruth. Yet even Paul said of himself that he was the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15); he said this specifically at the point where he was speaking of his service as an apostle. There can be no genuine acknowledgement of sin that does not lead to this extremity. If my sinfulness appears to me to be in any way smaller or less detestable in comparison with the sins of others, I am still not recognizing my sinfulness at all. My sin is of necessity the worst, the most grievous, the most reprehensible. (Life Together, p. 96)

When we look at ourselves in the mirror of the Law, each and everyone one of us must confess, "I am the chief of sinners." And so, we follow in the footsteps of Nicodemus and forget the crowd. Leave behind the clamor of the crowds and go to Jesus, so He can wash away your guilt, wipe away your tears, silence your fears, and save your soul.

To God be the Glory. Amen.