



### Despair in the Judgment Seat

*16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? 18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.*

Barabbas was, indeed, a notable prisoner – not notable for his philanthropy, but for his criminal and moral perversity. Yesterday, we examined two men of very different character – both denied Christ by their actions – Peter and Judas. But Peter denied out of weakness of courage; Judas, on the other hand, out of malice and premeditation. Peter repented with bitter tears, and Judas repented to other men, not God whom he had offended. To be precise, Judas repented to himself! It was “himself” that led to the egregious sin of betrayal to begin with. It is unlikely that self can undo the guilt that self has created. We discovered that we were like one, or the other, of these two men. We may, at times, have been Judas, and at other times, Peter. But what is important is the one you BECAME in Christ. Peter was not a rock, but a stone, chipped off that Great Rock which was Christ.

On this Tuesday of Holy Week, we continue to study about the incapacity of man to do justice and work righteousness in two personalities – Pontius Pilate and Barabbas! I will ask you at the conclusion of today’s devotion which of these two men best represents YOU!

The Roman governor began the day in darkness having been aroused from his bed sometime after midnight. He was not in a sociable mood to say the least. He had suffered many disputes with the constant nagging and petulance of the Jewish leaders. Now they awaken him in the early hours of the morning with yet another trifling complaint about a man of whom he had heard little, but of what he had heard, the man was simple a good man who never hurt a flea.

His wife had seemingly heard more of Jesus than Pilate. Her name was Claudia Procula, granddaughter of Augustus Caesar, according to the Gospel of Nicodemus – an apocryphal book that is not canonical, but may shed historical light on the period. Shortly after her husband had rushed to the Judgment Hall, Procula had a disturbing dream. Perhaps she overheard some detail of the reason for her husband’s hurried departure, tried to sleep again, but was awakened by a prophetic dream. Being a good wife, and perhaps more spiritual than her husband, she rushed to have a message carried to Pilate just as he sat down on the Judgment Seat! *“19 When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.”* But the reality of a host of

cynical Jewish priests, elders, and a multitude gathered, had greater impact than a dream of his wife. After all, Pontius Pilate was a political official and not necessarily an honorable statesman. He played to the crowds and numbers that would keep peace with Caesar. And Pilate was, as well, a PRACTICAL man. Never let trifles – even if unjust – ruin a blossoming and handsome career.

Pilate already knew exactly what the Jewish rulers desired, but he thought he might assuage them in some little way from their evil intentions. *11 And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, **Thou sayest.*** *12 And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.* *13 Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?* *14 And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.* Pilate marveled because he had never had a defendant come before him facing such horrendous circumstances who would not offer at least SOME word in defense. The silence of Christ in His own defense was in accord with the 700 year old prophecy of Isaiah: *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.* (Isaiah 53:7-8) It seems clear Pilate would have relished some word of justification from Christ that would have provided him an argument to release Jesus.

Pilate mulled over the situation. He needed more than simply the solution that would satisfy justice since these men were not before him to achieve justice, but murder! The solution must be a 'political' one. I am not sure if Pilate was Republican or Democrat, but he knew his politics nonetheless. Suddenly, a man's name came to his mind that caused hope to grow from the shadows of the morning – Barabbas. Most often, the mention of Barabbas' name evoked reprehension and disgust, but now it was a very sweet thought to Pilate. No one, Pilate surmised, would prefer Barabbas to be set free over the innocent Jesus! Aha! That would be Pilate's solution to the dilemma – or so he thought!

*15 Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.* *16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.* *17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?* *18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.* It is even now completely plain and clear Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and that jealousy and envy was the motivation for these Jewish leaders demanding His death. Pilate was feeling pretty good about his plan until the next shoe fell: *20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.* *21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.* The mention of Barabbas as the man to be released sent chills up the back of Pilate.

In our modern day society, Pontius Pilate would be considered a better-than-average public official. He was a fair-minded fellow, but he lacked courage and conviction. He persisted in his attempt to release Jesus: *22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.* *23 And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.* I know that the mob before Pilate was boisterous, but Pilate had the Praetorian Guard upon which to call to settle the issue, but he failed of character and courage. *24 When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.* *25 Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be*

*on us, and on our children."*

### **Pontius Pilate**

1. Powerful governor of Judaea.
2. Was politically minded.
3. Tried to set Jesus free.
4. Finally, surrendered to injustice for the sake of polity.
5. Vainly attempted to wash his hands of the innocent blood of Jesus, but washing one's hands is not sufficient to remove guilt of weakness of character.

### **Barabbas**

1. Barabbas was a hardened criminal – a murderer and insurrectionist. *7 And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection.* (Mark 15:7)
2. Perhaps Barabbas was the most guilty fellow in Jerusalem, since you and I were not present at the time.
3. Barabbas was destined to die on the cross that had already been prepared, but which Jesus bore.
4. There was no just reason why Barabbas should have been set scot-free, and Jesus should be put to death being without a single sin. The VERDICT: Barabbas – GUILTY but set free! Christ – INNOCENT but CRUCIFIED in the stead of Barabbas, and you and me.

Now, my friends, which of these two men best represents YOU and ME? I would like to believe Pontius Pilate since he at least made some effort to set Jesus free; but I would be wrong. Jesus died in the place of Barabbas just as He died in the place of you and me. But, you declare, "I am not guilty of any sins approaching those of Barabbas!" Yes, you ARE! You are a murderer, and adulterer, a liar, and a thief! Yet, Jesus died in your place on the cross. Let me see if I can make a solid closing argument on your guilt and mine: *10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* (James 2:10) The Ten Commandments are a seamless garment. Break one, the entire Law is broken.

Have a meaningful Holy Week, Mr. & Mrs. Barabbas!