

Is.53 / Jn.18,1 – 19,42

From then on Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar,' When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement. It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon. 'Here is your king,' Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!' 'Shall I crucify your king?' Pilate asked. 'We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. (Jn.19,12-16)

Dear friends

Hints are often lost on people who don't pay attention or who are not searching for the meaning of things. But for those who do, hints are essential. Where they are it is unwise to overlook them. But to pick them up leads to a successful conclusion.

Knowing our capacity and need to understand and grasp why Jesus died, God gave us hints – carefully prepared and revealed in history, they are laid down in Scripture. John (as well as the other gospel writers) highlights many of these hints as he recounts the trial and death of Jesus, because it is this event that these hints refer to. They help us understand what story is being told here: Not a story of a wrongful death, of a martyr dying for his cause, not a story of a judicial error or even of courage and love as an example to follow, but the story of obedience and sacrifice, the story of redemption.

One hint that John highlights is in the timing of Jesus's trial and death – that it happened on the day of Preparation of the Passover. The most important feast in the Jewish calendar, celebrated annually, when the people remembered God's mighty rescue of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt to bring them to the promised land and the freedom of worshipping Him in truth and obedience, as His own people. Symbolically re-enacting the night of Israel's deliverance by preparing to eat lamb in remembrance of the lamb that was sacrificed, the blood of which saved the people of Israel from the judgment that fell on Egypt, setting them free, the Jewish people remembered, as it were, their own place as God's people in the promise of his deliverance from slavery and bondage to the freedom of being truly His.

Now, the hint that is the timing of Jesus' trial and death is that it points to the fact that he is the true sacrificial lamb: That he is the offering that atones for

sin, who bears God's judgment on sin as the stand-in who is himself sinless and perfect in obedience for all who are not, whose blood cleanses from all unrighteousness and who tastes death so that his people might taste life.

Of this John the Baptist spoke at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when he pointed to him saying, *'Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.'* (Jn.1,29)

While the Jewish leadership worried about moving things along quickly so as not to interfere with the festivities, they were in truth preparing the sacrifice that brought to all who received it peace, deliverance from all sins, deliverance from death, freedom from fear and the enslavement to the powers of darkness and evil. While they thought they were getting rid of a nuisance, of a threat to their authority, they were in truth installing the King of God and his kingdom. While they thought the cross showed he was punished by God, he was in truth *"pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."* (Is.53,5)

Dear friends, that Jesus was the sacrificial lamb who brought us all deliverance from death and from all our sins is clear from the way he reoriented the Passover meal with his disciples. Lamb and bitter herbs became bread and wine, the symbols to which he attached the words, *'This is my body which is broken for you'* and *'This is my blood which is shed for you'*. It is a palpable way for us to remember that what Jesus did on the cross, he did for us; and not just to remember it but receive it – real forgiveness of real sins through his blood and real life through his real death. AMEN