

7 Easter B SML 2018
JN 17:11b-19

If you take a mini-quick tour through the passion and death narratives of John's gospel, you will notice from the outset that throughout his passion and death, Jesus is very much in control. Jesus' hour of death was an hour of triumphant glorification.

In John's Last Supper, Jesus is very much in control. There is no question as to who the betrayer is, for Jesus, always in control, takes the bread and hands it to Judas. Judas does not make one move until Jesus gives him permission to do so. "Judas, what you are about to do, do quickly."

In John's passion narrative, there is no agony in the garden. There is no Jesus pleading with the Father to take the cup from the Son for Jesus is very much in control.

In John's arrest, Jesus is very much in control. The soldiers do not come to Jesus. Jesus goes to the soldiers. "Whom are you looking for?" When the guards learn that it is Jesus who is standing before them, they fall to the ground, not Jesus, for Jesus is very much in control.

In John's trial, seven times Pontius Pilate scurries back and

forth between the Sanhedrin and Jesus, like a rat in a cage - trapped between a frenzied, bloodthirsty crowd outside, so filled with hate / and a majestic, tranquil and calm Jesus inside, for Jesus is very much in control.

In John's trial, the ones found guilty are Pilate and the Sanhedrin. For Pilate is found guilty being tried against the truth and the Sanhedrin make the most profound blasphemy. Ironic that the Jews are now more loyal to Caesar than their Roman enemies! I'm sure Jesus nodded his head to acknowledge their incrimination when they shouted, "We have no king but Caesar," for Jesus was very much in control.

In John's crucifixion, there is no Simon of Cyrene. Jesus, very much in control, carries the cross by himself. There is no darkness, there is no cry of God forsakenness. And at the moment of death, Jesus realizes that all is completed. Reigning from the cross, Jesus decides the moment of his death. "It is finished." He bowed his head, and he delivered over his spirit, for Jesus is very much in control.

What for the evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke was an hour of darkness, earthquakes, wailing women, and God forsakenness was for John an hour of glory. If you walk into a

Christian gift shop and notice the crucifixes on the wall, the crucifixes where Jesus is dressed in kingly robes and a crown are the Johannine crucifixes, for John portrays Jesus reigning from the cross.

It seems rather untimely that such attention would be given to Christ's passion and death, especially since it's the Easter Season, and we just celebrated His Ascension to the Father's right hand this past Thursday. But for John the Evangelist, Jesus' passion and death, His Resurrection and Ascension were all three triumphal hours, the hours of glory. So now what?

This morning's gospel seats us back at the table of the Last Supper. This morning's gospel is the prayer after the meal. Instead of praying, "We give thee thanks Almighty God for these and all thy benefits," Jesus prays for the Church. For the hour was close at hand when he was to return to the Father. The hour was close at hand when the disciples would have to carry on without His visible presence and Jesus knew it would be a tough go for the apostles; it would be a tough go for the Church.

From time to time, it's easy to be a Catholic. The death of

the late Holy Father, "St. John Paul II," was an hour of glory for the Catholic Church. His Holiness' Funeral Mass was the most watched event in the history of television. There was no world event that had as many viewers as the Funeral Mass of John Paul. Critics there will always be, but by and large, John Paul did much to identify the Church as Catholic. By and large, Catholics were proud to say they were Catholic at the death of John Paul and the election of the new Holy Father, Benedict XVI. When Pope Francis was elected, and again, when he came to Philadelphia two years ago – easy to be a Catholic.

However, there are some who allow church imperfections to challenge their relationship with Jesus Christ. And I'm quick to admit the Church is not perfect. As I said last Sunday, the Church was never perfect, is not perfect, and never will be perfect, because I'm not perfect and you're not perfect.

I rely on the wisdom of the saints, and one saint in particular, St. Francis de Sales, who provides an excellent framework to address these imperfections, scandals in the Church. St. Francis de Sales was asked to address the situation of scandal cause by those in the Church during the 15 and 1600s. What he said is as important today as it was then.

St. Francis said, “Those who commit these types of scandals are guilty of the spiritual equivalent of murder,” destroying other people’s faith in God by their terrible example. St. Francis went among the people in Switzerland to prevent them from committing spiritual suicide on account of scandal.

However, one of the greatest Catholic preachers in American History, Bishop Fulton Sheen, used to say that he preferred to live in times when the Church had suffered rather than thrived, when the Church had to struggle, when the Church had to go against the culture.

For it was then that real men and real women stood up and were counted. “Even dead bodies can float downstream,” Sheen said, pointing out that many people can coast when the Church is respected. “But it takes a real man, a real woman, to swim against the current,” the current that will use the mortal sins of a few as a springboard to preach their criticism for the Catholic Church as if they had been right all along.

It’s Mother’s Day, so like John’s Jesus, who was very much in control, my mother, who was a woman of strong faith, was a woman, a mother in control. Forget to wipe down the bathroom tiles after taking a shower, and she would go

ballistic, but in a crisis, she was calm and resolute. I've shared a few stories of my Mom and her strong and resolute faith in previous homilies, so I'll save them for another homily, but one funny story regarding my Mother and Bishop Fulton Sheen.

When my mother was single, she and her girlfriends took the train from 30th St. Station in Philadelphia to New York City so they could be in the audience of Bishop Sheen's television show. The train was delayed so they just missed the closing of the door. They pleaded with the guard at the door to let them in but he said that wasn't possible once they started filming. So my Mom and her girlfriends went across the street to a bar and told the bartender their story, and to put Fulton Sheen on the television above the bar. So there my mom, her friends, and the entire bar for that matter, sat, tossed back a beer and watched Fulton Sheen. After the show they got up and left and when they got outside, the guard saw them and motioned them to come over. He said he told Bishop Sheen how they traveled it from Philadelphia, but were too late, and the Bishop wanted to see them. So as the guard went in to get the Bishop, my mom and her friends were checking their pocketbooks for breath mints because they smelled like beer. The Bishop arrived, was

lovely, mom and her friends took a knee and kissed his ring, and left that ring smelling like beer. So, yeah, my Mom was a woman with a strong faith. But she was human.

I would never give a Catholic basher the satisfaction of thinking they are right, of preventing me from celebrating what is experienced in this Church day to day, and week to week. And those of you who are here on a daily or weekly basis know exactly what I mean.

You can bash the Church or you can come to Church. In last Sunday's gospel and homily, I prefer to "remain," to be part of the answer to Christ's prayer in today's gospel, rather than defy it, because at the end of the day, Jesus is always in complete control.