

The Passion of the Christ

Comments by Fr. Dave Heney

The passion of Jesus shows the *source* and *solution* to the evil and violence of our world that began with the envy of Adam and Eve and the murder of Abel by Cain. If you want to see what our sins look like or what they do to people, look at the crucifix.

The sequence of violence begins with revenge for some hurt, accusing and blaming others, and even getting others to form a mob to attack. Jesus lived in a way that *surfaced* the evil or goodness in people. In the film we see that evil in the blaming, scapegoating, and painful executing of Jesus. We see different people join together in a mob and point accusing fingers at Him. A mob provides anonymity and hides responsibility but the film helps us point to our self.

One controversy is the issue of “Who killed Jesus?” The Gospel is no mere “detective story” in which we discover “who did it” so we can punish them in revenge. That is the very problem Jesus came to solve. If we walk away from this film pointing an accusing finger at any group, *then we don't have to point a finger at our self*. We are off the hook and Satan wins. Mary's soulful look into the audience at the descent from the cross is important and beautifully filmed. *Mary's look lets no one off the hook*.

The Jewish trial and Roman interrogation help us understand the charges and show both good and bad people among the leaders and in the crowd. This makes it harder to blame any one group as a whole; Romans or Jews. The film makes it difficult to avoid *self examination*.

The woman caught in adultery is a perfect microcosm of the passion and our salvation. The mob points an accusing finger at her. They are united and place her “outside” the mob, just as the mob placed Jesus “outside.” It is so much easier to kill outsiders. His challenge to the crowd about their sinfulness shows the woman and the crowd are the *same; both sinners*. She then becomes “inside.” The crowd cannot kill one of their own so they melt away. Her hand slowly reaching to His feet reveals she had been flat on the ground about to die. It is a profoundly beautiful and moving image of humble gratitude. It should be ours as well.

So many people in the film change when they meet Jesus. (You cannot meet Jesus and stay the same!) They notice his intense suffering and sense His innocence and it fills them with compassion. For Christians, *compassion leads to courage* and the strength to fight evil and face the crowd, like Simon of Cyrene who helps carry the cross. Compassion that leads to courage is the solution. This is a perfectly named movie. His *passion* evokes deep *compassion* from Simon the Cyrene, some of the Romans, Pilate's wife, the good thief, and even Caiphas, who is rattled a bit at the cross at hearing of his forgiveness by Jesus.

Many people would seek fast revenge after hours of cruelly inflicted pain, but this film helps us reflect on the kind of person who says at *the exact moment* the nails go in, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!” This is the only movie ever to show this level of graphic suffering so those words mean so much more. Jesus did not want to suffer but would do so out of great love and to show us *what violence and our sins actually do* and to save us from them. “For God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son.” Now we know what “gave” meant. Now we know we must change, but that change will bring salvation and profound peace.

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