

They resisted. Of course they did. And when I sensed that this man's death was important to them—expedient to their purposes—it only served to make me want to fight them more. This time, by Jupiter, they would bend!

It was his silence that gave him away ... that proved that this man was no threat to the Emperor. I have tried traitors before—instigators and insurrectionists. They are anything but silent! It is difficult to silence them, in fact. They usually go on and on—against Rome, in favor of their cause. They are full of threats and bombast. But this man ... he was no traitor. No, whatever they had against him, it was no threat to Rome. And I told them just that. "I find no fault in him," I said.

But those stubborn leaders! They would not yield! Even after I had the man flogged—publicly humiliated and severely punished—they would not ... bend!

Until finally they resorted to threats. "You are no friend of Caesar," they said—their coy and clawing way of reminding me of the standards fiasco, and their subtle way of threatening to bring this case (and my unwillingness to bend to their decision) to Tiberius' ears. Tiberius is, from what I have heard, in no mood to hear of more problems. Word has it he has become dour ... and withdrawn. He has moved to the Island of Capri, and does not wish to be disturbed. Meanwhile, his men in Rome have been conducting treason trials in his stead. It would not take much for them to put me on trial.

No. I did not condemn that righteous man. His trial was over, and his fate was sealed before he had even been brought before me. He did not die by my hand. I have washed my hands of his blood. They killed him—they are the guilty ones! That is the truth!

Or is it? As I consider what I could have, what I should have done, I am tormented by a restless sleep, the question that I asked of him now haunting me: "What is truth?" I did not kill that man; that is the truth. But this is true as well: I did not ... say NO!

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## Homily: Lent Week Four

Look at your hands—so simple and small; ten digits, two palms, knuckles and sinews and skin. Who could imagine the wonders they can perform. Who could fathom the authority they can exercise. For they can exercise authority ... and plenty of it—from the hands of the crossing guard at school, who can stop traffic at a whim, or the hands of the one who holds the prison keys, who can proffer freedom at the turn of a wrist, to the hand that holds the gavel in a court of law. Look at your hands. What authority have they conveyed?

Pilate knew full well what his hands could do. He was acquainted with such authority in a way that none of

us will ever understand.

Pilate was the one, after all, who had final authority over matters of life and death. Thumbs up ... life. Thumbs down ... death.

So, what is it, exactly, that Pilate did that terrible day of Jesus' trial? No thumbs up. No thumbs down. Instead, he washed his hands. Washed them. Pardon me, Pilate, but I don't think that that was an option!

It can truly be said that Pilate did not do anything. He did not put Jesus to death. Jesus' blood was not on Pilate's hands.

But it is in what Pilate did not do that the condemning evidence against him lies. Pilate had the authority to free Jesus in his hands. Instead he washed his hands, shirked his responsibility. His silence condemned Jesus to death.

Sins of omission. That is what the Church has named them; sins of omission. They are the sins that show themselves not in what we do, but in what we do not do.

When we do not stand up for the right in the face of the wrong ... when we do not defend the defenseless ... when we do not speak the word of kindness that needs to be spoken ... when we do not visit the imprisoned, feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, love the unlovable ... is not each of these another hammer-blow that drives the spike deeper into the hands of Christ?

It would have been easy for God to turn his back on humanity, to have reduced Adam and Eve to ashes way back in the garden of Eden. But God did not turn his back. God did not wash his hands of them ... of us.

No, God got his hands filthy—with dirt, with sweat, with blood. And thank heaven for that!

### Monologue: Pilate

A restless sleep. That is what she complained of. A restless sleep. The messenger came to me that afternoon with word from my wife. “I have had a dream,” she said, “concerning this righteous man. Have nothing to do with him.” A restless sleep; that is what she complained of. And since that dream of hers I have had nothing but a restless sleep. Even now I know that I will lie down, again, tonight, for another—yet another—restless sleep. Thoughts of that righteous man consume me.

Now bear in mind that I did not nail him to that cross. He was not crucified by my hand! I went to great lengths to make that clear—illustrating it, in fact, so that all could see. I washed my hands of that man’s blood. And that was just fine as far as that crowd was concerned. “His blood be on us ... and on our children!” they cried out. No! I did not nail that righteous man to the cross. They did. They are guilty of his blood.

It was not even my trial, you know. Their council tried him and found him guilty. Guilty of what, who can say? I suspect that the charge of capital treason was trumped up, a way of calling my attention to the issue, of swaying my judgment, of making this into a political case. I suspect that when they claimed that he was guilty of “stirring the people up”—disturbing the peace, our Great Roman Peace—that was the closest they ever came to the truth.

The truth is that *they* were the ones stirring up the people—they, the religious leaders. I saw them, mingling with the commoners, inciting them to call for Barabbas, stirring them up until nothing but that innocent man’s blood could quell their fury.

Indeed, I do know how that council operates! I have confronted them before. Shortly after I began my tenure here, I set up the traditional Roman standards around the city of Jerusalem—circles of gold, fixed on wooden poles, bearing the image of the Emperor. I expected some resistance; to tell the truth, I welcomed it. I had heard about the rebellious nature of these people, and thought it prudent to teach them a lesson. This is Roman territory, after all. It is only right that these folks, like many others all around the world, bend to the powers that be.

But these people will not bend! For six days they protested those standards. When I stood firm in my decision, their protest grew more intense. When I threatened them with violence, they argued more vigilantly. When I

threatened their leaders with death, they did not flinch. I was the one who bent! I was the one who gave! And even that was not enough for them. When I removed the standards from the city, I sought to compromise by setting up a few golden shields—not standards, shields; and not everywhere in Jerusalem, just at my own personal residence. No images! No “idols,” as they call them! These simply had my name and the name of Tiberius inscribed upon them.

Still they persisted! I was defiling their holy city, they claimed. They went right over my head, petitioning Rome. *Word got to Caesar!* Tiberius himself sent word that I should remove the shields, and went on to rebuke me for causing an affront to these people and their religion. This from the one to whom I was giving honor!

Since that incident, things have only gotten worse. The Roman government, at my request, began construction of an aqueduct for the city of Jerusalem. The water supply of this city has always been a problem—even the histories and religious writings of these people show evidence of that. When their great king—David, King of the Jews—first conquered this place, he gained access through the water supply. So, it stood to reason (at least as far as I was concerned) that these people would learn to appreciate us Romans if I offered them what we do best. The aqueduct was a masterpiece of modern engineering! Beautifully constructed, with arches and stone, it carries a never-ending stream of clean spring water over forty stadia from its source. I built it as a show of good faith! A gift from Rome to them. Oh, when money for the project grew scarce momentarily (these things happen), I arranged to borrow some funds from their temple treasury, assuring it would be returned.

The demonstration they held as I entered Jerusalem was evidence of their wrath. Tens of thousands of them, rioting in the streets. But this time I made sure they were the ones to bend, not I. I sent soldiers out into the rioting crowds. At my command the soldiers threw off their cloaks, revealing their short swords. My response to the insubordination of these Jews was swift, stern ... and bloody. They did not bend; so I broke them.

So ... when they brought that man ... that righteous man ... before my judgment seat ... by heaven, I was not going to bend to their will! They brought him here not for a trial—that had already taken place. Their council, the Sanhedrin, had already tried him, as they have the right to do. It is rare that I even hear of their proceedings. But this was different. This was a *capital case*. And **I have final veto power** in all capital cases. They cannot put a man to death without my approval. And I relish that tiny bit of authority I have over them. They had no case against this man. I knew that soon enough. And, oh, how I looked forward to vetoing their sentence—to letting this man go free.