

roving prophet? A miracle worker? A peace maker? He was going to “bring in the kingdom of God,” his people said. “With what?” we wondered, daggers ready. “With words,” they said. Words!

He stood beside me now. “Which one will you have?” Pilate called out, “Barabbas? Or Jesus?” Did I hear correctly? Pilate is asking them to choose between us? The irony of the situation did not escape me, even in the confusion of the moment. In a way, we shared a title, shared a claim—to be sons of the Father. That’s what he, Jesus, had claimed to be, so I had been told. And that’s what I was as well. My name, Barabbas—it means “Son of the Father.” Which “Son of the Father” would they release? What a choice! They know who I am, and that frightens me. And him? He’s harmless. Which one will they choose? Which one would you have chosen? Of course, it’s obvious: the true and righteous choice was him! And me? Captured, condemned, what would become of me?

“Barabbas! Barabbas!” Listen to them cry! “Give us Barabbas!” And just that quickly the command: “Set him free.” My hands, unmanacled ... my feet, cut loose. FREE! I AM FREE!

Need I tell you I ran? As I came down through those halls, another roaring cry arose, a cry that stopped me in my tracks. What? Did I hear them right? “Crucify him!” they roared. “Crucify him!” I was free, but the other “Son of the Father”—docile, silent—he was going to die ... in my place ... for me. Oh, let those words sink in: FOR ME!!!

Do you know what it feels like to be able to say that? And to know that it is true? That should be my cross, you know. I should be hanging there. Do you know how it feels to have somebody take your place—somebody innocent, when you are guilty? Do you know what it means to be named a child of the Father? Do you know what it is to be free?



Homily: Lent Week Three

Look at your hands. Watch what they can do, these miraculous tools. They can build up—creating wonders of architecture, sculpture and art, warming others with hugs, greeting others with waves, comforting others with caresses. And they can tear down—hitting and hurting, crushing and ... killing. Hands can cause all sorts of harm—from the itchy finger of the gun-toting murderer or the calloused hands of the molester to the delicate fingers of the safe-cracker.

It is rather telling that, when a criminal is captured, the first things bound are the hands. Bind the hands, and you have bound the person.

Look at your hands. Just look at them. And consider the things that they have built ... and the things that they have destroyed.

Do you suppose that Barabbas considered such things? Do you suppose that he saw in his hands the murders he had committed ... the insurrections he had caused ... the blood he had spilled?

Or, do you suppose that all he saw, whenever he looked at his hands, was the mark of missing manacles; the fact that his hands were free. For, you see, someone else took Barabbas’ place that fateful day. There were no longer any manacles to bind his hands. And there were no nail holes either.

Barabbas may come closer than any of us to the realization of what Jesus' death on the cross in our place means ... truly, fully, wondrously means. Barabbas, one hopes, may have understood the full weight of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Because, if it had not been Jesus, it truly would have been Barabbas up there—naked, pierced, bloody, dying.

Look at your hands. Look at them. And take note of this—there are no manacles there. There are no nail holes. Jesus died in your place. He died for you!

Monologue: Barabbas

That should be my cross, you know. The center one. I should be hanging there, surrounded by the crowds who've gathered here—the women, priests and Pharisees, a follower perhaps, and those curious, calloused onlookers who seem to enjoy beholding death by crucifixion. I should be there!

Right now, though, I'm not sure I even want to be here, where I might be seen, recognized—lest someone try to throw me back into prison again. Ah, but that can't happen, don't you see? For I am free! That cross is his, not mine, and I am free. Because of him. Because he took my place there on the cross. I think they call him ... Jesus.

And they call me ... oh, yes, they called me ... so loudly, so enthusiastically they called my name: "BARABBAS! Give us Barabbas!" That's why I am here, at the foot of the cross. Because I shouldn't be here. I should be running and hiding in the hills, running for my life.

My life! That's what it's all about, this crucifixion, this man's untimely death. It's all about my life. Today I was to die. That cross was made for me; those nails were mine. But, at the very last minute, I was released!

Maybe I need to go back a little and tell you how I got into prison in the first place. It was no surprise to many that I ended up there. As a kid I was brash, loud-mouthed, leader of the gang ... and I liked it. If there was mischief, I was there. Things didn't get better through my teen years. By the time I reached adulthood, someone had said to me, "Hey,

you want some real excitement? We have a cause; a group of us are doing something about those Romans in our land. They are enemies of our God and our people! Our group, the Zealots, is tired of just talking, praying, waiting. We have gathered a band of patriots, brave, unafraid. And look, if we can show the other men of Israel what just a few can do—a few brave patriots—the rest will follow. Raid! Strike! Kill if we must! And we need fearless men like you!"

"Like you," I heard them say, and I joined. I followed where they led, and soon ... I led! Daring, brash, and calloused, I led the attacks. We hit and ran. We plundered and stole. And all in the name of the Father, our God. And things were going just as we had hoped until someone ... someone betrayed us. Plans ... a huge caravan headed for Rome. Money, treasures, goods of all kinds—there would be enough plunder to raise a small army! I was in charge ... but someone had betrayed us. They were waiting for us. And what was most obvious: they were after me. "Barabbas!" Apparently my name had struck terror in many hearts, and they wanted me. I fought. My sword cut, struck, and killed. And then ... everything went black, and I awoke ... in that prison cell.

Now, less than a week later—today—as I was lying there ... I knew. They had wasted no time. Today was the day. They wanted to make an example of me. Crucifixion! What really hurt was that many of my own people agreed. They too saw me as an outlaw and murderer. Out there, they were making three crosses. Two men in cells beside me, they also knew. It was today for them too. They were calling out for mercy, scared. But not me. I would not crawl and plead. I would be the brave patriot to the very end.

I heard the steps, armed guards. This was it! They grabbed me, pulled me from the cell. It wasn't until then that it hit me: crucifixion!!! I have seen it; it is a terrifying way to die!

But wait ... they dragged me past the crosses ... up the stairs ... to the governor's balcony. Voices ... I could hear the voices ... a crowd ... loud, crazy people. And then I saw ... him. I had heard about him. A