

Bishop Jaime Soto – Homily for Good Friday,
April 2, 2010

“You are not one of his disciples, are you?” *Simon Peter* denied it and said, “I am not.”

Simon Peter’s denial as well as the abandonment of all the other disciples, except one, is as much a shocking scandal as the brutal scourging and vicious mockery of the Roman soldiers. Simon Peter and the other disciples turned their back on their friend. Simon Peter denied him three times. The weak and feeble faith of the first apostle makes the horror of Calvary even more dismal. The powers of darkness seemed to rob Jesus of any remaining human affection. Jesus’ earlier kind offer to the disciples saying, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” was left hanging as was he, alone on the cross.

None of the gospel accounts, including John, shy away from the disciples’ denials or betrayal. It is part of the passion narrative. More stunning is the extraordinary fidelity of the good friend who was failed by his own. The enduring legacy of this painful text also speaks the truth of every generation of the disciples of Jesus since that first band of feeble friends. Are we any different from Peter, James, Andrew and the others? Would we have been any less timid or any more loyal than they would?

The passion narrative is read year after year. Its sorrowful saga sears our hearts and scourges our conscience because we are too often like Peter, James, Andrew and the rest. Their failures find resonance with our own. Such shame might have been written out or written over but it remains as part of the enduring narrative of redemption.

The betrayals, the denials, and the fearful running away are read year after year because they are still true. What earthly prize might lure us away from the Lord’s embrace? What harsh challenges might silence our voice of faith or provoke a denial that we even know the Lord? Do problems and travails cause us to run away or turn away and hide?

The recent news about the sad, sick stories of child abuse by clergy and the feeble failures of leadership is such a trial for us now. It brings us to our knees and poses to us the difficult question, “You are not one of his disciples, are you?”

The hard grip of sin tried to choke the Church on that dark dismal Good Friday long ago. Its suffocating grasp grips us still. All of us disciples know the taunting, accusing scold that says we are not worthy of such a friend as Jesus. We are a wounded Church, the fumbling followers of the Lord. We shudder to see the price of our sinful follies in the flogged figure of Christ or the wiped body of His Church. Yet we come this day, to hear that sorry yet saving story, our story, the story of our good friend who loved his friends till the end.

The woeful tale of sin is still true and we endure its retelling because His friendship still prevails. His mercy still can heal. The blood and water still flow from his sacred heart to wash us clean and restore the vigor our feeble faith. By his wounds we can still be healed because He is the Good Shepherd, the good friend. We did not choose him. He chose us, to be his friends. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.” That is what will save us.

“Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear ... and he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses.” (Is. 53.11-12)