

Column

Some memories don't fade. I remember like yesterday travelling to a theatre in Canton to see Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*. The year was 2004.

Watching this movie was like no other. Some scenes were so graphic and brutal that I found myself looking down at the floor. I noticed others doing likewise. When the film ended, there was no wisecracking or laughter, people filed out in stunned silence.

The graphic nature of the film, especially in the beating scenes, brought forth not a little criticism, but, in the end, the Pope at the time seems to have said it best, "It is as it was."

A softened and sanitized version of the final chapter of our Lord's life would have obscured several key theological truths about the event. The first has to do with the human condition and thus the reason a saviour was needed. While humans are capable of heroic deeds and acts of kindness, they are also capable of acts of brutality and

callousness. If there were no doctrine of original sin (the concept that the brokenness of Adam has passed down to his offspring), it would have to be invented.

Just as a cancer requires radical action on the part of a surgeon, so the disease of sin required radical action on the part of God. This radical action is seen on the cross . . . God in the person of His one and only Son takes the sin of the world upon Himself, bears its consequences and somehow expiates it.

More than that, this brokenness, which at times manifests itself in beastly behavior, is not just the problem of this or that group *over there*. No, it is our problem. Not even the Apostle Paul was exempt, as we hear him say in 1 Timothy 1:15: “This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”

So, the first reason the events surrounding Jesus’ death should not be softened or sanitized is that we humans need to know true nature of our condition. We need more than good advice and self-

affirmation. Many years earlier, the Old Testament prophet had pinpointed what was needed when he wrote: “With his [the suffering servant of the Lord; for Christians, Jesus] stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

The second reason no softened or sanitize version of the passion of Christ will do is that any such telling of the story would obscure the love of God as manifested in the human-divine Christ. The hymn writer Isaac Watts captures the extent of this love when he says: “See, from his head, his hands, his feet, / sorrow and love flow mingled down. / Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, / or thorns compose so rich a crown?” Why not make this personal: See His scourged and beaten body and say, He loves ME this much.

One final thought . . . if Mel Gibson’s epic film had ended with Jesus breathing His last on the cross, there would be something beautiful and inspiring about His dedication to a cause in which He believed; nevertheless, there would be no Gospel, no good news. Nothing would have changed. Other men had done the same.

No, what sets Jesus apart is what follows on Easter morning. As the film ends, Jesus is seen alive coming out of the tomb. More than a martyr, Jesus stands as a representative of the restored human race. The good news is that His life can be your life and my life. Alleluia!

ALMIGHTY God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee that, as by thy special grace preventing [going before] us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost ever, one God, world without end. Amen. (Collect, Easter Day, Book of Common Prayer)

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