

Rev. Donato Infante III  
Good Friday 2018

If you so desire, you can take an online survey to find out “What Biblical character are you most like?”

Maybe you will get Mary Magdalene. You love strongly and you act bravely. You're a devoted friend who won't back down in the face of adversity and who fights courageously for the things and people you care about.

Maybe you will discover you are Noah. You're a passionate, emboldened leader who marches to your own drumbeat and chases down your own ideas. The best part? You've got what it takes to accomplish them.

Or maybe you will learn that the Biblical character you are most like is Eve. (I should preface this one by saying that I did not write these descriptions. They came from one such online test.) You're smart and sophisticated and value the pursuit of knowledge above all else. Don't mind those who mistake this for arrogance; your tenacity and wisdom will take you far in life.

You get the picture.

Growing up, my parish did a stations of the cross for children every year on Good Friday. Each reader, a child, got up and read the meditation in the first person, as if they were a character who witnessed the passion. I was asked to participate twice, once as the cross-bearer, walking from station to station, in which I made my debut as an altar server. I have never been the same since. The other time I was a reader. These meditations were geared towards children, and they would sound something like this.

“Hi. I’m Simon of Cyrene. I helped Jesus carry his cross after he fell several times. As Christians, all of us are called to help those who are weighed down by heavy burdens in their lives. Jesus says that whatever we do to those most in need, we do to him, so you, too, can help Jesus carry his cross by helping those in need around you.”

It was simple, and beautiful in its simplicity

The year I was asked to read, the week prior my religious ed teacher had given me my part, and I was confused because it was not the name of a character I recognized. I had to ask her who it was. It was to begin, “Hi. My name is Barabbas.”

Who is that? This is what we heard this evening.

[Pilate] again went out to the Jews and said to them,

“I find no guilt in [Jesus.]

But you have a custom that I release one prisoner to you at Passover.

Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?”

They cried out again,

“Not this one but Barabbas!”

Now Barabbas was a revolutionary.

As a third grader, I did not want to be one of the bad-guys. I did not like this at all. However, over the years, I have come to see that it was a good fit. He represents the Biblical figure with whom I have the most in common. First of all, Barabbas is a name that means, “son of the Father.” Christ is the only-begotten son, but I, too, as a child of God, am a son of the Father. The name fits me perfectly.

Hebrews tells us that Christ learned obedience in the midst of suffering and was made perfect. Unlike Christ, I have not been obedient. Due to willful pride, I have formed bad habits, that even now, in weakness I fall back into. That makes me, too, a revolutionary. I have revolted against the moral order and the law of God, and I continue to do so at times. My crime is exactly the same as Barabbas.

I am also owed the same punishment as Barabbas. Barabbas was supposed to be put to death, which is also what should happen to me for my sin. Adam and Eve, by sinning, brought about a disorder in our nature, one that ends in death. But like Barabbas, Jesus of Nazareth died in my place, that I might be saved.

Not as some way of placating divine wrath, not as some form of divine child abuse, but Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, died in my place out of love. If we think about it, we come to understand that sin has no explanation. We can rationalize and justify, but none of that makes sense. Likewise, what Christ experienced in many ways does not make sense. He was handed over, and the Father let it happen. The Father let him suffer like so many people in this world suffer, that suffering might be redeemed.

In one of his articles, the theologian Father Joseph Komonchak citing 1 Peter, writes, “But that is the world we live in, and it was into that world that Jesus of Nazareth came, and it was that world of sin he encountered and that burden of death that he bore. But the evil and the malice ended with him: “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return: when he suffered, he did not threaten, but he trusted him who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:23). The reign of sin and death were

absorbed by his love and forgiveness, and a frightful evil was transformed into a transcendent good, an execution became a self-sacrifice.”

Father Komonchak then quotes Saint Augustine, saying that when we look upon the cross, what do we see? “The crucified limbs? The pierced side? Or the love? When we hear that he suffered for us, what do we love? We love the love. He loved us so that we might love him [in return], and that we might be able to love him [in return], he visited us with his Spirit.”

That we might love him [in return].

I end with these words from the Letter of the Hebrews, which serve as a fitting invitation to all who know in their hearts that they are very much like Barabbas:

“let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help”