

Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles. *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

Passion According to John - Not a Condemnation of the Jews

Bob's Perspective:

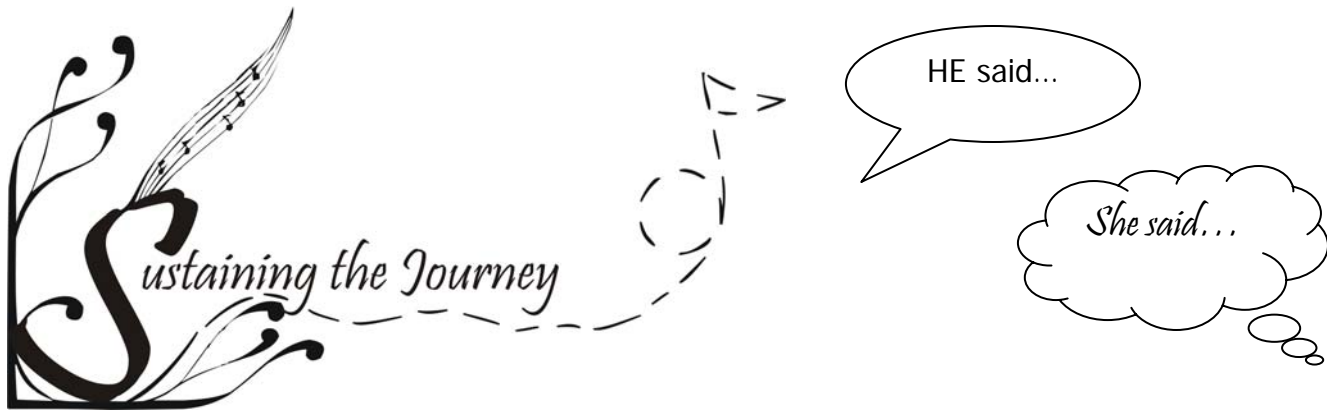
On Good Friday the Church proclaims the Passion of our Lord according to the Gospel of John. There has been a great deal of controversy over the years from our Jewish brethren with regard to this particular Gospel. Many feel that the Church views this text as a condemnation of the Jewish race for the execution of Jesus. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

In order to illustrate the point, allow the following two premises. Although they may seem to be disjunct at first glance, stay with me.

1. The continent of North America is made up of three countries: Canada, the United States and Mexico. In a strict geographical context, citizens of any of these three countries could be called "Americans," since they live on the North American continent. However in the modern international political context it is understood that "Americans," are exclusively citizens of the United States – in the same way that those who reside in Canada are Canadians and those in Mexico are referred to as Mexicans.

2. Although the Supreme Court interprets the laws for the United States (having little or no effect on the laws of Canada or Mexico), the laws do not necessarily reflect the views or moral convictions of U.S. citizens. Many times the position of the court tends to sway with the political tide of the administration or political party in power.

That being said, here's the explanation. In the time of Jesus, the country now known as Israel was made of three somewhat independent regions: Galilee, Samaria and Judea. Although Jewish people may have lived in Galilee and Samaria, it is generally thought that "Jews" referred to the residents of Judea. In John's Gospel, the Greek word, "Ioudaioi" translates as "the Jews" - but in context of his writing, "Ioudaioi" more correctly refers to the "Judean authorities" (Sanhedrin), which in essence was the Jewish Supreme Court. Referring to the Sanhedrin as "the Jews" would be the same as referring to the U.S. Supreme Court as "the Americans." - while the reference is not



untrue, it is somewhat inaccurate in meaning. In Jesus' day, the Sanhedrin was strongly influenced by the Roman Empire which was the government in power and had civil jurisdiction within most of Pilate's geographical areas (most of which was Judea).

Now looking to the context of John's gospel, it would have been very unlikely that Pilate (a Roman Procurator) would converse in general with common Jewish people. However his conversations most likely (and even more probably) took place with members of the Sanhedrin (Supreme Court) which did not necessarily reflect the views or moral convictions of the citizens - but rather swayed with the political tide of the administration in power.

The bottom line here is that the Jewish people (at large) most likely had little if anything to do with the execution of Jesus. Rather, our Lord was executed by a religious/political machine (who although may have had good intentions in mind) were misguided at best.

Mary's perspective:

I have spent quite a bit of time reflecting on this, and my thoughts have strayed in two directions...

First, the entire concept of the passion reflecting a condemnation of the Jewish race is one that has truly never crossed my mind. Sometimes I feel like I live in a little homogenous bubble, and my exposure to world views needs to expand. Perhaps it's because I don't often feel like I'm on the receiving end of discrimination - or perhaps, if I do feel like I'm getting the shaft, I do something about it. However, if the intent of this blog is to make the reader think, then Congratulations, Bob. Mission accomplished!

The other thought that has been very present to me occurred a couple of weeks ago. I was preparing the contents of the ritual binders for the weekend of Palm Sunday, and I spent time reading the passion. New parts of the story struck me. After 33 years of liturgical ministry, I thought I knew the story pretty well - but I'm still learning!

So perhaps the message here is that Scripture is still alive, and we as liturgical ministers need to be open to new revelations on a regular basis. Even when we think, "I've got this", leave room for the Spirit to intervene!