

The Cross of Glory and Reception in an Adverse and Hostile World

John 17:1-11

By

Revd Isaias Ezequiel Chachine

Many have defined the core of this passage, in John's Gospel, as a 'farewell discourse' in which after, his death and resurrection, Jesus bids a farewell to his disciples in his way to the Father. The message tells of the fulfilment of Jesus' mission in a world so adverse and hostile. Central, in the message, is the fact that where love wounds most, we find one of the deepest fulfilments of divine glory in the world. The message reaffirms the significance of the Cross in the realm of divine grace. The message tells of the Cross of nails that has become the Cross of glory. Where Jesus is wounded, God's glory is revealed. For John, it is in the thick of disgrace and adversity, where the will of God is mostly revealed and fulfilled. The Gospel heralds the culmination of a story of salvation and its reception in world that has precipitated the divine into calvary. Jesus as he prepares himself to leave the world, he prays for his disciples to remain in the world. Jesus' intercession, reaffirms the fact that, through his love for the world, God has sent his only begotten son into the world in order to vindicate it. By vindicating the world God vindicates our core humanity. The Good News today is that Jesus begins his prayer not by asking his disciples to be taken away from the world but to remain in the world. Since God so loved the world that he was prepared to suffer for it, Jesus sends out his disciples into the world in order to lead it back to God and to make it aware of God's grace. The Good News today is that Jesus prays for his disciples so that they may remain in the world and win the world for him.

When the Cross of glory is revealed in Jesus' wounds, the will of God is fulfilled most. The Good News today is that Jesus's prayer for divine reception in a world so adverse and hostile reclaims the world's holiness. It is a prayer for divine redress and reconciliation. Human conflicts and miseries have come to exacerbate the wounds of creation, renting asunder God's will and sensibility for the world. The wound of love that continues to inflict more pain in God, by inflicting pain in the world, remains one of John's supreme symbolisms in the Gospel. God has sent his son into the world knowing that he could be handled and wounded. Yet, it is Jesus, the wounded, who leaves the world conscious of the fact that, through his disciples, as the world continues to reflect on his wounds will find an occasion for healing and nourishment of its own wounds. Today's Gospel is a call to human re-examination, conscious of the fact that some of our human actions, expressed in terms of our social policies, religious codes, and otherwise, might have contributed in harming and wounding the world most. Apart from this planet earth, we have no other place to call home. As sentient human beings and part of this world, it is in our prerogative and responsibility to care for the world, knowing that where the world is wounded, God is wounded most.

I have been too far and abstract in my reflections. Now I would like to try to bring the message home, to speak in a language that will all understand and capture. Today, as we are confronted by Covid-19 pandemic, let us take today's reading as a call for retreat in order to reflect upon our human position in the world, to examine our human actions in order to see how far we might have wounded the world, and what can we do to remedy it. In today's Gospel, John gives us a Jesus who intercedes on behalf of his disciples to remain in the world. Following this intercession, the Good News today, is not that Jesus prayed for his disciples to be removed from the world but in order for them to remain in the world. Today's message is a great consolation as we battle with our own anxieties and fears. Jesus offers himself as a friend and saviour who always remain with us. The fact that Jesus never prayed

so that his disciples might find escape from the sorrows and challenges of life in this world but that they might find a breakthrough within the confines of this world, is a great source of encouragement as we face the challenges of the moment. For John's Gospel, Christian life and ministry that might tend to retreat and escape from the world may not have been part of Jesus' prayer.

For John, Christian life that might tend to find its strength in prayer and meditation but assuming its core values in a life of solitude and withdrawal from the world might have been contrary to the message Jesus died to bring. Jesus of John always insisted that, at times, it is within the rough and risky of circumstances in this world that one should try to live out his or her Christian life. As William Barclay once thought, Christian faith was never meant to withdraw ourselves from the world, but to equip ourselves better for it.¹ Our Christian faith does not offer us release from world's problems, but a way to come to terms with them. It does not offer us a life in which troubles ought to be escaped and evaded, but a life in which troubles are faced and at times conquered. Still, though much might be said from the belief that Christians are not of the world, but it remains true that it is within the world that Christians are called to live out their faith. Today, the Gospel tells of the complex reality of God's grace as found in the hidden bark of world's adversity and hostility. Jesus' plea is that his disciples must never expect to abandon the world, but always expect to understand it or even overcome it by remaining in the world.

Amen

¹ Barclay, William: *The Gospel of John, Volume 2, Revised Edition*. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1956