

## Was it Pilate that nailed Jesus to the Cross?

A Good Friday message of reflection considering the role Pilate played in the crucifixion of Jesus.

2/4/21

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

An extract from today's Gospel reading:

***"Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews?'"***

(John 18:39)

Was Pilate ultimately responsible for the death of Jesus?

This is a tough question to answer.

Consider two personal real life experiences for a moment...

Back in 1989 I received call up papers to complete my National Service under the previous government, the National Party. This was enforced conscription. If you refused to do your national service, you would be arrested by the Military Police and sent to jail for at least six years. It was a difficult choice to make if you were a conscientious objector. While I did not agree with the National Party's policy of Apartheid, I chose the path of passive resistance and decided to complete my national service and see what dissent I could cause from within the system. How I did this is a story for another day!

This was a difficult time for me and many others, I guess, who had the same sentiments. The military machine and culture was so big, intense and powerful that you were completely immersed in the culture and ethos of pure racism from the moment you woke up to the moment you went to sleep. The agenda was racist, the culture was racist, the motivation was racist and the product was racist... you had to fight to remain yourself. Eventually, I became depressed trying to remain true to myself but yet still fit into a system that demanded total obedience. I was under immense pressure to conform, both in

thought and deed. I was part of a military machine that was bigger than me. If I wanted to stay alive, I had to conform. There was no choice in the matter, no negotiation, no compromise. This is how you will think. This is how you will act.

Was I weak? Perhaps. Could I have been stronger? Maybe.

My point is that I was forced to become someone I wasn't and to make decisions that I didn't necessarily agree with.

The second experience that I would like to share with you this morning is slightly different to the army but still powerful in shaping how you are expected to behave and conform.

After the army I joined a large national retail group as a trainee manager. I had completed my divinity degree just prior to entering the army and thus my formation was still very much as a Christian minister and priest.

Now I was shark bait in a large retail organisation that placed wealth and money above the importance of its staff and people.

One day, while I was training in the Dry Foods section, I heard that one of the supervisors I had become friendly with had resigned. I was concerned. I knew that he had a family to support. I went up to Issie and asked him if he had another job to go to. He said no. I said to him that he should rather resign when he had secured another job. He agreed with me but the problem was that he had already put his resignation letter on the HR Manager's desk. I had access to the Admin Block and so I took it upon myself to intervene. I went through to the Admin Block and into the HR Manager's office. She was not at work yet. I removed the letter of resignation and gave it back to Issie.

When senior management heard about what I had done, I was immediately summonsed and given a serious dressing down. You see, I had put people first. It is who I am. Management was only keen on putting the business first and were not interested in the fact that Issie had no other job to go to. I have always believed that if you look after your staff the business, the staff will look after the business.

Was I weak? Perhaps. Could I have been stronger? Maybe.

My point is that I was forced to become someone I wasn't and to make decisions that I didn't necessarily agree with.

Now let us look at Pilate for a moment...

Wow! Here was a powerful man who not only was an integral part of the largest military machine in the world at that time, but also a large institution that demanded its own protocol be followed and conformed to.

At the end of the day, Pilate, although in a fairly senior ranking position, was a government servant who had to deliver the goods in order to keep his position and possible future promotion. Pilate was under immense pressure to keep the peace, often at all costs. This was his main mandate. He was expected by the powers that be, in Rome, to keep the peace in Israel at all times. He did not want to be seen as weak or a pushover by Rome. He had worked hard for his position and was determined to keep his place in the military.

Pilate also knew that in order to keep the peace, he had to keep the masses content and happy. Obviously, he was still in charge and he would not hesitate to use military force if needed, but generally speaking he left the masses to their own doing, as long as everything was peaceful and there was no strife.

When Jesus was brought before Pilate, he was determined to keep the peace and give the people what they wanted. He had no particular affiliation for Jesus and in fact, at one time, said to the masses that there was insufficient evidence to crucify Jesus, but he succumbed to their wishes anyway.

You see, Pilate was merely a pawn in a chess game much larger than himself. He was caught between the pressures of conforming to military policy of keeping the peace at all costs, as well as the pressure of being part of a large institution that often saw people as dispensable. He wanted an easy way out and he took it...

So the difficult question remains...

Was it Pilate that nailed Jesus to the Cross?

I would argue both yes and no...

Yes, in that he signed the final paper work that decreed that Jesus be crucified.

No, in that he was a small cog in a big machine succumbing to the pressure of the masses who demanded that Jesus be crucified, as well as the pressures of the military culture that demanded he fix the situation as soon as possible.

As a side note, I often wonder if it could be argued that Pilate had to do what he did in order for God's plan to be fulfilled. If so, can Pilate be judged for his actions if they were pre-ordained by God?

Whatever the case, I do believe that our God is a God of love and grace and that Pilate would be forgiven for his actions.

What do you think?

Amen.

