

It doesn't take long for us to realize that the world is full of evil. All you have to do is turn on the news and you'll see that to be true. But the evil that we go through may be something personal. Maybe it's some trial that we're going through or some trouble that just never seems to go away. And all of this evil can leave us feeling pretty hopeless. It can leave us feeling cast down in our souls, as we said earlier in the Psalm. And it leads us to ask, where is our hope? What good could come out of this? Where can we turn? What are we supposed to do in the midst of this evil? Yet there is hope, Christians. God is indeed our hope and our salvation, because God can turn evil into good. God can take the very worst situation and make it something which builds us up in faith. Because God works all things for good for those who love him.

And we see a proof of this in our Gospel reading for today. Because in John chapter 11, Jesus has just performed a very great miracle. He raised Lazarus from the dead. And many of the people who were there that day who saw him do this believed in him because of it. Because he had raised Lazarus before their very eyes, they knew that he was the Son of Man. They knew that he was the promised Christ. They knew that he was the one they had been waiting for. They believed in him because of what they saw. But not all of them did. Some of them saw the miracle and still refused to believe. They saw Lazarus rise from the dead before their very eyes, and they still turned away from Jesus. And this group, we are told, went to the Pharisees, and they told them what had happened. The Pharisees also did not believe. They did not trust in Jesus. They knew what had happened and still turned away from him as well. Because they didn't see Jesus as the Christ, Christians. They saw Jesus as a threat, and not a small threat either. So they called together the whole council, the Sanhedrin, to decide what they should do about Jesus.

Now, why were they so concerned? we might ask. They say in verse 48: "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." Everyone's going to follow him if he keeps on doing things like this, they say. And it's going to lead to a revolt. He's obviously trying to raise up a rebellion against the Romans. That's the real reason he's doing all of these things, at least in their own mind. And for that reason, the Romans would not hesitate to put that rebellion down.

Because ever since the Romans had conquered Israel in 63 B.C., there had never been peace between them. The Jews, on the one hand, wanted to throw off the Romans. They wanted to be independent. They didn't want to be dominated by a foreign nation anymore. But the Romans, on the other hand, wanted peace and security, and they were willing to do whatever it took to get it. So the Romans, first of all, tried giving them their own kings. This is Herod the Great, for example, whom we know from Christmas. As long as he was in control, they thought, as long as somebody local was taking care of them, then they would be happy, right? Then they wouldn't cause any problems. But it didn't work. The Jews hated Herod and his sons. They wanted nothing to do with him. They thought that he was illegitimate, and they especially fought against his sons after Herod died. So that didn't work. So the Romans tried ruling them directly. We'll take charge of the situation right then and there. And that's why we have Pontius Pilate, for example, as one of the governors. As long as we are the ones in direct control, then there will be peace. But that didn't work either. The Jews kept stirring up rebellion after rebellion. In fact, we're told about two of them in Acts chapter 5, where it says this: "For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and

all who followed him were scattered." So the Pharisees thought that Jesus was just another rebel leader like Theudas and Judas the Galilean. And if he caused problems, they knew that the Romans would do something about it. And they also knew that Rome was beginning to lose patience. One more rebellion, they thought, and the Romans would crack down hard. So we need to do something about Jesus. We need to take care of this problem before we are all destroyed.

Caiaphas speaks up at this point. It's worth pointing out the Caiaphas is the high priest only because of the Romans. The previous governor had removed his predecessor and had set him in that place instead. So Caiaphas is just as worried about his job as he is about the nation. Caiaphas has a simple solution, a way to fix their problem. He says, beginning in verse 49: "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." Get rid of this one man, and there won't be any more danger. Kill Jesus, and there will be no more threats, no more trouble. The Romans will leave us alone, and we will be able to keep our jobs and our nation intact. Better that one man should die than that the whole nation should perish because of him! And the Council agreed. The very next week, they decided, they were going to put Jesus to death. And in this way, they thought that they were going to save the nation. They knew that they had nothing against Jesus, nothing that they could really pin on him. They knew that Jesus had done nothing wrong. In their desire to save the nation, they were willing to murder an innocent man. What could possibly be more evil than that?

Well, what good could come out of this? we might ask. How could God turn the evil plan of the Pharisees into something good? It seems too terrible. It seems too horrible. How could God do anything about this? How could good come out of this at all? And yet God did bring good out of this, Christians. He turned their evil into good. Because what Caiaphas said was right, just not in the way that he meant it. As John goes on to say, verse 51: "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation." Even though Caiaphas had been appointed by the Romans, he was still the high priest. And being the high priest, the Holy Spirit spoke through him. Caiaphas prophesied that it was better for one man to die rather than all die. And he was right. Jesus would die so that the whole nation would not perish. And not just the nation! Verse 52 says: "And not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." The death of Christ would bring life to all people, to all nations, to all who call on his name. Because even though we deserve death, Christians, through the death of Christ we have been forgiven. It is indeed better that that one man died for the sins of the whole world rather than we should perish!

So God turned their great evil into the greatest good. Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin murdered Jesus by having him crucified. And yet, through his death on the cross, through the death of Jesus, God brought salvation to the whole world. God used their evil plan as a way of moving his plan of salvation forward. Because God can work all things together for good for those who love him.

And if God could turn that evil into good, Christians, if God could turn the crucifixion into our salvation, then why should we fret and worry about anything else? Why should we be afraid of the evil around us? God can turn our suffering into glory. God can turn our sorrow into joy. Though all the world may be against us, though we may suffer the worst evil of all, God can use these things to build us up and to strengthen us in our faith, because nothing will ever get in the way of God saving those who call on him.

So yes, Christians, we can hope in God. Even in the very worst situation, we can hope in him. Even when it seems like nothing good is ever going to happen again, God will be our salvation. Because God can bring good out of evil. God can turn the bitterest cup that we drink into sweetness. God can turn the blackest night into brightest day. So do not be cast down, Christians! Hope in God. He will deliver you, and he will save you, because he can do all things.

Let us pray. O God, our Refuge and Strength, our very present help in trouble, strengthen our faith and lead us to always hope in you, because though we enter into your kingdom through many trials and tribulations, you are preparing us for glory through them. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.