

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning.

Congregation:

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Theresa Lungu:

And welcome to Morning Prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is Professor Francis Xavier Clooney, he's a priest of the Jesuit Order, and Professor of Divinity here at Harvard Divinity School. Please rise as you're able, and join me in the responsive reading, Number 31 in the black psalter book.

"In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed. Deliver me in thy righteousness."

Congregation:

"Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily. Be thou my strong rock, for an house of defense to save me."

Theresa Lungu:

"For thou art my rock and my fortress. Therefore, for thy name's sake, lead me and guide me."

Congregation:

"Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me. For thou art my strength."

Theresa Lungu:

"Into thine hand I commit my spirit. Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

Congregation:

"I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy, for thou hast considered my trouble. Thou hast known my soul in adversities."

Theresa Lungu:

"And as hast not shut me into the hand of the enemy, thou hast set my feet in a large room."

Congregation:

"I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes. Nevertheless, thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee."

Theresa Lungu:

"O love the Lord, all ye His saints. For the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer."

Congregation:

"Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."

Choir:

(Singing).

Fr. Francis X. Clooney:

When we think of Holy Week, we think of different times of day. On Palm Sunday, we think of the midday, the bright day, when the people gather. On Holy Thursday, we think of the evening into the night, when Jesus was at table with His friends. We think of Friday afternoon, as Jesus hangs on the cross; and Saturday, when Jesus is in the tomb; and the bright rising sun on Easter morning, when Jesus rises from the dead. We're asked now, at this time, to reflect not on this bright sunshine, but on the darkness of Good Friday in the morning. After Jesus was arrested, after Jesus was taken into custody, there was that long, dark night before the sun rose, and we are asked to be there and to think about Him.

I lead us through, just briefly, several passages from Matthew 26-27, that put before us what happened in that time, climaxing in the reaction of Jesus. "Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plan to have Jesus executed." They could not wait for daylight. They could not imagine putting off this decision. But in the darkness of the night, when no one could see them, they gathered in order to say simply, "How can we get rid of this man? How we can kill Him, on this very Friday."

And after that, Peter, denying again, "began to call down curses and he swore, "I don't know the man!" But then the rooster crowed, and Peter remembered the words that Jesus had spoken; "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And Peter went outside and wept bitterly." Even as they were trying to find ways to kill Him, Peter, close to Jesus, chosen as a leader, trusted in so many ways, steps away and says, "I don't know Him, I don't know Him, I don't know Him." The crowing of the rooster reminds us that it's still before dawn, but the sun will be rising soon. And somehow, Jesus, who predicted this event, knows very well that Peter has gone away. Peter will not be there to support Him.

"And Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that Jesus was condemned. He was seized with remorse, and he returned the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priest and the elders. He cried out, "I have sinned... For I have betrayed innocent blood." And they replied, "Well, what is that to us? That's your responsibility." So Judas threw the money into the temple and went away. He went away and hanged himself." This terrible moment of despair, where a disciple of Jesus, who as we heard last night, his feet too were washed by Jesus at the Last Supper, he turns away, he betrays his master with a kiss. And now, in the darkness before dawn, he realizes, "I have done a terrible thing, and it is too late. How can I turn back? I cannot." So he hangs himself.

And finally, Jesus. "They bound Him, they led Him away, they handed Him over to Pilate the governor... And the governor asked Him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" And Jesus replied, "So you say." And then He was accused by the chief priest and the elders. And He gave no answer. And then Pilate asked Him, "Don't you hear the testimony they're bringing against you?" But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge. And the Governor was greatly amazed."

For me, it is a great question and a puzzle. Why is it that Jesus remains silent? He knows the injustices being done. He knows they've been plotting against Him. He knows that Peter went away. He possibly knows that Judas is now dead. But when they bring these false charges against Him, He remains silent. He could speak up, He could defend Himself, He could quote the Hebrew Bible. So many things He could say. And yet there, in the dark of the morning, when He is alone and there is no one with Him, He remains silent.

And I think for us on Good Friday, this is a reminder too, that there are many times in life when there is injustice around us, when people are plotting somehow to destroy us. When friends we have turn away and deny knowing us, leave us in the lurch. When people we thought were on our side somehow betray us. And with the leaders of our people, the leaders of our church, can sometimes do the awful thing, of charging us wrongly. Can we bear the silence of Jesus in the dark? Can we be like Him, who refuses to speak?

I close with words that Jesus probably was thinking of, that He did not utter aloud, from Isaiah 53. "Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered Him punished by God, stricken by Him, afflicted by God. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. And by His wounds we are healed... He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. But as a sheep before its shearers is silent, He did not open His mouth."

And let us pray. Jesus, you set for us an example that we can barely understand. You heard the truth, you lived by the truth, you did not flee the truth. You stayed steady in the day and in the night, when you were with your disciples, when your enemy surrounded you, when you were alone in that cell waiting for them to execute you. When they all turned against you, you kept your silence, you kept your focus on your Father. You remained true to the mission for which you have come. On this Holy Day, we ask you, Lord, to open our hearts and minds that we may speak the truth, that we may live up to the word you call us to live. That we may not run away, we may not be bitter, we may not be angry. And that we know how to be silent, and to wait for the fulfillment of your will. We ask this in Christ, our Lord.

Theresa Lungu:

Please rise as you're able, and together, let us recite the Lord's Prayer, saying, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen."

Congregation:

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen."

Theresa Lungu:

And let us join in the hymn, Go to Dark Gethsemane, number 151 in the crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(Singing).

Theresa Lungu:

As we go forth unto this day, may we be reminded that Good Friday is not about gloom and despair, but about the triumph of love over hate, and hope over despair. Amen.

Congregation:

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Amen.