

June 24

Scriptures: Read John 19

Key Verse: “Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews”.(John 19:38b --NIV)

Overview

After recording the events of the crucifixion and the touching scene around the foot of the cross, when Jesus entrusts His mother to John’s keeping and care, John tells us about the burial. We might have expected the twelve disciples to come out of hiding, convicted in heart of their cowardice in deserting Jesus, and take the body down from the cross. Instead, we see two heretofore-secret disciples, and the most unlikely candidates for the task

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both members of the Sanhedrin, and the two of all Jesus’ disciples with the most to lose, courageously and lovingly declared their allegiance on that fateful day. They were secret believers. Nicodemus was the one who had come to see Jesus under the cover of night, and one wonders if Joseph had not had a similar nocturnal interchange with Jesus. Somehow they had connected, for obviously they had planned, however quickly, what they should do about the burial. They had also counted the cost. Their positions with the Sanhedrin were forfeit if they identified publicly with the crucified Christ. Their influence, status, and even most of their long-term friendships were shot. They were about to enter a social wasteland.

They worked hurriedly, for the Sabbath was almost upon them. As the sun sank into the western sky, they took Christ’s body down from the cross, suffering ritual defilement as they touched the dead flesh. They wrapped Him in strips of cloth, packing between each layer the burial spices Nicodemus had brought. Then, with their own hands, they carried their Master to Joseph’s own grave. Gently and sorrowfully, they laid Him there. As the sun disappeared, it seemed all hope disappeared with it. The two grieving brothers slowly walked away.

Nicodemus and Joseph were outstanding men in terms of their public profile, but were retiring in their faith. They “feared the Jews”. Like you and me they shied away from the cost of discipleship; at least, they had done so most of the time. But now they acted differently, when it was toughest. It is no great matter, declared Cardinal Newman, that we obey the Master in the ninety and nine cases where to do so is easy. The real test for us lies in the hundredth case, where it is hard.

Jesus, our Savior and Lord, is able to empower us to do what we never thought possible. Nicodemus and Joseph know all about that.

Prayer

Father God, as Pilate said to the crowd, “Behold the man,” he directed the gaze of all history to Your Son and our Savior, Jesus. Grant that we may ever focus our gaze upon Him who alone is the Author and Finisher of our faith.