

Palm Sunday
April 5, 2015

“Germanwings pilot Andreas Lubitz deliberately caused the plane crash in the French Alps, even accelerating the plane’s descent, readings from the second black box confirmed on Friday.

“A day after finding the mangled and blackened flight data recorder from the Alps crash site in southeastern France, investigators said the box revealed that Lubitz repeatedly accelerated the airliner to hasten its collision course with the mountain.

“France’s air accident bureau, BEA, said that the German clearly changed the settings to increase the plane’s speed”
(<http://wk-box-confirms-French-Alps-crash-co-pilot-Andreas-Lubitz-acted-deliberately.html>).

Christian tradition holds suicide to be a sin. The reason for this is that in suicide a person abandons hope and denies God’s providence and forgiveness. Some Christian theologians have expressed the opinion that Judas Iscariot’s ultimate sin was not that he aided the authorities in Jesus’ arrest, but rather that after the arrest he committed suicide, in effect stating that his sin was beyond God’s ability to forgive. Suicide indicates that the very last action in one’s life is to abandon hope.

As someone who has had a suicide in his own family, I pray that God is merciful and takes into account mental illness. God knows the hearts and minds of us all, and I pray for his mercy on all. Nevertheless, we need to understand why suicide is considered a sin.

The case of Andreas Lubitz appears much worse. It was not enough that he abandoned hope and took his own life, but more so, he took the lives of about 150 other people. It is one thing to take one’s own life because of depression, and quite another to take 150 other lives. This is evil.

“Early Thursday five shooters from the Somali-based al-Shabaab terrorist organization swept through a university in the Kenyan town of Garissa, shooting Christian students. They knew who to kill because they ordered students to recite an Islamic prayer. Those who could were spared. Those who could not were shot dead, about 147 so far. Police killed four of the terrorists and captured the fifth”
(<http://www.wsj.com/articles/killing-christians-in-kenya-1428019500?KEYWORDS=Kenya+University>).

Again, what we can say, other than that these murders were the product of evil? Something is terribly wrong in the world.

The story of Palm Sunday and of Holy Week is a story laced with good and evil. Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, and shortly thereafter he entered Jerusalem in a grand procession, a victory celebration. Crowds acknowledged him as a conquering hero, giving him the equivalent of a ticker tape parade. They covered the roads with clothing and palms and tree branches to make the dirt roads seem more regal.

We observe jealousy- the high priests resented the attention that he received. We observe fear- the Sadducees, the cohort associated with power in the Jewish community, feared that if Jesus disturbed the Roman authorities, then the Romans might take it out on them. We observe a power play- the Romans did not want anyone challenging their authority. We observe misplaced expectations, because many Jews wished that the Messiah, God's chosen redeemer, would rid the area of Roman colonial government and its army of enforcers.

Then as now people ask why God does not intervene physically. Why does he permit all these bad things to happen; when and where will he finally take action against the ills of our world?

Jesus refuses to abide by their expectations. When his disciples try to physically resist his arrest, he tells them to put down their swords, saying "He who lives by the sword will die by the sword." When asked if Jewish people should pay taxes to the Roman colonial authorities, he tells them, "Render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God." When asked by Pontius Pilate if he is a king, he responds, "My kingdom is not of this world."

The Lord chose his battle wisely, and he taught us that the most important battlefield is the human heart. The renewal of the world begins not by external force but rather by interior power. People must be transformed from within, by following God's ways rather than their own wishes. We read this past week the words of the Prophet Isaiah,

"Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains...'" (Isaiah 48:17-49:4).

In Jesus' days on earth as in our own times bad things happen- bad people do terrible things. It is easy to fall into despair. What we see in Holy Week is God's victory over evil not by compulsion, not by the physical force of an army of soldiers or angels, but rather by an act of ultimate love. "Greater love than this has no one- that he give up his life for his friends."

The victory over evil begins with God's victory over evil and death; it ends with our personal victory over sin and death. And when the victory is ours, we attain the blessings promised in the prophecy of Isaiah,

"Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, "Here I am." (Isaiah 58).

May this come true for all of us. Amen.

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