

In Nomine Iesu

Midweek Lent 3 2026

Thy will be done - Luke 23:20-25

“Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, ‘Crucify, crucify him!’ A third time he said to them, ‘Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.’ But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So, Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the innocent Lamb sacrificed for our sins. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

There is an old saying we have all heard: “To err is human, to forgive, divine.” The words are those of the renowned 18th century English poet, Alexander Pope, and are found in his 1709 work, *An Essay on Criticism*, which itself is poetry. Other famous sayings from this same poem are, “a little learning is a dangerous thing,” and “fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” As we contemplate the power of forgiveness that flows from the cross, let us use Alexander Pope’s words to help us understand.

Pope was not just a gifted poet of English, but well-read in French, Italian, Latin, and Greek literature. He is famous for many things, perhaps chiefly for his translation into English of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for which he received the previously unheard-of sum of 200 guineas per volume for each of the twelve volumes in each of the two works. That would be the equivalent of more than a million dollars today. He also produced the first annotated edition of the works of William Shakespeare.

That said, “to err is human,” was not Pope’s original thought. He took it from a Latin author, Seneca the Younger, the full quotation of which is: *Errare humanum est, perseverare autem diabolicum*, “to err is human, to persist in it, diabolical.” It is instructive for us to see that pre-Christian Seneca understood that error, sin, is the most human of traits, but that persistence in it is of the devil. Seneca would come to know how very true this was when Emperor Nero, whom Seneca had tutored as a young man, forced him to commit suicide. The nature of man has not changed since Seneca’s time. Sin and error remain the true marks of humanity. But Alexander Pope turned Seneca’s phrase into something far more profound, when he wrote, “To err is human, to forgive, divine.” Forgiveness does not come naturally to man. Forgiveness is the **gift of God**.

There is no doubt many in Jesus’ day recognized Him as the long-promised Savior. His welcome into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday shows that very plainly. There is also no doubt that some who welcomed Him later changed their minds under the pressure of their religious leaders and abandoned Him. There is also no doubt that some who opposed Him at that time later regretted their rejection of Him as the Messiah and came to believe that He was the Promised One; Saul of Tarsus and Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, are just two well-known such examples.

But our focus for the moment is on yet another group, one which would fit well the saying of Seneca, “to err (or sin) is human, but to persist in it is diabolical,” that is to say, of the devil. In our text we see that there was a dedicated group of men who were determined to see Jesus of Nazareth killed. They agitated the crowd to threaten Pilate with loss of control, inspiring the fear in him that if he did not accede to their demand the trial would end in disaster and shame for him. Pilate, knowing well how the law was supposed to work, replied, “Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” This is where Pilate made his mistake. For if Jesus was innocent, why would he, the governor, inflict any punishment on Him at all? Obviously, he was trying to appease the crowd. It didn’t work. The crowd was thoroughly fanaticized. They wanted blood. So, it wasn’t the case that the religious leaders were simply erring in their judgment of what should be done with Jesus, but they were persisting in their error and had become, as Seneca wisely once said, “diabolical,” devilish, demonic. Luke reports, “They were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And **their voices prevailed.**”

Luke continues, “So, Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to **their will.**” Pontius Pilatus, the Roman governor of Palestine, undoubtedly holds the all-time world record for both the worst and the best managed capital punishment trial in history – and all on the same day! In fact, both in the same trial! Worst in that he allowed the diabolical crowd to have their way – in accord with their own totally and completely evil will! - in the condemnation of the most innocent man on the face of the earth, in fact, the only completely innocent man who has ever lived! But the best in that Pilate oversaw the perfectly carried out, pure and undimmed will of God.

When Luke records that Pilate “delivered Jesus **over to their will,**” he is speaking the absolute truth. It was their will, and the will of the Evil One. And Satan must have been beside himself with joy as he saw his diabolical will win the day in the hearts and minds of those who persisted in their evil shouts of “Crucify, crucify him.” He must have been bursting with self-congratulatory pride as he saw Pilate’s will being bent to his own on this the day that saw the Son of God and Son of Man condemned to die a shameful death in the sight of all Israel, God’s own chosen people.

But dear friends, when the Apostle Paul greeted the Galatians, “Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, **according to the will of our God and Father,** to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen,” (Galatians 1:3-5) he too was speaking the absolute truth. Everything that happened that day was “**according to the will of our God and Father.**”

Why? Because, as Alexander Pope wrote, “to err, to sin, is human, but to forgive is divine.” You see, long before the demonically inspired crowd demanded that Jesus be crucified, the prophet Isaiah had told Israel regarding the promised Savior, “He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5) Why? **Because God so loved the world** that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. The Father in heaven to whom we pray “Our Father who art in heaven ...” , placed all of our very human sins

upon His own dear Son, who then paid for them, fully, completely, so that He could forgive us, fully, completely. So remember, to err is human, to forgive, divine. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria