



WAS IT GOD'S WILL THAT JESUS DIE A CRUEL DEATH ON THE CROSS?

Deciding what is and isn't God's will can be difficult, to put it mildly, especially when bad things happen to good people. We wonder why? And we may wonder if the bad things are God's will. I will comment on that question later, but first, let me address the question posed above: Was it God's will that Jesus die a cruel death? The answer is "no" and "yes".

In what sense was it not God's will for Jesus to die on the cross? (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 606-623, *United States Catholic Catechism* p. 91-94)

Jesus was executed because he was a big threat to the Jewish establishment (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 574). Some of the leadership wanted to get rid of Jesus and they manipulated Pilate into doing their dirty work. Needless to say, it would be a gross error to blame *all* Jewish people for the death of Jesus. So Jesus was executed because his enemies wanted to get rid of him. In this sense, his death was an evil act. It would be a contradiction to say that our all-good God would desire such an evil act. It would also be wrong to say that God wanted a human sacrifice as a price for the sins of humanity. We know from the incident with Abraham and his son, Isaac, that God is very much opposed to human sacrifice (Gen 22:1-19).

In what sense was Jesus' death God's will?

It was God's will that Jesus be faithful to his mission even if it meant dying a cruel death. Jesus could easily have escaped death by *not* saying or doing things that threatened the religious leaders. He could have preached a safe gospel. But then he would not have been faithful to his mission. A true prophet says and does what he believes to be true even if it will cost him his life. We see this with the Old Testament prophets.

The example of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King and Archbishop Oscar Romero, will be helpful here. All three felt called by God to carry out a certain mission - to be liberators of their people, and to speak truth to power. All three were assassinated for their "crime" of speaking truth to power. All three knew that they, like Jesus, would most likely pay the ultimate price for their fidelity to their mission. They could

easily have escaped death by preaching a safe message. But in doing so, they would be unfaithful to God and to their mission. So they continued to say and do things knowing it endangered their lives.

Did God will for them to die? "No" and "yes." All three men died because their enemies wished to get rid of them. It certainly was not God's will that evil people kill good men. God's heart would be deeply grieved by such an event. But it was God's will that all three be faithful to their mission even if it meant sacrificing their lives for the liberation of their people. In this sense, God willed the death of Gandhi, King and Romero. But we also know that God always turns the tables on such evil acts. The deaths of Gandhi, King and Romero brought about significant progress in the liberation of their people from oppression. Their sacrificial death gives us some glimpse into the significance of the death of Jesus.

Because Jesus was God in human form, his death was infinitely more valuable for all of humanity. Looking at the death of Jesus in this way does not make God a bloodthirsty God. Rather, it makes him someone who wants us to be faithful to the truth we know. Looking at Jesus' death in this way helps us to see that we are saved by an act of *sacrificial love*. God took what was intended as an evil act and used it to save the world. In one of his poems, Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, uses the phrase "Terrible Beauty" to speak about the death of Christ. It is *terrible* in the sense that it symbolizes what evil people will do to stop goodness from moving forward. The cross is *beautiful* in that it symbolizes what Jesus was willing to do to show his love for sinful humanity.

The meaning of the cross for us

- Never again need we look upon sacrificial love as useless. Sacrificial love always bears fruit whether we live to see it or not. The world is always better because of sacrificial love.
- The cross might scare us from speaking truth to power. But it should also *inspire* us to do so.

Lord, protect me from a negative attitude

God, keep me from grumbling.
I know that there are few people harder
to put up with than those who are
always complaining.

Don't let me become like that.
Don't let me have discontent written
all over my face.

If I can't get my own way, don't let me sulk about it.

If I can't get what I want,
help me to make the best of what I have.

Don't let me take offence easily,
getting into a huff,
even when no harm was intended.

Help me all day and every day to

see the best in people.

Help me, too, to live in the certainty
that you are working all things
together for good.

May I have the patience to wait for your
purposes to work out.

This I ask for your love's sake. Amen.

William Barclay

A prayer for trust in God

My God, I want to have confidence in
your love, but so many things seem to hold me back:
past wounds, past hurts, past betrayals,
past sins—mine and others'.

Open my eyes. Open my heart.

Enable me to take the leap of faith
that is needed now.

Holiness isn't a matter of starting to love
you some time in the future,
or even tomorrow.

I don't have to wait until I become
a better person, more worthy, more virtuous.
It's a matter of trusting in your mercy today,
just as I am.

You showed this to the saints; show me, too,
and give me a spirit of great confidence.

I ask this through your beloved Son,
our merciful Saviour. Amen.

Elizabeth Ruth Obbard

Holy Week, the holiest week of our liturgical year

I am hoping that large numbers of you are planning to
attend our Holy Week services. The following is our
schedule.

What makes people happy?

Recently, *USA Today* ran a cover story on "What
Makes People Happy?". After asking that question to
psychologists, sociologists and others with
comparable expertise, Marilyn Elias, author of the
article, concludes that the happiest people are those
who surround themselves with family and friends.
Realizing the toxicity of materialism, these happy ones
don't care about keeping up with the Joneses next
door. They pursue personal growth and intimacy; they
judge themselves by their own yardsticks, never
against what others have or do; and, most importantly,
they readily forgive and seek forgiveness.

Have a blessed Holy Week,

