

Good Friday “Tetelestai”

Fr. Frank Schuster

I’m told that, a few years back, there was an archeological dig in the Holy Land where they uncovered an old Roman tax collection station. They found something very interesting. On the parchments recording the tax statements of the locals in the area, if the account was paid in full, the word *tetelestai* was written on those parchments. That is a really cool Greek word isn’t it? *Tetelestai*. Let’s say it together, *tetelestai!* Why is this word important? This is an important discovery for biblical scholars because the last words of Jesus on the cross are “It is finished.” Now, the Gospel of John is written in Greek, and in the original Greek, Jesus actually only says one last word from the cross, *tetelestai*, the same word the tax collectors wrote on accounts that were paid in full. *Tetelestai*.

I mention this because the last word of Jesus from the cross is filled with meaning. Humanity owes a debt to God that is impossible to repay on our own. The last word of Jesus on the cross, *tetelestai*, suggests that our debt has been paid. As I was sharing with you last night, for John’s Gospel, Jesus is our Passover lamb who takes away the sins of the world. For John’s Gospel, baptism is the doorway to a relationship with Jesus. In the Eucharist, we truly eat the body of the Lamb and drink his blood. The Passover sacrifice has been reversed. It isn’t our sacrifices that save us, it is God now sacrificing himself for us that saves us. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. *Tetelestai*, it is finished, our account is paid in full.

What does that mean for us today? As we listened to the John’s account of the passion, we are moved to repentance for all our sins. We realize we can’t save ourselves. We are moved with sorrow for how our lives went astray.

If only we can stay in this moment for awhile, something will happen within us tonight. We are moved to have a deeper relationship with the God who would suffer and die for us. We are moved from where we sit, to make our spiritual pilgrimage that promises change, to touch the wood of the cross on this holy night, recognizing the deepest love God has for you when you offer your love to God in return in the simple touch of the wood of the cross.

In the Roman Missal, the rubrics call on the priest to remove his chasuble and even shoes in a gesture of humility to the wood of the cross. I will be doing this tonight. As a pastor, I can see how taking off our shoes in the pews, if this isn’t too cumbersome, before coming forward can be spiritually beneficial. The wood of the cross is holy ground. It is a place where we can encounter the living God, a place where we can hear the words of our savior telling us that he loves us and that he forgives us, a place where our lives can change if we let it. Jesus makes all things new.

Do we dare venerate the cross this evening with a deep desire to encounter Jesus? Tonight we are mindful of all our sins, our hurts, and all the ways we have been wounded and have wounded others in life. When we touch the wood of the cross, can we permit ourselves to feel Jesus touching us in return, healing us from within, as he whispers gently into our ears, *tetelestai*.