

Good Friday “Tetelestai” 2022

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My friends, I’m told that many years ago, there was an excavation in the Holy Land where archeologists 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 wonderful Greek word, isn’t it? *Tetelestai*. Let’s say it together, *tetelestai!* Why is that 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 that tax collectors wrote on accounts that were paid in full.

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 in fact 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. This is why Jesus gave us his Body and Blood as food and drink. The Passover sacrifice has been reversed. It isn’t our sacrifices that save us, it is God now who sacrifices himself for us for the sake of our salvation. From the cross, Jesus cries out “*tetelestai*”, it is finished, our account is paid in full.

What does that mean for us today? As we listened to John’s account of the Passion, we have been moved to repentance for all our sins. We realize now how broken we are and how we cannot save ourselves. If only we can stay in this moment for a while, something remarkable might happen this evening. We can be moved into a deeper relationship with God who suffered and died for our sake. We can even be moved from where we sit so to make a spiritual pilgrimage to the foot of the cross. This is a pilgrimage that promises change if you realize how deeply, deeply God loves you. Hear that again. God loves you. Believe it! This powerful love of God is why, of all Fridays in the Church’s calendar, this one is called good. This Friday is remarkably good.

Yes, my friends, 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. This is a place where our lives can change; but only if we want it and are willing to reform our lives and live in his love. Only Jesus can make all things new. Only Jesus. Do we dare? If we touch the wood of the cross on this holy night, we just might feel Jesus touching us in return, whispering gently into our ears from his wounded and broken body, *tetelestai*.