

Today's gospel has some very familiar words in it: "I am troubled now...Father, save me from this hour." Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, right? Not today...we do hear from Gethsemane, but in the second reading. Today's gospel happened immediately after Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; Gethsemane is still a few days away. The context of those familiar words in today's gospel puts them into a new light. The full passage says: "I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour."

Jesus' entire life had led him to this moment. He was on a rescue mission to save us from slavery to sin and death. "Father, save me from this hour"? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour." Instead of continuing his conversation with his Father, Jesus could very easily then turn to us and say, "If I let this hour go by, you guys are in big, big trouble." The hour refers to Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. In Gethsemane, he prays that the cup will pass him by; it's the same thing. He's referring to his passion. Had Jesus not drunk the chalice, if he had not endured his hour we would not be redeemed.

Covenants with God were broken. The price of breaking the covenant is death. Death in this sense means eternal separation from God without hope of that friendship being restored. That isn't what God wants; God doesn't desire the death of the sinner—the prophet Ezekiel tells us that. Here is a potential conflict between God's loving, merciful heart and his justice. He can't just ignore the sin, but he doesn't want to lose us either. The solution: the divine son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity became man. The Son of God humbled himself and took on our full humanity and paid the price for us. That is why Jesus was born, so that he could rescue us. All it would cost him was his life.

This brings us to the letter to the Hebrews. "In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death." Prayers, supplications, cries and tears. This is the Garden of Gethsemane in which we hear Jesus say: "Father, let this cup pass from me, but not my will, but your will be done." In his humanity, Jesus dreaded what was about to happen to him but he knew he had to face it. It was the only way our broken relationship with his Father could be restored. Hebrews continues on: "he was heard because of his reverence." Wait a minute. He was praying to the one who was able to save him from death...but he died. How can the author of Hebrews say that Jesus had been heard? He did die (he had to die)...but his life wasn't **taken** from him. In the passion narratives it says, "Jesus **handed over** his spirit." He **gave** his life away. Jesus was a full and

willing participant in what happened to him. That was his mission. When he says, "It is finished" he meant that his mission was accomplished. He freed us. Because of this, his father heard his cries and raised him from the dead, making it possible for us to share in his resurrection.

What about this sentence though: "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." Jesus had to learn obedience? Jesus was never disobedient. The word "learn" here means to learn through experience, by doing something. It is one thing to know how to do something in theory but something else to do it in practice. In theory, I know how to perform brain surgery, but would you want me to operate on your brain unless I had some actual practice? Jesus knew what obedience was, but it wasn't until he became a human being that he had to put it into practice. Do we think Jesus' obedience was never tested? What about the Gethsemane quote I used earlier? What about when he faced satan in the desert? What about when he hung on the cross and all those people mocked him and spit on him. Why didn't he just snap his fingers and remake everything so he didn't have to go through it? Love. Sacrificial love. He was obedient to his Father and the mission his father had given him out of love for us.

How was Jesus made perfect? The simplest answer is that to be made perfect means to be made complete. When Jesus was a baby, he wasn't complete. In his human nature, he had to grow in wisdom and understanding of what it meant to be a man. He wrestled with temptation. He experienced tragedy and hunger and pain and abandonment. By the time he hung on the cross and willingly gave up his spirit, he knew what it was to be a man. At the end of his mission, he handed all he had learned over to his father—along with his life and his father took all of that, and gave it back to him when he raised his son from the dead.

Jesus' cries, his obedience, his love...all of this done for our sake and as an example for us to follow to the extent that we as mere human beings can follow it. He did not run away from his hour. He did not let the cup pass him by. What chalice is Jesus inviting us to drink from? What is the hour he is inviting us to embrace? God put us right here and right now for a purpose. Whatever our hour is, we were born for it and we don't need to be afraid because Jesus is always with us.