

Mark 14:60-65

⁶⁰Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" ⁶¹But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, ^[i] the Son of the Blessed One?"

⁶²"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

⁶³The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. ⁶⁴"You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as worthy of death. ⁶⁵Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.

A famous poem written in the 1800s titled "Invictus" (meaning "unconquered") ends with the ringing words, "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul."

Many people think this poem is quite courageous and inspiring. You can picture the speaker living life to the full, surviving by his wit and wisdom and strength. No one else will set his course. No one else will command his soul.

Caiaphas, the high priest of the Jewish nation, and the members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Israel, could have had that as their motto. It was their task to keep the people of Judea safe in the ever-changing political world. This was no small challenge! It would take all the wits and all the wisdom they had to keep little Judea from being swallowed up and disappearing, as had happened to so many other nations. But they were accomplishing it, and they were proud of themselves for it.

And in all of that they forgot who the true master of Israel was and condemned him to death when he came before them. And although we might never have gone along with this great crime, we still are tempted by the same pride and arrogance that led Caiaphas and the others. And so we must pray:

Forgive Our Desire to Defy Your Divine Authority!

1. At times we are annoyed with your commandments and authority.

2. Teach us, for Jesus' sake, to submit to your authority.

1.

How did the high priest get to be the high priest in Jesus' day? It took political skills. The Romans had conquered Judea. The Roman governor of the province was the man who chose the high priest. And he wanted to make sure it was someone who could keep the peace and keep the taxes coming in.

Caiaphas was that kind of guy. Caiaphas knew how to spot and exploit the slightest weakness in the Roman governor's position. He knew how to keep the streets of Jerusalem relatively peaceful. He enjoyed all the perks of the position, including a grand house in the better part of town. And he gladly wielded the power of the high priesthood and would allow no rivals.

But Jesus of Nazareth was a thorn in his side. The man traveled throughout Israel preaching and teaching. He kept on talking about the Jewish leaders' hypocrisy and false teachings. Jesus was saying that the priesthood had abandoned the pure laws of God and had substituted them with the traditions and foolishness of man-made laws and opinions. And Jesus kept performing all these miracles and getting everybody all worked up about himself. Every wonder he performed made him look better to the people and the priests look worse. "See, this is getting us nowhere," some of the higher-ups had complained. "Look how the whole world has gone after him" (Jn 12:19).

So the high priest and his council, the Sanhedrin, had to do something to lessen Jesus' influence on

the people. They tried to trap him in a misstatement and ruin his popularity with the people. That failed again and again. They confronted him directly on the day he rode into town with palm branches all over the road. But Jesus wouldn't back down.

So they plotted his death. They bribed one of his disciples to betray him for 30 pieces of silver. They had him arrested. Now they had him where they wanted him. They held this fluke of a trial and condemned him. They brought him to the Roman governor and demanded that the governor execute him. And when Pontius Pilate put up the sign on his cross to show what crime he was dying for, the priests protested loudly, but to no avail. What an insult for Pilate to write "The King of the Jews" above the head of the man they had utterly rejected. Not him! They would not have him rule over them! They would have nothing to do with his "authority"!

And that was the trouble right there. They didn't want to yield the control they had over Israel. They didn't want to yield their power to any Messiah.

We would never do anything like that or would we? You see, that is the thing about sin and temptation:. We can see it clearly in others. We can easily see it in Caiaphas and in the Sanhedrin.

But can we see it when it rears up in our own hearts? Is there not at times a feeling that Christ's authority is too much of a burden for us? His laws are not always what we want to do, after all. Our sinful flesh sometimes gets annoyed that we don't get to call all the shots for our own lives. There are times when those commandments he gives are too much for us. And then we look for ways around them, ways to cut a few corners, ways to find some special circumstances that will allow us to ignore the clear laws of our God. We make excuses. We ignore our own hypocrisy, down play our sin and point to other people's sins.

Yes, we must all admit that there are times when we defy the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and turn to sins we know he has forbidden or ignore doing the things we know he has commanded us to do. These are not those iniquities we fall into through weakness or thoughtlessness. These are acts of rebellion against our King at those moments when our human nature just plain doesn't want him to be our King—those times when we want to be the masters of our own fates and captains of our own souls.

And suddenly there we are, sitting in the council chamber of the Sanhedrin with Caiaphas: Putting Jesus, our Lord on trial—questioning him—condemning him. But we can't condemn Christ to a Roman cross as Caiaphas did. We condemn him to the backseat of our lives, out of sight and out of mind for the moment, while we do what we want to do and refuse to listen to him. And if we continue in this fashion, then we will soon cast him out of our lives as surely as the high priest and his Sanhedrin cast him out of their nation.

We daily have to stop and consider our own rebellious thoughts. We need to ask with horror...What am I doing? What am I saying? And why? And then we need to fall to our knees and pray, "Father, teach us, for Jesus' sake, to submit to your and his authority!"

2.

God, help us remember that we really are not fit to be the captains of our own fates or the pilots of our own souls. We are sinners, stained through and through with sin from the moment we came to exist. We live in sin our whole life long. Scripture says, no good thing is present in our sinful flesh. We can't be in control without disastrous results.

We can see the shipwrecks that people make of their lives when they try to live according to their own made-up rules. In the end, they bring only sorrow and pain, usually to themselves and often also to others. They follow their heart and it leads them astray. The final destiny is death. Eternal death in hell. That's the path we keep choosing with our sins.

It was to save us from such ruin and disaster that God's Son came to this earth and submitted himself to the authorities of the Jewish nation and of the Roman Empire. But more than that: He submitted

himself to the authority of the divine law, which we so often throw aside. He submitted himself to the condemnation and death that we earn for ourselves.

He did not allow us to continue happily and foolishly on the road to eternal ruin and regret and punishment. He surrendered himself to the power of these wicked men. He allowed a Sanhedrin to try him and a Caiaphas to condemn him to death. Through this death he paid the price and penalty for our many and constant refusals to live under the authority of his commandments.

He saved us from our headlong rush away from God and set us once again on the course that God, in his love and wisdom, had ordained for us from the beginning and revealed clearly in the pages of his Holy Word. Now that we know the price he paid and the damnation from which he saved us and the heaven to which he is guiding us, why would we ever want to rebel against his perfect authority?

Jesus Christ is the pilot of our lives. He and he alone is the captain of your soul and mine. Yes, we know that his commandments are sometimes hard to live by. We live in a sinful world and Satan seeks to devour us. Our life as Christians is hard. Temptations will not cease, and again and again the world and the devil and our own sinful nature will tell us we are being fools. But Jesus gives us strength.

It may indeed be that we will be giving up much that the world finds pleasurable. Is that too great a price to pay to show our gratitude to him who died to make us the children of God and citizens of Heaven itself? He gave his life that we should belong to him and live in his kingdom and serve him. Will we throw that aside? Will we try to fool ourselves, as the high priest did, into believing that we know better than God what is right and what is wrong or what direction we should go and what paths we should avoid?

Remember what St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians: "He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Co 5:15). Try to throw off his authority? Why? His authority is the most precious and important thing in a Christian's life.

"Master of my fate"? "Captain of my soul"? That's Jesus and only Jesus. He spent himself to make us his...and now we get to live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."

Father, forgive us when we forget this and seek to deny your Son's divine authority! Make us right in your sight by the blood of your Son. Give us innocent hearts that truly seek to live by your commands. And teach us the blessedness of knowing Jesus Christ as our Savior and of living under his authority as our King. Amen.

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Midweek Lenten Service #2

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