

# JESUS or BARABBAS?

*Taken from The Sacred Passion Prayer Book*

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**P**ontius Pilate, convinced of the innocence of Jesus, and wishing to release Him, yet unwilling to displease the Jews, recalled that, at this time of the Passover, it was customary to liberate whatever prisoner the people might prefer. He also recalled that there was a notorious prisoner, Barabbas, who, for sedition and murder, had been cast into prison. It occurred to him that, if, instead of asking the people whom they desired, he narrowed their choice to taking Barabbas or Jesus, they could scarcely fail to choose the latter.

To give greater effect to this proposition, he ascended the judgment-seat, and, addressing the multitude, said to them: "Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?"

The whole multitude called out: "Away with this man [Jesus]. Give us Barrabus!"

What an astounding spectacle! The all-holy God placed on a par with the infamous Barabbas! What humility in Thee, O Jesus, to suffer the comparison. And

the crowd chose the robber!

It is not for me to condemn them. I have rejected Thee, my Savior, times without number. I have spurned Thy love and Thy grace for the passing pleasure of a sin or the momentary gratification of a passion. How many Barabbasses have I preferred to Thee!

"Away with Him!" Away with whom? Is it Barabbas? No, it is the meek and lowly Jesus, around Whom a few days ago they gathered to praise and glorify; He Who raised their children from the bed of sickness; Who took their little infants in His arms and blessed them; Who never returned an unkind answer to all their unkindness, nor a word of reproof for all their cruelty; He Who would have folded them in the arms of mercy, and did love them with an everlasting love.

It was against He, Whom that cry was raised: "Not this man, but Barabbas." Against Him the judgment hall now rang with accusation: against Him were raised the voices that had blessed Him but a little time

ago; against Him were all the powers of Jerusalem leagued in opposition; and, with no dissenting voice, was chanted that chorus of hate and defiance: “Crucify Him!” — They denied the Holy One and Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto them.

The Chief-Priests and Ancients persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and to destroy Jesus; and without one feeling of gratitude, without a thought or consideration of what they were about to do, they obeyed the impulse their rulers gave them, and at once demanded the crucifixion of Jesus.

How many characters like these are there not in our day — men influenced by the feeling of the moment, without any moral principle, ruled by the dominant voice of their associates, and willingly to sacrifice anything, rather than to stand alone for truth and justice.

It is easy to profess our religion in the company of Catholics; it is easy to stand by Christ when no one is against Him. But the test of our loyalty comes in the face of opposition. It costs us nothing to bow our heads at the church; it costs an effort to reverence it on the street. Yet, it is the same Name in the church

and on the street. Probably there were some believers in Christ among the crowd that gathered before Pilate’s house. If there were, their cowardice made them dumb. We are not required to proclaim our belief in Christ and His holy religion from the house-tops; but there are occasions in everyone’s life when we cannot be loyal to Him without, in a quiet way, at the very least, letting our associates clearly understand that we are for Christ.

Writers on Our Lord’s Passion have remarked that the most conspicuous figures who were associated with Him were three thieves. Two of them were placed on equal footing with Him on Calvary; and the third, Barabbas, was set in rivalry with Him for the favor of the people. To one of those who were crucified with Him, He promised a place in Paradise; and it was not Our Lord’s fault that the other did not have the same happiness.

We may be sure that it was a joy to the Sacred Heart of Jesus when Barabbas was freed through His own condemnation. We may take this as typical of His love for every sinner — for each has He delivered Himself up; and the greater the sinner, if he be so saved, the greater Our Lord’s joy. 