

As clergy I find that I am often invited into situations where there is no solution. What I mean by this is that if you ask a plumber to come and fix a leaky toilet you expect that upon their departure the toilet will have stopped leaking. But if you invite clergy to the bed of a dying person, or into a broken relationship or to the parents of a sick child, we cannot leave with the same assuredness of the plumber. We cannot always reverse the situation to the time when the relationship or person was healthy. Thankfully, we have the Book of Common Prayer and the sacraments but these are not a “fix” in the same way a new flapper or flush valve are. I thought of this today as we read the last part of the passion narrative from John. It reads, “After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.”

Why does it remind me of what clergy often do? Well let’s first start with the characters. You have two imperfect humans (which should remind you of clergy). Joseph of Arimathea, was a disciple of Jesus, but who, until this moment has been afraid to say it publically. Second, we have Nicodemus who similarly seems to believe that Jesus is the Messiah but who until now has done his following at night when no one was around to see. They have come to the dead crucified body of Jesus, a situation where there is seemingly

no solution. The one who they believed to be the Messiah has been murdered by being hung on a cross. They cannot reverse the outcome; they are too late for that so they follow the rites and customs of the Jewish faith. They wrap his body in spices and linen cloths and place Jesus in a new tomb. The problem still exists but they have done what they can and it is up to God now. But in this action I see not just a reflection of what clergy do but what all of us as humans are called to do. Life is not neat and clean and we are all invited into situations most everyday where there is no clear solution. We live in a world of brokenness where there is real evil, real distress and real chaos. And we wonder what can we do about it all, can we fix it? And often the answer is no we cannot. But here is the thing because we are broken creatures just like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus we can use the tools that God has given us in his Holy Scriptures and through his Holy Church to participate in the struggle, to go into the places where there seems to be no hope for a solution.

Many of you have probably heard me tell this story but I think it is worth retelling. When I was at my first parish a man who was getting ready to walk into our 8:00 service suddenly collapsed. He had a massive stroke and was rushed to the hospital. Once there it became apparent that there was too much damage and there was no hope for recovery. I visited him a few times and soon it became time to give last rites. The man's daughter and son-in-law were there who, as best I could tell, had no religious inclinations, but they wanted to be there. When I finished the daughter who was visibly moved turned to her husband and said, "When it is my time to go you better make sure that I get this." Somehow in her non-religious state she saw the connection. She saw in the ritual the connection between ourselves and God. That is the same thing that happens today. Joseph

of Arimathea and Nicodemus did not fix the situation but they participated in what God was doing. They participated in the new life that God is calling us all to. On Sunday we will see where all of this leads but today like much of our lives we are called to be faithful and to participate in the holy, in the things that God calls us to do even when we do not see a solution. In our life we may not see all things set right. For that we may have to wait for the age to come, but we can be there in the gap, in the place of the unknown following and obeying God this day and forevermore.