

As I have mentioned before, during this time of pandemic, I will often listen to a podcast while out for my daily exercise. A couple of weeks ago a link appeared in my email about a debate between Bishop Robert Barron of the Word on Fire ministry and a young man from Oxford University by the name of Alex O'Connor. O'Connor has a YouTube channel called the "Cosmic Skeptic" which he uses to spread the message of atheism

The debate was in two parts. The first part was on the existence of God and part two was about the reality of evil and suffering. Now this was my own impression but I found that part one was a fairly reasonable parlay, with attentiveness and patient critique of the arguments for and against the existence of God.

Part two, however, was more tense. The young Oxford student had a really difficult time with an "immoral God" who would allow 100000 people to die of Covid in Great Britain. And he was summarily not impressed with Christianity, for Christianity has Good Friday, a God who offered up his Son in sacrifice, offered him up to die on a cross, what a horrible God and what a horrible bunch of people who believed in this God.

In our second reading today from the letter of John, speaks of the death of Jesus.

"My little children, I am writing to you that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (repeat)

The Swiss theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar in his book Love Alone is Credible, writes this, "It is always the dogma of the removal of guilt through representative substitution that shows most decisively

whether an approach is merely anthropologically or truly Christologically (that is theologically) centered. Without this dogma it always remains possible to interpret everything in rational terms as an expression of human possibility...Our inability to resolve this dogma rationally is a true scandal; it is a signal and a warning that this is where faith begins.”

What’s he talking about?

Well like our young atheist a rational look at St. John’s words. “Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and the sins of the whole world- doesn’t make sense. Good Friday is a scandal.

However, can we see beyond the limits of our human reason which only sees the scandal? Can we interpret it theologically, according to God’s Word and not our own? Can we see that God’s power resides in humility? God’s love resides in sacrifice? God’s life is about giving of one’s life away? Can we see that because Jesus is God, he passes through death to Risen life? And through the forgiveness of our sins, we can join Him in that Risen life.

At the end of today’s Gospel Jesus unlocks for them the meaning of the Scriptures. The Word of God (meaning the Old Testament) is to be interpreted in light of Him. “Thus, it is written, that the Christ is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. We are witnesses of these things.