



MEDITATIONS FOR LENT by Father Robbie Low

FIFTH WEEK OF LENT – SATURDAY John 11: 45 – 56

'You don't seem to have grasped the situation at all.

It is better that one man die for the people....'

You can't really blame Caiaphas any more than you can blame poor old Herod. They had an arrangement with the occupying Roman war machine, the ubiquitous imperial power, that kept the peace, that granted more privileges to the Jews than any other subjects and though far from ideal was a tolerable *modus vivendi*. Imagine a new king, an insurrection, which would inevitably be put down with terrifying violence. The sacrifice of a few hundred babies was a small price to pay for peace and order. As a political calculation it made absolute sense. It was the alternative to the death of countless thousands and therefore, while we may agree 'immoral' nonetheless, in simple utilitarian terms, absolutely correct. Similarly here, thirty years on, the same issue. Do we stand by and let some semi-educated charismatic parvenu raise a storm and have the whole might of Rome come crashing down on our heads.

Frankly, gentlemen, it's a no-brainer. We need to confect the execution of one man and the state will be saved. Cut off the head and the body will die. It's a very small price to pay.

And who can argue with Caiaphas? After all, when the occasion arose for a future Messianic Freedom Movement, the suppression of the Revolt in AD 70 saw the utter destruction of the Temple, the last stand at Masada and the longest exile in the history of Man.

What Caiaphas cannot know is that he is inadvertently wiser than he knows. He thinks he speaks politically but, in truth, he speaks prophetically. He is a priest

who accidentally but providentially speaks the Word of God. It is, as it turns out, beyond our and his wildest dreams, better that this particular 'one man' die for the people. Because this salvation will not be little or local but universal, cosmic and eternal. Rome can try to suppress it but will in the end, irony of ironies, be captured by it and defined by it ever after.

And just as God can use the wickedness of Man to confer salvation in the story of Joseph and his brothers in the Book of the Genesis, so, in Christ, the tree of defeat, the Cross of Calvary, becomes the place where Satan is defeated, sin and death overthrown and we may agree with Caiaphas that it is indeed very good that this One Man should die for the people.

Spiritual exercise: Pray the first Station of the Cross and pray for those in public life.