



Pietro Sarabbi's Barabbas in *Passion of the Christ*

Have you ever wondered what happened to the individuals who pass through this account of Our Lord's Passion in the Gospel of Mark? You know, the ones who just dash across stage for a fleeting instant; the characters in the story of which we only catch the tiniest glimpse?

What happened to the temple guard who has his ear was struck off by somebody with a sword (see Mk.14:47)? And what about Barabbas the criminal who gains his freedom because Jesus takes on his sentence (see Mk.15:11)? What did he go onto do? And what happened in the life of

the Centurion who confesses Jesus "the Son of God" at the moment of Christ's death (see Mk.15:39)? And finally, whatever became of this strange young man that we hear about only in the Gospel of Mark – what ever became of this unnamed young man who is stripped of his linen tunic, and goes running naked into the night away from his pursuers (see Mk.14:51-52)?

Here's what I've found out. With regard to the temple guard whose ear is cut off, we find that In the account of Luke, Jesus actually heals his ear, right then and there (see Lk. 22:52). And then, a little bit later in the bible, in John's Gospel we find that the one who struck the blow with the sword was (yes!!!) Peter; impetuous, bumbling Peter. Can't you just see Peter clumsily whirling a sword around his head, not really particularly thinking about just who he's going to chop in half?

In John, we also discover that this temple guard who had his ear cut off and then miraculously healed by Jesus was named Malchus (see Jn.18:10). In the Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, Malchus is profoundly changed by this act of inexplicable mercy. Here was this man, Malchus who was being paid to go and capture, and eventually beat and spit on, and finally subject Jesus to a horrible death. And yet this same Jesus has so much love in his heart that he can't bear **even his attackers** to suffer injury. And so, that night Our Lord reaches down, even as they are getting ready to tie them together, Christ reaches out his beautiful hands and heals Malchus from his wound. How could you NOT be profoundly changed by such an act of limitless love?

Whatever became of Barabbas, the man who won his freedom that day? Well, this man Barabbas was, many scholars believe a zealot. Just like the Apostle Simon the Zealot, Barabbas would have been a man of violence, a kind of terrorist.

And certainly, under the law in force at that time he Barabbas deserved to die. Yet, Barabbas was set free, and in his place they murdered this wonderful, wonderful man whose only crime it was to love with a greater love than this broken world could stomach.

So, what happened to Barabbas, this man of violence and hatred? Who can say? But I believe Barabbas must have been deeply impacted when he finally realized just who this was who had gone to meet death in his place. I believe Barabbas must have become a mighty instrument in the building of God's Kingdom. What else could have possibly taken place, once this man realized what God had done for him? How **could anybody** NOT have been profoundly changed by such a act of boundless mercy?

And what about the Centurion of Mark's Passion, the one who, at the bitter end is standing there at the foot of the Cross, and says "Surely this man was the Son of God"? The Centurion would have been the same one who commanded his soldiers to flog The Lord bloody along the torturous rode to Golgotha. It would have been at the command of this Centurion that those beautiful hands and feet were nailed into that tree.

Could the witness of this man who finally realized at the very end just exactly who Jesus was, could the witness of this one soldier have started the tradition of Christian discipleship which grew so strong among the military men of his day? Could this single soldier's confession of Christ have led to the conversion of the Centurion Cornelius, a man God used to break down the wall of division in the early Christian community between Jew and gentile? (see Acts 10) Could the witness of this Roman soldier standing at the foot of the bloody cross of Christ, could his conversion have gone onto influence the actions of another Centurion named Julius who became Paul's faithful protector on his voyage to Rome? (see Acts 27:42-44) What became of this Roman Centurion who stood there as the blood of Jesus flowed down that cross – blood which was surely on his hands - this man who when Our Lord gave up the ghost, felt the earth tremble beneath his feet, saw the sun grow dark, and heard the booming thunder of rocks exploding as the temple veil was torn in two?

This Roman officer would certainly have been changed by the events of this day. How could you **not** have been profoundly affected by witnessing such awful majesty?

And finally, this strange young man who, stripped of his linen tunic, runs naked into the night in order not to be arrested with Jesus; how do you think the events of Our Lord's passion effected this anonymous young man from this morning's Gospel reading? Well, we believe we **do** know something about him. Because you see, a very early Church tradition holds that this young man would return to the fellowship of believers, and this same young man would be so profoundly affected by the what Christ had done for him and his world, that he would go write about it. And he would give his own name to that story of Jesus, his own name of Mark. But we shouldn't be surprised by this, because how could this young man **not** have been profoundly affected by the events of those days?

Good people, in this world, we are constantly looking for ways to change the mistakes of our past, or to avoid the consequences of those mistakes. It's normal and human to go through life wishing you could have the equivalent of a golf-game "mulligan shot"; It's normal to wish you could get a "do-over" for all those things you got embarrassingly wrong. But the fact is, the changes that Jesus makes in our lives with this week of His passion – the changes that the blood of Jesus makes are so profound, that it's not really your past mistakes that are changed. Because the grace of the blood of the Cross doesn't just erase the blemishes of your past. The blood of Jesus actually **changes your destiny**. That's how profound are the changes that Jesus makes in this week of His Passion.

So this Palm Sunday, how are you going to let Jesus change you? How are you going to be profoundly affected by the events of this week? How are you going to let Jesus not only forgive and wipe clean the darker marks of your past? This Holy Week, how are you going to let Jesus change your destiny? Because He will, if you'll only let Him.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Blessed Holy Week. jwb† 3-22-18