

Good Friday, Gospel, Year B

AGENDAS REVEALED AND REPLACED

(THE PHARISEES ARE NEARER THAN WE REALIZE)

John 18:1–19:42

Good Friday

Analysis by Matthew DeLoera

DIAGNOSIS: The Agenda of Death

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Everyone Has an Agenda but Us

We have a lot to argue about these days. Gun control. Prayer in schools. Immigration. Sexuality. Social programs. The list is endless. Though we agree that we have urgent problems, we bitterly disagree as to root causes. We inevitably take sides and fight, but we have no choice! We are determined to win our battles. We have to do whatever it takes to get our lawmakers to hear us and bend to our side. After all, lives hang in the balance, and if we're not part of the solution, we're a part of the problem.

But we know there's more to the battle than the common good, don't we? Isn't it really about the other side's selfish agenda? They just want to preserve their "rights" at any cost, no matter the danger, or they just want to restrict ours, like some kind of power trip. Their motives should be as clear as day to anyone who has eyes to see and ears to listen, and it's up to us to spread the word and make sure everyone else knows what they're really up to. We have to reveal their agendas.

After all, just look at the power games played by the chief priests and the Pharisees. Jesus stood for the marginalized and called out injustice, but this only won him more enemies. Clearly, Jesus was a threat to their selfish power and ill-

gotten gain—we know the truth. Surely they knew what hypocrites they were, manipulating the system for their own ends. Heck, they piously stood outside Pilate's chambers to keep from defiling themselves, in order to manipulate Pilate to do their dirty work for them. What a farce!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): We Discover Our Hidden Agenda

The thing about activism or being political, is that after a while, it's hard to say whether it's truly about others' needs, or just about ourselves. Are we progressives purely for the sake of equality and justice, or because we really just want everyone to know how enlightened we are? Are we conservatives purely for the sake of time-tested reason and order, or because we just want to preserve our privileges? Are we raising awareness, or are we just signaling our virtue? Are we starting a revolution, or just stealing power for ourselves? Regardless of our alliance, on some deep level we all finally come face-to-face with our profound self-centeredness, and the guilt crushes us. Even still, we work so hard to prove to everyone around us that we're not as bad as we suspect we are, because that's the only thing we truly care about. We're so quick to point out others' agendas, because they divert attention away from our own. We refuse to accept just how much we have in common with the chief priests and Pharisees. We are enslaved by the same agenda of self-preservation at all costs.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Our Agenda Is Death

Our struggle is futile. The harder that we try to justify ourselves, the more we prove ourselves guilty. We have not served our neighbors, because everything we have done has been for survival, and they know it. Even if they have inadvertently benefited from our actions, who could say for sure? Our actions remain self-serving to a depth that we cannot comprehend. Like Pilate, we can only wonder what truth really is. But we do know

one thing that's true – futility is death, and we have crucified ourselves. So we look to Jesus, the paragon of selflessness, but he fares no better. Ever misconstrued and misunderstood, his countless acts of perfect service only lead to crucifixion and our same ignoble death. Any fire of revolution is extinguished.

PROGNOSIS: The Agenda of Life

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus' Agenda Is Life

But unbeknownst to the crowds, everything has changed. In three days, Jesus will be raised from the dead, having died our death in order to give us his own life. For just as Jesus said, he came into the world in order to testify to the truth—our self-justification is our death. This is his one and only agenda. We aspire and strive after perfection and righteous life. But as Jesus reveals, perfect service does not avoid the cross, but leads directly to it, because only by dying to ourselves can we finally be brought into true fullness of life. And he does it to us, killing us by forgiving us, and raising us to life by absolving us—a life that can never be taken from us. And he does this to us not once, but daily, throughout our lives of faith.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): The Spirit Resets Our Agenda

Having died to ourselves, and become filled with faith, we discover that the Spirit has completely reset our agenda. Because we know that we have been justified in faith, and this is not our own doing, we finally serve our neighbors freely. We no longer have anything to prove to them, to ourselves, or even to God. We can make mistakes and be humbled by them, in the same way that Jesus' service was humble. We can be surprised by the unexpected ways our actions help others, in the same way that God's free giving is always surprising. We can lose arguments and be taught, in the same way that repentance is a change of

mind and heart. By our utter failure we win everything in heaven and earth. By our death, we no longer live in ourselves, but in Jesus.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Everyone Recognizes Our Agenda

Daily arguments continue to rage around us, like nothing has changed. But now we hear something different. Beneath the fervor we hear others confessing their hopes and struggles to us. Even when they know we disagree, they are surprised to find themselves opening up to us, somehow knowing that we truly hear what they need to unburden from themselves—somehow knowing that we were made for this moment. Yet, it's not we who listen, but Jesus who listens through us. And perhaps this will be the spark of repentance for them, because in our bodies they will look upon the one whom they have pierced, and be transformed by the one who gave his life for the sake of the whole world.