

A question that a guard, in days long past, would supposedly ask to identify an approaching stranger was, "Halt! Who goes there, friend or foe?"

In our Scripture reading for tonight it might be a bit difficult distinguishing between the two. Certainly the mob with swords and clubs is approaching Jesus as a bitter foe. Yet the one leading the mob is thought to be a friend. A disciple of Jesus even, and who approaches Him with a kiss. The other disciples we would also call friends of Jesus. Yet they fall asleep in Gethsemane, failing His urgent request to be loyal friends, to watch and pray. And then, friend Peter tells bystanders not only that he is no disciple of Jesus, but that he does not even know Him. Friend or foe?

It appears that Jesus has no friends at all. And truly, if His disciples are His friends, well, you know the saying: With friends like these, who needs enemies?

Now there is an interesting development that takes place in Gethsemane. One of Jesus' so-called friends cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant with his sword. Maybe this disciple actually is acting like Jesus' friend in coming to His defense. Except that later he is the same disciple who denies Him three times. Not a very friendly thing to do at all.

But look at what Jesus does. He puts the ear back in place and heals the man. This man is Jesus' foe. He has come with the mob to arrest Him. But Jesus treats him as a friend.

This entire evening, as the events unfold, were a guard to have asked, "Who goes there, friend or foe?" well, he would not know what to believe. Friends acting like foes, and Jesus treating foes like friends. It would all be very confusing.

And let's put that same guard into our present day. Were he to say to you and to me, "Who goes there, friend or foe?" would he be convinced or confused by the answer that we give? We would say that we are friends of Jesus. But what would our actions, or our non-actions, say? Sadly, we would have to confess that just like Jesus' friends in Gethsemane, we act quite often like His enemies.

This is why it is comforting to see Jesus pick up the ear of the high priest's servant, place it back where it belongs, and heal the man. For this man, nameless in Luke's Gospel, can be given a name. Your name, and my name. For just like him, we were no friends of Jesus. In fact, we were foes. His enemies, it says in Scripture. But Jesus, as we see with this man's ear, treats foes like friends. Fast forward a few hours and we see Jesus praying for His crucifiers, His Roman foes. Not only that, He is on that cross to die, not for His friends, but for His foes. "*Christ died for the ungodly,*" writes St. Paul, "*while we were (His) enemies.*"

This good news is for you and me. No matter how great a foe we have been toward God, we have a Savior in Jesus Christ who forgives sinners like us, sinners who have acted like enemies.

Jesus placed your ears where they belong so that He then places into your ears the good news that all your sins are forgiven; the good news that God made peace with all His enemies, including you and me, through the sufferings and death of Jesus.

When Jesus acted to restore the ear of that one man, this is totally in keeping with who He is and why He has come. He treats those who are His enemies better than we treat our friends. And truly, He makes friends of those who were His enemies.

You are His friend He declares to you in your baptism. An enemy no more. And even when you fall into sin, and thus treat Him as an enemy, Jesus still treats you as a friend. And into your ears He speaks the word of pardon, that no sin of yours can make you His enemy because all your sin is forgiven. Amen.