

It was Roman law that if the one accused of crimes was silent, offering no defense, then by default, he was guilty of those crimes. And so, who would do such a thing? It was unheard of for someone to stand before Pilate and say nothing. Even if the charges against him were true, he would still speak to defend himself, because to say nothing would prove his guilt.

And so, here stands Jesus before Pilate. The chief priests are accusing Him of many things. None of them true. But Jesus opens not His mouth. He stands in silence before His accusers.

Can you understand Pilate's curiosity? This has never happened. Even the most hardened criminal, with the blood of his victim still on his hands and clothing, would say something in his own defense. "*Have you no answer to make?*" he asks Jesus. Pilate himself is almost speechless with amazement.

He would not have been familiar with the prophet Isaiah, but the chief priests were. They should have recalled the prophet's words in the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter: "*He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*"

Yet even had the chief priests recalled these words of prophecy, they were too hardened in their unbelief to understand them. Here, before their very eyes, is that Lamb. Here is the One whose mouth remains closed. In response to every single one of their charges, Jesus says not a word.

Why? Why does Jesus give no answer at all? Why does His mouth remain closed? Because our mouths are open. You and I are exactly like our parents, Adam and Eve. In Eden, when God came with His accusing questions: "*Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree that I commanded you not to eat?*" they refused to be silent. The evidence was there. They knew they were naked. They had sinned. But did they shut their mouths? No! They opened them up fully to defend themselves. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the Serpent. Ultimately, they both were blaming God for their sin.

It's that way with us. The evidence is there. We are guilty of sin against our God; sin in thought, word, and deed. Yet we refuse to remain silent. We defend ourselves. We blame others. Ultimately, we blame God for our sin.

My friends, this is not how it should be. To repent is to close our mouths; to give no defense, no excuse for our sinful behavior; to admit that, yes, all the charges are true, and to accept whatever punishment we deserve.

Now hear this, our God opens His mouth in calling us to repentance because Jesus, before Pilate, kept His mouth closed. What we refuse to do, Jesus does. The sin we refuse to accept, Jesus accepts. The blame we place on others, Jesus takes for Himself.

It is not the chief priests accusing us. It is the devil himself, and his accusations are true. But Jesus stands between us and our accuser. Jesus, my friend, accepts full responsibility for your sin. Not just for some of your sin; for all of it.

Adam and Eve had shame in their nakedness because of their sin. There are reports that the Romans crucified their victims in utter nakedness, adding shame to their intense suffering. And so, Jesus, too, would have hung from His cross completely naked. The shame of our first parents, Jesus took for Himself. Your shame Jesus took. Your guilt, your punishment, He took it all.

And consider this, that Jesus closed His mouth before Pilate, but to you He opens His mouth. He opens it to speak the word of the cross to you, the Gospel of forgiveness. Jesus refuses to keep His mouth shut when your salvation is at stake. He joyfully speaks to you, yes, to each one of you, that your sins are forgiven. He delights in opening His mouth, through the mouth of your pastor, to announce the good news that you are truly forgiven.

Is this not reason for us to open our mouths in praising Him and thanking Him, and in sharing this good news with others? This is Lent. The Law shuts our mouths in repentance. But the Gospel opens them with rejoicing. Amen.