

## LESSONS FROM GETHSEMANE: CONSTANTINOPLE III- THE WILL OF JESUS

The liturgies of **Holy Week** rightly stand out within the liturgical year. Those who participate in the Sacred Triduum experience the solemnity of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday. The **emotions** are raw as we recall the agony in the garden leading to the **cruel way** of the Cross on Good Friday. We silently wait on Holy Saturday and finally rejoice in the glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday. Having been in a position to experience the entirety of the Triduum, Easter Sunday is even more powerful. Still, the **Garden of Gethsemane** occupies a unique place in my own heart, as I contemplate the **loneliness of Jesus**. Abandoned by his closet friends– who could not even spend an hour in prayer with their Lord– Jesus was alone. Gethsemane highlights the humanity of Jesus in a unique way– “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.” (Matt. 26:39)

“The Council of Constantinople III (680-681) occurred as the conquest of North Africa by the Arabs was almost complete. The ecclesial landscape was **significantly different** now. Constantinople III was also called the Council *in Trullo*, a reference to the domed hall (*trullos*) of the Imperial Palace (long since vanished) in which its sessions were held. Though only a few piers (columns) remain from the ruins of the palace, it is easy to imagine this magnificent and imposing structure, which served as the residence of the Eastern Roman Emperors until the late 11th century. Gathering there to discuss important matters of Church doctrine surely “upped the ante” for its binding decisions. The **central issue** concerned the “will” of Jesus, or “wills,” as the case may be. **Macarius**, Patriarch of Antioch, held that attributing to Jesus two “wills” was tantamount to falling again into the already condemned error of Nestorius from two centuries earlier.

Nestorius said that Mary was mother of Jesus, but **not** of God. Due to the Arab conquest, Macarius resided at Constantinople, unable to even take possession of his See in Antioch! **Monothelism** is the name given to the mistaken (i.e., heretical!) belief that Jesus had but one will. The theologians of the East were not fond of the term “nature” to describe a principle of activity. Some preferred the term “energy,” positing that the “energy” of Jesus derived singularly from his person, rather than from his two natures. Using alternative language is one thing, but in the end, **they denied** a human will in Jesus. Theirs was a **stubborn** adherence to this error. I’ve long felt that one of the early Church’s unsung heroes is **St. Maximus the Confessor**. For his uncompromising defense that Jesus Christ– fully divine and fully human (two complete wills and natures), Maximus was **tortured**. They removed his tongue and right hand, the very instruments by which he defended true doctrine! He **died in exile** in the present-day nation of Georgia in 662 A.D.

By 680 A.D. the situation demanded definitive clarification, as confusion reigned amidst such semantical differences between east and west. A local Synod in 680 held in Rome composed a profession of faith in which Monothelism was condemned. **Papal legates** carried this profession of faith more than 1,000 miles by land and sea to Constantinople. Once there, the Emperor convened an ecumenical council that consisted of 18 different sessions, with the emperor **himself** presiding at the first 11 of them! Approximately 174 council fathers participated, so it was clearly a significant event. The results were forwarded back to Pope Leo II, who first approved, then ordered them translated into Latin and finally promulgated them. The Council’s clear teaching on a complicated matter is worthy of an extended quotation (my emphasis added):

“Following the five holy and universal synods and the holy and accepted fathers, and defining in unison, *it professes* our lord Jesus Christ our true God, one of the holy Trinity, which is of one

same being and is the source of life, to be **perfect in divinity** and **perfect in humanity**, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity, like us in all respects except for sin..." Later, it added: And *we proclaim equally two* natural volitions or **wills** in him and two natural principles of action which undergo no division, **no change**, no partition, **no confusion**, in accordance with the teaching of the holy fathers." While human **language always falls short** in describing a mystery, the fundamental error in claiming that Jesus had but one will is puzzling, especially in light of the scriptural accounts of the passion.

If one honestly believes that Jesus possessed but one will, then the Garden of Gethsemane plea appears little more than play acting. In the 7th century, some high churchmen wrongly concluded that the one will of Jesus was divine. Some contemporary theologians posit quite definitively that Jesus had only one will– the **difference** being that today they think the singular will is **human!** Old heresies have a knack of resurfacing, under a different disguise. Same error– different actors. This is yet another reason why the ecumenical councils have served the Church so admirably, despite their many complexities. Holy Week taught us that the humanity of Jesus **must be taken seriously**. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Constantinople III concisely and definitively enshrined that reality in our faith.

- Each Friday I look forward to praying the Chaplet at 3:00 pm, the hour of mercy. I heartily encourage your participation in next Sunday's **Divine Mercy** program, beginning at 2:00 p.m. In contentious times, this devotion has much to offer our world.
- You, the good people of the Cathedral parish, have **stood by** in challenging times and have continued to support us. We all owe a special **debt of gratitude** to the volunteers who helped to **decorate** the Cathedral sanctuary and side chapels with flowers, made possible through your generous donations. Thank you!
- Easter optimism! The **Twins** open at Target Field this Thursday. The experts are hot on the White Sox– true, they added some key stars. Yes, lots of new Twins faces. But **solid** infield **defense** and starting pitching combined with a great 2021 for **Max Kepler** and **Josh Donaldson** signal a **91-win club**, bound for the playoffs.
- The Cathedral maintenance and sacristy staff have ensured that Holy Week ran smoothly, while our musicians lifted their voices to God in a manner worthy of the sacred liturgy during this most special week.
- With each passing week, it appears we are **rapidly moving** towards normalcy, as more and more people are vaccinated and return to Church. **Deo gratias!**
- Neither rain, nor snow. Who could forget last Easter Sunday's snowstorm, watching our bishops **bestow blessings** to passing cars in the cold? It was amazing. Well, Archbishop Hebda and Bishop Cozzens are making a **return appearance today** (Easter Sunday) **from 2:00-4:00 p.m.** They will bless you and your family members as you pull up by the Selby Ave. doors.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector