

Good Friday 2007

Eight times Gretchen Wilson appeared in front of Nashville executives attempting to land a record deal. Eight times, she was rejected. It was not because of her voice that execs believed that she didn't have what it took to be a success, but it was always something: she didn't have the right look. Her hair was dated; she was a little too old, a little too heavy, a little too rock and roll; always, just a little too something to satisfy them, and to convince them that she had what it took to make it as a recording artist. In 2003, on her ninth audition, she learned that her appointment for the next day was at 8:00 am; not a good sign. Accustomed to singing in clubs, Gretchen had become the consummate night owl; she had been singing at night her whole life, and knew that her voice wouldn't be in top form in the morning, and especially not the first thing in the morning. Her manager told her to try getting up at six in order to convince her vocal cords that it was at least ten o'clock. The appointment remained way too early for Gretchen, as scheduled; and shortly after eight o'clock in the morning, in the middle of her second of three songs, a passionate ballad, she glanced up at one of the executives sitting behind his desk, looking for something to write with, as if (as Gretchen herself put it), as if to jot down a grocery list. He seemed to her to be disinterested, and from where she stood, trying not too obviously to look at what he was writing, she distinctly saw an "N" and an "O". After the audition, he handed her the paper, she wasn't clear as to *why* when the rejection would usually come through the manager. But there, in her hand, was a little slip of paper that would confirm her future, and what would become of her hopes, dreams, hard work, and sacrifices. What dreams would evaporate, what hopes when be dashed, what chances would be crushed, as soon as she opened it up and saw that the answer to her dreams, was "no."

Today the Church commemorates a day in time from a little over two thousand years ago; but many centuries of activities led up to this day, and along the way many had hoped and dreamt of having a Savior, and many had sacrificed and worked hard to bring God's will about. After the era of sin was ushered in by our first parents, soon a righteous man, Noah, constructed an ark; and to him it was promised that never again would God send such a destructive rain upon the earth. God's chosen people, the Israelites, endured slavery in Egypt, and a long and hard exodus to their promised land; they combated enemies on every side seeking their destruction. When they were unfaithful, the prophets were sent to call the people back to faith; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, all faced persecutions and hardships so that they could relay God's message to his people. Then

came the most pivotal moment to date: the fiat of a young Jewish girl named Mary, who in choosing to do God's will for her allowed the promise of salvation to take hold on earth. Then Jesus showed forth his miracles, showed forth his power as God; man was even given a glimpse of his glory at the Transfiguration. He performed miracles, worked healings, raised people from the dead. Everything pointed to his being the Messiah and being the one to save us from our sins; everything, at last, seemed to point towards eternity working out for man.

But then came the fateful day we remember today, when it all appeared to come crashing down; when it appeared that God's answer to our hopes for something more than this life, something beyond this life, went from being "yes" to being "no." There was so much that did not happen on Good Friday. Jesus demonstrated the power of God when he worked miracles; legions of angels should have been able to come to his rescue and save him from this horrible death—but they did not. One would think that he should have been able to walk through the group of people in the Garden of Gethsemane just as he walked through the crowds who earlier were poised to toss him off the cliff after ordering the demons into the swine—but he did not. The man who spoke with an authority unlike any other ever heard before should have been able to repel the soldiers who arrested him with his overpowering rhetoric, should have been able to talk them out of arresting him—but he did not. *Like a lamb led to the slaughter*, he was. Even at the 3:00 hour, when he was gasping for his last breaths, he who raised Jairus' daughter from her death bed and Lazarus from the grave should have been able to order the nails to be gone, climb down from the cross, embrace his mother and friends, and hold his enemies at bay with the sweep of a hand—but he did not. His helpless followers, and his heart-broken mother could only watch, as the one whom they loved died—and the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of man died with him. For centuries, it looked like the answer from God might be "yes"—I will offer you salvation. On Good Friday, it appeared that the answer would be "no."

There are few things in life as difficult as letting go of a dream. Gretchen Wilson realized this as she walked out of an office in Nashville, with a piece of paper in her hand that she was certain, once again, would tell her "no"—that she was not destined to have a career as a recording artist. She didn't even want to look at it, but look she did. And while what she saw the recording exec write on the paper was accurate, it was not all: after the "n, o" there was another letter that she did not see him write, a letter which made all the difference. He did not write "no"; he wrote "now." As in, no time to wait to get

busy recording, to get busy with her career; now was the time for her plan to go into motion, and for her dreams to begin coming true. We can call Good Friday good because this was not Jesus' moment of defeat, even though it appeared to be. It was his time for action, necessary events which would lead to his triumph. On Good Friday, God's answer was not "no," it was "now"—now the time for Satan's power to be vanquished, now the time to reclaim the prisoners of death, now the time to open the gates of heaven for those who desire to dwell with God rather than with Satan; now the time for Jesus to demonstrate the power of his love; and for all that man had ever imagined and hoped for, we never fathomed love this strong.

There are many things which happened on this day which we now recall two thousand and some years later, but the most important is this: this is the day when Jesus grabbed hold of what looked to the world like the greatest defeat ever; grabbed hold of it, and made it become the world's greatest victory. What he did, he did for each of us; and now, as we gather here, his victory may be ours. Ours, if we go the way of the Savior and if we go the way of the saints who followed him. Today, God may ask something of us: mercy towards others, mortification of ourselves, to do some work, to stop some action. And today, we may say to him, "no" or we may say to him "I'll do what you ask you ask of me—NOW."

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