

Quinquagesima  
St. Luke 18:31-43

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“Then [Jesus] took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.’”

We have come to the last Sunday before Lent. We have exited the season of Epiphany in which we witness Jesus revealing Himself to the nations. The Magi have visited, Jesus was Baptized, and Jesus was Transfigured before His inner circle of disciples. These last few Sundays—the Gesima Sundays—we have taken a look at a couple of Jesus’ parables which illustrate the workings of the Kingdom of God in the lives of the faithful and unfaithful, that show that God is an unfairly generous God who scatters the seed of His Word without concern for where it lands.

Now, as the church turns toward the season of Lent, preparing to recognize Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus tells His disciples this third of His passion predictions. Jesus and His followers are making their way to Jerusalem—the temple city—whereat Jesus will give His life as a ransom for all. All that was written of Him by the prophets will be accomplished. He will be delivered by the Jews into the hands of Gentiles who will torture and crucify Him. He will die, giving His life that others may live. And the third day He will rise again. The Kingdom of God is come, and the Lord has staked His claim on you on the cross.

We are at the fiftieth day from that day of rising again. These last three weeks have been a sort of countdown to that day: Septuagesima, approximately 70 days away; Sexagesima, approximately 60 days away; Quinquagesima, now 50 days away. From here on out, what you will hear in the service is Jesus resolutely setting His face toward Jerusalem to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world—that takes away your sin.

That’s what Jesus is telling His disciples in today’s text. And their response is one of befuddlement. They’ve spent three years with Him and learning from Him as is befitting the title “disciple.” They knew the Torah and prophets, or had at least been instructed using them as they followed Jesus those past three years. Now, when Jesus tells them that He is going to Jerusalem to fulfill what they have learned and been instructed in, they are blindly bewildered. What gives?

Well, I could ask that same question of you. You hear the same message from the pulpit week in and week out, that you are forgiven for all of your sins. You hear the way that your forgiveness is procured every time, that Jesus shed His blood on the cross where He gave His life over to your death. And you hear the reason for Jesus having done that all the time, that you are a vile and corrupt sinner who deserves to die and forever be cut off from the Father in heaven. Does any of that ever come as a shock to you? Perhaps not a surprise, for many of you outwardly confess every bit of what has been said, but does hearing it again and again still hit you like a ton of bricks every time? Are you bewildered by any it? What gives?

What gives is the Old Adam, that voice in the back of the head which seeks to convince you that Jesus’ death is a good thing, but you do pretty good despite that. Or perhaps it’s the voice that says your sins are so bad that Jesus’ death could never be enough to cover them. According to your flesh, what it is you hear from within, you’re either too good or too bad for Jesus. And so, the words “for you” are bewildering.

You are not too good that Jesus did not need to die for you. As a matter of fact, no matter how good you are or think you are, you struggle with sin, and any sin is enough to separate you from the love of the Father. But the Father would not have that, so He sent His Son, just as He had promised in the prophets.

You are not too bad that Jesus’ death did not cover your sins. As a matter of fact, there is no sin, spare blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is unforgivable. That’s why the Father sent His Son, just as He had promised in the prophets.

The Son's coming was not any mere arriving on the scene, either. He came as one of you. He was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary. God became man, God joined Himself to man, God became your brother. He was conceived and born just as you were, but without sin. God took on flesh like yours, bone like your, blood like yours, so that He could take that sin of yours into His flesh and bones and shed His blood as your once-for-all propitiation. God deigns to be your substitute under His wrath. This is the wrath that you deserve, and it is the wrath that Jesus receives **fully** on your behalf.

The trick, you could say, is not to become blind to it, like the disciples were. How is that done? Only by the grace of God. The Father has given you into His Son's hand; there, you are safe in His keeping. That which you do which you ought not and do not do which you ought are covered. For it, the Father has given you His Word, wherein you find the confession of your sins and doubts. He has also given you His Word wherein you find the confession of your faith. "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." (cf. Mark 9:24) You have been placed into His Church, where you hear, time and again, of the faults and sins that you have committed and the grace of God to remove your sins from you. And it is in this Church where you are given to speak the same words spoken as a confession of faith by the Church the world 'round; today, you spoke them as they were first penned at Nicaea. As you speak these words, they give you in your hearing exactly what they say:

1. I believe in God the Father Almighty who has made me and all creatures and given me everything I need to support this body and life.
2. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me not with silver or gold, but with His holy, precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death.
3. I believe in the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies me in the Christian Church, daily and richly forgiving my sins there.

It's enough to overcome the blindness of sin and doubt. It's enough, because it is given by God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. By His grace, you say I believe to all of it (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3), and by His grace, you are given the faith to believe.

By the grace of God, your sight is given to you, much like the blind man near Jericho in today's text. You see the gravity of your sin. You see the greatness of Jesus to overcome all of your sin. And you see it all by way of what happened on the fiftieth day from today. For after Jesus was crucified and buried, He rose again to seal to you the everlasting life into which you have been baptized. Since He died and rose again, after your death, you will rise again to life everlasting.

Forty days after Jesus' resurrection, He ascended into heaven. There, at the right hand of the Father, Jesus directs all things for your benefit, that you would come to know, again and again, the saving deeds of your Lord. There, at the right of the throne of glory, is Jesus, your Prophet, Priest, and King, sending you the proclamation of His Word, interceding on your behalf before the Father, and ordering all thing for the good of His Church. Before Jesus was removed from the view of His disciples, they were told to remain in Jerusalem until they had been anointed with power from on high. (cf. Luke 24:49)

On the fiftieth day after Jesus' resurrection, that power descended upon the disciples. There, in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit descended upon them all, and they preached in the languages of all those assembled for the feast. They preached the same thing that you hear week in and week out in this place. They preached the same thing that Jesus told His disciples about in today's text: that He was delivered to the Gentiles and mocked and insulted and spat upon and scourged and killed and on the third day He rose again.

They heard the same thing as you do, and then, as now, eyes were opened to see the grace and mercy that is Jesus on the cross for you. For you...there are no better words that can be uttered from this pulpit. They declare to you that Jesus had you in mind when He uttered what you heard in today's text, that His passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost are for you—His Lent, Easter, and Pentecost are for you! These Jesus accomplished so that you would be gathered here to hear and receive Him in His means. For you, Jesus lived, died, and rose again, and so you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.