

Wednesday of Oculi

The Seven Last Words - "Woman, behold your son!" "Behold your mother!"

John 19:25-27

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

At the point in time of tonight's text, the wedding vows are being spoken. True, it doesn't sound like, "I take you to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish," et cetera, but in this last word, "Woman, behold your son," and "Behold your mother," Jesus is leaving His mother to be joined to His bride. Next week, the vows will be complete as Jesus cries out the word by which indicates the leaving of His Father; but there is more to that word than simply leaving Father.

And there is also more to this third word, too. From a purely cultural view, Jesus is probably His mother's caretaker at this point. When Mary was very young and with child by the Holy Spirit, she married Joseph, who was likely considerably older than her. Therefore, some 33 years later, as Jesus hangs on the cross dying, that Joseph had already died, and the task of caring for Mary fell to her oldest Son, Jesus. Now, Jesus is dying, and He makes sure that Mary is cared for. As much as Jesus is substitute for mankind on the cross, now John, the young disciple, becomes the substitute son in Jesus' place, and he is given the task of caring for the Mother of God. It's the work of a loving son; of course Jesus would look out for His own mother in this way.

"Jesus, loving to the end / Her whose heart Thy sorrows rend, / And Thy dearest human friend: / Hear us, holy Jesus."

But this wedding taking place is happening in those words, too. In fact, it had been happening since Mary became the Mother of God. In her little cell in Nazareth, Mary was told that the Lord was with her. In that moment, conceived of the Holy Ghost was the Son of God. He who was equal to the God-head in all respects, and is in fact the Second Person of the Trinity—the One through whom the universe was created—emptied Himself, lowered Himself to become part of His creation. And He became not simply a part of His creation, but that part which is the most fragile and vulnerable: a single-celled organism which would divide and divide and develop into the Man who would take the sins of the world into His Mary-given flesh and die on the cross.

It was the fulfillment of the promise made to the serpent in the Garden. He who deceived Eve—the mother of all living—would have His head crushed by the Seed of the woman. Because of that deception—and more precisely, their participation in it—all mankind fell when Adam fell. From that moment on, you were doomed to a life on this fallen world of sin and decay...chaos, disease, and death. From that moment on, creation was spiraling downward to death and destruction. Only divine intervention would stem this downward spiral, and so the Seed of the woman would come to crush the devil's head, while that crafty serpent would bruise the heel of the Seed. In the womb of Mary, the Seed had taken shape as God became one-flesh with man.

But that wasn't the wedding. That was the Bridegroom coming for to claim for Himself His Bride. It was the beginning of His task of presenting Her to Himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish. (cf. Ephesians 5:27) From there, that little town of Bethlehem, Jesus would make His way to Jerusalem at just the right time, in order to be "delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon," to be scourged and killed and on the third day rise again. (cf. Luke 18:31-32)

On the cross, Jesus does exactly what was written of Him in the prophets. Having taken the sins of the world into His own flesh, He presents to Himself a spotless Bride—the Church, as St. Paul described Her and you just heard. Into this Bride, He placed you when you were Baptized, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:3-4) This new life is one of spotlessness, for the sake of Christ, because you are a part of His Bride.

Now, that doesn't mean that you don't bring spots and blemishes to the table. You are still a part of this fallen creation, and so like Adam and Eve before you, you are tainted and corrupt. You sin on a daily basis, something new every moment, but nothing new under the sun. Jesus did the work of cleansing you from all sin, and you continue to sin. In fact, you are very much like the ancestral Hebrews who, though God was as a husband to them (cf. Isaiah 54:5), whored themselves out to idols and false gods. (cf. Hosea 5:3; 9:1) Anything which you would place in or above the place of God is an idol; it need not be a graven image of anything, but any object or person in whom you trust above all things. Your Father in heaven has a commandment against that: the First, in which you learn that you should fear, love, and trust in God above all things! What's a Husband to do with an unfaithful Bride?

The beauty of this marriage is that Jesus is in it for the long haul. His Bride may be unfaithful—well Her members are—but that doesn't affect the way He sees Her. He has given His own life for Her, "for Her life He died;" therefore, He will not abandon Her. He has made Her perfect, and He continues to do so as He gathers Her members to Himself and grants them forgiveness of sins again and again. It's the tender care of a Bridegroom for His Bride.

"May we in Thy sorrows share, / For Thy sake all peril dare, / And enjoy Thy tender care: / Hear us, holy Jesus."

Jesus joins you in flesh like yours, then joins you to a death like His. Here is the one-flesh union of Jesus the Bridegroom and His Bride, the Church: His Bride is called the Body of Christ. You have been made a part of His Body, having been joined to Him in a matrimony, as it were, at the cross. There, Jesus takes you to His side, into His riven side, and cares for you, a care that is expressed in the divine gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And while you may bring your sins and sinfulness to the table, you are met at that table with the very body and blood of your Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. For in, with, and under the forms of bread and wine, Jesus feeds you with His life-given body and blood, given and shed for you from the cross. It's a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. You get a taste of it as a member of the Bride and Body and Christ here in time, being prepared to sit at it in eternity.

"May we all Thy loved ones be, / All one holy family, / Loving for the love of Thee: / Hear us, holy Jesus."

What great love the Bridegroom has for His Bride, that Jesus has for you. It's the kind of love that One has for His family, into which, by the way, He has also brought His mother. First, in the womb of His mother, He becomes like you in your flesh. Then He becomes one with you under the suffering of your sins on the cross, giving His life as your ransom. And He joins you to Himself as He makes you a member of His Bride, the Church, where He daily and richly forgives you for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.