

Lent V

Monday Isaiah 53:10

God=s Will

In Lent each year we go over the same things. That is because they are too incredible to be believed. In the Collect this week we speak of how it was the Almighty and eternal God=s will that His Son Ashould bear the pains of the cross.≡ Every Christian knows that this is the case, but because it is so familiar sometimes it seems normal. But is it? Isaiah puts this truth so shockingly it should startle us. He says, Alt was the Lord=s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer.≡ The King James translation is even more shocking, Alt PLEASED the Lord,≡ it says. Do moms like to see their children hurt? Are loving fathers glad to see their children in pain? So what gives with our God?

The simple truth is that rather than see you suffering and dying on a cross for the wrongs you think, say, and do God the Father willed that His Son should suffer in your place. That was the choice before God. He had given His word that every single sin ever committed, every single command of His ever broken, every single Commandment of His left undone would be paid for. Someone had to pay: the choice was either you pay or Jesus pay. Either God could watch as you hung helplessly on the cross bearing the guilt of your sins or He could watch His Son. God could either roast you or Jesus over hell's hot, hot flames.

You might think such a decision would take God an eternity to make, but in reality, He made the decision from all eternity. There was no choice in God=s mind. There was no indecision on His part. No, going this way and that and then back again. He willed from all eternity, from before the foundation of the world to send His Son to the cross rather than send you. He could not bear the thought of seeing you in such pain and eternal agony.

AO wondrous Love, what hast Thou done? The Father offers up the Son!≡ we sing in a hymn. But do not conclude from this that the Father must have loved the Son less. Instead conclude that the Father loved you more. But it just does not make sense. The perfect Son is sent to the cross so the wicked sons and daughters can be saved. Does not make sense, does it? But God in gracious love willed it. If God could will to sacrifice so much for your sake, need we ever be afraid of what else He might have willed for us? Or as St. Paul says, AHe who did not spare His own Son, how will He not with Him give us all things.≡ Now you know why we can sing that other hymn: AWhat God Ordains is Always Good.≡ We can sing that not because we know for sure what the future holds, but because we know for sure Who holds the future. The One who spared not His own Son just so He could spare us.

Prayer: Almighty and eternal God, because it was Your will that Your Son should bear the pains of the cross for us and thus remove from us the power of the adversary, help us so to remember and give thanks for our Lord=s Passion that we may receive remission of sins and redemption from everlasting death; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday Colossians 1: 13-14

Rescued from the Devil

You have probably seen on television where someone was rescued, a fireman might have saved a woman from a burning house, a policeman might have gotten a boy from a flooded river, or an ordinary person might have stopped a robbery. Two things you might have noticed. The person saved knew they were in big trouble, and they were very grateful to their rescuer once they were out of danger.

When Jesus died on the cross thousands of years ago, He rescued the whole world from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He went to the cross bearing the sins of the whole world. He gave up His life as a sacrificial offering in place of all people. When He died, it really was finished for the whole world. He had successfully rescued us all.

But what do we find? Not everyone goes to church to sing the praises of their Rescuer, do they? Lots of people act as if Jesus is trying to get things from them, take advantage of them. What is going on? Every year when policemen and firemen are honored in my city for their acts of bravery those they rescued are in attendance. They would never miss the opportunity to thank and praise their rescuers. Every now and again one who has been rescued will make something, give something, or do something for their Savior.≡ When asked about it by the reporter, he or she will say, *It is really nothing at all compared to what he did for me.*≡

Now I never go to the ceremonies honoring the police or fire personnel who have saved the lives of others. It is not that I am against them. It is just that I have never been rescued by one. Furthermore, not only do not I go to their ceremonies, but sometimes I complain about the pennies on the dollar I pay for police and fire protection. I act like they are taking advantage of me. Why? Because, thankfully, I have never needed their help.

Do you see why not everyone who has been rescued by Jesus from sin, death, and the power of the devil is in church? Do you see why so many think Jesus is trying to take things from them? They either do not know, do not care, or do not believe that Jesus rescued them from the devil. And/or they do not know how helplessly they are ensnared by the devil. They are living in a burning house without realizing it. They are being held hostage by a thug, but do not realize it.

First they have to be shown their house is on fire or that Satan has them in bondage. Then they can be told how Jesus rescued them. Then they will give thanks for the Lord's Passion.

Prayer: Almighty and eternal God, because it was Your will that Your Son should bear the pains of the cross for us and thus remove from us the power of the adversary, help us so to remember and give thanks for our Lord's Passion that we may receive remission of sins and redemption from everlasting death; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday Luke 23: 27-31

How to Use the Lord=s Passion

We pray in the Collect this week to remember and give thanks for our Lord=s Passion.≡ But not every remembering of our Lord=s Passion is good. Many people feel sorry for Jesus when they remember how badly Jesus suffered for them. They think Lent, Good Friday in particular, are pity parties for Jesus. Some even think the point of Lent is to make yourself suffer for Jesus in some measure.

I am sure the woman following Jesus to the cross thought they were showing kindness to Jesus. They were not mocking, accusing, or laughing at Jesus the way the crowds normally did at the condemned being led out to be crucified. They did not curse or hit or whip Jesus the way the Roman execution squad did. They cried for Jesus. They mourned for Jesus. They weiled for Jesus. But is that what Jesus wanted? Evidently not because Jesus turned on them and said, ADo not weep for Me but for yourselves!≡

Imagine how shocked these women with tear streaked faces must have been. Imagine how a few might have been indignant. Some Christians today are just as shocked to learn that Jesus does not want them giving up something for Him for Lent. Jesus does not want them going to Lenten Services for His sake. Jesus does not want their pity.

According to our prayer for this week, we are rightly remembering and giving thanks for our Lord=s Passion when we are receiving forgiveness from it. When we follow Jesus to the cross remembering that it is our sins that send Him there, we are remembering rightly. When we see Him put to a brutal death there and remember that He is suffering and dying in our place so that we do not have to, we are making use of His Passion rightly. When the devil bothers us with our sins and we point him to Jesus' passionate suffering for our sins, then we are making a right use of our Lord=s Passion.

The term Passion usually only refers to the last week of Jesus' life. That is less than 1 % of the time that Jesus visibly walked this earth, but the Gospel writers devote about 33 % of their Books to the Passion. Why? Because the events of this week are the essence of the Gospel. We are not saved because Jesus fed the 5,000; we are not saved because Jesus raised the dead. We are saved because Jesus shed His innocent blood to pay for our sins; we are saved because Jesus died forsaken on a cross in our place. Shaking our head in pity at the gross, inhuman brutality of the cross does not make use of that great sacrifice. Taking shelter under the wings of the cross does.

Prayer: Almighty and eternal God, because it was Your will that Your Son should bear the pains of the cross for us and thus remove from us the power of the adversary, help us so to remember and give thanks for our Lord=s Passion that we may receive remission of sins and redemption from everlasting death; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday Psalm 51:16,17

Giving Up Something for Lent

Last night's devotion touched on the subject of giving up something for Lent. It is popular among Catholics and some Lutherans to give up something for Lent. It may be a particular food, beverage or pleasure. We should not have a knee jerk sort of reaction as if, "All that is bad." Our Catechism, in talking about receiving the Lord's Supper properly, says, "Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training." St. Paul in I Timothy 4:8 says, "Physical training is of some value."

There are good reasons to give something up for Lent. Anything that makes the sinful flesh uncomfortable, upsets it, or suppresses it, is good for us. Anything that draws our attention to spiritual things, anything that cuts our attachment to physical things has some benefit. There are good reasons **for us** to give something up for Lent, but there are no good reasons to give something up **for God**.

God does not need us to give up something for Him. God is not happier with us if we do or disappointed if we do not. The temptation is ever before us sinners to believe the opposite, that although God owns the cattle on a thousand hills He still somehow needs ours. Though He Himself says, "If I needed anything, I would not ask you," we are still tempted to believe that He needs what we have.

Israel in the Old Testament did not fail to bring God their sacrifices. What angered Him was not their forgetfulness, but their thinking that God needed their sacrifices, their thinking that their efforts made God put away His wrath. No, that is the pagan idea of sacrifice. God is angry and you offer up something to make Him not angry.

No, the mercy of God endures forever. He is kind, tenderhearted and forgiving toward sinners. What God wants sinners to give up is the idea that they can get right with Him, that they can get back in His good graces by being better people. What God wants is broken and contrite hearts.

"Open your mouth wide and I will fill it," God tells His Church. God fills the empty but sends the full away empty. In Lent, we do not approach God carrying in our hands the things we have given up or the sins we have conquered. We approach Him as broken sinners needing to be made whole, as people very much aware of their many sins needing to be forgiven. We approach our God as people giving up, not as people having given something up.

Prayer: Almighty and eternal God, because it was Your will that Your Son should bear the pains of the cross for us and thus remove from us the power of the adversary, help us so to remember and give thanks for our Lord's Passion that we may receive remission of sins and redemption from everlasting death; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday Revelation 20: 4-6

The Second Death is the Problem

This week in our prayer we are reminded that the way to escape everlasting death is by means of the Lord's Passion. In the Book of Revelation everlasting death is called the Second Death. The first death is our soul separating from our body. As bad as that may be, that is not the problem according to the Bible. In fact, the Bible says the first death is unavoidable. It is appointed for men to die once, says Hebrews chapter 9.

Did you catch what I just said? The first death is unavoidable. Do you get that impression from the world around you? Do not you get the impression that if you eat all your vegetables, take all your vitamins, exercise, do not smoke, and do not drink too much you can live forever? Every single day there are reports on the news, articles in papers, and stories in magazines that give the impression the worst problem facing us is the first death. But the Bible tells us that is unavoidable.

The Bible is not concerned with teaching you how to avoid the unavoidable. The Bible does say things about not eating too much, not drinking too much, and leading a productive life. However, you will search in vain for healthy lifestyle tips or for how to live longer programs. The Bible is focused on avoiding the Second, everlasting, Death.

Jesus came into the world to rescue man from that death not the First Death. We all, believer and unbeliever, baptized and unbaptized, Christian and non-Christian, are going to die the first time. Jesus did not go to the cross to stop that from happening. He went to the cross to rescue us from the Second Death that goes on forever, and Jesus succeeded!

Yes, though we are all going to die the first death, none in Christ die the Second Death. In fact, because we are in Christ through Baptism, the first death must spit us back out into life. Our world is all confused; it thinks the real battle is against the First Death. That is why people spend money to freeze their bodies hoping that some day science will be able to stop the First Death. That is why all the focus is on healthy living. But as we grow we see one after another die. The devil can tempt us saying, "Well, if your Jesus came to defeat death, He obviously lost." Do not be fooled. Jesus tells us it is appointed for all people to die once. But once is enough. Nobody has to die twice. Nobody has to experience the Second Death. Jesus went through that on the cross and swallowed it all up. In Christ, that is in your Baptism, in the Pastor's Absolution, in the Body and Blood of Holy Communion, the Second Death is not a problem.

Prayer: Almighty and eternal God, because it was Your will that Your Son should bear the pains of the cross for us and thus remove from us the power of the adversary, help us so to remember and give thanks for our Lord's Passion that we may receive remission of sins and redemption from everlasting death; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.