

1 April 2007
Palm / Passion Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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Homily #1

Text: Luke 22

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Lord knew how difficult those days would be for His disciples. He told them, and continues to tell them, ahead of time, what will happen. But they don't seem to hear. Or remember. Maybe they hear only what they want to hear. *We know what that's like.* We do it too.

Our Lord knows the weakness of their flesh. He knows they will not be able to stand firm in the fight. He warns them. Even twice telling them to *pray that [they] may not enter into temptation.* But even this small thing they cannot do. *We know what that's like too.* For how often do we fail to pray, or fail in our prayers?

Our Lord knows too of their ambition. It is the old, old story of reaching for what you do not have, or trying to hold onto it if you do. The chief priests and scribes with their power. Judas with his greed. The others all wanting to be the greatest disciple; the follower following the best; perhaps best personified by chest-thumping, sword-drawing, quick-to-speak Peter. *And yes, even here we are as well.* For what are we reaching for? And with what pious thoughts or spiritual admiration do we want others to think of us?

Our Lord knows. He knows us.

He knows that in these gray and latter and difficult days we would forget His Word, fail in our prayer, and too often rely on our own strength and ambition. Even in the Church, drawing the sword of programs and methods and movements, of power politics, of gimmicks and games – not fully trusting that our Lord can defend Himself and His Church against the gates of hell.

It's just that He chooses to do it through a cross.

That He conquer through weakness.

And it was not a fair fight.

For against such weakness, the devil, the world, and our sin, stood no chance!

When will we learn?

And so our Lord goes as it is written of Him.

Choosing not His own way, but His Father's: *His will be done.*

When will we learn?

When will we return to its sheath our misdrawn swords, thinking that we are doing God a favor with all of our violence for His kingdom, cutting each other up with our sharp and biting words, the daggers of gossip and innuendo, the power plays and self-defense – and learn that we are never so strong as when we repent; we are never so loud as when we speak the truth in love; and we are never so great as when we are the least.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philip 2:5-11)

Through a cross our Lord saves the world, and saves you.

Dying to live, that you too may die to live.

In baptism, in repentance, dying to sin, dying with Christ, that you may also rise with Him to walk in newness of life.

Do not run from the cross in fear, because of what it will mean for your life.

Instead come, eat, drink, the fruits of the cross – your Saviour's own body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sin.

For know, that it is on the cross – and no where else! – that Jesus is most King, most Saviour, most Lamb of God, most powerful, most **for you**.

Homily #2

Text: Luke 23

They began to accuse Jesus. False accusations, every one of them. How could they! They? How can we?

With what do we accuse our Saviour, our God? Of unfairness, partiality, not doing what He promised, not coming through for us, of getting in our way?

But there is no guilt in Him. Only in us.

Pilate doesn't know what to do with Jesus. Herod doesn't really care. Pilate finally turns Him over – a “career move.” But how does he do it? An exchange is made. Barabbas for Jesus. The murderer goes free. The Prince of Life goes to death. And here *we* are in the story again. For we are the guilty ones. Jesus exchanges Himself for us and goes to death in our place. He dies our death, and we go free.

And so He is lifted up. Luke says it so simply: *And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him.* No drawn-out details, no blood, no gore. Luke is no Mel Gibson, writing a passion movie, for us to see or visualize what took place there. It's almost as if he wants to close our eyes and open our ears – that we may understand the cross. *For faith comes by hearing.* (Rom 10:17)

So what do we hear?

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!

Here is the Gospel according to St. Luke!

The Son as our **mediator**, interceding with the Father for us.

The Son **opening** the gates of Paradise closed by Adam's sin and our sin.

And the Son living the perfect life of faith, entrusting Himself into His Father's hands, and knowing there is no better place to be.

And, Luke wants you to know, this is all yours. All done for you. The Son mediating and interceding and opening and living for you, that you may be sons and daughters of God, and cry out with Him *Abba! Father!* (Gal 4:6) For joined to Him by faith, by water and the Word, His forgiveness is your forgiveness, His home is your home, and His Father is your Father.

And so death is defeated.

Sin is forgiven.

The destroyer destroyed.

The promise fulfilled.

Creation restored.

For yes, we have come full circle.

For just as on a Friday, the sixth day, God finished all His work of creating, so too now on a Friday, the sixth day, God finished all His work of salvation – of re-creating what sin had destroyed.

And just as in the beginning God saw all that He had made, and it was very good; so too on this day of Jesus death, God saw all that He had done, and it was good. A *Good Friday*.

And he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. (Gen 2:2)

Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. (Luke 23:50-54)

And he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done!

Now you too, sons and daughters of God - rest.

For all has been done **for you.**

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us rise and confess our faith in this God in the words of the Nicene Creed.