

6 April 2007
Great and Holy Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Our Bridegroom Covered with Blood”

Text: John 19:26-27

In the ancient church, the liturgy for Good Friday included the following proclamation:
“Christian, adore your Bridegroom covered with blood.”

Tonight we ponder the love of God. The love of a bridegroom for his bride. Love so amazing, so divine, that the Son of God would lay down His life for His Bride, the Church. For you and me, who in no way, shape, or form deserve such love.

For at weddings today, the bride is adorned in her best, in the white of innocence, to look beautiful for her husband. But what about us? Our wedding dress is black (Is 64:6), like our paraments this night. Black with the slime and filth of our sin and rebellion, our unrighteousness and unfaithfulness. *Yet our Bridegroom loves us, and His love is no less.*

At weddings today, the bride carries a bouquet of sweet smelling flowers. But what about us? The bouquet that we carry is the foul stench of death, the penalty for our sin. *Yet our Bridegroom loves us, and His love is no less.*

Weddings today are joyous occasions, filled with smiles and dancing and song. But our Bridegroom’s ears are filled with taunts and mocking and derision, by the very bride He came for! *Yet our Bridegroom loves us, and His love is no less.*

Weddings today are often between people who decided that here is a person I want to live with . . . for a while, at least. But our Lord is on the cross because His Church was not just a bride He wanted to live with, but a bride *He didn’t want to live without.*

What wondrous love is this? It is a love unlike any in this world. Perhaps that is why it is so hard for many to believe. Yet tonight, the Son of God, who left His divine Father and came down to earth, now also leaves His human mother (John 19:26-27), and holds fast to His bride – His undeserving, unthankful bride – that we become one flesh with Him. (Gen 2:24)

And so nothing could bring Him down from that cross alive. For nothing in this world is more powerful than the love that held Him there. For the bride He didn't want to live without. **For you.**

“Christian, adore your Bridegroom covered with blood.”

And so the great divorce, orchestrated by Satan in the Garden, has been undone in Christ. The hatred of Satan is overcome by the love of God. Our Bridegroom is covered in His own blood to atone for our sins, to take our curse, and to die our death. He does not love us because we love Him. (Rom 5:10) He loves us, *period.*

And so He did not first demand that we clean ourselves up. He did not first demand that we get better and improve. That's *conditional* love. That's not our Bridegroom's love. Instead, He goes to the cross to *provide* the gifts that do these very things. His Word of forgiveness, the water of Baptism, and body and blood that He feeds us with. Our Bridegroom withholds nothing, giving all that He is and all that He has for you.

And the result? Well, St. Paul put it best: *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish!* (Eph 5:25-27)

And so the blood of our Bridegroom, shed on the cross, has washed us clean, to be brides again dressed in the white of innocence! (Is 1:18; Ps 51:7) He has taken away the stench of death, and given us life! And He has filled our mouths with confession and love. That we be brides *sanctified* for our Bridegroom – not because of what we have done – but because of what He has done for us, and gives to us. This day. On the cross.

And so now there awaits for us a feast. A wonderful marriage feast of celebration and rejoicing, when the Bridegroom, who lived and died and lives again, will come again and take home His bride, forever! (Mt 25) It is the feast we will celebrate this Sunday, the Feast of the Resurrection! But even that is still only a foretaste of the feast to come. A foretaste of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in *His* kingdom, which will have no end! (Rev 19:7-9)

What joy then is ours, *even* on this somber and serious day. For while yes, we look on the

cross and see the deadly serious and sobering reality of our sin – our sin that put our Bridegroom there . . . even more we look and see love. The unfathomable love of Christ.
“Christian, adore your Bridegroom covered with blood.”

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