

## His Spirit and His Sufferings

### V - On the last day He will raise me and all the dead ...

Over the Wednesdays of the last weeks we have followed our Lord Jesus through the last days of His path to His sufferings and death, by which He would bring His salvation to completion for us. And along the way, we have observed how He now brings His salvation to completion for us and in us by His Holy Spirit. We have observed from Holy Scripture how, as our Catechism sums it up, *I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gift, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.* So profound a reality is sin in us, that we can neither save ourselves nor embrace the salvation He offers to us, freely and for nothing, at the greatest cost to Himself; we cannot, for we will not, and we cannot will it. But He Himself makes us to, by the power of His Holy Spirit, who is His own life and breath, by means of His Word of His love and what His love has done for us. And He not only makes us to *believe* His salvation, He also gives Himself to us, who is Himself our salvation, by the power of His Holy Spirit, by means of His Word, He who is Himself the eternal Word of God.

The Holy Spirit, who is the life and breath of God, brings Him to us, who is Himself the Word of God, by means of the Word of God of His salvation. He not only calls us and enlightens us, He *sanctifies* us, that is: makes us holy, by *the Gospel*, that is: by means of the Word of God of His salvation, by which He declares us to be free from all sin and guilt, pure and perfect and precious in His sight, as His beloved children and heirs to His heavenly Kingdom, and by His declaration makes us to be that.

And this He has done for all Christians, for that is the only way a sinners will become Christian. As our Catechism says it: *In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church ...*

Tonight, in our readings, we finally followed our Lord Jesus to where His sufferings would reach their climax and completion, that is: to the cross.

We observe, again, what cruelty sin is capable of bringing about and bringing out in human beings. We heard how the soldiers mocked Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him, a robe of royal colour, as it was considered in those days, and crowned Him with thorns and put a reed in His right hand as a scepter. They dressed Him up and set Him up as a caricature of a king, a clown-king.

And they knelt before Him and mocked Him and said: *Hail, King of the Jews!* And they spit on Him and took the reed and struck Him on the head.

But why would they do that? He was already hurting and humiliated. And He was going to be hurt and humiliated even further, hung up high in shame and suffering. It was a done deal. So why strip Him of all remainders of human dignity? The soldiers had no reason to hate Him. Most probably they did not. Most probably they did not care enough, or know enough about Him, to have anything against Him.

Compassion is commonly considered a characteristic of a healthy human being. Those incapable of compassion are deemed sick, diagnosed as *psychopathic*, that is: *sick to the soul*.

Human beings have in themselves a reminder and remainder of His goodness in whose image we were made. We have the capacity for compassion, that is: for sharing in the sufferings we see others endure. There are limits to how much evil we can wish upon others, even those who did us wrong; at least there will be, when we actually see them hurting. As we sense their suffering and sorrow, we will be moved to compassion, we will *feel with* them; and that is what the word *compassion* means, to *feel with* others.

So profound a reality is sin in human nature, however, and so evil is sin, that even this remnant and remainder of the goodness of God in us can be overshadowed, and often will be, when we find ourselves in an atmosphere where we can get away with anything, when we are set free to let the evil we have in ourselves loose.

We can observe it often these days, how even the educated and enlightened will encourage and engage themselves in immense cruelty to destroy the lives of those they deem *deplorable* for no other reason than that they hold beliefs different than their own. That, and because an atmosphere of outrage allows them to get away, not only with the cruelty itself, but also with claiming that the cruelty they show those they hate is *love*; and *love trumps hate*.

We heard also of those, though, tonight in whom humanity was not entirely overcome. *There followed Him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for Him, as we heard it.*

We learnt, also, that even those who mourned for Him and were moved to compassion at His sufferings were under judgement. *Daughters of Jerusalem, our Lord Jesus said to them, weep not for me, rather weep for yourselves and for your children. For if this is what is done to the tree that is green, what will happen to that which is withered?*

He alone among men is the tree that is green. Only in Him, is the goodness of God neither withered, nor withering. He is the Son of God, and God Himself from eternity. In Him the goodness of God is full and complete. He alone has lived the life we owe it to God to live, in full and complete love for Him, and obedience, and submission to His will. He has lived that life for us, in our stead and on our behalf. Now He is to be hanged upon a tree. This is what happens to the tree that is green. And in this the goodness of God is fulfilled. The Son of God suffers for the salvation of sinners, out of His love for us. So good is God. So good is He alone.

We all share in sin. We all have in common the evil that sin is. We all fall short of the goodness of God, and the goodness we owe to Him. And that is evil, and we are all evil and ungodly at heart, whether or not our evil is ever actually made manifest in obvious cruelty. And not to see this, and not to acknowledge it, that is evil, also.

Therefore our Lord Jesus will lead us to *repentance*, by His Holy Spirit. And the repentance to which He will lead us is not merely to *mean well*; it is not even to keep evil under control so as to not actually do what is obviously evil.

Even if we mourn His sufferings, we are nevertheless in need of repentance. As were those to whom He said: *Weep not for me, rather weep for yourselves and for your children. For if this is what is done to the tree that is green, what will happen to that which is withered?*

Well, He knows very well what will happen to sinners; that He Himself shall come in glory to judge the living and the day. And dreadful is His judgement against all sin, all ungodliness and impurity and evil. *Days are coming*, as we heard it that He said it, *when they will say: Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never gave birth and the breasts that never nursed! Then they will begin to say to the mountains: Fall on us! and to the hills: Cover us!*

And from this He will save sinners by bringing us to repentance, by His Holy Spirit. As He has said it about the Holy Spirit: *When He comes, He will convince the world of sin, namely that they do not believe in me.*

Ultimately, sin is unbelief. All sin is born of our failure and refusal to trust in God and acknowledge His goodness, and allow for all things good to be given to us out of His goodness. This sin the Spirit of God makes us to see, and our need for His salvation to be given to us out of His goodness and mercy alone, and for no other reason whatsoever.

And He makes us to see that our salvation is what our Lord Jesus has suffered. He leads us, not only to grief and remorse, but to real *repentance*.

He presents our Lord Jesus to us tonight, stripped of all dignity, clothed in shame, robed in a garment not His own, and His own garment, seamless and whole, made into a prize in a cruel and callous game. And thus the Scripture was fulfilled, which says: *They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.*

He had had Himself clothed in a garment not His own, of sin and guilt, having had Himself baptised with us sinners, and baptised into the sin of sinners, clothed in us and all that is ours. And He was judged for us and our sin, in our stead and behalf, who shall come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead. And now that He is again in His glory with God, He has us baptised into Himself and clothed in Him and His righteousness, that is: His goodness and innocence before God, not divided, but whole and complete. And this is how He shall appear before Him when He comes in glory to judge the living and the dead.

When He comes in glory, He will call the dead out of their graves. And this He will do, also, in the power of God, that is: by the Holy Spirit, and by means of His Word.

*An hour is coming, as He has also said it, when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement. As our Catechism says it, again, with reference to the Holy Spirit: On the last day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me, and to all believers in Christ.*

But already now our Lord Jesus speaks in power. *Truly, truly, I say to you, as He has also said it, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. He has His Church speak His Word of life to us; and His Holy Spirit, who is the Lord and the Giver of life, He makes us to hear, us who are dead in our sin and trespasses, and makes us to come alive, as He breathes the life of God into us, with His Word.*

*And truly, truly, I say to you, says our Lord Jesus, also, whoever hears my Word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and shall not come into judgement, but has passed over from death to life. His life is ours already; for with His Word His Holy Spirit is in us, who is His life.*

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. Amen.