

The Third Sunday of Easter

1 Peter 2:21-25

It might seem to some that some of the Epistle readings appointed for Easter are not really all that Easterly; particularly when it comes to the Epistle readings appointed for Easter in the ancient Lectionary of the Church, which is the one we are following this year. Instead of engaging in exuberant expositions of the joy of Easter, they present us with exhortations on the Christian life, admonitions as to how we are to live as the Church of Christ, and as His Christians.

Particularly this holds true for what we hear today, of Holy Scripture; well, it holds true even more for that which we do *not* hear today, but which nevertheless sets the agenda for what we hear today: immediately before what we hear today, the Apostle has commanded Christians *for the Lord's sake to be subject to every human institution, and in particular for servants to be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.*

Now, this is not what we want to hear the most; in fact, most of us do not like to hear it at all. And yet, it is about this we hear today, in the middle of the great Feast for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

Well, there is a reason for this. And the reason is not only that which we hear today, that *to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example; no, there is more to it than that, so much more.*

Christ is arisen. He is arisen indeed, that is: He is arisen for real. And with His resurrection we have been raised, also, to live with Him. *We were buried with Him by Baptism into death, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, so 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.*

And therefore is it also that we hear today what we hear of Holy Scripture; because the Christian life is *real* life with the really risen Christ; because it is real resurrection life in this world, in which the Risen Christ really lives with us, and lives in us, with His own life.

But let us begin where what we hear today begins, the example our Lord Jesus has set for us to follow: *Christ suffered for us.* The Son of God, who is Himself God from eternity, Crown Prince of Heaven and Heir to all glory, He left His heavenly home behind to come to us and suffer for us and with us a lifetime in this world of suffering and sorrow and sin.

And a life of suffering and sorrow His was, confronted constantly with sin, and the temptation to sin. Nevertheless, as we hear it today that the Apostle writes it, *He committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth*. At no time did He ever set aside what He knew to be the Father's will so as to make life less uncomfortable for Himself, or even to escape the most severe sufferings; at no time did He abstain from speaking the Truth of God as it really is, so as to make it appear less offensive, more acceptable, neither in order not to drive away potential followers nor not to arouse the animosity of unbelievers. Such is the example He has set for us. *In every respect He has been tempted as we are, as the Letter to the Hebrews writes it, yet without sin.*

And as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, *He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death upon a cross*. And even in the most severe sufferings, and faced with the most outrageous injustice, He did not sin. He did not allow the evil done to Him to make Him to do evil Himself, or even speak evil. As we hear it today: *When He was reviled He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.*

Such, also, is the example set before us, that we should follow in His steps. To this we have been called; to bear even the most outrageous injustice, as He has, and the most severe suffering, in obedience to God, without setting His Word and will aside in order to make life easier and less uncomfortable for ourselves, or to avoid offending unbelievers. *For this is the will of God, as the Apostle has written it earlier in the chapter, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people*. We will not put the ignorance of unbelievers to shame by becoming like them; rather, we will only affirm them in their ungodliness. More importantly, though, it is the will of God, and what we owe to Him, that we reflect His own goodness, even when confronted with ungodliness and outrageous injustice.

After all, His goodness is goodness to the evil and ungodly such as ourselves. What He suffered, He suffered not only *for us*, but also *from us*, the outrageous evil that our sin is, and all sin, and His own judgement against it.

Even the most outrageous injustice and abuse we endure from others in this world, it is only unjust on the terms of this world; if it is even that, that is, and we not only *think* that it is. No sinner can ever suffer any more than what he or she has fully earned and deserved before God. So great an evil *is* sin, so outrageous an injustice.

But the Son of God took it upon Himself to bear all sufferings for us, the fullness of suffering, the judgement of His own goodness against evil, crucified and cursed and condemned for the sin of all sinners; for us from whom He suffered such outrageous evil as sin is, and still does. Such is His love for us. He suffered all for us; and for this, we owe Him all.

But there is much more to it, even, than that. For the example we see set before us today is not only an example of obedience in patient suffering. First and foremost His example is one of *faith*, of trust in God; as the Apostle writes it, He *continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously*.

All that He endured, He endured *in faith*, trusting in God to keep His promise, that He would not ultimately abandon His chosen One, even when He actually did that, that His Holy One would not see corruption, that He would save His Christ, the Anointed, and vindicate Him and restore Him to glory, as it is said all through Holy Scripture, and particularly in the Psalms.

Such is the example He has set before us, and to this we have been called: to honour God by *faith*, trusting in Him to make all things well, in His own time, and in His own way, who alone knows what it truly means for all things to be truly well.

Therefore is it, also, that the Apostle is not content to set the patient sufferings of Christ before us *as an example*, but also goes on to proclaim the precious salvation He has won for us; because the Word from God of His salvation is the means by which alone faith is born in us, and kept alive in us. Faithfulness and obedience will not be brought about in us sinners by admonitions to pull ourselves together and be good and godly, not even by reminders of how we owe it to God. But in His Word of salvation is His *power* of salvation. Therefore the Apostle takes pains to proclaim the salvation of God, and His promise of eternal life: *He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sin, might live for righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed!*

Not only is the Son of God the example set before us, who committed no sin; so much more, He is the one who has lived *for us*, in our stead and on our behalf, that life without sin which we owe it to Him to live, in full and complete love and trust and obedience. And He is the one who has suffered for us, in our stead and on our behalf, the death we have earned before His judgement by our failure to live that life ourselves. Not only is He Himself without sin; He has made *us* to be without sin before His judgement.

With His sufferings and death the Son of God has Himself paid the price and penalty for all our sins and shortcomings, for all evil and ungodliness and impurity in our lives, and in our hearts and minds, so that we shall not perish and die forever in His wrath but rather live and be with Him for ever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. And He who was baptised into death for us, baptised into our sin to take it upon Himself, and His judgement against it, He has had us baptised into Himself and His own life. And in the Word He has His Church proclaim, *He declares us to be His own, who shall come in glory to judge both the living and the death; and there is still no deceit to be found in His mouth!*

And so we have died away from sin and been born anew to live with God as His beloved children, now, in this life, and for ever, in His heavenly Kingdom. This He has His Apostle proclaim to us, today; for by having His love set before us, and what His love has done for us and won for us, that is how He works *faith* in us, and the assurance that the eternal heavenly inheritance He gives to us is well worth whatever sufferings and sorrows may follow from living in His love, and living out His love, in a world of suffering and sorrow and sin.

By His wounds you have been healed!, the Apostle also writes, as we hear it. *For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

By His sufferings and death we have been cleansed from the guilt of sin before His judgement; and by His Word of His love and what His love has done for us we have begun to be *cured*, also, of the *disease* of sin. For with His Word of His love and what His love has done for us, His love is poured out upon us, and into us, with His Holy Spirit, and His own life, so that we have come alive from the death of disobedience and defiance and doubt. By His own resurrection power He has raised us from death, also, to live with Him. This is how we have come to the faith. And for us to have come to the faith is nothing less than this: that we have come alive after being dead, completely dead; that His own life is given to us.

And by His resurrection power He lives in us and keeps us living with Him, and works it in us that we begin to follow Him in the life to which we have been called, assured of our heavenly inheritance, led by His love, and drawn into His love, so that we constantly seek His love in His Word and worship, by which His love lives in us.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. *Amen.*