

JUDICA—PASSION SUNDAY / THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Text: St. John 8:42-59

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

“The Lord will provide.” Have you ever wondered how Abraham, after waiting one hundred years for the birth of his only heir, could blindly obey a voice from the ether and take his one and only son, for whom he had waited so long, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering? To you and me, with our modern, educated minds, this seems just a bit over the top, does it not? Could you—could you willingly sacrifice *any* of your children, never mind your firstborn? Could you tie any of your children to an altar and ritually slit your child’s throat, watch your child bleed out, and then burn the remains—and all because of a voice from the clouds?

Can you imagine what Isaac must have been thinking as he carried the bundle of wood up the mountain on his back and then helped his father build the altar of sacrifice? He most certainly must have had his questions. *“Look, the fire and the wood,”* Isaac asked of his father, *“but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”* The wood was laid on the altar; the fire prepared; Isaac was bound with cords; the knife was in his father’s hand. What thoughts must have been going through this young man’s mind as his own father bound him and raised the knife to strike? As his hand was raised, what was going through Abraham’s mind? How could Abraham do it?

Abraham could do it because he did not believe that he was simply hearing a disembodied voice coming to him from out of the clouds. His faith and experience told him that *this* Voice was the Voice of the Almighty God. He heard the Word of God and believed.

As the author of the Book of Hebrews writes: *“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise...”* and it was *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.”* Abraham believed! Abraham believed in the LORD God and His promises, *“and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”*

What a contrast, then, between the faith of Abraham and the unbelief of the Pharisees. Abraham had only the promise of God, which, in itself is surely enough, but the Pharisees, well, they had God in the flesh. They had YAHWEH, the great *“I AM”* standing in their very midst. They had what St. John describes in this way: *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled...”* But, as St. John also tells us: *“He was in the world, and the world was made*

through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”

Thus, we have in Abraham, the perfect example of a child of God, and in the unbelieving Pharisees, an equally perfect example of those whose father is the devil. For whoever is of God hears God’s Words and believes them. Whoever is not of God, but of the devil, does not hear His Words. Not hearing means not believing. Not believing God’s Words puts one at odds with God, Himself, because not believing God’s Words is a denial of God and His gift of faith and salvation in Christ. Not believing God’s Word is to call God a liar!

When faith in CHRIST and His Word is denied and human reason takes its place, the Church must conclude that whatever remains, whatever is left, even if it calls itself “*Christian,*” is a sham. For only through the eyes of faith can one see that JESUS is the SON of God and “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*”

Therefore, one cannot reshape JESUS, through human reason, into something He is not; nor can one remake Him into one’s image of what one thinks JESUS ought to be. JESUS Himself tells us who He is: He is the great “*I AM.*” He is God—the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the Ending, and there is no other!

JESUS is God in human flesh who comes to die for the world's redemption. JESUS is the Lamb provided by God the FATHER to be sacrificed in your place. He was born to be bound and nailed to the wood of an altar in the shape of a cross. JESUS was born for sacrifice, to die your death, and it was His Blood that was poured out so that Abraham, Isaac, and all Abraham’s descendants—you and I—would live.

So you either hear God’s Words and live, or you do not. Either you confess CHRIST, or you deny Him! Either you are of God, or you are not. JESUS tells us, “*He who is not with me is against me.*” With JESUS, there is no room for the middle ground!

But Abraham heard, believed, and obeyed God. Yes, He heard the Word of God and He believed God’s promises are true. He believed in God’s promise of the Seed. Therefore, he took his only son, Isaac, whom he loved, bound him, and placed him upon an altar of sacrifice all at the Word of God. But the Angel of the Lord—the pre-incarnate CHRIST—stayed his hand, and God provided a ram to sacrifice in Isaac’s place. You see, there was another, a greater Sacrifice yet to be made, a permanent Sacrifice, but for the time being, the ram would suffice.

It is through the sacrifice of the ram, that Abraham saw the Day of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. Abraham saw the Day that the builders rejected the Stone that God, Himself, made the Chief Cornerstone. He saw it and he rejoiced. By faith, Abraham saw Good Friday. Abraham saw God substitute His only SON for his son, Isaac. He saw the Innocent die for the guilty; the wrath of the FATHER appeased in a perfect Sacrifice—a SON for a son.

On Mount Moriah, in the death of that ram, Abraham saw the events of Good Friday and the glory of Easter morning, when death, hell, and the devil were defeated for him, for Isaac, and

all mankind. He saw, not only his son Isaac, but also his true descendants, all believers in CHRIST JESUS, as numerous as the stars of the heavens and the grains of sand upon the sea shore, returned to him from certain death.

But the Pharisees could not see that Day, even though they would be major players in bringing it about even as the Lamb for the Sacrifice stood in their very midst. They were not of God. Satan, being their father, their greatest desire was to do his will. You see, children of God recognize and understand the language of God because it is their mother tongue. It is the language of the Church. But the Pharisees could not understand the words of JESUS, not because He was speaking a different language, but because they were of a different spirit. They were of the spirit of the devil, not of the Spirit of God.

In fact, the Pharisees would rather have been gods themselves. They heard only the Law and had hardened their hearts to the Gospel. Seeking their own glory, they rose up against the Gospel of JESUS, looking instead to establish themselves and *their rules* in its place. They loved the Law because they believed it gave them authority to judge, and in their judging, they revealed their hearts. They judged JESUS a liar possessed by a demon. But they were blind guides and could not see the prideful demons within themselves.

So the Jews end up rejecting the only One that can save them from themselves. The Stone rejected hides His face from those who would pick up stones to kill Him in His own house. They refuse to be broken on this Cornerstone; they refuse to see their sin, and with contrite hearts, seek absolution. So it is, that this Cornerstone would fall on them, and grind them to powder.

Is it not funny how things never really change? As King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes, *“That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun.”* After all, we like to think that we Christians of today are much more sophisticated and in the know than those poor Pharisees. Yet we prove day after day, week after week, year after year, that we are really no different at all from the Pharisees.

So it is that we think more of ourselves than we should and we somehow believe that we deserve to be recognized for more than we are. We are malcontents who purposefully refuse to hear the truth of God’s Word and therefore we cannot see things for what they truly are. We would shape the Word of God to our will because our will conflicts with God’s will. We do not wish to see and we do not wish to hear. We do not want to be made small. We prefer the delusion that we are mighty because we hate the thought that we are insignificant. We want to be in control. We want to have everything our way. We want to control even those things that are not given to us to control.

That is our sad state.

There is, however, another way. There is submission to the Word of God for *“blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it,”* and again our LORD says, *“He who is of God hears God’s words.”*

Therefore, submit to the Stone rejected. Fall upon it, be broken, and repent! Come to CHRIST in humility and confess to Him that you have not honored Him as you should; that you have lived and treated others as though God did not matter, that in your life, it is you who, in fact, matters most; that all your thoughts and desires are soiled with sin. And then, having confessed, receive His absolution. Then, and only then, can His love and His Word have their way with you.

In this is a promise. For that day in the Temple, JESUS said, *“If anyone keeps My Word he shall never taste death.”* This is so because JESUS came to taste death for us, to drink the cup of suffering to the dregs in order that we might be released from its power. In exchange for this cup of death and suffering, He gives to you a Cup of Life in the new Covenant of His Blood given at His Altar. Clinging to His life-giving words and the promises found in them, we are delivered from death’s strong bands and its eternal judgment.

As we have learned from our Epistle text written in the Book of Hebrews, Jesus entered into the Holy of Holies with His own Blood as your High Priest and obtained there, everlasting redemption for you, His people. This was His plan before all time.

For this timeless One, who was before Abraham, knew that just as Isaac would climb a mountain with the wood of his death and sacrifice on his back, He too would climb that same mountain two thousand years later carrying the wood of His Cross and death upon His back as the Perfect and Ultimate Sacrifice. There He was laid and nailed uncomplaining upon the altar of the Cross to suffer our FATHER’s fiery wrath for you, suffering for you the price of your transgressions, that believing you may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

JESUS is the Ram who died in your place, His head caught in a thicket of thorns pressed down hard against His brow. And now you need not be sacrificed. Nor must you sacrifice your sons and daughters. God’s promise has been kept. The LORD has provided. He has sacrificed His SON in your place.

The Ram nailed to a cross with your sins; the Body laid away in a tomb, has been raised up to life. JESUS lives and in Him, you have life. The substance of that sacrifice, JESUS’ Body and Blood, which has been given and shed for you, is now provided for you to eat and to drink, to unite you to Him so that you are able to understand His speech and listen to and believe His Word.

And this is the Word He speaks to you today and every day, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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