

QUINQUAGESIMA / ESTO MIHI

Text: St. Luke 18:31-43

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

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem....” That is our destination. And so it must be, for it is there, and only there, that *“the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped....”* It is there that *“...the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing.”*

In God’s holy City, JESUS makes all things new. In Jerusalem, He made of paupers, kings, and of sinners, saints. There, on a lonely hill, the font of righteousness has burst forth amid the wilderness of human depravation. There, JESUS has been raised up to draw all sinners to Himself, slaking their thirst with living water drawn from His pierced side. There, JESUS has set a table before the face of our enemies and has prepared the Feast of Salvation with His very own Body and Blood. Let us then follow our LORD up to Jerusalem.

There were, among others, twelve men, along with the women, such as His beloved Mother, St. Mary, other disciples, and the curious hangers-on, who followed JESUS. The twelve, His closest friends and disciples, spent three years with Him and having given up everything, leaving it all behind to sit at His feet and be fed on the Word of life, had, at the point of JESUS’ triumphant entry into the City of God to die, learned absolutely nothing, the meaning of His words hidden from their sight.

With this declaration, JESUS had now told them no less than three times that He must go up to Jerusalem to die. St. Luke writes, *“Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the SON of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.’”* Luke goes on, *“But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.”*

No, the disciples did not comprehend the meaning of our LORD’s words. They believed and had confessed JESUS to be the SON of God but without understanding what their confession really meant, and if He is the SON of God as they confessed, what could possibly be the purpose of His death? Surely, this could not happen to Him! But it did,

and the disciples despaired. Yet, *“Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”*

This, they could not and would not understand until JESUS’ resurrection. Then, they would understand that JESUS had to die *“to gather together into one the children of God....”*

God’s children had become estranged from Him. All sinned and had become lost and unclean; the holy image in which God created them was gone. It is beyond the power of sinful man to regain that image of holiness, for the holiness of God destroys sin, devouring all unclean things with fire. To regain the image of God requires a spotless, innocent sacrifice and we are all unclean; we are not innocent. So, God cannot just overlook our sins. To do so He would have to change His nature. Yet, if God were to change His nature, He would no longer be God.

Therefore, God, who is holy, and from whom all that is holy derives its holiness, cannot tolerate sin in His Kingdom. It must be expiated. It must be atoned for and removed. So, no, God cannot just overlook our sins, but He can redeem them! He can, through the death of His SON, a spotless Sacrifice, remove our sins so that nothing but God’s righteousness remains.

Everything that we do as Christians finds its genesis in this one great fact: JESUS died for us, to save us from sin, from Satan, and the grave. In JESUS, all things that are written by the prophets concerning our salvation have been accomplished. The FATHER’s will has been fulfilled; His terrible wrath has been appeased. It is finished. God, Himself has taken on human flesh that He would be the Sin Offering and Sacrifice of Mercy for His creation; the only Sacrifice that could pay our debt of sin.

This is the message of the Gospel. This is the very center of our faith, and this is the message of our redemption. If one gets this wrong then everything else in one’s life and worship is tainted by error. From the misunderstanding of this one great truth springs all doubt, all fear, much heresy, and even much unbelief.

Misunderstanding this one great truth, man strives in vain to achieve salvation through his works, to acquire the forgiveness of his sins by his own merit, and to build a ladder to heaven through his own self-righteousness. This we do even though the doubt that fills our hearts at such efforts tells us that our own pathetic labors are nothing more than fig leaves and foolishness. We know that our works and merit are worthless. We know that we owe much more than we could ever hope to repay.

We know that we are spiritually bankrupt before God, and even if we could repay our debt of sin, ultimately the price of sin is still death. For through the Apostle, Saint Paul, God tells us, *“the wages of sin is death,”* and for *“him who works, the wages are*

not counted as grace, but as debt.” This means that in the end, when we have done all that is commanded of us, all we can say is, *“We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.”*

Thus, our LORD set His face toward Jerusalem. He looked to that city that murdered the prophets and stoned those sent to her. He went up to Jerusalem to fulfill all things that even the blind shall see and the deaf shall be made to hear. He went up to the City of Peace to give you the peace of God. For to fulfill all things meant that your debt of sin had to be paid, *“not with gold or silver, but with [our LORD’s] holy, precious Blood and with His innocent suffering and death.”* (Luther’s explanation to the Second Article of the Apostle’s Creed, The Small Catechism)

So, we walk on the road to Jerusalem with our Savior and enter the City of Peace for our peace. There JESUS was mocked. There, God was treated with contempt. There He was betrayed by the very people He came to save. The soldiers of Pilate beat Him nearly to death. JESUS was nailed to the Cross of sorrow and disgrace, deserted by His friends, mourned by His Mother, and hated by the very people He came to save.

On that Cross JESUS was blasphemed. As He hung in agony the Roman soldiers offered Him sour wine and said, *“If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself.”* The religious authorities spit upon and mocked Him saying, *“If You are the SON of God, come down from the cross.”*

This is what it meant when JESUS told His disciples *“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished.”* For the sole concern of the SON of Man was to do the will of the One who sent Him—His FATHER, and our FATHER, in heaven. And the will of our FATHER, and therefore, the will of His SON, JESUS, is that you be saved.

In saving you, all things written by the prophets are accomplished. Not one thing could be left undone. For the way of the Cross of JESUS is the way of God’s grace. And if you would know the grace of God and the love of God, then you must stand at the foot of the Cross with Saint Mary, the Mother of God, and with Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint John, and look up into the bloody, disfigured face of your SAVIOR, JESUS Christ.

Though now we see but dimly, though now our vision is not yet complete, nor is it as clear as it one day will be, we can be assured of this; our hope *is* fulfilled. Not some distant or vague wish, but a confident and fervent knowledge of a promise fulfilled—a promise fulfilled by our LORD and our God.

Our LORD JESUS was crucified and did die, but He did not stay dead. The grave could not hold Him, for in His death He conquered death and we who are Baptized into

His Name share in His victory over the grave. Now we wait for His call to join Him in the Heavenly Jerusalem and there, to receive the gift of eternal peace.

Until that sacred day, our God has provided the gifts of His true Body and Blood in the blessed Sacrament of the Altar to strengthen us in times of fear and doubt, to strengthen our weak hands, and make firm our feeble knees and our weak faith. Thus strengthened, with eyes no longer blind and with ears unstopped that they can hear, with our hearts full of the hope of God-given faith, we shall leap like deer and our sin-parched tongues shall be released to sing with the angels, and archangels, and all the saints of heaven.

Behold, JESUS has gone up to Jerusalem for you. There, He has declared His love for you. In the City of Peace, His mercy has been poured out and your cup overflows. One day you too, will go up to Jerusalem and all things concerning God's promises for you will be made complete; there your eyes will be opened, for all things concerning the SON of Man have been accomplished for you. All things have been accomplished so that JESUS, the SON of God can say to you, *"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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