

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.

In our Gospel text this morning, we heard JESUS say, *“If God were your FATHER, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. He also said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.” And again, “... I do not seek My own glory.... It is My FATHER who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His Word.”*

To say that there is a lot going on here would be a gross understatement. JESUS was in the Temple treasury when He was confronted by pharisees who, as always, attempted to draw JESUS into a verbal wrestling match. They claim to be descendants of Abraham; something that JESUS does not deny. They *are* descendants of Abraham, but they *are not* Abraham’s children; something that their words and deeds clearly demonstrate.

Children of Abraham would do the works of Abraham but the Jews seek to kill JESUS. Abraham is not a murderer but the foundational figure of the Old Testament salvation story—the story of life. Indeed, Holy Scripture tells us that Abraham sought after and listened to God’s truth. Unlike the pharisees who rejected God in CHRIST, desiring to murder Him, Abraham received God with hospitality *“by the terebinth trees of Mamre.”* The pharisees were more like the residents of Sodom who desired to do unspeakable things to God’s emissaries. Saint John describes the attitude of the pharisees in the prologue of his Gospel, *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”*

Abraham’s faith was tested when God commanded him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, through whom God’s promise of descendants as innumerable as the stars in the heavens and the grains of sand upon the sea shore was to be fulfilled. Abraham believed God, *“and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”* He kept God’s Word. He subordinated his love for his son to his love of, and faith in, God and His Word, for he believed that God spoke only truth.

JESUS is the Truth of the FATHER in human flesh; He is the very Word of God. Those who hear and keep His Word hear the FATHER. JESUS speaks only those words He hears from His FATHER. Thus, those who reject His Word, reject the FATHER and are not God’s children. Their father is Satan. To have God as one’s FATHER includes love for, devotion to, and commitment to God’s SON. The pharisees were children of Satan, not by virtue of natural birth but their natural desires.

A “no” to JESUS then, is a “no” to the FATHER. Unbelief directed toward JESUS is unbelief directed toward the FATHER. There is no middle ground. Not to hear JESUS is not to

hear the FATHER. Behind faith in JESUS and His Word, one finds God the FATHER who sent His SON into the world for the life of the world.

God's intent was that man be made in His image, through whom, God would be present in the world. But in sinning, man betrayed the nature God had given him. God's nature was no longer mankind's, instead, man was then filled with the deceit of the devil. Mankind was filled with the desires of the evil serpent. Thus, Satan's will became mankind's will, and our hearts and tongues are filled with his deceit. When we lie, we speak from the devil's image, for Satan is the father of lies. When we murder, we act from the devil's nature, for Satan has been a murderer from the beginning.

In CHRIST JESUS, God the FATHER sent His image and nature back to the world in God the SON. In His SON, God's nature is again made flesh. In JESUS, God's intent for man is realized—in CHRIST, mankind is now what was always intended. This is how it is possible to know our Heavenly Father. We have JESUS CHRIST, God's SON, whom the FATHER has sent into the world to save the world.

Therefore, to love the SON is to love the FATHER, and to love the FATHER is to love the SON whom the FATHER has sent in His image that we may know Him. JESUS was sent to effect the will of His FATHER. Thus, the words and deeds of the SON reflect the image, that is, the very heart of our Heavenly FATHER and tell us everything we need to know about our God.

And what do we learn of the FATHER as we see His image within His SON? We learn that JESUS is the promise of God, and His death upon the cross of Calvary for the life of the world is the love of God for His creation, for you and me. We learn that JESUS is the promise kept—God's Word fulfilled. In His cross is His glory and so too, the FATHER is glorified as His love for the world and His will to save us are revealed, and through the crucified One salvation is offered to all who will believe. *"This is the unity of will and identity of purpose which reveals the Father and His Son to be the one God of Israel"* (Dr. William Weinrich)

Yet, in JESUS we learn more. We learn what it means to "keep" the Word of God. We learn that to keep the Word of God is to act according to one's identity as a child of God. It is to live out one's life in the "image" of the FATHER, meaning the "intent" of the FATHER's Word, which is nothing less than having faith in His SON. In short, to "keep" the Word of God is to live within your identity as a disciple of CHRIST JESUS who has saved you. This glorifies both the FATHER and the SON, and also the HOLY SPIRIT who keeps us in the one true faith.

This is what it means when our LORD says, *"if anyone keeps My Word he shall never see death."* We keep JESUS' Word and we become what we keep. We live from the Word of God, and we hold it fast as our dearest possession. We believe JESUS' Word and we become what we believe—disciples of CHRIST and children of God.

This is the gift of our Baptism. There, at the font, as the waters are poured over us, we are bound together by love to our God who loved us by dying for us. We are reminded of this love whenever we approach the God's altar to receive His Body given and His Blood shed to

save us—proclaiming His death until He comes. We are strengthened by His Word of love whenever we receive God’s absolution.

Whenever JESUS speaks, we hear what He heard from His FATHER. Whenever JESUS acts, we see the image of the FATHER. Whenever we receive His love, we receive the love of the FATHER. Let us now come and receive from the Table He has prepared that we may live.

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

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