

Quinquagesima Sunday

Fr. Jeff Monroe

Text: St. Luke xviii. 31. THEN Jesus took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

Lent is nearly upon us. It seems just yesterday we were celebrating the birth of the Christ child in Bethlehem. Now we are watching as our Lord begins His final journey to Jerusalem. Soon we will relive the agonizing last days of our Lord on Earth as He is tortured, beaten and hung on the cross to die for us. Soon we will relive the agony of Good Friday, the Holiest Day of the Christian year.

This is often a time of uncertainty for us because sometimes we are like the disciples not fully comprehending the depth of what is about to happen. We also ask the same questions the disciples did. Why did Jesus have to suffer? Why did He have to die? That is perhaps the reason Lent is such an important time because in it is an opportunity for us to come to understand the depth of the love of God for us through what happened on the cross and in doing so, allowing us to change. So let us put this all in perspective, what is this Lent thing all about anyway.

And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

Lent is a time of renewal, a time of cleansing, a time of purification. Not of our bodies as the Jews believed but instead of our faith. The blind man understood that. He called out to the Lord in his anguish and proclaimed Him as Lord, the Son of David. And then he cried Lord have mercy on me! Lord, give me my sight. And the Lord returns his sight and says **Your Faith has saved you.**

Lent is for us an opportunity for us to receive our spiritual sight, in hopes of our salvation. This time of penitence, marked by the purple on our altars and the color of our vestments, allows us to reflect on our own unworthiness before the Lord. St. Paul put it bluntly, “no one is righteous, all fall short of the grace of God.” But we have a hard time often coming to grips with our own sinful nature and understanding that it is our nature

that jeopardizes our salvation. We often deceive ourselves into believing that we are basically good and that God will see that in us, particularly on the day of judgment.

Look at what the Psalmist says in Psalm 12: HELP US LORD! THERE IS NOT A GOOD MAN LEFT; HONEST MEN CAN NO LONGER BE FOUND. ALL OF THEM LIE TO ONE ANOTHER; THEY DECEIVE EACH OTHER WITH FLATTERY. We have come to believe that the good of our human nature is enough and that ultimately, if we believe in judgment, then we should be OK.

Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross is the only thing that makes us right with God. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation or eternal life, yet we sometimes feel that being fair, and honest and as good as we can be is sufficient.

No, it is only by faith that we are saved and what we will do over the next forty days is about strengthening that faith by submitting ourselves to God without hesitation and in true humility. It is about setting aside our egos, our feelings of hate and discontent, our desires and looking at Christ's suffering for us in thanksgiving. It is also about allowing the love of Christ to change us and to be an example of His love before all mankind. The Epistle for Sunday states:

THOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.

When we were baptized into Christ, we were given the gift of the Holy Spirit to reside in us and make us one with Him. It is a marvelous gift because it helps us to grow in love, in faith and gives us hope. Our human nature works to extinguish the spirit of God. We hide the brightness of its flame, we cover its light with a basket, we put ourselves in the center of the universe and set God aside. And then we lie to ourselves and come to think that just simply believing in God is true faith.

We have hope in Christ, we have salvation, we have eternal life but the cost for us is a true and honest faith. Not faith in just believing, but faith in becoming. Faith that moves us to be exceptional in His name, faith that brings us to our knees in our sin, faith that calls upon us to reach out to others even when it can alter our lives.

A faith that needs to be honest and all trusting. A faith that understands the meaning of our prayer "Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid."

And cries out, Lord have mercy on me, a poor and miserable sinner.

This Lent, I want each of us to look at Christ on the cross in all of its horror. I want us to ask ourselves if we are we still moved by all that once happened? If we cringe when we hear about the tearing of our Lord's flesh by the scourge? If we feel disgust when the soldiers mock Jesus and place the crown of thorns on His head? Do we choke on the words "Crucify Him"? Do we feel the weight of the cross on the road to Golgotha? If we feel the pain of the spikes driven through our Lord's flesh? If we gasp for breath in

His slow dying on the cross suspended above those who mock Him? And if we in His dying, truly feel the weight of our sins lifted from us as we measure our commitment to Him against His commitment to us?

Why did Christ suffer and dies for us? **Because we would never be able to come to the Father on our own.** Because out of His love for us, that no one should be lost. And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son to die for us, that he who believes should not perish, but have eternal life.

The time is at hand for us to get right with God by renewing and strengthening our faith. The time is at hand for us to set aside the ways of the world and focus on Him. The time is at hand for us to sacrifice ourselves and come before Him and each other with humility. The time is at hand for each of us to renew our lives and our relationship with God.

As He loved us, so should we love Him and true love is always putting the other person first. God needs to always be first in our lives and in this time that is upon us, let us open ourselves to Him fully once and for all. AMEN