

3.29.2020 Passion Sunday Morning Prayer

In the 1600's, a German Archdeacon named Martin Rinkhart served in the walled town of Eilenburg during the horrors of the Thirty Years' War. During the war, Eilenburg became an overcrowded refuge for the surrounding area and the refugees suffered from disease and famine. At the beginning of 1637 there were four ministers in Eilenburg, but one abandoned his post to serve in a better area and Martin Rinkart officiated at the funerals of the other two. As the only minister left, he often conducted burial services for as many as 40 to 50 people a day, almost 5,000 people in all, and in May of that year his own wife died.

Yet living in a world dominated by death, he wrote a prayer of thanksgiving for his children to offer to the Lord. His prayer was later set to music and stands as one of the greatest hymns in the history of the Church. These are the words that he prayed with his children:

Now thank we all our God, With heart and hands and voices;
Who wondrous things hath done, In whom His world rejoices.
Who, from our mother's arms, Hath led us on our way
With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today.

The words of his heartfelt prayer proclaim the truth that Martin Rinkart knew thankfulness to God is not a self-centered appreciation for the all the things God does for us, but a God-centered appreciation for the faithfulness of God in our lives. Even in the midst of such unimaginable conditions he knew that God is faithful – that God “still is ours today.”

Another man who had intimate knowledge of God's faithfulness, and how to be truly thankful in every circumstance was St. Paul. Paul was never anxious or worried about his life, but simply and truly gave thanks in and for all things, because regardless of how desperate the situation appeared, Paul knew that the same God who met his needs yesterday, would faithfully meet his needs today. Holy Scripture describes many of the trials and sorrows that Paul faced.

In 2 Corinthians (11:23-27) Paul wrote, *“Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above*

measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.”

St. Paul endured countless trials, yet in a letter to the Thessalonians (5:18) he wrote, *“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus,”* and to the Ephesians (5:19-20) he said, *“Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

St. Paul was able to give thanks *in all circumstances*, and even *for* these trials because he approached this earthly life from an eternal perspective. His thankful heart was rooted in the truth that while everything in this finite world may change, God does not change. In the book of Malachi (3:6) God tells us, *“For I am the Lord, I do not change”* and in Hebrews (13:8) we hear this truth repeated with these words: *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”*

In our ever-changing world, a world where change is so often accompanied by difficulty and heartache, we serve a never-changing God. His love never changes. His mercy never changes. His ability to provide for us and meet our every need never changes, and like St. Paul, we can be thankful *in and for all things* when we come to the knowledge of the truth that no matter what changes around us, God in all His greatness, and majesty, and unconditional love will never change. When we look at the examples of St. Paul or Martin Rinkart, I believe we find that living with an eternal perspective is the key to finding peace, and rest, and the ability to give thanks for every new morning, no matter what the day may bring.

Jesus said, *“Don’t worry about your life... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Matthew 6:25, 33). In other words, whether you’re Martin Rinkhart in the midst of the horrors of the Thirty Years’ War, or St. Paul beaten and

shipwrecked and left for dead, or whether you're facing a global pandemic; don't worry about this earthly life. Don't be so short-sighted. Instead, set your heart, and soul, and mind "*on things above...*" (Colossians 3:2), for when we view this life from a biblical and eternal perspective, what we find is that the Creator and Sustainer of Heaven and Earth is also a Father who loves us more than we can possibly imagine.

There are difficult challenges ahead of us, but those who view this life from an eternal perspective, those who thank God *in* and *for* all circumstances, are those who find true peace. The peace of God that passes all understanding is found when we trust all that we don't know about the future to our Father who knows everything, our good, good Father who always has our best interests at heart and whose steadfast love endures forever.