

Easter 2, 2019
The Fruitless Tree Has Come Alive!

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1 Peter 2:19-25

“Almighty God, who has given thine son to be a sacrifice for our sins and an example of how to live a godly life, may we receive such abundant grace to warrant such a priceless gift.” And so goes my paraphrase of the collect (prayer) for this second Sunday in Easter.

We have recently completed our Lent and our Holy Week services. We have participate in the suffering of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the burial of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus from the grave. If you were able to experience the fullness of these services, I hope you have gained a greater and fuller relationship with our Father in heaven. But you may still have a question emerging in your thoughts; why would God go to such lengths at such a great cost? The question is a valid one...

Jesus offers peace...but we choose war; Jesus offers hope...but we want instant gratification; Jesus gave us love and we traded it for immorality; he gave us truth...we opted for a lie; Jesus offered us eternal life but we glory for an epitaph on a gravestone. What Jesus offered, mankind betrayed. What our Lord would freely give...we abused. We spit in his face, we bruised his bones and carved his flesh AND had the gall to mock him further with a crown of thorns. For the giver of life we forged a cross and nailed our Saviour to a fruitless tree...All this and God still loves us!

Listen to how the New Jerusalem translation expresses our reading of 1 Peter: *“You see, there is merit if, in awareness of God, you put up with the pains of undeserved punishment; but what glory is there in putting up with a beating after you have done something wrong? The merit in the sight of God is in putting up with it patiently when you are punished for doing your duty.”*

O' heavenly Father, may we learn this truth. Amen.

Truly, what glory is there if you are accused rightly for your wrong and accept the price? Isn't this your due recompense? Is not this the rightful balance of justice? If I steal from my neighbor should I not have to repay without the expectation of praise? Can I brag and look for admiration that I have justified my wrongdoing. My wrong may have been repaid, but still I have done wrong and it is of no heavenly value that I find satisfaction in the correction that I deserve.

Jesus, in no way, set the example we are to follow by sinning and then correcting his wrongdoing. No! Jesus set the example by walking righteously and patiently, taking the abuse of mankind...an abuse with its roots in sin. Jesus continued to speak truth and love, despite our reactions and then prayed for our forgiveness; "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Words that speak volumes from a man who is buffeted for OUR sins; words from God himself bestowing his righteousness upon the undeserving. Our undeserved eternal lives come through grace and it is that grace that shows itself in the way we respond to the world around us as we follow the example set by Jesus Christ himself.

"This, in fact, is what you were called to do, Peter tells us, because Christ suffered for you and left an example for you to follow in his steps. He had done nothing wrong, and had spoken no deceit. He was insulted and did not retaliate with insults; when he was suffering he made no threats but put his trust in the upright judge. He was bearing our sins in his own body on the cross, so that we might die to our sins and live for uprightness."

How often do we find ourselves wanting to be the bearers of righteous judgment? Sometimes we can act as though we have no sin to deal with in our own lives, deceiving ourselves that we can be both judge and jury. In a recent communication I had with Fr. Ian Dunn from All Saints, Fr. Ian was making the point that "we as Christians, should speak out against any and all religious violence and not tolerate it against anyone. Not because we think everyone is right, he said, but one way to extend the love of Christ, to those with whom we disagree, is to defend them and their right to life." He is right.

Religious violence...religious persecution is 'judgment'. We are not called to judge but to share the love of the Gospel that others may come

to the truth before the real judgment. It is unfortunate that we cannot be tolerant of each other and communicate honestly without fear of death. Isn't it ironic that religious differences can result in murder and genocide?

Is this following the example of Christ? Of course not. It is following the example of the Pharisees who ranted "crucify him!" It is the nature of mankind to assimilate or to remove. Jesus never supported retaliation against those who disagreed with him, but instead bore their indifference that through his example they may return to him in their memories and find truth. I mentioned a few moments ago that for the giver of life we forged a cross and nailed our Saviour to a fruitless tree. But even the dead may bloom again. On that tree Christ would bare the sins of all mankind that the dead in Christ may rise triumphant.

"For ye were as sheep gone astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." Jesus, the Shepard, the guardian, the Bishop of our souls does not flee when the wolf attacks and neither shall we. As Christians we have found the path home and our journeys can be difficult. We have an obligation to the Gospel to make the paths straight for others and not be stumbling blocks. If we must bare wrongful burdens, then they are our burdens to bare and we must endure them as examples to the truth. Do not look for glory in this life. If it comes, give it back to God alone and if you are overlooked or misjudged for doing a good thing, again, give it all to the glory of God. If you think about it, the best way to suffer is to suffer because of the goodness within your hearts were evil has been put asunder and love of God Almighty dwells.

Why did Christ go so far as the grave for sinful man? Why did Christ endure so much retaliation from those he came to save? Jesus did not come to give us partial redemption. Sin laid mankind in the grave and so Christ too descended into the grave to blow wide the gates of hell and raise us to everlasting life! Christ is risen...he is risen indeed! And with him so are those willing to follow his example and live by his holy word.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.