

2.7.2021 Sexagesima (2 Corinthians 11:19-31)

*“He saved others; Himself He cannot save...”* (Matthew 27:42). These are the words that the chief priests, scribes, and elders used to mock and ridicule our Lord as He hung on the Cross, suffering and dying for the sins of the world. *“He saved others; Himself He cannot save...”* They spoke these malicious words in anger, hatred, and unbelief, yet there is a sense in which they were correct. In the Gospels we see clearly that our Lord’s will was His own death. He could not save Himself, because His plan was to save us. He had come into the world to save others, to freely drink of that *cup of suffering* (Luke 22:42), and as the perfectly obedient, only-begotten, eternal Son of the Father, He would not deliver Himself from suffering and death.

*“He saved others; Himself He cannot save...”* This was God’s plan from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8), for the Father *“spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all”* (Romans 8:32). God the Father expressed His Divine love for us not merely by giving, but by giving *up* His one and only Son. King David famously said, *“I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing”* (2 Samuel 24:24), and by sending His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, God, the Creator, in a way seems to say to us, His creatures, *“I will not offer to you that which cost Me nothing.”* The Father *spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all.*

*“He saved others; Himself He cannot save...”* These were the words that came to mind as I read today’s Epistle, because this passage describes another man, St. Paul, who by proclaiming the Gospel saved others (1 Corinthians 9:22), and in doing so chose not to save himself from tremendous suffering and even martyrdom. In this letter, Paul describes his life and ministry, the huge obstacles and unimaginable trials in such a way that we come to know, by his example, precisely what it means to offer *“our selves, our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice”* unto God. In Paul’s example once again we see the perfect act of love as not merely giving, but giving up that which we value most.

*“He saved others; Himself He cannot save...”* These words are a reflection of Paul’s life and ministry. From the moment of his conversion on the Damascus

road to the day of his martyrdom in Rome, we recognize the truth that Paul could not save himself, because his only concern was saving others. When you consider all that he endured; prison, scourging, stoning, shipwrecks; persecution, hatred, hunger, and thirst; you see that St. Paul literally sacrificed his life by living for the One who died for Him. Paul gave the most valuable gift he had by giving himself personally and completely in obedient service to our Lord, by loving God and others more than himself.

*“He saved others; Himself He cannot save...”* We’ve considered a sense in which these words describe our Lord’s one, full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). We’ve seen how these words are an accurate description of St. Paul’s sacrificial life and ministry. Now, we must each ask ourselves the question, Is this the way I’m choosing to live? Am I giving *up* to God that which I value most so that I may truly be His hands and feet, that I might reach out to the world that He gave His life to save? Am I, like St. Paul, offering my self, my soul and body to my Lord as a *living sacrifice*? (Romans 12:1).

It’s an important question, and with Lent quickly approaching hopefully it’s a question we’ve been considering. We often view the traditional lenten disciplines of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving as sacrifices, and they are. It is a sacrifice to miss a few meals, to spend more time in prayer, and to dig a little deeper to give to those in need, but as you can tell from what we read about St. Paul this morning, he took sacrifice to an entirely different level, and this may be due to the fact that his definition of what it means to offer a sacrifice would’ve originally been formed by what he witnessed at the Temple. There Paul would’ve seen faithful people presenting to God the absolute best animal or first-fruits they had to offer in their entirety, giving up any right they had to them, and expecting their sacrifice to be set apart in such a way that it was used for no other purpose than to honor and glorify God.

This insight gives us some understanding of Paul’s sacrificial life and ministry, and helps us to see what he means when he urges us to offer ourselves to God as a *living sacrifice*. Like the Old Testament temple sacrifices, we are called to give our absolute best to God, to offer entirely to

Him that which we value most, and to be a people set apart for His glory alone; but unlike those temple sacrifices, our Christian sacrifice is a living sacrifice. The temple sacrifices were killed and therefore only offered once, but our sacrifice is one continual offering to God. We freely give ourselves, our souls and bodies to Him moment by moment, day by day, and in doing so, our entire life becomes an offering to God.

This living sacrifice, this offering to God of all that we are, all that we have, and all the we can do is the Christian life, and as we learned from the example of St. Paul, there is a daily cost in following Jesus. I was reminded of that truth when I read, once again, those words that the chief priests, scribes, and elders used to mock and ridicule our Lord as He hung on the Cross, suffering and dying for the sins of the world. *“He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him”* (Matthew 27:42).

I’m convinced there are many people in our society who would believe Him, who would embrace the truth of Christianity if the King would come down from the Cross, if discipleship wasn’t so difficult, if being a saint wasn’t such a sacrifice; but Jesus said clearly, *“The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord”* (Matthew 10:24-25). Our Lord did not save Himself, because His plan was to save us. May God give us hearts like His, hearts prepared not only to give, but to give up that which we value most as a living sacrifice to our Lord, our God, our King, who would not come down from the Cross.