

The Second Sunday after Easter - Misericordias Domini

Hymns: 206, 311, 276

The INTROIT

(Ps.33:5,6,1)

P: The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

C: By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.

P: Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous,

C: for praise is comely for the upright.

The COLLECT

God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son did raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou has delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Ezekiel 34:11-16

For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.

THE GRADUAL

(Lk.24:35, Jn.10:14)

P: Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

P: Then was the Lord Jesus known of the disciples:

C: in the breaking of the bread.

P: I am the Good Shepherd:

C: and know my sheep and am known of mine. Hallelujah!

The EPISTLE

1 Peter 2:21-25

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

P: Hallelujah! Christ, our Passover:

C: is sacrificed for us. Hallelujah!

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 10:11-16

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

1 Peter 2:21-25 — “To Us Leaving Behind an Underwriting, That You-all Should Follow after the Steps of Him”

INTRODUCTION

- I. FOR INTO THIS YOU-ALL WERE CALLED
- II. TO US LEAVING BEHIND AN UNDERWRITING, THAT YOU-ALL SHOULD FOLLOW AFTER THE STEPS OF HIM
- III. YOU-ALL ARE RETURNED UPON THE SHEPHERD AND OVERSEER OF YOUR SOULS

CONCLUSION

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Hymns: 206, 355, 276, 196

1 Peter 2:21-25 — “To Us Leaving Behind an Underwriting, That You-all Should Follow after the Steps of Him”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today is the Second Sunday after Easter. The appointed Epistle reading is 1 Peter 2:21-25:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Because of the Introit today is referred to as “Mercy of God” or “Loving-kindness of God” Sunday. Because of the Gospel reading today is often referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday. As Christians we often struggle to know what this really means for us and how applies to our daily lives. This struggle is why this Epistle reading is appointed in connection with the Good Shepherd Gospel. Let us hear what the Holy Spirit declares through the Apostle Peter.

I. FOR INTO THIS YOU-ALL WERE CALLED

The opening words of our text say: **“For into this you-all were called.”** Into what were we called? In the previous two sentences St. Peter says:

For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

The word for *thankworthy* is actually *charis*, that is, *GRACE*. So, St. Peter is telling us that to suffer wrongfully, that is, to suffer unjustly, is grace. This is the way of the LORD’s salvation. To suffer at the hands of the devil for doing what is meet, right, and salutary is grace. To suffer the trials and tribulations that come on account of sin when we do what is in keeping with a good conscience is grace. To suffer on account of our own sinful flesh when we follow the way that the Holy Spirit leads our conscience is grace. When we suffer on account of living as God’s children, we are suffering the things into which God has called us.

Is this your definition of grace? Is this your understanding of the way of a loving and gracious God?

This is what the Holy Spirit has recorded for us in the Holy Scriptures. This is the way that the saints of old understood the life of faith into which they had been called by God. Is this your understanding? Is this what we hear taught from the pulpits today? Is this what we hear from the TV and radio evangelists? Is this what we hear from the leaders of our churches? Are we willing to hear this declaration of God and His grace? Will we gather into a congregation where this is what is proclaimed?

II. TO US LEAVING BEHIND AN UNDERWRITING, THAT YOU-ALL SHOULD FOLLOW AFTER THE STEPS OF HIM

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

“For into this you-all were called, because also Christ suffered over us, to us leaving behind an underwriting, that you-all should follow after the steps of Him.”

Even this direct translation could be heard a thousand times and still not be heard according to what is being said. For there is absolutely nothing in this that our sinful human nature can understand, let alone trust as true and good and wise. Our corrupted human reason outright rebels against every part of this declaration. According to our own reason and strength we interpret this in a way that makes sense to us, rather than receiving it and embracing it as it stands written. We are inclined to do the same with what we pray every week in the General Prayer of the Church, where we pray:

All who are in trouble, want, sickness, anguish of labor, peril of death, or any other adversity, especially those who are in suffering for Thy name’s and for Thy truth’s sake, comfort, O God, with Thy Holy Spirit, that they may receive and acknowledge their afflictions as the manifestation of Thy fatherly will.

When we pray this, do we really hear what we are being led to pray? Do we really mean that we want God to work in us by His Holy Spirit so that we count our suffering in this world and especially our suffering for doing what God declares to be right and good, do we really want the Holy Spirit to move us in our hearts and spirits and minds so that we count such afflictions to be the manifestation of God’s fatherly will? Do we really want God to move us to believe this and to look for good in our afflictions? Do we really want to trust that the relief that we really need is not in having these afflictions taken out of our lives but rather that the relief that we need is found in the midst of these afflictions?

St. Peter tells us that this is exactly what God wants us to believe and more than believe, but to trust, and even beyond trusting, to fervently desire. This is what God wants to convey to us as our way of salvation and our way of life.

Why? **“Because also Christ suffered over us, to us leaving behind an underwriting, that you-all should follow after the steps of Him.”**

It is amazing what is being taught to us in this declaration! Why should we rejoice in the sufferings that we face? **“Because also Christ suffered over us . . . who in His own Self bore our sins in His own body on the tree . . . by whose stripes ye were healed!”** Yes, our salvation, our rescue, our relief from suffering is the path of Christ crucified. He has left behind for us the underwriting in which we trace His steps, which as we follow, are overwritten with our own footsteps. As we follow in His steps, our transgressions are wiped out. For as we follow His steps, where do His steps carry us? Where did His steps carry Him? To His cross, which is really our cross. To His death, which is really our death. To His sufferings, which are really our sufferings.

Here we have it. As we follow in the steps of Christ, He brings us to the waters of Baptism, wherein the merits of His suffering, death, and burial as well as the guarantee of His bodily resurrection are applied to us. He leads us to the waters of Baptism where we are made to be dead to sins so that we also are made to live unto righteousness, His righteousness.

But on account of our sinful nature, on account of the Old Adam still inhering to our flesh, we need the ongoing way of the cross to be manifested to us in our daily walk. We need the continual reminder that the ways of the world end in everlasting suffering and death. Otherwise, we will be lulled to sleep and led astray. We need the continual reminder that the devil is the deceiver, who uses the mammon of unrighteousness to tempt us into a false security. The devil is continually presenting us with a false positive, with lots of worldly goods that have the appearance of hope and security, but in the end, wither like the grass and blow away in the wind.

Those who follow the steps of Christ do not receive a warm welcome from those who seek the comforts of worldly mammon. Those who imagine themselves secure in their worldly hoards, or who imagine that if only they could hoard unto themselves such treasures that they would be secure, such people will always react with hostility to anyone who follows the steps of Christ. For the steps of Christ are always away from such things. The steps of Christ led away from the temple built with hands so that Jesus spoke of His body as the temple that would be destroyed and rebuilt on the third day. That is the problem that has always accompanied the establishment of church bodies. Church bodies are built upon the vanity of men, built upon the foundations that they establish for their churches. But the foundation of Christ’s Church is the doctrine of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone. Christ Himself is simultaneously the builder and the chief cornerstone by which the Church is made to be immovable and indestructible.

III. YOU-ALL ARE RETURNED UPON THE SHEPHERD AND OVERSEER OF YOUR SOULS

This is the mistake that so many have made throughout the millennia and that we are tempted to make even today.

For you-all were and continue just as sheep being led astray, but you-all are returned now upon the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Here St. Peter declares to us with the imperfect tense the juxtaposition of the *now and not yet* or the *simul iustus et peccator*, that is, the condition of simultaneously saint and sinner that

we daily encounter as the baptized of the LORD. This is the ongoing struggle that we must face. This is why we must not be permitted to forget the way of the steps of Christ. For we truly were and continue just as sheep being led astray. According to our fallen nature, according to our own reason and strength, we were and continue just as sheep being led astray. All of the temptations of the devil, the world, and our flesh continue to lead us into transgressions. According to our own faith, we always turn away from the steps of Christ, which are the way of suffering for doing good. Doing good has a cost associated with it, at least as far as our fleshly nature accounts things.

The new nature into which we are baptized has a very different accounting. Thus St. Peter also writes that we are returned now upon the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Notice that St. Peter uses the passive verb. We are returned. We do not choose to return but rather we are returned. This is not our doing, but God's doing. Moreover, St. Peter does not say that we are merely returned to our Shepherd and Overseer, but that we are returned upon Him. He is the rock and the chief cornerstone. He is the One upon which He builds His church. God the Holy Spirit comes to us through the preaching of God the Word and we are returned or converted upon Christ, who is both the chief living stone and the builder of the living temple into which we are placed as living stones in connection with Christ.

This is what is meant by the saying, **“For into this you-all were called, because also Christ suffered over us, to us leaving behind an underwriting, that you-all should follow after the steps of Him.”**

The steps of Christ, the way that He walked, the life that He lived for us, the way of suffering and death of the cross, this is the underwriting that He has left behind for us so that our steps would be written over His. We have the life and works of Christ written for us. As St. John so beautifully declares, **“But these are written in order that you-all should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, life you-all should have in the name of Him.”**

Yes, the life and works of Christ, His steps to the cross of suffering and death and subsequent resurrection from the dead, these are written that we might believe and live in them. As the Holy Spirit leads us to walk through the Scriptures that declare Jesus to us, our own walk is written overtop of His. As the Holy Spirit causes us to walk upon the Scriptures we begin to stand more and firmly upon Christ crucified. As this happens we are turned through confession and absolution to rely more and more upon the body and blood of the LORD as the basis of our life. As we gather into the proclamation of His death till He comes we are removed from our many transgressions and filled with the lifeblood of Christ so that we see His steps more and more clearly as our own. Then we walk in confidence without regard to the temptations and afflictions that the devil and the world and our own flesh press upon us. Then our hearts truly rejoice in the sufferings that we endure in connection with Christ. Then we truly realize and acknowledge Him as our Good Shepherd, who takes our sin and gives His life for His sheep.

CONCLUSION

We tend to associate victory with absence of suffering. We imagine that the elimination or removal or avoidance of suffering is victory. But our God shows us that the way of victory is through suffering. Christ's suffering and death are the very means of victory for us. The victory that is manifested by the resurrection is that suffering and death have no power to defeat us. The victory is that Christ's suffering and death were unable to end His life and His joy. Christ went to the cross for the joy of suffering and dying on our behalf. He left this behind for us as the

underwriting upon which our lives are written. His suffering and death is the writing by which our names are written in the book of life. His suffering and death is the writing that stands before us in the Sacrament of the Altar, where, as He gives to us His body to eat and His blood to drink, His death is proclaimed before all the world and especially for us. His death is our life. His suffering is our relief. **“For into this you-all were called, because also Christ suffered over us, to us leaving behind an underwriting, that you-all should follow after the steps of Him.”** In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.