

The INTROIT (Ps. 31:1-3)

*P: Be Thou my strong Rock;*

**C: for an house of defense to save me.**

*P: Thou art my Rock and my Fortress;*

**C: therefore for Thy name's sake lead me and guide me.**

*P: In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed;*

**C: deliver me in Thy righteousness.**

The COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 35:3-7

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

The GRADUAL

(Ps.77:14-15)

*P: Thou art the God that doest wonders; Thou hast declared Thy strength among the peoples.*

**C: Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph.**

The EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 13

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, 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 charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but

when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

The TRACT

(from Ps.100:1-4)

*P: Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands; serve the Lord with gladness.*

**C: Enter into His gates with thanksgiving.**

*P: Know ye that the Lord, He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves;*

**C: we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.**

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 18:31-43

Then he 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.

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.

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Isaiah 35:3-7 — “Behold, Your God Will Come with Vengeance”

INTRODUCTION

I. STRENGTHEN YE THE WEAK HANDS

II. BEHOLD, YOUR GOD WILL COME WITH VENGEANCE

III. AND THE PARCHED GROUND SHALL BECOME A POOL

CONCLUSION

Isaiah 35:3-7 — “Behold, Your God Will Come with Vengeance”

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

Today is Quinquagesima, the Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany, and the appointed Old Testament Reading is Isaiah 35:3-7:

**Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.**

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

INTRODUCTION

Today is the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany, the last Sunday of preparation for Lententide. This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. Advent prepared us for the coming of our God in the flesh to save us. Christmas gave us the celebration of the gift of God in the flesh to save us. Epiphany made manifest the presence of God in the flesh among the Jews for the salvation of all the nations. Now we come to Lent, and we shall have our eyes opened wide to the reason that God has come in the flesh.

Today’s Gospel reading shows us our blindness and weakness and fearfulness, the effects of sin in our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls. From this miserable condition Jesus has come to save us. He has come with vengeance, to recompense what has been taken from us by the tyrannical reign of sin in the world and in our lives.

I. STRENGTHEN YE THE WEAK HANDS

Why do we desire to seek vengeance? Why do we respond to the injuries and injustices that we receive wishing to do the same to those who have hurt us and who have done us wrong? Why is it that when evil has been done to us that we wish to do the same? If someone jeopardizes our safety on the road by recklessness and sometimes by outright selfish and brutish force, why do we find ourselves wanting to do the same to that person? If someone speaks evil against us and bears false witness against us, why do we find ourselves wanting to retaliate with equal or even more injurious words and accusations? If someone weakens our ability to do well financially or even outright steals from us, why do we desire to see that person ruined?

The reason, or at least part of the reason, is our feeling of weakness and helplessness. All of the evils that we endure show us how truly weak and helpless we are by our own strength. No matter how hard we work, in the end all of our efforts fail. No matter how careful we are with our bodies and our diets, still we get sick and eventually we die. No matter how much caution we exercise, still we get hurt. No matter how much we reach out to others, still we are rejected and abandoned. No matter how much we give, still we are treated with ingratitude and even more is expected from us.

This is true especially regarding matters of the faith. The Church has been persecuted from the beginning. Both from without and from within, the Church faces persecution and attacks. The Church is never truly appreciated. The Church is always mocked and scorned. Worse yet, the Church is always being corrupted and infiltrated and misrepresented.

In his commentary on Isaiah 35, Luther shares these words:

3. *Strengthen the weak hands.* This is wonderful comfort that is to be understood not in a physical but in an internal sense, because it shines under the appearance of the cross. For this church of Christ is extremely poor and wretched in appearance, since its poor, distressed, naked, imprisoned, and dishonored are the refuse of all and loathsome to all men for the sake of Christ's name. And the members of the church are exposed to all, to Satan and to the craftiness and power of the world and the flesh. They are like "the offscouring of the world" (1 Cor. 4:13). It is as if people were saying: "They are to be regarded as a misfortune and a monster. If we could only be rid of these scoundrels." With all their might they exert themselves to expel and exterminate this utterly loathsome Christian people. So we see today that all the most criminal people are less disturbed than the members of this church. Therefore the inward joy of the spirit fights with the grief of the body exposed to the cross. Therefore the prophet comforts them with exceedingly great consolations. Strengthen. This is a command. As long as Satan is awake he will not stop attacking us. It is for us to stand in the battle line against his stratagems.

*Weak hands,* hands that are so weary. Give medicine to those hands so that you become strong again. For Satan has two ways of fighting. He would gladly cast the faithful down suddenly from their joy and faith and into fear and despair. Secondly, he cunningly strives by long lasting torments and by the unremitting pressure of the torments to tire them out. It is as Cyprian confesses: "Satan did not want the captive brothers to be killed in this life, but he preserved them in a long life and distressed them with unremitting aggravation to the point of exhaustion." These are extremely powerful attacks. Against Satan's continuous attack we must set our continuous divine help. The devil is a spirit at leisure and thinks of nothing but to take us by storm. We ought not have slack and idle hands over against his deceptions. Have we not experienced in these ten years how he tried by various forces to frighten us away from faith in the Gospel? First through the terrors of the papists, then through the world's disgrace, then through murdering tyrants, through the fanatics, the schismatics, and fatherly flatteries. The church must diligently oppose his stratagems. (LW 16, Isaiah 35:3)

Amazing! Whether it be Isaiah or Cyprian or Luther, their comments sound as though they were standing with us today and bearing up against the same evils that we face in the Church today. The blessed message of the Gospel has not changed. What the LORD declared to the serpent in the garden regarding the woman's Seed is still the message of hope that is to be

preached to us today. This message is so powerful that Satan has not been able to erase its mark nor eradicate its preaching throughout the generations even from that first day many millennia ago. From that day that wicked one has warred against the pure Gospel and the power of God unto salvation to them that believe. He has warred against the Church of God in Christ, trying to wear us down and crush us. But the promise of God is that the head of the serpent shall be crushed, not us. This message is to be preached so that the weak hands will be strengthened and the feeble knees shall be made firm.

Truly our hands are weak and our knees are feeble or shaky. We cannot hold onto the Gospel tightly enough to keep it from being taken from us. We cannot believe strongly enough to keep from losing hope. We cannot stand strongly enough to keep our knees from buckling under the load. We cannot muster the courage to keep our knees from shaking when we face the overwhelming attacks of evil in our lives.

This is why we are not commanded to be strong in our own strength. This is why we are not told to make ourselves strong with our own reason and strength. The LORD commands that we be taught to the exact opposite perspective.

## II. BEHOLD, YOUR GOD WILL COME WITH VENGEANCE

**Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.**

Strength for our weak hands is not to be found within ourselves. The LORD is our strength. The LORD is our courage and hope. The LORD is the Just One. He is our Justice and our Righteousness. He is our Refuge and sure hope.

When the LORD commands that we be strong and to stop being afraid, this command is the opposite of what we tell ourselves. We seek to feel strong by seeking vengeance. The LORD says, **“Behold! Your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense!”** It is actually even more powerfully stated in the Hebrew, saying, **“Say to the hasty of heart, “Be strong (fastened upon)! Fear Not! Behold your God! Vengeance will come, recompense of God! He will come and save you!””**

Ah, yes, the hasty of heart. How quickly we assume things from our limited perspective. This is why the preaching office is established by God, so that His Word is proclaimed rather than our words. **“Behold your God!”** This is the message by which we are to have our weak hands strengthened and our shaking knees firmed up. When we look to our God, we have no further need for seeking vengeance. All that has been lost to us, all that the devil has taken away regarding the image of God in which He created us, all that has been wrongly put upon us according to the deceptions of our hearts and minds and souls, is recompensed by the coming of our God.

Throughout His ministry the Lord Jesus taught this to His disciples, but as we heard in today’s Gospel reading, they were unable to understand or to see or to know it.

**Then he 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.**

This is why the Lord Jesus said that in order to be His disciples we must deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow Him. We must deny ourselves, that is, we must confess the weakness of our hands and the shakiness of our knees. We cannot imagine ourselves to be strong by our own efforts if we are to behold our God who comes to save us. We cannot imagine ourselves able to stand strong on our own two feet if we are to rely upon the stand that our God took for us before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate and before Herod and finally before the throne of Judgement. Truly, if we try to stand on our own two feet and we try to present the works of our own hands even to our own consciences, we will find ourselves without hope. No, we need to deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow our God, our Brother, Jesus. He alone is almighty and able to save us.

### III. AND THE PARCHED GROUND SHALL BECOME A POOL

How amazingly opposite to our sense of vengeance and recompense is the vengeance and recompense of our God!

**Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.**

We imagine that we should stand our ground and fight for what is ours. But what do we have to claim as our own? What justice have we performed? Are we in any way whatsoever better than those whom we judge? Have we obeyed the LORD our God? Have we loved Him with all of our heart, soul, and might? Have we loved our neighbor as ourselves? Have we even truly believed God without doubting Him and without questioning His goodness?

Oh God, how blind we are! Oh God, how we need to have our eyes opened to see and our ears unstopped to hear! Oh God, how weak and lame we are! Oh God, how unequipped we are to speak rightly! How entirely unholy we are to sing praises to God! How dry our spirits are, with no hope for refreshment and relief! Oh God, what shall we present to Thee when even our prayers are full of selfishness and falseness?

To this the LORD our God says, **“Be strong! Fear Not! Behold your God! Vengeance will come, recompense of God! He will come and save you!”**

Furthermore, He declares: **“And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.”**

Because of the choice of Adam, God cursed the ground so that through death the ground would carry our curse for us. The earth is burning with the curse until the day of the final judgment. It has only trouble to offer mankind. The earth is the habitation of dragons, dreadful

and fearsome monsters. The world is full of evil of every kind and the devil steals away the Word of hope and regeneration and renewal.

But Christ has taken the curse. He bore our sin and the curse of sin in His own body. Our God took manhood into His Godhead and came to save us. He poured out His own blood into the ground and from His heart poured forth both water and blood to be poured out everlastingly through Baptism for our washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Behold our God! Vengeance has come! Recompense has been paid!

But behold His manner of vengeance!

**And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, **Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.****

**And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. (Luke 23:33-37)**

How much more plainly can our vengeance be contrasted to His? The silly song says, **“Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”** Oh how we want to imagine that we are different from those who took vengeance upon the Lord Jesus. But remember what He says about what we do to others, especially to the least of these His brethren! Even in the Church, do we truly behold our God, or do we look elsewhere? Do we come to the LORD’s table and direct others to His table to partake of His cup of the New Testament? Do we insist on the table being His table or do we in various ways make it our table, opening it through means other than the sanctification of Baptism? When we approach the Lord do we do so by our words of forgiveness or by His?

**And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.**

In the habitation of dragons the water of Baptism, the water of life, is dried up. But our God comes to flood the thirsty land with His water and blood of life. He comes to Baptize us into His Holy Communion of forgiveness and life. He comes to forgive and to restore. He comes to take our vengeance and to supply His recompense. He takes our sin and pays us with holiness and righteousness. He takes our hate and pours out His love. He takes our enmity and fills us with His peace. He takes our doubt and our fear and gives us His faith.

#### CONCLUSION

Truly the devil and all who serve him receive the LORD’s vengeance. The devil and the world mock the body of Christ, the communion of saints, but they are the ones who sink in the burning sand and try to live without the water of life. Should we seek vengeance upon such as these? Should we not rather behold the LORD our God who takes our vengeance and gives His peace? Should we not rather behold the LORD our God who comes with recompense and pays all of our debts for us and continues to pay to us the wages of His own merits? When we endure suffering and injustice and evil of every kind, does not the LORD’s recompense supply us with all

that we need? When we behold our God, even our brother, who was tortured for our transgressions, who was crucified for our condemnation, who died our death, who was buried in the ground with our curse, who rose again leaving our curse in the parched ground, when we behold Him, do we not find our hands strengthened for whatever we must do and our knees firmed up to hold us as we stand in the confidence of His grace, mercy, and peace? When we come to the place of gathering in His name and we kneel to confess our sins, does He not take our fears away and strengthen us to stand and come to His Table? When we approach His Table, does He not welcome us and feed us the bread the communion of His body and the cup of the communion of His blood? Does He not recompense us with the forgiveness and renewal that He purchased for us? Does He not confirm us with His own body and blood so that we may stand to go forth in His strength to do whatever He gives us to do in His name? Is this not infinitely better than any vengeance or recompense that we would choose or seek for ourselves? 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.