

Good Friday – April 10, 2020

Two phrases that have really stood out for me during this Lent are: **“God himself, will set me free from the hunter’s snare”** and **“By your own blood, Lord, you brought us back to God.”**

The absolute reality of these words is what we are remembering, reflecting and reverencing today as we lift up how Jesus, the divine Son of God, lovingly and in complete obedience to the Father’s will, offered himself up for our salvation through his suffering and death upon the cross.

Truly, **God himself, has set us free from the hunter’s snare, and by his own blood, the Lord has brought us back to God.**

If we who were created by God and are so blessed by God in many ways every day in his care for us, ever had any doubts about God’s love for us, St. Paul says: “this, above all, is proof of God’s love for us – that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

I can’t go into details here, but because sin causes death, only a blood sacrifice – a death on our behalf - can take away our sins, and God took on our humanity in Jesus so that he might be able to make this sacrifice to overcome our sins and death.

This is such a great mystery that God needed to prepare us to understand it. All that God did in delivering the Israelites from slavery and death in Egypt was a foreshadowing of what God has done for us through the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf.

Last night in our remembrance of Christ’s gift to us of the Eucharist to be a memorial of his death and resurrection and his continuing presence with us, we talked about how the Jewish celebration of **Passover** and its remembrance of God’s deliverance of them from Egypt in part through the sacrifice of a lamb and the use of its blood to mark their doorposts is the root of the Eucharist.

St. Melito of Sardis in an Easter homily wrote this:

“There was much proclaimed by the prophets about the mystery of the Passover: that mystery is Christ, and to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

For the sake of suffering humanity, he came down from heaven to earth, clothed himself in that humanity in the Virgin’s womb, and was born a man. Having then a body capable of suffering, he took the pain of fallen man upon himself; he triumphed over the diseases of soul and body that were its cause, and by his Spirit, which was incapable of dying, he dealt man’s destroyer, death, a fatal blow.

He was led forth like a lamb; he was slaughtered like a sheep. He ransomed us from our servitude to the world, freed us from our slavery to the devil, as he had freed Israel from the hand of Pharaoh.

He is the One who covered death with shame and cast the devil into mourning, **as** Moses cast Pharaoh into mourning. He is the One who smote sin and robbed iniquity of offspring, as Moses robbed the Egyptians of their offspring. He is the One who brought us out of slavery into freedom, out of darkness into light, out of death into new life, out of tyranny into an eternal Kingdom; who made us a new priesthood, a people chosen to be his own forever. He is the Passover that is our salvation.

It is he who endured every kind of suffering in all those who foreshadowed him. In Abel he was slain, in Isaac bound, in Jacob exiled, in Joseph sold, in Moses exposed to die. He was sacrificed in the Passover lamb, persecuted in David, dishonored in the prophets.

(In line with this thought, I would add that Jesus continues to suffer in our suffering and sacrifices made for others. I think of the truly poor and destitute in whom these days Christ is suffering the most during this world-wide outbreak of Covid-19 that God seems to be using to call the whole world back to Himself.)

St. Melito goes on: “It is he who was made man of the Virgin, he who was hung upon a tree, it is he who was buried in the earth, raised from the dead, and taken up to the heights of heaven.”

So for our sake and the sake of redeeming all people, Jesus himself suffered death by crucifixion, and suffered in those who came before him and continues to suffer in all who suffer after him. --- And the amazing thing is that he suffers all this in love and without resistance as we heard in today's first reading and in today's Gospel of his Passion. He did not cry other than to ask at his trial – "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong, but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

I encourage all of you, if you have not done so already, to place a crucifix in special place in your home where you and all can look at it today and reflect on this greatest act of God's love for us so that whenever and wherever you see an image of the cross you will be reminded of this love of God for you.

I close with these words of St. Peter Chrysologus that were in a meditation I read last week:

"If my divinity is something you cannot comprehend, then know me in my flesh. You see in me your body, your limbs, your organs, your bones, your blood. If you are afraid of my divinity, why do you not love me in your humanity? Do not be afraid. These nails do not pierce me with pain; they pierce me more deeply with love of you. These wounds do not draw groans from me; rather they draw you into my heart. The stretching-out of my body makes room for you in my heart; it does not increase my pain. Come then, back to God, and come to know God as a father. For see, I return good for evil, love for injuries, and for deep wounds a deeper love."

By your own blood Lord, you have brought us back to God. God himself has set us free from the hunter's snare.