

**Lent 2B (3/8/09 – The Suffering, Rejection, & Death of Christ – His Glory)**

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

**The Suffering, Rejection, and Death of Christ ARE His Glory** and **our** blessing – indeed, our adoption and salvation and life! Peter didn't want to hear about Jesus' suffering and rejection at the hands of the religious leaders of Israel – much less His death at the hands of the Romans. Even when Jesus pointed to His resurrection on the third day, Peter just had to say something ... **rebuke Him** [MK 8.32]. Mark doesn't record the words of Peter's rebuke in his Gospel – it would seem that to him (and the Holy Spirit here) **what** Peter said wasn't as important as the fact that it made him an instrument of satan ... a detractor of Christ and His work of salvation. And so, the Holy Spirit has Mark quickly move from the announcement of Peter's rebuke to Jesus' theological analysis of **just** what the rebuke actually meant. Like I said, our Lord's **Suffering, Rejection, and Death ARE His glory** – **not** because they are such great things for the Lord God Almighty to undergo ... but because of **what** Christ accomplished **through** them ... indeed, **in spite of** them: namely, the forgiveness of our sins ... our reconciliation with God ... and our eternal life. For **while we were still sinners** – as St. Paul reminds us in the *Epistle* [ROM 5.1-8]. **Those** are **the things of God** our Savior had in mind – even though Peter didn't – the things of God above everything else that show forth His divine love for us. **That** is why it is precisely in His suffering, rejection, and crucifixion that Christ – together with the Father – is glorified.

For Jesus is more than a John the Baptist ... more than an Elijah ... more than any mere prophet (no matter how faithful a proclaimer of God's Word in the midst of trial, tribulation, and persecution). Jesus is the Christ – that's what Peter had declared (by revelation of the Father and power of the Holy Spirit). Jesus is the Messiah ... the Anointed One – the Redeemer, Justifier, Reconciler. Indeed, He is precisely the One Who would lose His life – not only to save **it** ... but **ours** ... **us** ... as well. In sacrificing Himself as the Lamb without blemish – the Lamb God Himself provided (as we heard last week) – Christ has shown Himself as the One Who died not just for the righteous (for there is none righteous [ROM 3.10] apart from Christ Himself) ... not just for the good (for there is no one good but God alone [MK 10.18]) ... but **for us sinners** ... **for us** who were **enemies** of God by both our original sin and our actual sins ... **for us** who were **enemies** by both our sinfulness inherited at our conception and birth and our sinning against God and His holy, righteous commands ever since.

Jesus is the One Who delivered His soul – commended His Spirit – into the Father's hands ... and thereby gained the whole world of sinners ... including **you** and **me** ... back from our bondage to sin. There is nothing that a mere man – or woman ... or child – can give in return for his soul; but Christ is no mere Man ...

and so when He gives His life as ransom for the world, He saved not only His Own soul but **yours** and **mine** and **all mankind's** as well.

And Jesus was not ashamed ... even to make Himself our Brother – our Mediator, Advocate, and Savior. He even pleads for those who rejected and crucified Him, saying: ***Father, forgive them.*** Christ is not ashamed of us – no, quite the contrary – rather, He completely identifies with us ... by having become flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, and blood-Brother of our blood. Christ completely identifies with us – having stepped into the waters of the Jordan to take upon Himself the sins of the whole world ... so that as the Lamb of God He might bear and take away in His suffering and death the sins of the whole world. Christ completely identifies with us – that is why He was driven out into the wilderness to be tempted by the evil one ... even as we are tempted ... yet **He** without sin. Christ completely identifies with us – so that **we** might be completely identified **in Him** ... completely **re-identified in Him**. For by nature we are not only among the weak mentioned by Paul (and just like Peter), but also among the ungodly mentioned by Paul (and just like Peter).

So what about us? And what about Christ's Word to us, His modern-day disciples: ***If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it.*** [MK 8.34-35]? For we know that we do not confess Him as we ought ... nor deny ourselves as we ought ... much less follow Him as we ought – but, rather, tend more to deny Him by our sinful words and actions as we follow our own sinful desires above all else. Where do we stand, then?

To rightly understand our Lord's Word to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him, we should go back to our *Old Testament Lesson* – and there learn from Abraham what it is to take up **our** crosses and lose **our** lives ... and how it is that we take up our crosses and lose our lives, thus gaining them.

In the *Old Testament Lesson* we have God's offer to make a covenant with Abram ... soon to be Abraham [GEN 17.1-4]: ***I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless, that I may make My covenant between Me and you, and may multiply you greatly.*** So Abram/Abraham is to walk blamelessly before God. This at first would seem to be the condition necessary from Abraham's side before God will make His covenant with Abraham – *you do this, and I will do that*. On the surface it would seem to be in line with – and supportive of – decision theology. **But it's not!** First of all, note the little detail of timeframe – our text says that this happened ***When Abram was ninety-nine years old*** [17.1]. It was 24 years **earlier** that Abram set out from Haran – having heard and then obeyed the Word of the

Lord [12.1-4]. It was about 15 years **earlier** that Abram *believed the LORD and He [the LORD] counted it to him [Abram] as righteousness* [15.6]. What we have in our text is **not** really about Abraham **coming** to faith and coming into the covenant ... but about Abraham **continuing** in the faith.

Actually, what transpires here in GEN 17 is more akin to *Confession and Absolution* than anything else. *I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless, that I may make My covenant between Me and you, and may multiply you greatly.* OK, so Abraham should walk blamelessly before the LORD God Almighty – as should we. And what does Abraham do? What is it that Abraham does to walk before God, blameless? Our reading says: *Then Abraham fell on his face.* Abraham prostrated himself! He fell on his face in repentance and faith ... looking to his gracious God **to work in him** what he himself was – what **all** people are – **unable to do.**

And what is the word – the **good** word – he hears from the Lord in his face-down position of Lenten-like repentance? It is pure promise ... pure grace – holy absolution, if you will – pure Gospel: *Behold, My covenant IS with you, and you SHALL BE the father of a multitude of nations. No longer SHALL your name be called Abram, but your name SHALL BE Abraham, for I HAVE MADE you the father of a multitude of nations. I WILL make you exceedingly fruitful, and I WILL make you into nations, and kings SHALL come from you. And I WILL establish My covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.* [GEN 17.4-7] Notice particularly in this last part that God even establishes His covenant of providence, steadfastness, and forgiveness with Abraham's offspring – the offspring of the son of promise, Isaac, who is only about to be conceived ... and who will only be born the following year. All the offspring of Abraham – all who have righteousness accounted to them **not** by their own merit ... but by grace through faith in the One Who willingly lost His life on the Cross to gain the whole world – **we** ... are blessed recipients and beneficiaries of the covenant of our gracious God. It is **not** nearly so much about **our** actions – indeed, **all** we are able to do is fall on our faces, prostrate, before God ... owning up to our weakness and sin ... and in faith owning all the promises of God.

So it is with us ... with **you**, dear Christian. Denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Christ is nothing more, nor less, than recognizing your weakness – owning the fact that you are a sinner ... through and through. It means simply denying any righteousness in yourself ... confessing your sin – whether standing, kneeling, or prostrate before your Lord. It means owning the cross of your sin ... and the just wrath you deserve because of it – a cross that you are unable to bear. Don't try to save your life ... for you will lose it. Rather, lose it

for the sake of Christ ... lose it for the sake of Him and His working of the Gospel ... lose it **in** Christ ... and lose it in **His** saving work on the Cross! **Then** you will find yourself in the everlasting covenant of God's grace ... then you will have your soul and your life for eternal life!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]