

GOD IS PATIENT: HE SAVES BELIEVERS AS THEY WAIT IN THE FAITH

Hear again the Word of the Lord:

Christ also, once for sin He suffered, (the) Righteous Man for unrighteous ones, that you all may have been led alongside God, having been put to death certainly by flesh and having been made alive by spirit...¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This evening's Wednesday Advent readings declare to us God's patience and long-suffering for the benefit of His people. They are fitting to be heard anytime, but are especially relevant on this day wherein people are looking to behold signs, such as 12-12-12, as they watch for the end of the world, hope for good luck, and desire peace from any number of issues, people, governments, or things which are troubling them. After all, Noah could wait and work on the visible proclamation of the end of the time of repentance, the Ark, for 120 years before the animals and his family were sealed in. St. Peter could show how the faithful who died in the Promise of the Coming Messiah waited for thousands of years for Jesus' coming to lead them to heaven's open gates. Jesus could call the Twelve to wait in continued discipleship after thousands had left Him on account of the Good News of His impending death for sinners. In these texts we are free to learn that God is patient: He saves believers as they wait in the Faith.

If those teachings are all true, and they are, then God's people today can surely wait twelve days in this Ark of the New Covenant for the festivities of the

¹ 1 Peter 3:18.

Nativity to begin. If the waiting of the faithful shown in tonight's readings are all true, and they are, then you are free to wait for the end of the world which will remove from you any remnants of sin or unrepentant sinners. If the Words of God are all true, and they are, then you are free to wait, continually following the Word of our Lord, until it pleases Him to deliver each of us from our last enemy, death. That means that you are free in Christ who has conquered the devil, the world, and even death itself, to wait under God's patience until He brings all things to completion, just as He has promised in His Word, for God saves believers as they wait on Him to fulfill all His promises. Our Psalm for the day declares the cry of the faithful as they wait on His patience for sinners:

Cause to bring my soul out from prison, for I may be caused to give thanks to Your Name; righteous ones will be surrounding me, for You will deal bountifully with me.²

Now, without the header on that Psalm, which was likely added centuries after its composition, Who is the primary Speaker? (If you could see these notes, the capitalization of the question would give you a big clue...). As with all the Psalms, Christ, Whom you know is Jesus, is the speaker. Yes, David or others may have composed those words, yet Jesus declares that He is to be found in the Psalms, as well as the Prophets and Writings. So, in the 142nd Psalm, we who are watching for our final deliverance, behold Christ as the main speaker!

² Psalm 142:8.

Jesus, Who once was a prisoner, held captive on account of your sins, my sins, and the sins of the whole world for all time, was bound over into death in those sins. Hear Jesus say in the Psalm:

*Cause to give heed to My cry,
for I am brought very low;
Cause to deliver Me from My persecutors,
for they are stronger than Me!*³

You know the Passion narratives. Can you not hear an echo of that cry as Jesus cries out from the cross? Jesus the Christ is the One who cries out to the Father to free Him from those who persecuted Him in His humiliation, even as the Psalm leads.

The Father hears that cry, even of the faithful who are attached to Christ Jesus in the Faith. After a brief sleep of sin, the Father delivered Jesus, who died in the Faith while suffering under the burden of the sins of all people, as St. Peter's inspired hand records:

*Christ also, once for sin He suffered, (the) Righteous Man for unrighteous ones, that you all may have been led alongside God, having been put to death certainly by flesh and having been made alive by spirit, in which also to the spirits in prison He having gone, He preached to the ones having been formerly disobedient when God eagerly waited out, longsuffering, in (the) days of Noah ...*⁴

The Righteous Man, Jesus the Christ, died for those who were not right with the Father. The Father heard His cries for deliverance, and released Him from death. But He did so in the spirit only after Jesus had shed His blood as the final and

³ Psalm 142:7.

⁴ 1 Peter 3:18-19.

perfect atonement – covering over – for sin and sinners – for you. That means that you who believe Jesus’ words have the eternal life He promised, right now.

Then, returning to our text, as the Righteous Man Who was delivered by the Spirit from death’s dark prison, Jesus descended into the depths of Sheol. That was the place where all the dead had been held in God’s patience for the time of Christ. There, in the place of the dead, Jesus, no longer in a state of humiliation, but in the new, spiritual, Body, preached His victory. In His descent into that which is now called Hell, Jesus bound Satan by His Word and Deed, thereby preventing him from naming the sins of the faithful before the Face of the Father. In addition, Jesus bound over those who had been reserved for final judgment from the time of our first fathers – Noah’s era in particular is mentioned.

Then, after victory was declared in the Law which assures the eternal state of all who die outside the faith -- Jesus ascended from the place of the dead. In so doing, He lead forth those who had fallen asleep in the faith into the heaven which was then opened for them. From Hell, Christ Jesus led forth into the New Jerusalem above those spirits who had waited in the Faith for their deliverance. They are the righteous ones of whom the Psalm speaks, they who surround the Righteous Man as the Father deals bountifully with Him. Our text affirms those teachings, and leads us to more, as St. Peter declares:

Having gone, He preached to the ones having been formerly disobedient when God eagerly waited out, longsuffering in (the) days of Noah, as (the) Ark

*was continually being made ready, into which a few, these remain eight souls, have been saved through the water.*⁵

In a supernatural manner, in the spirit, Christ descended into what we now call Hell – even as we confess in the Creeds – and there preached the Law, as has been declared. He who cried out to the Father, in the Garden, on the cross -- that He might be delivered from the prison house of sin -- the sins of the whole world which covered Him -- once sins' debt had been paid by His blood, Jesus was raised from death.

Then, so that you might be ready for the Good News, St. Peter declares in the same phrase with all the Law talk, the salvation of Noah and his family, eight souls in all. That he turns his hearers' thoughts from Christ's preaching of the Law to the souls in Hell, to the reality of the Gospel in showing that He remembered faithful Noah that day of His descent, allows us to behold how God saved him – through the water and the Word. (Mentally grab this reality for 12-12-12: God saved Noah and His family through a baptism which drowned all the unrepentant sinners in the world. Through the Word of Promise of the Flood, God saved eight who had held to God's patient Word – even through 120 years of construction of an Ark far from any sea).

It is with those same means, though in a different manner, the Water and Word of the New Covenant, which is now the means of life that saves you who are the faithful since Christ came in the flesh. Behold the merciful simple means of Grace God uses to save you. Watch in the Faith as He leads you through the Flood of sin in the

⁵ *1 Peter 3:19b-20.*

Ark of the New Covenant, safe in the Nave of the Church. Here is your hope, as you return daily to the rich flood which washes away your sins. Here is your peace, in knowing that Jesus presents you clean before the Father. Here is where the Spirit is poured out, the One who gives life. Here with the Word of God, those who were destined from conception to the prison house of sin and death are freed to live forever, even now, with Christ.

You who are looking for signs of the end this 12-12-12, behold here the end of sin's eternal hold on you. Such a simple teaching, such simple means. "Too easy for salvation, not enough work on the part of sinners," some false preachers declare. Such was the reaction to Jesus' teaching long ago, when he spoke of life by the Spirit and human, fleshly, works having no avail before the Father. Jesus says to His followers tonight, faced with the proclamation of His chosen means of grace,

Do not also all of you will to go?

Do you wish to forsake God's chosen means of forgiveness, and life, and salvation to try to attain to a right relationship with the Father by your own thoughts, words, works, prayers, holy living, and so forth? Or, do you will to respond with St. Peter, even as you are beholding the Christ in simple Word tonight, watching for His coming?

Lord, to Whom shall we go? Sayings of life eternal You have, and we, having believed and having known, (declare) that You are the Holy One of God.⁶

⁶ John 6:69.

In the Faith of Christ, in God's patience, you are free to hold that last as your confession. God is patient: He saves you believers as you wait on Him in the Faith His promises to fulfill. You are free to watch for His coming in the hope you have from beholding the promises He has already fulfilled. And,

the peace which passes all understanding (will) guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Advent II, Wednesday

Psalm 14; Psalm 16; Psalm 142; Genesis 6:12–7:1; I Peter 3:18-20; John 6:63-69

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