

## **In the Name of Jesus** Agnus Dei

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

We are in a time of “forty.” There are a number of times in which we find this number scripturally significant. The rain fell on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights. Noah and his family were delivered from the wrath of God, by the grace of the God. Yahweh’s presence enveloped Mt. Sinai, and Moses stayed on the mountain for 40 days during which time he received the Law from God’s own Almighty Hand. After His baptism, Jesus fasted, alone in the wilderness, for 40 days before being tempted by the accuser.

Likewise, each year we too spend 40 days in remembrance, in preparation, in reflection about the Passion of our Lord. As was proclaimed here two weeks ago, these Stations of the Cross “assist the faithful hearer of the Word to make a small physical journey, a spiritual pilgrimage through visual images to the chief scenes of Christ’s Way of suffering unto death.”

Now particularly, at this time of Oculi, or “eyes,” it is fitting to reflect and look upon on these images. Today/tonight’s artwork and sobering journey take us to the sites of Jesus’ humiliation, crucifixion and death on the cross. But alas while these are scenes that bring us sadly to see our Savior stricken, smitten and afflicted; at the same time they show us His power, His glory and His victory.

The stripping of His garments in fact beautifully gilds Him as our High Priest revealing His full humanity as He is covered only in our sins. His outstretched arms on the tree are a symbol of His willing acceptance of the sin which he takes upon himself. And in His death, we regard His

hanging feet reaching toward the earth whereupon He crushed the head of the serpent.

We begin in the Gospel of Mark. In Mark's account of the events of that day, we hear that the chief priests, elders, scribes and the whole council had delivered Jesus to Pilate. Scripture tells us that Pilate was amazed by Jesus' silence when asked about the accusations of the chief priests. We find out that Pilate "perceived" that the chief priests were envious of Jesus and offered Jesus' release to the crowd, asking "what evil has he done?" But at the urging of the priests, the crowd declared that they wanted him crucified. On to the text ...

*... And they continued to distribute the garments of him, continually casting lot for them, what some may receive.*

It's safe to assume that these attendant soldiers were unaware of just what they were doing as they bickered amongst themselves and played games of chance, as was their custom. Psalm 22 was not likely in their minds as they fulfilled that prophecy to a "T." But do not take this verse for less than it is. Regard the artwork and its message. Consider not the soldiers, nor their dice. You are free to understand rather the garments of our King. You are free to understand the person of this Prophet. You are free to understand the meaning of the one High Priest.

Our High Priest isn't clothed in bejeweled vestry of intricately woven robes. Rather he is adorned in His own blood covering his body from the cruelty and the lashes. And atop his head isn't a turban plated with gold. Rather a crown of thorns mockingly and hard-pressed into his skull is His headdress. This is the Holy One who not only OFFERS the sacrifice as High

Priest but IS the sacrifice. Here we find the most profound fulfilling of prophecy and truest representation of the unending, covenantal love of God the Father displayed for sinners, for you!

Mark continues...

*It was the third hour, and they crucified him.*

This atoning sacrifice, that is, this “covering over” or “blood-covered” sacrifice, of course isn’t for the one making the sacrifice. To be sure, the holy Son of God, the very Lamb of God is offering this sacrifice once and for all, to redeem us from sin. Paul tells the Corinthians “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Similarly, in our Psalm we pleaded three times with the Lord to not be far off and to come to our aid. How beautifully has He heard those pleas over the millennia and how profoundly did He suffer and deliver us, sending His own Son to be the Sacrificial Lamb needed to bring us into the righteousness which neither you nor I merit nor deserve.

You hymn-singers just moments ago joined hymn-writer Gerhardt in describing this Lamb of God, saying He

*“Goes patient on, grows weak and faint,  
to slaughter led without complaint,  
that spotless life to offer,  
He bears the stripes, the wounds, the lies,  
the mockery, and yet replies,  
‘All this I gladly suffer.’”*

That suffering, that willingness to suffer, that gladness in suffering reveals not just the Uncomplaining Lamb of God’s love for you, but also

His obedience to the Father. Here you are free to behold not a timid, weak and helpless victim. To the contrary, here we see the bold, strong and willful Author of your salvation.

The Word of God repeatedly teaches us that any good sermon brings the hearer both Law and Gospel. On the one hand here we find the Law – our Savior suffering on the cross as a result of your sin and mine. On the other hand, well, of course, here we find more suffering driven into him on account of our sins. And for good measure, there's still another driven into His feet.

But for the Lamb of God, this suffering is also Good News. His state of exaltation is found on the cross. He is lifted up, for us, for you! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world HAS had mercy on us.

We plead that this would be so every time we receive His Body and Blood in this place. The Agnus Dei, that is, the “Lamb of God” is fittingly placed in the liturgy before the distribution of the Sacrament for it is there that we most visibly receive his grace and mercy. We sing,

*Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.*

We require his mercy so profoundly that we repeat the plea ...

*Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.*

This Lamb is neither meek nor powerless; He is a conqueror, so we implore

*Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world, grant us peace.*

That peace which passes all understanding is granted in the eating and drinking at His Table. How beautiful is the true, holy Body and the

Blood of which we are partakers in the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. For it is there that God uses His means as He wills to grant you His grace, mercy and life.

Tonight's Gospel text concludes ...

*But Jesus, having uttered his voice greatly, breathed out.*

In none of the Gospels do we see the common Greek word for "to die" when describing the moment of the death of Jesus. To be sure, to cry out was not a typical outcome of a crucifixion. During the suffering on the cross, the crucified was asphyxiated and grew weak, struggling with every breath.

But the Son of God cried out loudly! He "uttered His voice greatly." He gave His life of His own accord not in defeat but in victory. He ... breathed out. The High Priest finished His work. The sacrifice was made.

The blood of the Lamb of God Pure and Holy, of which we will sing shortly, needed to be shed, your sins necessitated His death. And yet, the Lamb went uncomplaining forth. Zephaniah was right when he proclaimed that every accusation has been removed. And you were right when you prophesied earlier along with brother Gerhardt,

*"Lord, when Your glory I shall see,  
And taste Your kingdom's pleasure,  
Your blood my royal robe shall be,  
My joy beyond all measure!  
When I appear before Your throne,  
Your righteousness shall be my crown,  
With these I need not hide me.  
And there, in garments richly wrought  
As Your own bride shall we be brought  
to stand in joy beside You."*

And so we give our sacrifices, such as they are, of Prayer, Praise and Thanksgiving.

- We Pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to keep us steadfast in the one, true Faith.
- We Praise the Father for His love that was so great that He was willing to sacrifice His Own Son.
- And we offer our Thanks for the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the World, and grants us peace.

**And now may the Peace that passes all understanding, which comes from the Lamb of God, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Psalm 27; Psalm 51; Psalm 22:14-21; Zephaniah 3:14-17; Mark 15:24-37

Lent III

March 11, 2015

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