

WATCHING IN HOPE FOR THE WORLD'S SIN-BEARER

Hear again the Word of the Lord as God calls us and empowers us to remain watching in hope for the world's sin-Bearer:

For Christ also, once-for-all, for sins suffered, (the) Righteous One for (the) unrighteous ones, that all of you He might have led to the God, being put to death on the one hand by flesh, on the other hand, being made alive by spirit.¹

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

This year, our Wednesday Advent readings are, and will be, proclaimed to call each of us to return to God's baptismal grace. That grace comes to each Christian through simple water and the Word. That was declared among us this evening with words attributed to St. Peter. It appears to be formed into just two long sentences in the original language. But, for the sake of the hearers, it will be divided into a few parts this evening. Peter's God-breathed letter, no matter how long his sentences, does serve today to bridge the Word of God in the Old Testament and Gospel readings.

This is what that means. In the first reading outside the Psalm, we heard of God's saving Noah, Ham, Shem and Japheth and their wives through a wooden ark which bore them over the waters of the sin-flood. In the Gospel reading, we heard of Jesus' call to make disciples through baptizing and teaching. In the midst of all of that, the center reading, is one in which we heard a theme-setting text. It looked back on God's rescue of the eight through the waters of the Great Flood. It gazed forward in hope to behold God's rescue of you through the water and Word of Holy Baptism: Hear that Word concerning both floods again:

Which also for you all (serves) as antitype now – Baptism saves – (not of flesh putting off filth, but of (a) good conscience pledge toward God), through (the) resurrection of Jesus Christ.²

The divine reality that serves as an antitype, from the context of the text, is Holy Baptism. God's saving Noah and the seven through the waters of the Flood is then rightly understood to be a biblical type which prefigures Christ's Sacrament of Holy

¹ John 1:5.

² 1 Peter 3:21.

Baptism. (You may recall that the relationship of an antitype to a type corresponds to an image struck to the die into which metal has been pressed. It may help you to think of pressed cookies taking on the image of the molds into which dough is pressed).

The Old Covenant era world-wide Flood serves to display the means God used to save a faithful few. He used cleansing waters to drown and wipe from the face of the earth multitudes of the unfaithful. The Flood's waters washed away all unrepentant sinners from the face of the earth.

That means that those whom He delivered through the waters were forever separated from those who had rejected God's grace. That was particularly true for the 120-year generation which came before the Deluge. Then, Noah's preaching of repentance was rejected by those witnessing his construction of the Ark. Thus the biblical type of the global sin- flood which rescued Noah and family from the sin rampant in the fallen world of his first 600 years serves then, to remind us of its antitype. That is the Word of God combined with the water He created, which rescues you from the sin rampant in our world in your lifetime. Hear again how today's central text from Word of the Lord began:

For Christ also, once-for-all, for sins suffered, (the) Righteous One for (the) unrighteous ones, that all of you He might have led to the God, being put to death on the one hand by flesh, on the other hand, being made alive by spirit.³

The Word of God declares the One Who suffered for you. It speaks of Him who was right with the Father, for all eternity. It declares that He suffered for all people, once. It teaches that those who were, and are, not right with the Father may be declared right in Him. He came into this fallen creation to lead sinners, you and me, and all people still living, to God. He did this for you and all mankind by means of His death in our flesh, and His resurrection to life in the spirit.

³ John 1:5.

Today's text declares the biblical truth of objective justification. That is a two-word way of saying that Jesus suffered and died to bring forgiveness of sins to all people from Adam to the last human conceived before Jesus returns triumphant on the clouds. God's objectively declaring right all people in the death and resurrection of Jesus makes fulfilling that which is often called the Great Commission very simple for us. That is, since Jesus did all that was, is, and ever shall be necessary for anyone to be declared right with the Father, to live in grace and eternal bliss, there is nothing left for humans to do. The truth that Jesus died for all, means that we are free to declare that as part of teaching all that He commanded His first disciples. Today's Epistle reading makes it very clear that Jesus death was even for those who lived and died before He came into this world, as it declares that Jesus, was put to death in the flesh and made alive in the spirit:

in which He also, having gone, He proclaimed to the spirits in prison, (who were) once having been disobedient, when God's long-suffering eagerly waited in (the) days of Noah, (who) had been building (a) wooden ark, into which (a) few, who remained eight souls, were having been brought safe through water.⁴

Jesus, in His resurrection from the dead, before He was shown alive to his still-mortal followers descended into the place of the dead. This we confess regularly through the recitation of the great ecumenical Creeds of Christendom. From this text, and its parallels, it becomes clear that Jesus went to the place where all the spirits of all the people who died before His death and resurrection waited. The ancient Israelites call this place Sheol.

In Jesus' descent, He proclaimed his victory to those who had died in the Faith. He bound, for the Last Day, those who had rejected the Promise of His all-availing sacrifice. He opened heaven for those who had held firmly to that which we call subjective justification. That means that they believed that the Promised Messiah

⁴ *1 Peter 3: 19-20.*

would die to save them as individuals, from sin, death, and hell. (Such “subjective justification,” you might express as, “Jesus died for me!”)

By now, you might be thinking back to the definition of objective justification— Jesus died for all, and comparing it to subjective justification, Jesus died for me. That is good! For, it is from the proclamation of God’s long-suffering for sinners of old and of now, that people hear of Jesus’ sacrifice to pay the price for the sins of all people, and by grace, through the Faith, begin to appropriate the reality that Jesus died for them! This makes the proclamation of the Good News so simple: “Since Jesus died for everyone, He certainly died for you!”

Everything that needs to be done for your salvation has been done by God. That is a fact that is external to you. It is not dependent upon you. Further, for human benefit, God willed to bring that truth to us who were conceived and born apart from Him. To do that, as He did in the type of Old, the Flood, He now does by saving through water. And, that, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, returns us to God’s chosen means to impart the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus to us, to you, the biblical truth:

Baptism... now continually saves all of you- (not of flesh putting off filth, but of (a) good conscience pledge toward God), through (the) resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁵

What does that mean for this Advent Season? It teaches that you are free, in God’s Baptismal attachment of you to the death and resurrection of Jesus, that you are liberated to daily return to His work in, for, to and through you. You are able, through His work in you, to daily drown your Old Adam with all his sins and evil desires. That will allow your New Adam, Christ-in-you, to rise up and live right before the Father in purity forever. Living in those truths, you are empowered to remain watching in hope for the world’s Sin-Bearer this Advent season.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

⁵ 1 Peter 3:21.

Advent I, Wednesday

Psalm 14; Psalm 16; Psalm 24; Genesis 7:7-13; I Peter 3:18-22; Matthew 28:16-20

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Pastor Michael H. Merchausie

Solī Deo Glōria