

My friends in Christ, consider Christ in His Passion. He Who is the Lamb without blemish, fairer than anyone who has ever lived or who ever will live, offered His fair face to be spat upon by violent sinners. He permitted those eyes which oversee the entire universe to be blindfolded by an overseer merely *pretending* at power and control. His shoulders and back, which carry the weight of the world, He bared willingly to those awful scourges. His head, which strikes terror in dominions and thrones, He submitted to the sharpness of the thorns. And He Who is Source and Summit of all dignity gave Himself up to be mocked and reviled and in the end nailed to the Cross, remaining always meek and mild, always gentle and humble of heart and full of peace – the Prince of Peace.

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb before the shearers, He kept silent and did not open His mouth in pain or in protest – but He *did* open His mouth and speak in quiet, loving prayer: “Father, forgive them.”

But He does not pray merely that they be forgiven; He says yet something more. It was not enough just to pray for them; He also wanted to make excuses for them, “Father, forgive them; *they know not what they do.*” They are great sinners, yes, but they have little judgment – therefore, “Father, forgive them.” They are nailing Me to the Cross, yes, but they do not know Who He is Whom they are nailing to the Cross, and if only they had known, then they never would have crucified the Lord of glory – therefore, “Father, forgive them.” They think that this is some lawbreaker – an impostor claiming to be God, luring their people away – but My face was hidden from them, and they do not recognize My glory – therefore, “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.”

Christ in His Passion.... And now consider Christ in His tomb. What a dreadful, horrifying thing it is that the Lord of Life is dead. The horror, manifested in a barren silence; the whole world, totally still as if keeping vigil because the King is asleep.

But really, the King only *appears* to be asleep; the Lord only *appears* to be trapped in the sleep of death – when in very truth He is ever as much hard at work *below, after* His death, as He was *above,*

*before* His death. Just as before His death it was His ministry and mission to proclaim the Gospel to all the living, so after His death it is His ministry and mission to proclaim the Gospel to all the dead.

The world shuddered when the Lord died; and now hell shudders *because* the Lord died. His first order of business is to go in search for our first parents as for a lost sheep. He much desires to visit (rather, to *rescue*) those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death. He wants to free from sorrow the captives – Adam and Eve. And He finds them; and He goes to them, bearing the Cross, the weapon with which He won the supreme and final victory; and He takes them by the hand; and He raises them up and He says to them, “Awake, O sleeper, and be raised from the dead, and I will bring you to a place of refreshment, light, and peace. I slept on the Cross, and a sword pierced My side for you – you who slept in Paradise and brought forth Eve from *your* side; *My* pierced side has healed the pain in *yours*; *My* sleep in death wakes you from *your* sleep in Hell; the blade that pierced *Me* on Golgotha has sheathed the blade that was turned against *you* in Eden. And so, awake; arise, and let us leave this place. For behold, I make all things new. And I have gone to prepare a place for you, there in My Father’s House, which has many mansions...the Kingdom of Heaven, which has been prepared for you from all eternity.”

This is not some made-up fantasy; this is very ancient tradition, one which expounds upon the truth of the Passion of the Christ – an ancient tradition which was preached again just a couple of years ago by Pope Francis, who reminds us that the Gospel was indeed proclaimed, yes, even to the dead. And we are mindful of the blessed truth that even though we might be tempted to think that some people are far beyond hope of hearing the beauty and the goodness and the truth of the Gospel (and death and the dead certainly do appear to be just about as hopeless as can be), yet we find the Lord proclaiming the Gospel even to the dead...and nothing is impossible for God. It is not impossible, therefore, that those who might appear to be *spiritually* dead can still be taught the beauty and the goodness and the truth of Jesus Christ, Lord of the living and the dead.

Christ in His Passion...Christ in His tomb.... And now consider *our* response to the call of Christ. He bids us follow; how do we respond? He has many who love the Kingdom...but so few who bear their cross. He has many who desire comfort...but so few who would endure trials. His companions are many who would rejoice with Him...but so few who would suffer with Him. And there are many who would gladly feast in the breaking of bread...but there are so few who willingly drink the chalice from which He drank. Many sing His praises...but only as long as they are never met with adversity. Many give Him blessings...but only as long as He gives them consolation.

Christ calls; how do we answer? Christ bids us follow; do we go His Way? Christ suffered and died to Self on the Cross; do we seek comfort and live only for self in our ease? Christ, in His tomb in the earth, proclaimed the Gospel to the dead; do we, in *our* "tomb" of the things of Earth, proclaim the Gospel to the *spiritually* dead? Do we ever even try to *live* the Gospel as a holy model for them? Do we ever even *whisper* the blessed and holy Name of Jesus?

Soon, we will venerate the cross, and because of COVID, we will do so simply from where we kneel in the pews, for a moment of silent prayer. May it be that our prayerful contemplation of Christ in His Passion and in His tomb and our holy and humble veneration of the cross would, for us, once more, be a clarion call and a profound inspiration to repent and believe in the Gospel; and may our humble reception of our crucified and risen Lord, soon to be given for us in the Eucharist, confirm our call and our commitment, come what may, to the Cross of Christ.