

“Have Mercy on Us, O Jesus”

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed (I Corinthians 5:7b)

Lamb of God, pure and holy, / Who on the cross didst suffer,
Ever patient and lowly, / Thyself to scorn didst offer.
All sins thou borest for us, / Else had despair reigned o’er us:
Have mercy on us, O Jesus, O Jesus.

Mercy is not a word we use every day. When I was kid, my brother and I would play game we called, “Mercy” in which we would lock fingers and then try to bend the opponent’s hand back until the knuckle-popping pain would result in one of us literally crying out for “Mercy.” In the course of normal, 21st Century life this dramatic word seems a bit archaic. However, in the Church, we use it all the time. In our liturgy we echo the cries of the blind men who begged Jesus for sight with the words, “Lord, have mercy on us” (Matthew 9; Luke 18). And just like the blind men who petitioned Jesus, we also seek healing. In the words of this repentant prayer we acknowledge that we are waiting for the One who is able to address our deepest need. And it is a need that can only be met by mercy, so we pray together: “Lord, have mercy on us.”

Today/Tonight, we have come to the right place to welcome Jesus, and we have come to the right place to receive His mercy, and today/tonight He gives it to His Church in a most remarkable and mysterious way. This is the day/night of our deliverance, when we begin journey with Jesus from His arrest in the garden, to Pilate’s judgment hall, then to the Place of the Skull, and through His cross and death, and finally to His glorious resurrection. And it all starts with a meal.

You have heard the words so often you can probably recite them from memory: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: ‘Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you.’” In just a few minutes we will once again approach the altar, and there we will receive the very Bread of heaven. Under this earthly bread we break and the cup we bless we will eat and drink the flesh and blood of Jesus. And when we do, we will follow His last will and testament where he told His Church to, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19). In this Sacrament, the Lamb of God has left us a memorial of His mercy. And it is a memorial that’s unlike any other.

If you visit the Lincoln Memorial in Washington you will be dwarfed by the impressive image of the great President, or if you go to the battlefields of Gettysburg you will find elaborate monuments to honor the sacrifices of the fallen soldiers, but all of these impressive markers are memorials to the dead. Jesus is the Lamb who once was slain but now is alive forever. And the memorial He instituted is not a monument, but a meal, and in this eating and drinking we actively recall, recite, and rejoice in His saving mercy. Yet, in our sinful disbelief we struggle to make sense of it all. “What good is it?” we ask. Wouldn’t it be better to have something we can use to make our lives more fulfilling or help us navigate the messes we’ve made? “But mercy!?! What good is that?” And that is one of our greatest problems. God sends us His gifts and we keep trying to exchange them for something we think we’d like better. Yet, there is nothing better than mercy.

You see mercy is a pardon from the punishment we deserve. And mercy is compassion instead of rebuke, and it is because of mercy that God opened up His heart to the world and sent the pure and holy Lamb of God to die in our place. The death of Jesus is mercy in action. And as a result of His

mercy, you and I do not receive the penalty we deserve. But instead, God's own Son took it upon Himself, and this substitutionary death of Jesus is at the heart of the New Covenant Meal, and it is the core of our faith, and it is the ultimate remembrance of God's mercy.

There had been other memorial meals. In fact, the night that Jesus was betrayed He had gathered in the Upper Room with His disciples to commemorate the exodus of God's people from Egyptian slavery. It was the Lord's Passover. In tonight's first reading, we heard how God had given elaborate instructions to His people for the preparation of this feast. The entrée was lamb, but not any ordinary lamb, it was to be a lamb without blemish or defect. And every time they ate that meal, the Israelites ate it in remembrance of the Lord and His mercy. It was a meal full of hope and promise, but hope and promise under the very threat of death. That first night in Egypt when God set His people free, it was in the midst of real danger as the angel of death was passing over; in every household in Egypt the firstborn of man and beast would die, except where the blood of the lamb marked the door. There, the plague of death passed over, and all inside were spared.

This was Israel's Passover. This was the Old Testament meal of deliverance. In that meal, God's people ate the flesh of the lamb that gave them life by dying in their place, and in this communion with the sacrifice, they were saved. And today/tonight, so are you.

You see, today's/tonight's Meal is also a communion. But instead of eating a lamb that will never live again, today/tonight we will commune in the living body of the living Lamb of God who has had mercy on us; Who intervened to rescue us from slavery to sin and death; Who was made a curse for us and died upon the cross; Who gave His body and shed His blood for the remission of our sins. Jesus – a Lamb without blemish or defect, Who had no iniquities of His own but took on Himself our sins to crush the ancient curse of death and end the Father's wrath against all sin and every sinner of all time. His body is the sin-offering. His blood is the sign and seal of our redemption. And when we eat the bread and drink the cup of this Supper, it is a communion in the body and blood the Lamb of God, and we are forgiven.

Today/Tonight, the cross has come to you. While you cannot go to Jesus, He has come to you and in this sacred memorial Meal, He does more than ask us to remember Him. He Himself actively recalls and gives us once again the fruits of His love and all the benefits of His saving death as He says to us: "Take, eat; this is My body, which was given for you." And those two little words "for you" bring the confidence and consolation that the world will never give. You see, God's love is no vague abstraction, or warm and fuzzy feeling. It is a concrete reality. Sin, death, and hell have been overcome, since Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us. And now you can know for certain that you are not alone in this world, that all the burdens and sorrows of life that threaten to overwhelm can never rob you of the love of God in Christ our Lord because today/tonight this Supper has your own name on it.

Mercy is what we need, and today/tonight mercy is exactly what the Lamb of God brings us. So today/tonight you can take heart. Death and destruction may loom, doubt and despair may lurk, but everything that troubles you and all that robs you of your joy is eclipsed today/tonight in this feast of love. Today/Tonight, sin is forgiven, death is defeated, hell is vanquished. But not only that...today/tonight at this altar, heaven and earth meet, and in this eating and drinking you have a foretaste of the feast to come in the mercy of Jesus. Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today/tonight, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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