

We followers of Christ live in an awkward, in-between time. We are redeemed, but not yet Glorified. What does this mean for us?

For one, it means that we have a very difficult time in apprehending the spiritual world, the spiritual realities that we profess. In this life, our faith is confirmed in us in subtle ways. We live by realities that are hard for us to grasp. So for now, it is difficult for us to live in this world in a manner that agrees with our profession.

Thus we have the gift of the Christian religion – all of the ceremonies and teachings and rites and writings that reveal the spiritual world to us so that we would be formed for the next world, instead of being formed by this world.

Of particular interest to us this night is the commemoration of the death of Christ. In a sense we always remember Christ's death, for we are recalled to it every time we partake of the Eucharist. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. But in being called to contemplate Christ's death regularly, we run the risk of taking it for granted.

Part of the problem is that crucifixion is too awful for us to dwell upon. Our minds recoil and suppress the horror of it. But the other part is that we are simply a distracted people. We are distracted by the hurriedness of life, we are distracted by the need to provide for our sustenance, we are distracted by other people. These distractions are not in themselves bad—we need to provide for our sustenance and for that of our families. But there are also plenty of modern distractions that are utterly frivolous. Think of the internet. Or fill in the blank with any of the bright lights and big city entertainments that are available to us at will.

And yet, God, revealed to us in the Word, the Word written and the Word enfleshed, is the basis of our being, the guide for our behavior, and the hope of our souls, and the Word alone is worthy of our utmost attentions.

This is why Christianity needs to be religious. We need a structure of practice and faith into which we can live with devotion. For our souls health, we need to order our lives by the spiritual realities that cannot be divorced from our being, from creation. Proper development of godliness in us, means that we structure our lives around the catholic community of the faithful, all of those saints who have gone before us, who before us, believed in the faith that finds its seed in the religion of the Jews, but is rooted, sprouted, and grafted into the vine of Christ. He is the vine. We are the branches. He that abideth in Christ, and Christ in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Christ ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Christ,

he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned (see John 15:5,6).

Our religion forces us this day to contemplate the sufferings of Christ. The Crucifixion, coupled with the Resurrection together, is the climax of existence. Upon this weekend, which celebrates the mysteries of the death and victory of Christ, hangs all of eternity. We might be tempted to think that our eternal life in the world to come would overshadow the events of Christ's death and resurrection, but this is not the case; for even in that life, the nail prints in Christ's hands and the spear wound in Christ's side will be a constant reminder to us that we live by the mercy, the love, the grace, of Christ alone. Our existence in that eternally blessed life will not forget the love which Christ extends to us from the cross.

Too often we pass over this reality. We proclaim boldly that, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." But, do we believe this? Do our hearts break at the sufferings of Christ? Because that is exactly what they need to do. Break our hearts, O God; break our hearts. May we understand in our minds, in our hearts, in our utmost being that it was my rebellion that mocked Christ, it was my pride that cracked the whip over His back and that smote the crown of thorns into His brow. It is my sin drove the nails into the hands of Christ, that pinned the feet of our Lord to the tree, and that pierced His side.

Whether we consciously admit it or not, we like to think that we aren't that bad. But do we dare contemplate what our sin did to the Lord Jesus Christ? We are that bad. Tonight, because of the wisdom of the Church, we must come face to face with who we are. Our eyes staring into the infinitely loving eyes of Christ as we pound those nails into the perfect, spotless Lamb of God. Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us. May we in some sense, even the slightest sense, comprehend the pain that we have caused to our Lord Jesus.

Tonight it is time to mourn the evil of our sin. It is time to mourn the sufferings of Christ. Tonight it is time to fall down at the foot of the cross and weep, to let our hearts break because He who knew no sin, became sin for us, so that we could be the righteousness of God.

But thanks be to God, that we are not left in some perpetual state of self-flagellation. The consequences of our sins are indeed more burdensome than we can bear. But they are not more burdensome than Christ can bear, for He has borne them for us. And He has borne them for us in love. And He conquered death. And He lives. He lives in the presence of the Father interceding for us. And He lives in us. And He lives through us. And He lives wherever the faithful go. But perhaps we ought to save that for Sunday.

Yes, may God always break our hearts with the dreadful reality of Christ death for us. But may we also remember that He gladly, out of His infinite and divine love for us, welcomed this suffering, because He knew that the glory to be had in the company of the redeemed throughout all ages was surpassingly worth it. And now we have fellowship with our Savior and Redeemer and God for evermore.

Yes, let us leave from here this night in mourning, but also in joy for in Christ, sorrow is turned to the most exquisite joy. God does not resent us; God does not regret what He did. He is forever for us.

Romans 8

31 If God be for us, who can be against us?

32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.