

Holy Week – Good Friday

Isaiah 53:2-3: “O Sacred Head, Wounded for Me!”

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In Nomine Iesu

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Almighty and everlasting God, You willed that Your Son should bear for us the pains of the cross, that You might remove from us the power of the adversary: Help us to remember and give thanks for our Lord’s Passion that we may obtain remission of sin and redemption from everlasting death; through the same, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (ELH p. 154)

In Christ Jesus, who looks upon us with eyes full of mercy and grace, dear fellow redeemed:

How often did Mary kiss the face of the Christ-Child? How often did she gently touch His rosy cheeks as He drifted in and out of sleep? As she gazed at Him, did she think to herself that no woman ever had such a precious Child as she did? It was true—there was never a Child so precious. This Child was God’s gift to the world. It was God the Father’s only Son, begotten of Him from eternity, now clothed in human flesh.

But not all looked upon the face of this Man with the love that Mary did. Many hated Him. They despised the words that came from His mouth. They turned away from His eyes so piercing, so true. The very sight of Him made them scowl. They wished to look upon Him no more. They wanted Him to die.

Their plotting caught the ear of Judas. Yes, he would be glad to betray Jesus to them at an opportune time—for a price. On Thursday evening, he saw his chance when Jesus went with the other disciples to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas came to the garden with the leaders of the Jews and a band of soldiers. He stepped up to Jesus and kissed His face with a kiss of betrayal.

Then Jesus was arrested and bound and brought before the high priest. There, He began to suffer both verbal and physical abuse. After being declared guilty and deserving of death, the officers and others present proceeded to *“spit in his face and [strike] him. And some slapped him, saying, ‘Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?’”* (Mt. 26:67-68). Then He was sent before Pontius Pilate, who ordered Him to be flogged. The Roman soldiers likewise struck Him in the face and drove a crown of thorns into His head.

Now that face, so precious to Mary and beloved by His followers, was hardly recognizable. Now it was swollen, bruised, and bleeding. The writer of our chief hymn tried to paint this picture in words: “O sacred Head, now wounded,” “scornfully surrounded With thorns,” “despised and gory,” “pale with anguish,” “from Thy cheeks has vanished Their color,” “From Thy red lips is banished The splendor” (ELH 334/335, vv. 1-3). Jesus was wretched to look upon.

Then He was led to Golgotha to be crucified. Swollen though they were, His eyes still looked compassionately at the thief who suffered nearby and at His mother Mary and John. But His

eyes also beheld with pain the jeering crowd below. What He saw was recorded long before this day in the 22nd Psalm. *"All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; 'He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!'... Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion"* (vv. 7-8, 12-13).

He should not have had to see and suffer these things. He had done no wrong. But the world had. All had sinned. All had turned their faces away from God and His Word. Even when God became Man, *"the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him"* (Jn. 1:10-11). It was as Isaiah had prophesied long before, *"He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not"* (53:2-3).

Men did not *"hide their faces"* from Him because He was so ugly or disfigured. *"Men hide their faces"* because they are ashamed of their sins. Our sin is the reason Jesus was abused. Our sin is the reason He was nailed to a cross. None of this would have happened if we had listened all along to God instead of the devil.

But God the Son was willing to endure this pain. He *"set his face to go to Jerusalem"* (Lk. 9:51) and suffer *"sore abuse and scorn,"* because He wanted to save you. He went to the cross to blot out your sins. He went there to atone for the sinful things you have looked at, the ungodly things you have listened to, and the unkind words you have spoken. He offered His sacred head—so full of compassion and grace—for yours, so full of selfishness and sin.

He is not angry that your sins caused Him such anguish. He does not look upon you disdainfully. He looks upon you with favor. He wants to bless you by the sight of His Sacraments before your eyes and the sound of His Gospel in your ears. He wants to bring you His forgiveness and life, so that your eyes are not filled with tears or your mouth with weeping, but that you find eternal joy and gladness in Him.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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