

Among those who came up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They went to Philip (who was from Bethsada in Galilee) and told him, “Sir, we want to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

Jesus answered them, “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Surely, I tell you, if a kernel of wheat doesn’t fall into the ground and die, it will be just one kernel. But if it dies, it produces much grain. Love your life and lose it, but hate your life in this world, and you will keep it for an everlasting life. If you serve Me, follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be. If you serve Me, the Father will honor you.

“I am deeply troubled now. But what should I say? Father, save me from what is going to happen? No! I came to suffer this now. Father, glorify Your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified My name and will glorify it again.”

The crowd, which stood there and heard it, said it had thundered. Others said, “An angel talked to Him.” Jesus explained: “That voice did not come for My benefit but for yours. Now this world is being judged. Now the ruler of this world will be thrown out. And once I have been lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to Me.” He said this to indicate how He was going to die.” - John 12:20-33

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There is a saying that is inscribed on the inside of some pulpits, written for the pastor to see every time he should step in to begin his sermon. The words read: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” These words come from St. John’s account of Palm Sunday. Some Greeks who were at the feast said this to Philip. They came to observe the feast of the Passover. They were not children of Israel, but they trusted in the God of Israel as the merciful Savior who delivered his people out of Egypt. So when they arrived in Jerusalem they sought after Jesus. This remains a great example of faith for generations of Christians. It is a constant reminder to every pastor of what he should preach: Sir, we want to see Jesus.

And yet, how do we see Jesus? How is he portrayed? Some would have portrayed him simply as a good moral teacher. Others might have portrayed him as a liberator from the Roman Empire. Today, Jesus is portrayed in similar ways. Some teach that if you have enough faith then you will be able to make all your troubles go away. Jesus becomes more of a facilitator of our own religious exercises while the teaching of repentance and forgiveness becomes less and less important. But we hear from Jesus how he wants to be portrayed. “The hour has come,” he says, “for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

Here our Lord affirms the desire of these Greeks to see him. Certainly, they would witness his glorification. But how would he be glorified? Our Lord continues:

The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Surely, I tell you, if a kernel of wheat doesn’t fall into the ground and die, it will be just one kernel. But if it dies, it produces much grain. (John 12:24)

This is how Jesus would be glorified. This is how God’s glory would be revealed. He would produce much grain by dying. In other words, he would gain salvation for all sinners by taking their place under God’s wrath. This is how Jesus portrayed himself to those who sought him. It is therefore how we proclaim him, just as St. Paul says, “We preach Christ crucified.” We don’t portray our Lord as some kind of pep-talker. We don’t see him as merely an optimistic fellow who overcomes his problems with a smile and a positive attitude. No, we see something quite different. We see our Lord heading toward death. We esteem him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. He is the Son of God, but we see the Man of Sorrows who is troubled in his soul.

Jesus was troubled when he rode into Jerusalem. He was troubled, because he knew why he was coming to the city. It was the week of the Passover, and our Lord knew that his hour had come. Now, he himself would be the Passover Lamb. He would be sacrificed. He would be forsaken by God as he would die the death of a sinner.

From the cross, Jesus would speak these words of Psalm 22, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” David wrote them almost a thousand years before Christ was born, but he wrote them by the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ. These words express our Lord’s anguish in his passion. They express the real reason the Son of God became a man. It is in our Lord’s trouble that the glory of God is revealed.

Therefore Jesus says, “Now My soul is troubled. But what should I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? No! I came to suffer this now. Father, glorify Your name.” This is how God’s name is glorified. It is glorified when his eternal Son gives his life up into death.

Jesus came into Jerusalem as the King promised by God through the prophet Zechariah, who says:

Be very happy, people of Zion! Shout aloud, people of Jerusalem. You see, your King will come to you. He is righteous and victorious, poor, and riding on a donkey, on a young burro, the colt of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

This King does not come in the pomp of the world. His divine majesty is hidden under his humiliation as he rides in lowliness on a donkey. But it is in this way that he would destroy the power of another ruler who has so much influence on this dying world.

Jesus calls the devil the ruler of this world. And as the hour of his death approaches, our Lord declares that this wicked tyrant is cast out. He is defeated. The devil is defeated because his power is taken away. And what is his power? It is sin – your sin! He uses your sin, your present sin, your future sins, and your past sins to try and destroy your faith in Christ. He tempts you into sin, and then when you have fallen in weakness, he holds that sin against you. He does this again and again until he has either driven you to despair, or he has made you completely cold toward God’s mercy.

This is the sin that Jesus’ disciples still feel within their nature. As we dwell among all the pressures of this world to conform to whatever is popular, we must also struggle against real sins, which the devil uses against us. Christians, with St. Paul, see within themselves wicked desires that they are too ashamed to tell anyone about. If you have a tender conscience, which is sensitive to sin and recognizes God’s wrath, then this is good. After all, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. But the devil tries to exploit this. When you sin in thought, word, or deed, the devil wants you to doubt God’s mercy. Perhaps the thought enters your minds like, “*No true Christian would say, or think, or feel that.*”

The devil also knows that we are naturally wired to defend ourselves. We naturally love our earthly lives. We naturally want to justify ourselves, brushing off our sins as if they aren’t that big of a deal. “*Other people do it too,*” we might think to ourselves, “*It can’t be that bad.*” But this only leads us into colder feelings toward God. It leads us to trust in the vain pleasures of this world instead of God’s mercy in Christ.

But Jesus teaches us not to rely on ourselves. He says, “If you love your life, then you will lose it, but if you hate your life in this world, then you will keep it for an everlasting life.” In other words, he who finds his comfort and security in the works of his own life will lose his life, but he who sees the corruption of his own life and mourns over his sins has the sure hope of eternal life in Christ. Jesus teaches us to repent and lament over our sins, but with the confidence of eternal life, which he so freely gives.

He continues: “Where I am there my servant will be also.” In other words, if Jesus had to battle against our sins and the devil’s attacks, certainly we will face them as well. If his soul was troubled by our sins, certainly our souls will be troubled by them as well. But this is where Christ gives us such great comfort. Even in his own distress, he declares his victory over the world’s sin and the devil’s attacks. He says, “Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out.”

The devil is cast out when the world is judged. And the world is judged when the Passover Lamb is sacrificed. The devil’s power is stripped away when Jesus takes away the sin of the world in his own dying body. Our King brings salvation and victory over the devil by shedding his own blood. This is because the judgment against our sins was carried out in God’s only begotten Son.

This is how God is glorified. Jesus prays to God on the night of his betrayal, “Father glorify me... with the glory which I had with you before the world existed.” This is the glory that the Father has always shared with the Son. It is the glory by which the Son is eternally begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, just as we confess in the Creed. And how is this glory revealed? How is it portrayed to us? It is revealed when Jesus is lifted up on the cross in order to draw all sinners to himself, just as he said to Nicodemus (John 3:14-15), “As Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.”

When you consider Christ suffering on the cross in bitter agony, remember what the Father said. “I have glorified My name, and I will glorify it again.” This is how the Father wants us to see his Son. See him in his suffering and dying. See him in his agony and bloody sweat. See him lifted up from the earth on the cursed cross. See him forsaken and smitten and afflicted by God. Yet remember those words of the Father. Through all this wrath and terror, the Father’s name is glorified. This means that he still loves the Son. He is well pleased with him. He is perfectly satisfied with his Son’s obedience. He is not ashamed of his Son’s suffering. This is why Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.

So when you see your sins, your own misery, your own sorrows, and your own bitter temptations, remember Jesus. Remember how he was glorified. Listen to his words. Don’t love your life. Don’t be enslaved to vain attempts to justify yourself or guarantee for yourself comfort in this world. Instead, rely on Christ, who alone gives eternal life. Let his words of grace, issuing forth from his cross, always draw you to him. He does not forsake you in your misery. His deep trouble and anguish of soul means peace for your troubled heart and conscience.

With those Greeks, we too desire to see Jesus. With the crowd, we too sing Hosanna, which means, “Save us now!” As we lament over our own sin, we draw strength from Jesus whose soul was troubled for our sake. We are honored by the Father as we serve his Son who gave his life to save us. This is the Jesus we seek, and he is the Jesus we find every time we gather around his Word. We find our Lord in his body and blood. We wish to see Jesus, and until we see him with our eyes, we begin to see him even now through faith. Trusting in his Word of promise, we have everything he came to give us: the forgiveness of our sins, righteousness, and eternal salvation. So may this be what we constantly seek.

Behold with faith God’s only Son. Come nigh and see what Love hath done
To save thee from damnation.
The Father cast on Him thy guilt. For thee His precious blood was spilt
To bless thee with salvation. Amen.