

Season of LENT

Prayers

Let us pray for the whole Christian Church, that our Lord God would defend her against all the assaults and temptations of the adversary and keep her perpetually on the true foundation, Jesus Christ:

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalms 119:9-16
(antiphon v. 10)
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Hebrews 5:1-10
Mark 10:(32-34) 35-45

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 430
Other Hymns – 435 (OT), 529 (E),
685 (G), 857 (G), 427, 560

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us. You have revealed Jesus Christ alone to be the way, the truth and the life. Protect Your Church from the temptation to compromise this message of salvation, as well as from the temptation to remain silent, that Your pure Word, passionately proclaimed and guided by the Holy Spirit, may be an occasion for all nations to worship and praise You in this life and in life eternal: Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us. You have called upon us to pray to You as dear children ask their dear Father. Hear us for the sake of Your Son, who fulfilled His vocation by His atoning death on the cross and life-giving resurrection. Bless and guide all who preach and all who hear, that Your Christians, in the varied vocations You have given them, may serve You by serving their neighbours: Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us. Strengthen the faith of all who study Your holy Word, that Your disciples may rejoice in the gift of the washing of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and in lives of repentance, faith and holiness before You: Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us. You have ordained the service of men and angels. Remember _____, our Prime Minister; _____, our Premier; and all who make, administer and judge our laws, that all who receive the sword as Your servants may bear it according to Your Word and for the safety and temporal blessing of those You have given them to serve: Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us. Have mercy upon all who call upon You in their time of need [especially Your servants _____]. Give us this day and every day our daily bread as well as the knowledge that You are the Giver of every good and perfect gift, that we may receive our daily bread with thanksgiving: Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us. No one may approach You except through Jesus Christ. Strengthen all who call upon You in Jesus' name. Where there are errors among those who profess to be Christians, purge them. Reform all occasions of compromise from the purity of Your Word. Deliver all who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death: Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us. Grant us peace with You because of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Help us to be and remain at peace with all who would be at peace with us. Enable all in the Body of Christ to bear with one another in love. Grant us true unity in that we all may have the mind of Christ. And grant us the peace that surpasses all understanding: Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Cont'd on next page...

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us. Grant that we would not return evil for evil, but that we may turn the other cheek, go the extra mile and do good to all. Bless our enemies, that they may become friends. Turn the hearts of all who would persecute us for Your name, that they may confess You with us: Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us. Your care for Your creation endures forever. Bless all godly vocations. Grant us good health. Provide gainful employment to all who are able to work, that they may provide for themselves and their families. Grant Your blessing on all who bring forth the bounty of Your creation for the good of others. Help us to be good stewards of all that You have given, that the abundance You give us may fulfill the prayers of those in need so that all may rejoice in Your good and gracious gifts; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our suffering Lord and Saviour. Amen.

The logo features a stylized blue cross with a white outline, positioned above the text. The text "LENTEN" and "SERMON" is written in a bold, black, serif font, separated by a vertical blue bar that aligns with the cross's center.

LENTEN SERMON

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT MARCH 21 2021

Sermon Text: Mark 10:35-45

'Someone's In My Seat'

Grace peace and mercy to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Few people will turn down the opportunity to be bumped from economy to first class when flying. Or when renting a car, you'd hardly complain if the rental lot said, 'Oh, we don't have the economy two-door compact you asked for, but we can give you – at the same economy price – an upgrade to a luxury four door model.' People generally like a chance at having the best, and we all like to think we know what the best is.

When it comes to our Gospel Reading today, it looks like the rest of Jesus' disciples began to be offended with James and John when they thought that Saint James and Saint John were angling to get the best spot next to Jesus, that they would end up getting an upgrade compared to the rest of them – some kind of special status . . . that they would get the best two seats next to Jesus – one brother on the left and the other brother on the right. Maybe even the seat that they themselves deserved to have, if only they had thought to ask Jesus first! And from the sounds of it, perhaps James and John were angling for some kind of special treatment; although at the time they didn't seem know what they were truly asking for. But Jesus knew!

And yes, we, too, often don't know what we are asking for when we ask. We make our requests of God in our prayers and we know that we, as children of God, are free and encouraged to ask in our daily bread for whatever we think we need in this life; in fact, knowing that God wants us to ask and that He promises to hear our prayers "certainly ought to encourage and kindle our hearts to pray with pleasure and delight," as Luther puts in in the Large Catechism. In the Lord's Prayer we likewise pray that God the Father's "will be done" . . . and in such a prayer,

which the disciples including James and John were taught, we acknowledge that our will and God's will might not be in perfect alignment and that "the good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayers" . . . to use the words from the Small Catechism. Keeping this in mind we seek to have a humble heart when we make our requests of God, trusting that He knows best what we need in this life.

Returning to James and John and their request of Jesus. By this point Jesus had already been teaching James and John and all the disciples about the true nature of humility, so you'd think these brothers wouldn't even be asking for what they were asking. Then again, we all know that "the spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak," so a request that brings imagined earthly fame and prestige to a couple of blue-collar fishermen may have certainly been tempting. To help get a better picture of what Jesus had already been teaching them along the way, let's think back then to a lesson He taught the disciples before James and John came with their request:

"One Sabbath, when [Jesus] went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, [the Pharisees] were watching Him carefully . . . Now [at the supper Jesus] told a parable to those who were invited, when He noticed how they chose the places of honour, saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honour, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Returning again to James and John and their request a question emerges: Might they have considered that there may already be a seating plan worked out for the day Jesus would come into His glory? A seating plan where they already had a seat prepared for them, just not the one they were asking for? Patience here would be the better part of valour. For if they were to be seated on Jesus' left and right, then they simply needed to wait to be called up to the higher place. If not, those seats would simply be for someone else and they would need to be 'ok' with that.

Another quirk to this whole situation seems to be a rather a short sighted view of what the glory of God truly is. Now both James and John had been present

with Peter at the Transfiguration when the three of them had witnessed Jesus “transfigured before them, [and saw with their own eyes how] His clothes [had become] radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them” and saw how Jesus’ “face shone like the sun.” Perhaps this is the kind of glory they were thinking of when they ask to sit at Jesus’ right hand and at His left hand. Perhaps they imagined that when they all finally arrived again in Jerusalem after the Transfiguration that Jesus would do publicly there as He had done privately on the Mount of Transfiguration. That, in the event that such should happen again, they – James and John – wanted to be right there flanking Jesus just as Moses and Elijah had done on the Mount of Transfiguration. In our Gospel Reading today Jesus, however, is quick to point out that the two brothers don’t really understand what they are asking for, and they don’t really understand what His glory would be when that day came.

What then is the true nature of the glory of God? How do we understand it as Christians? Remember when some Greeks on that first Holy Week came to the disciple Philip and asked to see Jesus? Jesus, alluding to His fast approaching crucifixion on Good Friday, responded, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” For Jesus, glory was not going to be a crown of laurel leaves; rather, His glory would be a crown of thorns. On the surface, society often paints a picture of glory as being all flash and dazzle accolades and applause; but glory is more complex and deeper than all that.

The first important part of understanding the glory of God is to get past the surface of it. Now, being good Jews and having an understanding of the Hebrew language, John and his brother James would have understood glory to have two parts – first, the Jews understood glory to have a kind of weight of authority to it that could not be avoided; and second, glory had a visual nature that would be inescapable. Here are a couple Old Testament examples to help illustrate this: In Exodus, chapter 40, when the glory of the Lord in the form of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night rested on the tabernacle tent of meeting; the children of Israel had to be patient because while it was there they couldn’t set out on their journey. They couldn’t pack up the tent of meeting while the glory of the Lord rested upon the tent, and they couldn’t avoid seeing it. The weight and presence of it made it impossible to move; and, like a sort of eternal paperweight, it held the tabernacle tent in place until it was moved. Later, once the temple was constructed in Jerusalem, a similar occurrence took place when the ark of the covenant, previously residing in the tabernacle tent, was placed in the Holy of Holies. “And when the priests came out of the Holy Place,” the writer of 1 Kings tells us, “a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand

to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord” . . . again visible, immovable, unavoidable, and full of meaning.

Yes, while on the one hand the world teaches us that glory is a kind of public fame and admiration gained by doing something impressive, or some public display of ability in sports or business or the arts; Jesus, however, teaches us that true praiseworthy and godly glory is found in humility and service to others. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, the cloud that filled the temple in Jerusalem when the temple was dedicated, certainly would have been impressive to look upon . . . but stripped of the stunning visuals, the more impressive part was what these events meant for the people, what they truly were – namely, examples of God being present with His people, moments and times where the Creator of heaven and earth – the Lord God Almighty – revealed Himself before the people to show them that He was with them.

And Jesus wasn't just a passing or temporary manifestation of the presence of God, a pillar of cloud by day or a pillar of fire by night. No, He was, and is and ever shall be, the singular and only incarnation of God. Jesus is God in the flesh . . . God in the flesh who came to serve His creation, to give His all, even His very life, in service of the whole world and everyone in it. Jesus had been trying to teach James and John and the other disciples this very thing. In fact, prior to James and John making their request Jesus had picked up on a discussion the disciples were having about who was the greatest amongst them, and said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

This brings us back around again to the Gospel reading for the day. Jesus knew that He would be truly coming into His glory when He was made to be last and least . . . that is, when He would truly be the servant of all. Public crucifixion was the last thing any Jewish man of the day wanted to have happen to him. The wood of that seat was the least and most unenviable seat in the land . . . the very opposite of a throne of gold or a high seat of power. Thousands of Jewish men had been crucified by the Romans during the Roman occupation of Israel; and crucifixion was meant to be a shameful punishment, intended to humiliate both the man who was crucified, but also their family, along with the people and the nation. It was an instrument of political control and evidence of the domination of foreign law over and against the Jewish laws of the people. And in the minds of the people crucifixion would be an affront to the perfect law of the Lord. It was a bloody and ugly affair.

And this is why Jesus says to James and John, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the bap-

tism with which I am baptized?” Jesus knows that the seat He is going to in His crucifixion was no bump from economy to first class, no upgrade on a car rental . . . no, this was indeed the lowest seat and the places to Jesus’ left and right were already determined to be taken by two criminals that would be crucified with Him. Those places did not belong to James and John. And they didn’t belong to any of the disciples; although, as Jesus said, “the cup” that He was about to drink they too would eventually drink. Saint James would taste from the cup of martyrdom when in the year 41 AD – some time after Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension – he was arrested during Passover in Jerusalem and beheaded by order of King Herod Agrippa. And his brother John – while not martyred – did suffer beatings and imprisonments “on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” . . . most notably, his imprisonment on the Isle of Patmos where he recorded the Book of Revelation.

But on the day of the crucifixion of our Lord, where were James and John? James had run off in fear, and the Scriptures do not tell us what he was doing or where he was seated in those hours. John did have a seat near to Jesus’ crucifixion, but not the one he had asked for. His seat was at the foot of the cross where he witnessed the events of Jesus’ death and was charged by Jesus as he hung from the cross to take care of His mother, the Virgin Mary.

No, it was not meant for James and John to die that day with Jesus. Instead, it was the will of God that they would live and bear witness to the events leading up to and swirling around Jesus’ crucifixion. In John’s case, to be an eye-witness to the death of Jesus, to see the true glory of God in that cross – the weight of its meaning and the very image of it; to be a witness to a different kind of transfiguration where Jesus in humble service to all mankind transfigured the brutal Roman wooden cross of crucifixion into the very immovable and exalted embodiment of love; to show, not just with His words, but with His very life-blood that whoever would be great among us must be our servant, and that whoever would be first among us must be slave of all. Speaking of Himself and foreshadowing His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciple that day and to you this day, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” At the cross God, in Christ Jesus, is permanently present with us, so much so that all time revolves around the hour of His death. Everything has lead to that moment, and life itself flows from it.

Now, under normal circumstances we don’t like to find someone in our seat when we expect to sit in it our self. We don’t like to be bumped out of our seat, or to have taken from us what we expect to receive. When this happens we see it as

unfair. And truth be told, mercy is unfair . . . in mercy you don't receive what you have earned or deserved, in mercy you receive something better. James and John didn't receive what they thought they earned or deserved. They didn't receive what they asked for. In Christ Jesus they received something far, far greater . . . they received mercy and an opportunity to share with thanksgiving the love of God to a world in need of mercy and forgiveness. Look now at the cross, and you will find Jesus in your seat; and now in His mercy He gives you His seat of honour in heaven.

When you reflect on your life and on the way your prayers have been answered, can you see the wisdom and will of God at work? Not every request is granted the way we ask because not every request we make is aligned with the will of God. If the one thief on the cross, seated next to Jesus, had had his spot taken away by James or John; he would not have had the opportunity to call out to Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Nor would he have had the chance, if James or John had taken his place, to have heard the sweet words of the Gospel from the lips of the dying Lord Jesus: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise." And these words would not then have been passed down to you . . . to hear with your ears of faith.

'Dear Lord, provide in us all hearts appreciative of the seat we have been given and a desire to serve others as You have served us and continue to serve us in Your perfect love and mercy. Amen.'