

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane
Luke 22:31-44, Ash Wednesday
February 13, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....Very early in the Christian Church our Christian forefathers established a season before Easter called the Lenten Season. Its purpose was to meditate upon the Passion of Christ, namely His suffering for our sins, and also this was a time of general fasting. As Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness, the Lenten season was eventually established at 40 days before Easter, not counting Sundays. Gregory II (who lived in the 700's) officially made Ash Wednesday the first day in Lent.

We call it "Ash" because it was a practice among Christians to have ashes rubbed upon their forehead in the sign of a cross. These ashes represented mourning over sin, repentance, and also served as a reminder that as we come from the dust we return to dust. This evening as we begin our Lenten season, let us devote all our heart and mind and soul to the serious meditation upon all the Son of God suffered for our sins, for our sake, and for our salvation. Tonight we will look at Jesus and His disciples in their journey to Gethsemane, and also the prayer of Jesus.

This conversation between Jesus and His disciples, especially Simon Peter, takes place Thursday evening, after Christ gave the first Holy Communion to His disciples. Judas had been seduced by this time and greed carries him away into the darkness of the night. Both Matthew and Mark tell us that after Christ and the disciples sang a hymn, they headed for the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is just east of the Jerusalem about a mile or two, and this Passover hymn was either from Psalms 115 to 118, or Psalm 136. They first cross the brook Kidron before ascending up. It is on this evening walk where Jesus now speaks personally with His disciples, for much will happen tonight. He calls Peter "Simon" because Peter would not be a rock that evening. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat." This expression, "sift you as wheat" means Satan desired to use violence and force to steal Peter's faith away. When wheat is first harvested, the wheat seed itself is first protected or surrounded by a covering which we call the chaff. By a process of winnowing, the harvester shakes and throws into the air this wheat with its chaff, so they are

separated. In like manner, Satan would use the threat of violence that evening, to steal away the wheat or faith of Peter's heart. Fearing men more than trusting in God, his heart would be emptied of faith. Denying his Lord three time, Peter would become empty chaff.

In His omniscience, Jesus knew all of this, yet Jesus had prayed Peter's faith would not fail, "and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." How can Jesus pray Peter wouldn't fall, yet also refer to Peter's future conversion? Here we must not confuse God's omniscience with His gracious will. Peter was not a robot doomed to deny Christ because Christ knew the future. It was not God's will that Peter deny Christ three times, but His earnest will was that Peter's "faith would not fail." There is a perfect wall of separation between God's omniscience, and gracious will for Peter and all men. Just as Judas was not doomed to betray Christ, but it was his own evil choice, so Peter was not doomed to deny Christ, but it was his own evil choice. God does not then predestinate anyone to evil, for "the Lord is not willing that any perish, but that all should come to repentance." On the side of omniscience then, God knew Peter would fall, yet on the side of grace, God's will was Peter would not fall. Also Peter himself had the Holy Spirit and therefore the strength NOT TO DENY Christ three times. On top of this Jesus really did earnestly pray that Peter would keep the faith. Whenever people do evil then, or we do evil, or Christians fall, God cannot be blamed and it is never His will, though God is still omniscient.

Likewise God knows our future too, and all the evil we will do, but His foreknowledge of all we do doesn't mean He will bless any of our sins. Rather it is the knowledge of His grace which we should use to fight against our own evil and do the good that God would. For these reasons we must always maintain two things in our Christian faith: FIRST, God is never the cause or Author of our evil. We are the miserable sinners, not Him. SECOND, we have the promise of the Spirit and salvation by the blood of Christ. Use that grace and forgiveness and Spirit to do the good God intends you to do, remembering "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you."

Sadly Peter's proud flesh was hurt by this sincere warning of Christ, hence, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death." So

said all the disciples. Here is the great sin of self-confidence, Peter's sin and our own. But God doesn't want us to think we can preserve our own faith by our own reason or strength. Just as we are saved by grace and not works, so we are upheld by grace and not works. Jesus says "Without Me ye can do nothing". Likewise we should remember God's warning to the proud Gentiles (the wild grafted in branches) who boasted against the Jews (the natural branches broken off). Paul writes, "Boast not against the (natural) branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." His grace alone covers our sinful boasting of works, but if we continue to boast God can take His grace away and break us off for our own unbelief. "Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed* lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." True faith in Christ continues in God's grace alone which preserves us, for we cannot preserve nor keep ourselves, for by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" and First Peter 1:5 says we are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Knowing this, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation."

Jesus now says something which might seem strange to us. Whereas before He sent His disciples out "without purse, and scrip, and shoes" and they lacked nothing, now He tells them to take a purse and scrip, even a sword. Why is that? A purse is a pouch for money, and a scrip was a beggar's bag for collecting donations. The meaning here is that Christ would soon withdraw His earthly presence by sight, and in His absence they would have to fend for themselves by faith alone without sight. The world would soon become quite hostile toward them. The same is true today. Jesus said "Marvel not brethren if the world hate you" and we know the world hated Jesus before us." God does not forbid us from using the sword to defend innocent life like wife and children, but God does forbid us using the sword to defend or advance the Gospel. So Jesus allows the sword for Peter here, but later the same night rebukes Peter who slices off the ear of Malchus with the sword.

Our last point this evening concerns Jesus praying alone and by Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." At this time the dark curtain of His suffering and death descend upon Him like a great stone crushing His soul. Even the name Gethsemane means "oil-press", for this is where the olives were pressed and crushed to produce olive oil. Yet here now in great anguish and the prospect of just what lies before Him, the winepress of God's wrath, He "sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." His agony so great, that in this compression and stress, blood, or perhaps a mixture of sweat and blood....seep out of His pores.

What exactly is it that Christ now faces? He faces the horror of death, which is absolutely foreign to the nature of Christ, which is life everlasting. Now life everlasting must die everlastingly, and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world. Jesus now will also taste death for all sinners, for all mankind, even suffer the damnation of all sinners for all eternity. Moreover, since Christ must overcome all the temptations of the devil for our sake, God allows Satan at this time to fully vex Christ and the devil hopes Christ will despair of the love of God, not fulfilling His mission. In the midst of it all however, Jesus does not despair, but He prays in faith as a child saying, "Father" and "if Thou be willing" and "nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." "And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him". Knowing the Father's will, after prayer Jesus rises up allowing Himself to be captured and crucified. Not for a moment did this Captain of our salvation turn away from the Father's will, for He was and still is and ever shall be, "the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world." "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." Truly His blood heals all sins, and His blood makes whole. "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Amen.