

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Last Sunday, we heard how Peter was led to confess Jesus as *“the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Matt. 16:16). But, although he had come to know who Jesus was, it had not yet been revealed to Peter what Jesus had come to do.

To be sure, Jesus had talked about binding the strong man and plundering his house (Matt. 12:29), speaking of His defeat of Satan; He had told the scribes and Pharisees about the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12:40), talking about His three-day sleep in the death and His resurrection; and stepping outside of Matthew's gospel, in John's gospel, there are a number of cloaked references to Jesus' death and resurrection: the destruction of the temple and its being raised back up (John 2:19), the lifting up of the Son of Man like the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14) and other “lifting up” references (e.g., John 8:28) that point us to the cross, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life and takes it back up (John 10:15, 17); but now that Peter and the disciples had passed the little test about who He was, Jesus was ready to spill the beans about why He had come.

Today's was the first of several passion predictions by Jesus. *“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”* Jesus would repeat it a bit later: *“The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day”* (Matt. 17:22-23). And again later: *“the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day”* (Matt. 20:18-19). And one more time only days before the dastardly deed: *“You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified”* (Matt. 26:2). Four times He told the disciples. Well, it makes sense ... how many times do we need to hear something before it sinks in?

The first one was not well received. Peter would not hear it. He wasn't ready to hear it. *“Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”* The second time, the disciples still *“were greatly distressed”* (Matt. 17:23), although no one challenged Jesus. And by the time the third prediction came along, and the fourth, there was no reaction from the disciples. Does that mean they believed it? I don't think so; not yet, not given their distress when that time finally arrived. Maybe, they just thought that Jesus talks kind of gloomy.

And surely it is gloomy talk, but Jesus did indeed mean it. It's the reason He came. It's the reason He took on human flesh. It's the reason He became mortal ... so that He could die ... die for sinners, die for the ungodly, die to save us from God's wrath, die to deliver wretched sinners from eternal death, die to declare the

unrighteous righteous by His blood, as St. Paul would later say: *“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost”* (1 Tim. 1:15).

Jesus did it because it was a Divine necessity. This first passion prediction differs from the others to come, for it shows the Divine necessity. In all the other predictions, Jesus tells us what is about to happen. *“The Son of Man is about to be delivered into ...,”* He *“will be delivered over ...,”* He *“will be delivered up”* But in today’s Gospel, Matthew reports that *“Jesus began to show his disciples that he MUST go to Jerusalem and suffer many things”* It was necessary for Jesus to go to the cross; it was necessary for Him to die as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). It was necessary because He was righteous and we are not ... because we are sinners and He was not.

Now that seems unjust ... that an innocent man should be put to death. But more is going on here, for even though He was righteous, without sin, He was reckoned guilty for us, bearing the weight of our sins upon His innocent body, and this so that we might be reckoned righteous before God. Again, as St. Paul says of Jesus, *“For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Cor. 5:21).

It was a Divine necessity. It had to be this way. God is just; He cannot abide sin; He can’t overlook it. Sin is law breaking, and it must be punished. Therefore, all mankind must be punished, for we are sinners; Scripture says, *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one”* (Rom. 3:10-12). This is our plight. We *“justly deserve [God’s] temporal and eternal punishment”* (LSB, Divine Service, Setting 3, p. 184).

But the LORD is also a *“God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, ... abounding in steadfast love”* (Neh. 9:17). He is a God who does not forsake us. These two Divine characteristics — being both just and gracious — would be in irreconcilable conflict were it not for Jesus, for in Jesus God could be both: just, punishing all mankind for their sin in the horrific death of His Son, and gracious, reckoning sinners righteous by the blood sacrifice of the same Son.

In Junior Catechesis, we have been doing a survey of the Bible, and we have made our way to the passion and death of Jesus ... the resurrection comes next. In order to visualize the physical suffering of Jesus, I showed the class a bit of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*. I began it with Jesus in the Garden, sweat falling off Him as drops of blood (Luke 22:44), pleading with the Father: *“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will”* (Matt. 26:39). Again, He prayed, *“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will*

be done” (Matt. 26:42). But it could not pass from Jesus, as Jesus knew very well, though here He was dealing with weak human flesh, as Jesus had told the disciples today. It was a Divine necessity.

I must say, I identify with Peter. In watching the scenes from the movie, I shudder at the visual. I can hardly watch what Jesus suffered for me. I want to say, as Peter did, “*Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.*” But that’s setting my mind also on “*the things of man,*” and not “*on the things of God.*” That’s minimizing Jesus’ sacrifice and my own sin that made it necessary. It’s a scandal all over again! No! It had to happen. Jesus had to drink this cup lest I get what I deserve. “Go away, Satan! Get out of my head!”

“Yes, Lord, and lead us to deny ourselves, to admit that salvation is not our doing, but Yours. Lead us to look not at ourselves more highly than we ought, but to look to Jesus lifted up. Lead us to lose our life in Christ, that in Him, we may find it. Lead us to realize that there will be crosses to bear in this life — suffering and tragedy and persecution and loss. Through all of this, let us not turn aside from You, O Lord, but follow You steadfastly to the end. Lead us to live our life according to our calling as Your disciples, in faith toward You and in service to our neighbors: loving, doing good, showing honor, welcoming, etc.” May this be our life. May this ever be our constant prayer. God grant it for the sake of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.