

## **Quinquagesima Sunday;**

### **Luke 18:31-43**

*Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*

#### **I. THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST**

1. This Gospel presents to us again the two thoughts of faith and love, both in that Christ says he must go up to Jerusalem and suffer crucifixion; and in that Christ serves and helps the blind man. By the first thought, that of faith, it is proved that the Scriptures are not

fulfilled except by Christ's sufferings; also that the Scriptures speak of no other theme than of Christ, and they treat only of Christ, who must fulfil the Scriptures by his death. But if his death must do this, then our death will add nothing to that end; for our death is a sinful and a cursed death. However, if our death be sin and cursed, which is the highest and severest suffering and misfortune, what can our suffering and death merit? And since our sufferings are nothing and are lost, what can our good works do, in view of the fact that suffering is always nobler and better than doing good works? Christ alone must be supreme here and faith must firmly lay hold of him.

2. But Christ spoke these words before he finished his passion, when on his way to go up to Jerusalem at the time of the Easter festivities, when the disciples least expected to witness his sufferings, and instead anticipated a joyful occasion at the Feast of the Passover. These words Christ spoke for the purpose that his disciples might later grow stronger in their faith, when they recalled that he had before told them, that he had voluntarily offered himself as a sacrifice, and that he was not crucified by the power or strategy of his enemies, the Jews. Long before Isaiah also had prophesied that Christ would voluntarily and cheerfully give himself as a sacrifice, Is 53, 3-7; and the angel also on Easter morning, Lk 24,6, admonishes the women to call to mind what he here utters, in order that they might be assured and the firmer believe how he suffered thus willingly in our behalf.

3. And this is the true foundation, thoroughly to know Christ's passion, when we not only understand and lay hold of Christ's sufferings, but also of his heart and will in those sufferings, for whoever views his sufferings in a way that they do not see his will and heart in them, must be more terrified before them than they are made to rejoice on account of them. But if one sees Christ's will and heart in his passion, they cause true comfort, assurance and pleasure in Christ. Therefore Ps 40, 7-8 also praises this will of God and of Christ: "In the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O, my God." The Epistle to the Hebrews says on this point: "By which will we have been sanctified;" Heb 10, 10; it does not say: Through the suffering and blood of Christ, which is also true, but through the will of God and of Christ, that they both were of one will, to sanctify us through the blood of Christ. This will to suffer he shows here in this Gospel when he first announced that he would go up to Jerusalem and allow them to crucify him; as if he had said, look into my heart and see that I do all willingly, freely and cheerfully, in order that it may not terrify nor shock you when you shall now soon see it, and you think I do it reluctantly, I must do it, I am forsaken, and the power of the Jews force me to it.

4. *"But the disciples understood none of these things," says Christ, "And this saying was hid from them."* That is as much as to say: Reason, flesh and blood, cannot understand it

nor grasp that the Scriptures should say how the Son of man must be crucified; much less does reason understand that this is Christ's will and he does it cheerfully; for it does not believe it is necessary for him to suffer for us, it will deal directly with God through its own good works. But God must reveal it in their hearts by his Spirit more than is proclaimed by words into their ears; yea, even those to whom the Spirit reveals it in their hearts believe it with difficulty and must struggle with it. Such a great and wonderful thing it is that the Son of man died the death of the cross willingly and cheerfully to fulfil the Scriptures, that is, for our welfare; it is a mystery and it remains a mystery.

5. From this it now follows how foolish they act who teach that people should patiently bear their sufferings and death in order to atone for their sins and obtain grace; and especially those who comfort such, who should be put out of the way by the civil law and the sentence of death, or who are to die in other ways; and pretend that if they suffer willingly all their sins will consequently be forgiven them. Such persons only mislead the people for they bury out of sight Christ and his death upon whom our comfort is founded, and bring the people to a false confidence in their own suffering and death. This is the worst of all things a man can experience at the end of his life, and by it he is led direct into perdition. But you learn and say: Whose death! Whose patience! My death is nothing; I will not have it nor hear of it for my consolation. Christ's suffering and death are my consolation, upon it I rely for the forgiveness of my sins; but my own death I will suffer, to the praise and honor of my God, freely and gratuitously, and for the advantage and profit of my neighbor, and in no way whatever depend upon it to avail anything in my own behalf before God.

6. It is indeed one thing to die boldly and fearlessly, or to suffer death patiently, or to bear other pain willingly; and another thing to atone for sin by such death and sufferings, and thus obtain grace from God. The first the heathen have done, and many reckless villains and rough people still do; but the other is a poisonous addition, devised by Satan, like all other lies, by which he founds our trust and consolation upon our own doings, and works, against which we are to guard. For as firmly as I should resist one, who teaches me to enter a monastery, when I wish to be saved; so firmly should I also oppose any who would in my last hour point me to my own death and suffering for consolation and hope, as if they would help to wash away my sins. For both deny God and his Christ, blaspheme his grace and pervert his Gospel. They, however, do much better who hold a crucifix before the dying and admonish them of Christ's death and sufferings.

7. I must relate an example and experience that is in point here and is not to be despised. There was once a good hermit, reared in this faith of human merit, who was called upon to comfort a man of prominence upon his death bed, and he approached the sick man

dauntlessly and consoled him thus: My dear friend, only suffer death patiently and willingly and I will pledge you my soul you will be a child of eternal life. Well, he promised him he would do so, and he passed away by death with this comfort. But three days later the hermit himself became sick unto death, when the true teacher, Rev. Reuling, came and opened his eyes so that he saw what he had done and taught, and he lay until he died and lamented that he had given such counsel and consolation: O, woe is me, what have I advised! Frivolous people laughed at him that he failed to do as he had taught others to do; he offered another the pledge of his own soul that he might die in peace and he himself now sinks in despair not only before death, but also at the advice he so confidently had given and now so publicly rebuked and recalled. But God surely said to him that which is written in Lk 4, 23: "*Physician, heal thyself;*" and another passage, Lk 12,;21; "So is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God." For here surely the blind led the blind and both fell into the ditch, and both were condemned.

Lk 6, 39.

The first, because he died trusting in his own patient suffering and death, the other, because he despaired of God's grace and had not acknowledged it, and besides he also thought, had he not committed sin, he would have departed this life saved; and in both Christ remained unknown and was denied. On this point some books are misleading, in which the sayings also of St. Augustine and others are sounded forth, how death is only a door to life and a medicine against sin; for they do not see that these words are to be understood as referring to Christ's death and sufferings. But simple and plain as this example is, it teaches us in a masterly manner how no work, no human suffering, no death can help us or stand before God. For one cannot indeed deny here that the first did the highest work, namely, suffered death with patience, in which free will did its best; and yet he was lost as the other who confessed and clearly proved by his despair. And whoever will not believe these two examples must find it out by experience for himself.

8. The above is said concerning faith in the sufferings of Christ. As he now offered himself for us, we should also follow the same example of love, and offer ourselves for the welfare of our neighbor, with all we have. We have spoken sufficiently on other occasions that Christ is to be preached in these two ways; but it is talk that no one desires to understand; the Word is hid from them; for "*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.*" 1 Cor 2, 14.

## II. THE FAITH AND LOVE OF THE BLIND MAN

9. The second part of our Gospel treats of the blind man, in which we see beautifully and clearly illustrated both the love in Christ to the blind man and the faith of the blind man in Christ. At present we will briefly consider the faith of the blind man.

10. First, he hears that Christ was passing by, he had also heard of him before, that Jesus of Nazareth was a kind man, and that he helps every one who only calls upon him. His faith and confidence in Christ grew out of his hearing; so he did not doubt but that Christ would also help him. But such faith in his heart he would not have been able to possess had he not heard and known of Christ; for faith does not come except by hearing.

11. Secondly, he firmly believes and doubts not but that it was true what he heard of Christ, as the following proves. Although he does not yet see nor know Christ, and although he at once knew him, yet he is not able to see or know whether Christ had a heart and will to help him; but he immediately believed, when he heard of him; upon such a noise and report he founded his confidence, and therefore he did not make a mistake.

12. Thirdly, in harmony with his faith, he calls on Christ and prays, as St. Paul in Rom 10, 13- 14 wrote: *"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed."* Also, *"Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

13. Fourthly, he also freely confesses Christ and fears no one; his need constrains him to the point that he inquires for no one else. For it is the nature of true faith to confess Christ to be the only one who can and will help, while others are ashamed and afraid to do this before the world.

14. Fifthly, he struggles not only with his conscience, which doubtless moves him to think he is not worthy of such favor, but he also struggles with those who threatened him and urged him to keep quiet. They wished thereby to terrify his conscience and make him bashful, so that he should see his own unworthiness, and then despair. For wherever faith begins, there begin also war and conflict.

15. Sixthly, the blind man stands firm, presses through all obstacles and triumphs, he would not let the whole world sever him from his confidence, and not even his own conscience to do it. Therefore he obtained the answer of his prayer and received Christ, so that Christ stood and commanded him to be brought unto him, and he offered to do for him whatever he wished. So it goes with all who hold firmly only to the Word of God, close their eyes and ears against the devil, the world and themselves, and act just as if they and God were the only ones in heaven and on earth.

16. Seventhly he follows Christ, that is he enters upon the road of love and of the cross, where Christ is walking, does righteous works, and is of a good character and calling, refrains from going about with foolish works as work-righteous persons do.

17. Eighthly, he thanks and praises God, and offers a true sacrifice that is pleasing to God, Ps 50, 23: *"Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his way aright will I show the salvation of God."*

18. Ninthly, he was the occasion that many others praised God, in that they saw what he did, for every Christian is helpful and a blessing to everybody, and besides he praises and honors God upon earth.

19. Finally, we see here how Christ encourages us both by his works and words. In the first place by his works, in that he sympathizes so strongly with the blind man and makes it clear, how pleasing faith is to him, so that Christ is at once absorbed with interest in the man, stops and does what the blind man desires in his faith. In the second place, that Christ praises his faith in words, and says: "Thy faith hath made thee whole;" he casts the honor of the miracle from himself and attributes it to the faith of the blind man. The summary is: to faith is vouchsafed what it asks, and it is moreover our great honor before God.

20. This blind man represents the spiritually blind, the state of every man born of Adam, who neither sees nor knows the kingdom of God; but it is of grace that he feels and knows his blindness and would gladly be delivered from it. They are saintly sinners who feel their faults and sigh for grace. But he sits by the wayside and begs, that is, he sits among the teachers of the law and desires help; but it is begging, with works he must appear blue and help himself. The people pass him by and let him sit, that is the people of the law make a great noise and are heard among the teachers of good works, they go before Christ and Christ follows them. But when he heard Christ, that is, when a heart hears the Gospel of faith, it calls and cries, and has no rest until it comes to Christ. Those, however, who would silence and scold him are the teachers of works, who wish to quiet and suppress the doctrine and cry of faith; but they stir the heart the more. For the nature of the Gospel is, the more it is restrained the more progress it makes. Afterwards he received his sight, all his work and life are nothing but the praise and honor of God, and he follows Christ with joy, so that the whole world wonders and is thereby made better.

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