

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

Our Lord is on his way to the cross. He will soon be lifted up from the earth and forsaken by his Father in order to make atonement for his rebellious children. And on his way there, he catches a glimpse of Jerusalem and he weeps for the futility, not because he must pay for the sins of the world, not for the horrors that are before him, but because so many refuse the benefit of what he does and insist instead on their own way. Jerusalem of all places should have known better. They had the Holy Scriptures. They had the temple. They had eyewitnesses galore of the divinity of Jesus Christ and the truth of his teaching. They knew that he was sent from God But they would not listen. It was too inconvenient. They loved pleasure and the status quo. They thought they could get away with it, that there would be a chance to repent if they needed to. They mistook God's patience for weakness and indulgence. In the city of peace, they did not know what makes for peace. The city of peace refused the prince of peace. This because they did not know the time of their visitation.

They sat down to eat as though nothing were wrong. They rose up to play as though their pleasure was all that mattered and they had all the time in the world. They murdered Lord Christ because they hated what was good and preferred darkness to light. But they pretended it was a lark. Then they laid him in the ground and tried to forget. They worked hard at ignoring what followed, insisting that the guards were drunk. At last, the Roman general Titus laid siege to them and showed them where self-worship leads and what cruelty is.

All of it was easily avoided. It was unnecessary. They simply could have believed in Jesus. They could have trusted in him. They could have embraced the heritage of the prophets. The repentant thief did. Mary Magdalene did. Even Nicodemus and Zacchaeus and Jesus' own brothers came around. They all accepted the law's accusations and the futility of their efforts at finding happiness by sin. They repented and believed, and therein they found relief, joy, and fulfillment in Christ, and they knew peace. This requires no great sacrifice or effort, no horrific loss. The things that we are called to leave behind do not lead to peace.

What do you lose if you refrain from sin? The thrill of thinking you have pulled one over the eyes of the Lord? The immediate pleasure that is fleeting? And what do you lose, if you do not commit adultery or engage in self-abuse or sick fantasies spurned by digital images? The shame, the dysfunction, the loss of masculinity and purpose.

The devil is more cunning than any beast of the field and any human that walks the earth. He knows how to sell. He told Eve that eating the forbidden fruit would make her like God. She would know good and evil. Did it work? Of course it did not work because he is a liar and the father of lies. It did not lead to happiness or fulfillment or knowledge in the way that knowledge ought to actually be measured. What it led to was hiding in the garden with fig leaves surrounded by mosquitoes and predators, vulnerable, even a husband that she could no longer trust.

But God visited her there and she received him unlike Jerusalem. And she was restored by the promise, returned to God's fellowship, made an heir to heaven and kin to God himself. So don't be like Jerusalem, be like Eve. Now is the hour of visitation. You have sinned, but it is not too late. Christ comes today with healing. The liturgy bids us to lift up our hearts, to dismiss earthly concerns and thoughts. Because Christ himself comes to us. He is the peace that passes all understanding and he is here for us in his crucified and risen body and blood. Do you not know that he himself makes for peace?

That is why the pastor holds the body and blood before us just before we eat and drink it for the forgiveness of our sins and he says, "The peace of the Lord be with you always." And we say, "Amen, yes, yes, it shall be so." So can we pay attention? For those few moments, can we lift up our hearts? Can we banish wicked daydreams and earthly concerns for just a few minutes? With the help of God, we can. God forbid that we do not. God forbid that we take this sacrament and its benefits for granted, that we treat it in any way irreverent or common or less than essential. God forbid that we repeat the mistakes of Jerusalem, which is an example for us. For what happens here today is no less of a miracle than God walking in the garden seeking to restore Adam and Eve.

This is no less than our Lord Christ himself gazing over Jerusalem ready to lay down his life. He is actually here in his risen body and blood. He makes himself to be food for repentant sinners. He puts his immortal body into your mortal body and joins you to himself.

I do not think it is sufficient to describe our doctrine of the Lord's Supper as the real presence. I know that many of us have been taught this. The problem with that language is that people who do not believe that Jesus is bodily present believe that he is really present because they believe in spiritual things. So spiritual presence is real presence. But we confess that there is more than a spiritual presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion.

We confess that he is bodily present for us, that the risen Jesus Christ comes to us according to his institution and promise in order to join his body to our bodies. So that what he has done in his body would be done unto us and for us in body and soul. We need more than spiritual forgiveness because we are more than spiritual beings and we are going to face more than spiritual death. So he prepares us for this by giving us his body and his blood to eat and to drink, to join us to him, to restore us to his image, to strengthen our faith so that we would face what we must, unlike Jerusalem, but instead like Eve, like Mary, like Joseph, like all of the saints who have gone before us.

Because he, in his risen body, is the antidote to what ails us, to death, to sin, and to the devil. He gives himself as something far greater than pods meant for pigs. He gives himself so that you would be moved beyond the need to look after yourself, to amuse yourself, to better yourself. He is not here for your pleasure in the way that men count pleasure. He is here for your good, temporal and eternal. He is here for your humanity, to make you a man or a woman after his own heart, to fulfill you and to give you purpose and meaning. This is the hour of his visitation. Lift up your hearts, give thanks, trust in Christ. He comes in and for and with peace.

✠ In Jesus' name. ✠