

Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent March 16, 2025 jj

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Sometimes even the smallest, most insignificant words can carry the most weight. That's especially true when Jesus speaks those words and they're recorded in Scripture. Some Pharisees had come to Jesus to warn Him that Herod was seeking His life. We're never told why they came to tell Jesus these things, but whatever the reason, it only matters to see how Jesus answered them. He said: "Go tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish [or perfect] my course.'

"Nevertheless," then says Jesus, "I must" continue my journey onward to Jerusalem - a journey whose end would spell a hideous, horrific death by whipping, scourging and crucifixion. This little word, "must," means that ultimately even King Herod, with all his scary power and might, would not be able to turn Jesus away from His chosen path. Even Jesus' own devoted followers - who cringed with fright at the very thought of what Jesus had told them was about to happen - would not be able to deter or sway Him, just think of Peter who heard Jesus rebuke Satan who was standing behind him as it were. And, as you may recall from last week's Gospel lesson, not even forty days of starvation in the wilderness followed by more of Satan's trickery and wiles, could get in the way of what Jesus knew He "must" do.

Jesus alone is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And this Lamb cannot be sacrificed just anywhere. It was necessary that He travel up to Jerusalem to present Himself for this sacrifice. It was necessary, and so He had no choice but to continue on toward that ancient, notorious city, the city of sacrifice and worship - the city that "kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her" by God. This journey is a Divine necessity for Jesus, and the reason He gives? "It

cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem." It was necessary. And because it was necessary, it all had to come to pass exactly as it had been written about Him in Holy Scripture!

Remember that word, "must," dear friends. Contemplate the depth of its meaning, and meditate on it throughout this coming week - for as hard as it might seem, this one little word tells the entire story of our relationship with God. It speaks of who we are, what we've done, and of course, what we've failed to do. It tells of God's love and compassion even in the face of our dismal failures - and it directs our gaze to the amazingly high price Jesus willingly and gladly paid on the cross to redeem us from our sinful condition. To be sure, all of salvation history is bound up quite simply in this tiny, divinely-inspired word "must."

Just consider for a moment how easy it is for us to abuse and twist the meaning of this word on account of our own sin. You children, whatever your age, doesn't it aggravate you to think that God wants you to honor and obey your father and mother? When they speak, you must listen to it as though God Himself is speaking! But no matter how much it goes against what you want, even when you know that sometimes they sin and misuse their authority to exasperate you, the truth of the matter is that you have no other option! You must obey because God demands it in His Law - and because a Godly punishment awaits you if you refuse to do it.

You wives, how often have you failed to fully comprehend what it means when the Scriptures speak of how you must submit yourself to your husband? You're tempted to condemn those Bible verses as obsolete that refer to a woman as the "weaker vessel." Life in a self-centered, pagan American culture would like to teach you

that you're answerable to no one - and thanks to the sinful nature, you'd like to believe it. The word "must" at times has to be a heavy vocational burden for you to carry.

But we husbands haven't escaped the weight of God's Law either. Perhaps we're the most miserable, and self-centered of all, for God tells us for our vocation that we must love our wives and families in the very same way Christ loved the Church - even to the point of giving up His own life to save Her! This means that we husbands are to spend every moment of our lives in the service of another, that is, our wife and our family, that we must be willing to sacrifice our entire self – our selfish desires, hopes, dreams and ambitions, all for the sake of the family which God has seen fit to give us, and this we must do, even if no one takes notice - or much less, shows us in return their undying love and devotion. No wonder so many men are tempted to take the easy way out of this weighty and apparently thankless responsibility.

You see, according to the Law, each of us must live our life with complete, undivided devotion to our Lord. We're to love no one and no thing more than we love Him. We must be content with the life, the income, and the position God has given us. And woe to him who casts the green eye of envy at their neighbor's possessions! We must speak well of our neighbor, no matter how badly he speaks about us! We must defend him against slander and gossip, no matter what kind of low-life he might really be! We must forgive him and do good to him, no matter what he's done, or hasn't done, for us. Under the scourge and rod of the Ten Commandments, the list of what we must do goes on and on, and each requirement God throws upon us preaches an entire sermon about how miserably we've failed to do what God has said we must do. But like children, we have no other option! We must obey because God demands it, and because punishment awaits all who refuse. In all this the word "must" becomes

for us a saddle which cannot be shaken off - a bit in our mouths that can't be spit out.

But what you also need to know is that precisely because you cannot do what God has said you must do, Christ, then, “must” do it for you. That's why Jesus said: "I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem." Our Lord Christ “must” go up to Jerusalem because you and I need Him to go there. Everything Jesus does, from the moment of His birth, He does it out of necessity - our necessity. Do not be mistaken, dear children of God, Christ came, and still comes, to save you for one reason and one reason only - because He loves you. And it's due to the fact that He loves you that the Scriptures can then ascribe to Him great joy as He busies Himself with the terrible work of crucifixion. And this He must do of necessity. He must do it because we are not able - and because there is no one else in all of heaven and earth who can do it!

Jesus had no choice other than to keep going because it was necessary for the Son of God to draw our humanity into Himself, to make us one with Him, and to take our place. We separated ourselves from Him, and have continued doing so right up to this very moment. It was necessary for Jesus to suffer the temptations of the devil in the wilderness, He must be tempted in all ways even as we are, because we so easily and willingly give in to temptation. Unlike us, however, Jesus remained without sin through it all. And this, too, was of greatest necessity, because He was living life in our place. He had to live a life of perfect obedience to the Father because our lives are so riddled through and through with imperfection and willful disobedience.

And so, in today's Gospel you see Jesus enduring yet one more temptation for your sake. He's tempted to turn from His course and abandon the work the Father had sent Him to do. Some Pharisees came to Him, saying:

"Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." Jesus replied, "Go tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.' Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem." Jesus is tempted, but He doesn't fall or falter. In all of this He remains faithful and flint-faced as He continues His journey toward the goal of the cross. Jesus is again preaching to us, saying, "Do not fear those who can destroy the body, but fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. Make it your concern to obey God above all things - to fear Him more than you do the threats and plots of man." Saint Patrick, whom we'll celebrate tomorrow, was captured and enslaved as a young Englishman. He escaped, then went back as a missionary to the Irish people who had captured him. Why would he risk his life for people who treated him like that? Because as a preacher of Jesus Christ, he was convinced that's what he must do.

"I must keep going," says Jesus, and that's exactly what He did. He did everything necessary to procure your salvation. Reaching the goal at Golgotha, He willingly paid the price to redeem you from your sin. With His very own body and blood Christ fully and completely appeased the wrath of God in our place. So, as a Christian, when someone asks you if you have hope of being saved, you can and must give a positive answer. You can and you must say, "Yes, I am saved! Yes, I am an heir of heaven! Yes, I belong to God through the life and work of my Savior - who knew that if I was to be saved He must be the One to do it." And do it He did - because He knew. He must do it for you!

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