

Sermon for Holy Cross Day September 14, 2025 jj
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Listen to what Isaiah sings about God, “Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.” But is that what you want? A God who hides Himself? Hides from what? What could there possibly be that would make God want to hide Himself?

First of all, He created the world and everything in it. From vast solar systems down to microorganisms, He is the designer. He formed and fashioned the human race to make it the crown of all creation. Everything He created was totally good, perfect in every way. The Father’s world, as He formed and made it, had no sin in it, nor death, nor destruction. People and animals lived with one another in complete harmony. Even God made a point of taking a walk Himself through His Garden of Paradise in the cool of the day, that is, toward evening. This gives you a quick glimpse of how our Lord has always wanted close contact and unity with the world and the people He created in His image. He was hardly a God who had wanted to hide Himself.

But one of those divine strolls through Eden was interrupted. Adam and Eve disobeyed the Word of the Lord, the Word that gave them their life. The woman and then her husband followed instead the word of the devil, the Ancient Serpent who opened his mouth with the poisonous question, “Did God really say...?” They saw the bait and set the deadly hooks into their own mouths, using the newly planted feelings of lust and greed for wisdom and power. They decided fatefully to rely on what their eyes saw and their emotions felt rather than what their ears had already heard before from the mouth of God. And God suddenly stopped taking walks in the garden. His perfect creation had already been ruined. But He was not hiding, not this time. Adam and his wife realized in their brand new sense of sinful

shame that they were naked, so they were the ones who hid from the Lord God. They had never been afraid before.

And so you are like they became. You have been dead in sin from the very first moment you took a breath. While He was forming you and knitting you together in your mother’s womb, you were opposed as an utter enemy of God. In the Old Testament, the Lord chastised His people Israel for setting up wooden idols and praying unto a god that cannot save. What wooden idols have you carved for yourself? What so-called gods do you rely upon in your life? Have you let family disagreements escalate into personal attacks? Perhaps you have come to church with a primary desire for something else besides forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. You might congratulate yourself on the close relationship with Jesus that you have, all the while ignoring His command to repent and drown your sinful nature in daily remembrance of your Baptism. You have carried the cross of burden, sorrow, anguish and trials, hoping it will serve your advantage in the end. Instead of suffering and a promise of future salvation, you have found yourself expecting earthly benefits from being a Christian, that it will make your family stop arguing, that you’ll get that promotion at work, that you’ll get A’s on all your tests, that you think God wants you to be happy and carefree all the time.

And yet, from time to time, those blessings may very well come your way, that little everyday miracles will indicate the love of God for you. But that is all because He is a God who hides Himself. It was just the same with Moses whom God hid in that “Rock of Ages” while the earth-shattering Glory of God passed by. Moses was a mortal man and a sinner like us all, and could not see God’s face and live. Instead

the Lord revealed His back to the prophet as He passed by the rock. Were God to show His face to you, believe me, it would not be to bless you and keep you. He is perfect, without any corruption of sin, like we have. A sinner cannot stand in the presence of the Eternal King, and those who tried have been instantly condemned in His holy wrath. And as God's law says over and over again, you deserve to fall under His righteous condemnation for eternity.

However, it is not God's true nature to punish and destroy. He must do it in order to remain perfect and without allowing sin in His presence. But He desires to love and create—and for you who have wandered off in disobedience, He desires to save. That is why Isaiah sings, “Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.” He hides Himself from you so that He will not destroy you or give you the punishment you deserve. It was the reason why God the Son hid Himself nine months in the womb of the Virgin Mary and as a baby lying in the manger. The almighty creator started walking through His world once again. This time the hidden Savior took the form of a humble, Suffering Servant. The Lord spoke righteousness using a human mouth. He lived a perfect life for you.

As the Gospel of John says many times, Jesus was truly glorified when He was raised up on the cross in order to die to pay for your forgiveness. The punishment of God was no longer hidden but finally revealed in all of its fierceness, however not on you. The hellish hurricane of the heavenly Father's righteous anger that was bearing a direct course for you made a sudden turn and struck down His beloved Son instead on the cross. You were spared the utter destruction you had coming, even though occasional light storms of suffering will still attack you in your life until its blessed end. He gives you a sign to which you may cling, a sign by which you may be assured that the Lord never says to precious children, Seek ye me in vain.

It was a simple, ancient Roman execution device. It was used many times for countless criminals. But with the precious human Body of the hidden God that is nailed onto it, that is how the hateful cross of shame becomes a Holy Cross. If you ask along with those pious Greeks: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” use your ears instead of your eyes and listen to the truth of God's Word. Look at the Holy, wondrous Cross on which the prince of Glory died. At the foot of this cross you will indeed find His precious Body, as well as His Blood, sitting upon the banquet table of the altar. This Body and Blood, which on account of the Lord's instituting Word of promise is no longer merely bread and wine, it is the actual sacrifice that Jesus gave on that Holy Cross so long ago, not just a symbol or reminder of it. And those of you who have publicly confessed the truth that is taught in this place, this Body and Blood comes to your mouth straight from the God who hides Himself on the cross. Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, for the Holy Cross of Jesus and His Body and Blood feed and strengthen you in body and soul to life everlasting.

Then He gives His cross to you for the rest of the week, for the rest of your life, for you and your children, so that you continually die with Him—die to sin in order to rise with Christ. He may not ask you to go all the way to endure a martyr's death, but you have His promise that you will not be tempted beyond what you can bear. It will be difficult in the days ahead to stand for the truth, to love the unlovable, to carry within your flesh and blood the Holy Cross of Jesus, but remember, this suffering that you may be going through is not something you now get to do for Jesus like you're returning a favor, or thanking Him for being such a great God. Instead He is hiding Himself in you as you serve others. He hides Himself as you endure thorns and thistles, trials and suffering—and not necessarily when things are going right. When the devil and the world, even your own sinful nature are against you, and the struggle

seems hard, and God's love seems distant, then you know you have been given the gift of a holy life set apart from the sinful world.

But as holy as it is, life under the cross will not go on forever. Suffering will not endure permanently. For the Lord who reigns in triumph hanging on the cross, now leads you His baptized children in a procession heavenward where He sits at the Father's right hand. Speak with confidence today and always the way Isaiah suggests: Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength. For it is in the Lord that you, the new holy seed of the new Israel, are justified. And He with nail-marked hands and spear-gashed side welcomes you to the glory of His resurrection. Even though it still remains for you to die here on this earth, your death that already happened in Baptism was the death that guaranteed you everlasting salvation and true life. And the God who hides Himself to you now under pain and the cross, He will reveal to you His blessed face in all His fullness as you sing to Him with Isaiah and all the saints in the eternal joy of heaven.

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