

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

<sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup> When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Today is commonly known as Good Shepherd Sunday, the day on which we focus on the fact that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, that He tenderly brings us back into the fold of His mercy, and doesn't rest until He turns us from disbelief to faith. Hymns such as, "The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want", "I Am Jesus' Little Lamb", and "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us" come to mind as typifying the message of this Sunday's Gospel reading. However, it's possible for us to come away with thinking that this is pretty easy, that God's love conquers all things, that our sins are removed from us without much to be done on our part, and we can become "lazy Christians" by this hands-off kind of thinking. We get the idea that Jesus, meek and mild, gently pushes us back onto the "straight and narrow" path of His righteousness, and doesn't get angry or express frustration with us, but is always loving and kindly. While there is a lot of truth to this characterization, our Epistle reading from Peter's 1<sup>st</sup> letter gives us at least a little bit of background information, that fills in the gaps on what exactly was involved in Jesus' paying the price for our sins.

Peter reminds us that this once-for-all sacrifice on the part of Christ was bloody, painful and literally took every ounce of strength that He had as the God-man. Even though it would have been tempting to put to an end His horrible passion, He knew that it was necessary for Him to continue on. Even though He would have been justified in speaking up and declaring His innocence, because He never sinned once during His earthly life, He didn't. His role in salvation was to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice for us who are definitely less-than-perfect. He came to earth to die. Don't ever forget that! The purpose of His coming was not to be cute and cuddly in the manger of Bethlehem, but to grow up and become the sacrificial Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world. This was ugly, it was gruesome, it was unprecedented in its brutality. Even though it's rated "R", I would encourage all but the youngest among you to view the movie, "The Passion of the Christ". Even though it's difficult to watch, it's also the closest we've come in cinematic history to being realistic in how torturous it was for Christ to bear the sins of the world, and be the Savior of all mankind from the stain of sin.

Let's look in some detail at what Peter has to tell us, and see what we can learn about our lives going forward from this point, having just celebrated Christ's Passion, the Holy Week rollercoaster of emotions, culminated by the joys of Easter, when we remember that He is Risen! He is risen indeed! The Easter season isn't over; rather, similarly to the Christmas Season, when we celebrate the twelve days AFTER the event and the ramifications of His birth, so we talk about the results of His Resurrection for the next few weeks. We need to get a handle on all that these singular acts have done for us and all creation.

We've been CALLED to this faith; we've been REDEEMED by Christ; we've been given the POWER to follow in His steps. Notice here – the verbs throughout this passage are in the passive tense – in the Greek language, unlike English, verbs have different voices that are readily apparent. Bear with me, as I'm going to go into a bit of an excursus on grammar, the difference in the voice of verbs. Active – someone is actually doing something – I walk to the store – implies that the power to do this comes

from the muscles and bones in my body, that I've learned to walk, and do it well, that I'm able to do this on my own, without assistance. Passive – something is being done to me – I was driven to the store – implies that someone else drove the car or the other conveyance to the store, that this was not something that I did on my own, but actually someone else was the impetus and the one doing the action

Both when it comes to our salvation being brought to us, and for our calling to faith, and our being sustained in this faith – this is stuff that's being done TO US, not BY US. Those who would like to argue that the first mover when it comes to this faith is us human beings have to overcome the grammatical truths about the passage before us – it's very clearly using the endings and verb forms of the passive tense, rather than the active tense

It's interesting that Peter leads out by talking about the results of Jesus' sacrifice, rather than what he will get to in the next couple of verses, that which is done by Christ the Redeemer. This might have something to do with the audience that Peter was speaking to. Much like James in his epistle, Peter was dealing with those who were confident in their own inclusion in the people redeemed by Christ, and thought that they could then be complacent in their daily lives. Unlike most of the churches that Paul set up, among the Gentile believers, who had been beaten down by the Law by the Jews, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, these folks were already convinced that they had done enough, and all they had to do was sit back and enjoy what Christ had already done.

We could, unfortunately, be numbered with this crowd today: I've heard it said something like, "I know I'm going to heaven, and that my salvation is secure. I don't need to study the Word of God, or amend my sinful life any more than that. Christ has taken care of everything already." Or, "Why do I need to go to church or Bible study? I know all that stuff already. I've covered the Catechism in Confirmation classes, I've read through the entire Bible six or seven times during my life. What's left for

me to learn?” We must be careful, lest we become complacent, and the devil move in and snatch away our faith

Peter isn't saying that we earn our salvation by what we do, or that we play a part in what Christ has totally done for us. However, we know from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Use of the Law that the Law of God is a guide for Christian living, to show us what God wants us to do and what He wants us to avoid – it's a guideline for the Christian life. Peter is strong in reminding us here that we are to follow in Jesus' steps – this doesn't mean that we need to be crucified, or live a perfect life (this is impossible for us sinful men). What it does mean is that while we know that we will fail to do this perfectly, “don't let the perfect get in the way of the good.” We are to strive to keep the way of God in our lives, knowing that the Holy Spirit will drive this improvement, and gradually and daily make us more and more into the image that God wants us to have

But, how does this work? We learn it in verse 24 – we die to sin and live to righteousness – kind of sounds like the transformation that happens in Baptism, doesn't it? Even though it carried baggage that spoke against the practice, Luther was in favor of baptism by immersion – it showed in vivid form that we are drowned and die, in our sins and our sinful nature, and emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. We live our lives on earth in the Latin *simil eustis et peccator* – simultaneously sinners and saints. Paul describes this dichotomy in Romans chapter 7, but to sum it up here, we live in this world, with the sinful nature that clings to us like glue. But, we don't want to live that way! The only way that we're delivered from this sinful nature, and the war within us to want to do differently, is through Christ our Lord and what He has done for us and for our salvation.

This brings us to the second point of Peter's writing – to show us just what Christ has done, so that we can see the total transformation of our future – from death to life, from hopelessness to a blessed, eternal future. We see here that Christ did things that we would have no hope of doing on our own. He suffered, but never threatened to use His divine power to change things to reflect His power

over all of them. He was reviled, hated, spit upon, cursed – but never responded in kind. That whole section of the Scriptures talking about turning the other cheek, or walking two miles when asked to walk one mile – He actually lived that out during His passion.

He perfectly trusted in God the Father – that His plan of saving His people from their sins would work, that even though the Father would ultimately turn His back on the Son, it was for the sole purpose of saving us His children from our sins. He had to die, so that the penalty of death was paid. He bore our sins on His body, so that by His stripes, we would be healed. Every crack of the whip, every strike of the “cat of nine tails”, every blow to the face or piercing from the thorns in the crown that was placed on His head, all were for the purpose of paying for our sins. He suffered so that we wouldn’t have to, because only He could endure this and not crack under the pressure, not give up and forsake His love for the Father and for us

He was the propitiation for our sins – there needed to be a death, and He provided us with the lamb of sacrifice, the ram in the bush, the sacred offering necessary. Remember God’s provision when Abraham was directed by God to slay his son? Just in time, the angel of the Lord intervened, stopped Abraham from going through with the killing, and provided a ram caught in the thicket as a substitute. Rather than destroying His people, Israel, because of their sin, He allowed them to be enslaved in Egypt for many years, but when they came to their senses, He provided for their release. He allowed 10 plagues to afflict the Egyptians, but spared His Israelite people from these deadly calamities, including the plague of the Firstborn. When the Israelites were starving in the wilderness, brought there because of their sin and their false worship of a golden calf as the chief example of their intransigence, God brought them bread in the form of manna, and meat in the form of quail, and water from a rock – they didn’t starve, but thrived, totally by His protection and provision

He serves as the Good Shepherd of our souls – yes, we’re back to this, but with a renewed perspective – He was selfless, humble, and self-sacrificing – He put His own needs on the back burner,

and did what was necessary to save us sinners from our sins, to keep us from the ravenous wolf and the roaring lion that prowl around, seeking to devour us. We now understand what it means that He was our Good Shepherd – that He guides us in the way of Truth, by fully serving the Truth in our place, in a way that we couldn't even begin to emulate. Even though we stray (daily!) from His protection and His guidance every day, He continues to guide us back to Himself. Sometimes this is a gentle, still voice within our conscience – guiding us into what He would have us do and what He would have us avoid. Sometimes this is a more violent “rap” with the shepherd’s crook – if that’s all that we’ll listen to, sometimes He allows testing and trial to come upon us, to wake us up and help us realize that we are not living as He would have us live. Sometimes there’s nothing He can do to wake us up, and that’s why He came and bled and died – to take away our sins. It’s only through studying the extent of His sacrifice that we can wake up and realize that we must repent and amend our sinful ways

Peter’s 1<sup>st</sup> epistle gives us a glimpse into the salvation history of God’s people, both the Jew and the Gentile. Don’t forget that the first part of this letter declares to the people that they are a holy people, special to God, protected by Him from destruction and condemnation to the fires of hell. Then Peter goes on to show them that the reason this is the case – because God has made them His people, looked out for them, and blessed them with His favor. Not because they deserved it, but because His love knows no bounds. He leads us in the paths of righteousness, and guides us to walk in His ways, more and more every day. Even though we are simultaneously sinners and saints, in this life, only to be resolved into perfect saints when we get to heaven, God still works with us.

He washes us in the waters of Baptism, to wash away our sins and our sinful nature, and instill faith in Christ in our hearts where there once was no belief whatsoever. He feeds us with His Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar, for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our bodies and souls. He teaches us with His Word, the Holy Scriptures, to further lead us and guide us. He superabundantly blesses us with multiple ways to make us mindful of all that He has done to save us,

and for us to receive His blessed absolution, which is the pure Gospel. He has truly done everything for our salvation. Amen.

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

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.