

Jesus Remembers
John 19:25-30 (Part VI)
Lent Midweek V
March 25, 2020

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Sometimes, we need the assurance and comfort that Jesus didn't "just" go through the motions of salvation as a 'mechanical Messiah.' We need to be reassured that He didn't, in his own mind, die for a nameless, faceless people, but that he was mindful of, compassionate toward us sinners. We need the same comfort for which the thief on the cross yearned when he pleaded, "Jesus, remember me when You come into your kingdom."

And, in many ways, that's the underlying narrative of tonight's passion reading. It's almost as if, as Jesus died (and, years later, as John recorded it) the narrative of these moments was very intentionally meant to be: "Jesus remembers."

First, that Jesus remembered his mother and made sure she was safeguarded: "Woman, behold your son," Jesus gave her to John. I suppose at first glance there's nothing remarkable about that, as every mother would hope that her dying son would make sure she's looked after so as not to be left a childless widow. But, that's sort of the point, isn't it? That Jesus was and is not just Son of God, but son of Mary... what a reminder of the incarnation and its consequences; our God Incarnate cares for and loves his mother. In

fact, what a beautiful coincidence that today in the Church Year – March 25th – is the date the Church commemorates the Annunciation, the angel telling Mary she will bear the Son of the Most High God, so that she recognizes all generations will call her blessed. In the hour of that cross, that blessing probably felt far removed, as the signs of her Son’s incarnation are all too real – blood flowing from his hands and feet, lungs gasping for breath, and his heart beginning to fail. But, he remembers his mother.

But, what *is* remarkable – on second glance – about Jesus giving his mother to the disciple is that he reorders the family, for his brothers (not yet believers in Him) were nowhere to be found and – as we heard a few Sundays ago – the blood of Christ is thicker than the blood of family – so that Jesus entrusts his mother not to his fleshly brothers, but to his beloved disciple, so that “from that time hour the disciple took her to his own home.”

And that may well have been a redefining moment for the disciple, might it not? For, we hear that he is a son of Zebedee and that he left his father’s fishing nets to follow Jesus, but we never hear of John’s own mother. Perhaps she’s still alive; perhaps still with Zebedee in his fishing business. But, the blood of Christ is thicker than the blood of family, and Jesus says, “John, behold your mother.”

Some like to allegorize this and say that it’s a picture of Jesus giving his disciples to the mother Church. Perhaps... but that sounds

a bit Roman Catholic for me: Mary was never ‘favored’ as the mother of the Church, but of the Christ... though one can see how giving birth to the Son would lead to one connecting those dots. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that Jesus put the new son and mother, John and Mary, together – not as fleshly lineage, but as spiritual lineage – and, though the emphasis is certainly on the care for Mary, *Jesus remembers them* both; they will both benefit from each other’s comfort and confession in the days ahead, the weeks ahead, the years ahead, when they together will rejoice in the resurrection (in fact, is it not *John* who, with Peter, first benefits from the confession of the women that Jesus is risen?! Here, John is supposed to be protecting Mary, but it is the confession of Mary and the other women that gives John strength and hope and confidence). Yes, *together* they will rejoice in the resurrection, will huddle in the Upper Room awaiting the day of Pentecost, *together* will remain steadfast in the apostles’ teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers... together confess for each other and for the rest of their brothers and sisters in Christ and all who have ears to hear, all who have been joined together by the blood of Christ thicker than the blood of family, they will confess the certain promise that Christ will return in glory, just as the disciples saw him go.

So, even in the hour of his death, Jesus remembers his mother and his beloved disciple. But, he also remembers His Father

and, more specifically, His Father's will. In the days leading to the cross, He had said "Father, glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You." And, in the hours of the Upper Room that preceded his Passion, Jesus said, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know I love the Father." And in the garden of Gethsemane as he anticipated his passion, Jesus had prayed to the Father, "Not my will, but Thine be done."

And now, on the cross, he remembers his Father's will; He remembers the Scriptures that record and promise the Father's will to be fulfilled in the Messiah whom He had sent. And so, the dutiful Son having fulfilled all things, he said (*to fulfill the Scriptures* – as he remembered His Father's holy will), "I thirst." And, when that very last little detail was completed, when that final "I" was dotted, that final "t" crossed, Jesus could rightly say, "It is finished." Yes, all preparations have been remembered and fulfilled... all is accomplished. The Father's promised will is completed and the new covenant in place. And the dutiful Son commended himself to his Father, bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Now, we can look proudly on this dutiful Son and say, "What a loving Son, who remembered his mother, remembered his Father, even remembered the disciple he loved as his brother!"

And yet, if we stop there and offer polite words about this dutiful Son, we miss the point entirely. For, he subjected himself to death where he would have to look upon his weeping mother and

his downcast disciple, and he dutifully did the will of his Father, not only because he remembered *them*, but precisely because he remembered *you*.

This is truly remarkable, for his mother – as his mother – was due his love. And, his Father, as his Father, was worthy of all honor. And, his disciple, the only one brave enough to be found at the foot of the cross, deserved his sympathy and encouragement. But *us...* we *sinner*s... we who in our sin and by our sin forget the name of Christ we bear... there is simply no reason for Jesus to remember us. “No merit or worthiness in me,” the catechism says... no reason for honor, no reason for remembrance, yet he remembered us.

To be sure, he would have gone to the cross to do his Father’s will even if his Father hadn’t had any salvation in mind but just wanted to see him do it. “Yes, Father, yest most willingly, I’ll do what you command me,” the hymn depicts the Son’s loyalty. But, time and time again, we hear Jesus say that he’s going to the cross because he agrees with his Father’s will and the Lamb goes uncomplaining forth the guilt of sinners bearing. Jesus promised, as the Good Shepherd, not only to lay down his life, but to lay it down *for his sheep*. And again, he says, “I came to seek and save the lost.” And again, “I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” And again, “I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.” And again, “I will not leave you nor forsake you.”

He goes to the cross because he remembers you... you as once defined by your sin which he now carries – so, repent of, despair of it – that he in his mercy would “remember your sins no more.”

But, he also willingly goes forth as a Lamb to the slaughter because the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep that he knows by name: “My sheep listen to my voice. I *know* them, and they follow me; and I *give* them eternal life and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” And he lovingly remembers you as those he now in our text dies to free from your sin... and he seals the covenant made with you; he rejoices over you; he shares the inheritance with you.

You see, he doesn’t just “remember you” for sentimental benefit. When the thief pleaded with Jesus to remember him, Jesus promised that he would... but such remembrance was not sentimental but, you might say, authoritative and effectual: “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” His remembrance of you is the same. He doesn’t remember you sentimentally, but authoritatively, effectually. He is the One worthy to open the Book of Life; He has opened it, written your name in it in his blood, and promised you a share of his inheritance.

And that means, the Christian faith is not one of sentimental remembrance. “Do this in remembrance of me” is not a command to sentimentalize about Jesus. Rather, it’s invitation to benefit from

that which he has authorized and effectualized: “Because I remember you in my kingdom... This is my body *for you*. This is my blood for you. Remember my promises; for, by them, I remember you... not merely sentimentally, but I continue to remember and promise you that which I have authoritatively effected by my own blood.”

And, suddenly, we understand that Jesus’ remembrance of us, his willingness to declare our sins forgiven, to apply the benefits of the cross to us, to be one with us, that is not at all irrelevant to daily life in a broken world. In these dark days of great distress, it’s Jesus’ steadfast love and remembrance of us upon which we can depend and ground our certain hope. All the earthly comforts we thought we could build on have forsaken us and proven too frail for a virus. All the earthly wealth we thought would remember us in life’s latter days has evaporated in a week’s time. All the reputation we had built up for ourselves is as irrelevant as is Hollywood in these trying weeks, and all the friends that we thought we had to lean on are now quite literally out of arm’s reach.

But Jesus remembers you; His promises are still for you; they cannot be undone by mandates that seek to close church doors “for safety;” they cannot be undone by scientific claims that viruses can overcome sacramental fellowship. They can’t even be undone by the situations in which we feel constrained by and bound to our own crosses, unable to fall at his feet but only plead and pray. Yes, it

might have been impossible for the thief to cling to Jesus... but Jesus remembered him; and, yes, it might have been dangerous for John to stand at the foot of the cross... but Jesus remembered *him*. And Jesus remembers *you*, that you too – even under the threat of illness, suffering, persecution, death itself – might share in the comfort of the thief who cried, “Jesus remember me” and who heard the remembrance that swaddles every Christian in this life’s last hour: “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” And *that* promise, that *guarantee* that those words *will be for you* the day you need them, that gives us every reason to cry with faith’s certainty, “Kyrie Eleison. Lord, have mercy.”

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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