

“...of the world”

John 1:29

Lent Midweek V

March 20, 2024

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

The text for our entire Lenten midweek meditation: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Tonight, our meditation concludes with that final phrase “the sin ***of the world.***”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When we think of this phrase “the sin **of the world**”, we start to think so big and broad, so much in platitudes, that we lose focus on what it really means. The world is big and faceless; the generations are largely unknown to us and thought of as an entire demographic of nameless people. How broadly do you think of that term when the Scriptures declare, for example, “God so loved **the world** that He gave His only begotten Son... for God did not send His Son to condemn **the world**, but to save **the world** through him.”

(Don’t you think of that Sunday School image of two hands holding the globe?) And again, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins **of the whole world.**” Certainly, those verses are meant to sound very ‘universal’ – ‘Universal Atonement’ or ‘Objective Justification’ are the theological terms we use to describe the totality of Christ’s work. But, perhaps we don’t often think of how that ‘objectively-’ or ‘universally-beneficial’ work

of Christ is to be thought of as ‘universally individual’ or ‘for every man, woman, and child.’

Yet, the Lamb of God who took upon himself the sin of the world took upon himself each and every sin of each and every sin-stained person of each and every nation and in each and every generation.

But that is hard to conceive of; we tend to ‘group’ it all. For example, when we say He died for all those from the beginning of the Bible to its end – from Adam to the apostle John – we tend to think in terms of ‘groups of people’ – the unfaithful in Noah’s day, those who earned Sodom its reputation, the faithless Israelites, the hungry 5000, the Palm Sunday crowd, the Roman soldiers, the Pentecost gathering, the pagan Gentiles. But, *when* we think collectively, we often fail to stop and consider that Christ carried the individual sins we know so well from the Scriptures – Cain’s murder of his brother, Jacob’s deceit of his father, David’s adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, Peter’s denial, and even Judas’ betrayal.

And as we think of Scripture’s ‘narrow-focused’ history, we might also think of broader world history – in terms of groups and peoples, without thinking of individuals. Yes, we say, Christ died for the sins of the pagan Egyptians and Babylonians, the warring Spartans and Athenians, the human-wisdom-loving Greeks, the mystic minds of the ancient Eastern world, the marauders of Genghis

Khan, the savage Turks and the Christ-less Crusades, even the Stalinists and Nazis and today's terrorists and even 'the sins of America' ... yes, Christ died for them all.

But, what does it mean when we consider the weight of Christ dying for each *individual* within that 'group- and peoples-' dominated view of history? That Christ took upon himself the sin of each individual Spartan who animalistically raped, pillaged, and murdered women and children. That Christ took upon himself the self-idolization and human-wisdom-loving of Plato, the Buddha, Mohammad, Nietzsche, and every individual student of their false doctrines. That Christ died for each Turk who married yet another wife and treated her as a piece of meat, for each Papist officer who separated pastors and wives and forced them into monastery and convent.

And what of each soldier that idolized Stalin, and every citizen who rationalized the deeds of Hitler, and every Muslim jihadist that beheads his religious prisoner, and every scientist that advances that false doctrine of Darwin, and each confused individual that is encouraged by psychiatrists to mutilate "their" body to reject God's creation... breathtakingly, Christ took that sin upon himself, too.

And what about those quiet, daily-life, not so 'media-juicy, attention-grabbing' sins – the Chinese couple that aborts their unborn to please the government, the American couple that aborts

their unborn to please themselves. The cartel member in Mexico who sees dollar signs when he captures a young girl or sends fentanyl across the border; the boy in an African village and the girl in suburban Chicago who equally disrespect their parents; the young European who sees the cathedrals not as houses of worship of the one true God, but as mere museums; the western woman who has been taught to hate men and marriage; the western man who has found the internet as a substitute for woman and marriage; the husband who abused his wife last Friday; the wife who will cheat on her husband this Friday.

The list could go on forever. It's difficult enough to grasp thousands of years of sin in every generation of every nation under the sun in every 'national event' never recorded by history; it's something all that much more inconceivable to try and capture the mental image of each sin – on top of the original sin and sinful nature that condemns even without the 'daily life' sin... how do you mentally capture the truth of this phrase "the sin of the world" when you consider that it includes 'each and every person whose sins were placed upon the Lamb of God as the Lamb went to the altar of Calvary'?

Perhaps you capture it in the smallest of ways by realizing that 'each and every person whose sins were placed upon the Lamb of God as he went to the altar of Calvary'... that 'each and every person' includes you. Yes, look at your own life, for you see in *its*

each day the very sins that are committed *by 8 billion people* each day. Look at your own life, and there's plenty there to visualize the magnitude of what it would mean if Christ took upon himself *just your sin*, let alone the sin of the whole world:

Do you not see in these sins we've already pictured through worldly characters, do you not see yourself? Hear them again; consider your place in them: the wife who cheats on her husband, the husband who abuses his wife (and, in our age of equality, those examples could be 'visa versa')... the Christian woman (or man) more influenced by feminism than by Christ; the Christian man (or woman) loving the world's pictures of sexcapades more than Christ's picture of marriage and its sexual beauty. The one who sees the church as a ritualistic weekly relic of cultural Christianity and doesn't bother to actually *live* the faith. The one who disrespects parents or sees dollar signs by looking beyond virtue, honesty, and integrity. The Christian tempted to live for himself rather than for his children, or the child thinking the faith the parents hand down to him is a worthless waste of time. Yes, even in your own heart and mind: the thirst for faulty but ego-stroking human wisdom or personal vengeance or political revenge, as if Christ's kingdom is of this world.

So many sins in the secrecy of your heart, that you need not look past yourself to consider the enormity of what it means that Christ was willing to take upon himself the sins of the world.

And yet, He did just that... even if you were to personalize that down to just you. For you, He bore the fullness of sin's weight. His saving death included you and those sins you so intimately know and feel in your heart, and even those sins you're not even aware of! That's how 'universal' yet how 'personal' is the 'for you' reality of Christ dying for the whole world... that you may say of your own sins – forgetting all the others that Christ takes from this fallen creation and once bore to the cross – you may say of your own, “Are you telling me that as embarrassing this is to admit, as shameful as it would be to bear, as damaging to society or relationships or even my own body, as harmful to my reputation before men and condemning to my reputation before God... as totally destructive as that sin is, are you telling me Christ died for it, that I may walk away from it free of guilt?” Yes, Christ died for *it*, for *you*, and for every other *individual* of earth's time back to Adam who like you makes up the unwritten, unspoken “ME” in the phrase “the whole world.”

And that unwritten, unspoken “ME” becomes *manifest* and *tangible* when the benefits of the sacrificial Lamb are delivered to you and shared with you in the Word spoken and in Sacramental form. Of Holy Baptism, our Lord says, “Baptize all nations” – the whole world; and yet, the apostles cry out, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins.” Of the Holy Word preached, the Lord says that the gospel must be proclaimed to all nations unto the ends of the earth; and yet, His

preachers are authorized down to the individual: “He who hears you, hears Me.” Of Holy Absolution, our Lord says, “Whatever you bind **on earth** will be bound in heaven – yes, over the whole earth; and yet, how does He describe it playing out, but down to the individual: in granting forgiveness, “you have gained your *brother* (singular).” Of the Holy Supper, our Lord says, “... shed for you all (or, elsewhere recorded as “shed for the many”), for the remission of your sins.” And yet, our Lord says of each individual, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will never cast him out.”

Yes, you and each individual – the one next to you in the pews, the one next to you in the car at the traffic light, the ones next to you in neighboring homes (the ones who lived in your house before you and those who will live there after you), in the next office, or at the next bar stool... you and each individual may recognize the unwritten, unspoken “ME” not only in the weight of your sins, but in the redemption secured for you by the substitute, and in His desire to bestow the gifts upon you in His Word and Sacrament, that you *each* – and you *all* – may live every day of life as a unique heir of the inheritance of God.

Now, just as difficult as it is to see the individual in a phrase like “the whole world,” equally difficult can it be to see the whole world in the word “ME.” Can I mentally duplicate my daily life, my daily sins 8 billion times to consider what the Lord watches over each day? Can I mentally duplicate my life billions more to consider what

the Lord has watched over each day, year, generation, and century back until the dawn of time? I just can't do it. And yet, that, too – each of the 8 billion, and the billions more throughout all history – is the “ME” for whom Christ died.

Thus, for the whole world Christ went to the cross. For all time and every generation Christ went to the cross. Thus, in every century, every generation, every one of earth's years, we ought remember Christ's suffering and passion... not as if we're reliving it, recreating it, trying to run back into history to re-enact it. But in thanksgiving for history and for what was once – for the sins of the whole world – accomplished in history. Thus, we again stand at the threshold of Holy Week... with no intention to pretend we are “then and there,” but only with awe and solemn thanksgiving for what *was accomplished* then and there... what was accomplished so uniquely and exclusively then and there... for us and for our salvation, what was so *divinely* long-promised, yet accomplished in a way so *unexpectedly*: Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

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