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*Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ*

*“God forbid that I should boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world is crucified to me and I to the world!” – Gal.6,14*

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Collect:

God of light and truth, open our eyes to the glory of your presence in the world around us, but chiefly in the face of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord; that we may grow into his likeness, and attain the happy fulfilment of our hope when the splendour of the Saviour will be revealed; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, now and for ever. Amen

Readings: Am.5, 21-24 / Ps.15 / 1Cor.13,1-13#

### **And can it be**

- 1 And can it be that I should gain  
an interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!
- 2 'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies:  
who can explore His strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
to sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,  
let angel minds inquire no more.
- 3 He left His Father's throne above –  
so free, so infinite His grace –  
emptied Himself of all but love,  
and bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
for, O my God, it found out me!
- 4 Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
fast bound in sin and nature's night;

Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
my chains fell off, my heart was free.  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

5 No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
and clothed in righteousness divine,  
bold I approach the eternal throne,  
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Words by Charles Wesley

### **Mk.8,31-38**

**“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ he said. ‘You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it or someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.’”**

Dear friends

In the words which Peter speaks to Jesus to dissuade him from the notion of having to suffer and die, Jesus hears the voice of Satan, the tempter. Do we think this reply to Peter to be somewhat harsh and perhaps unmerited? If we do, we need to let ourselves be reminded of Jesus’ experience in the desert after his baptism by John. When, of course, after 40 days of fasting he was tempted by the devil (=Satan, Mt.4,1-11). By addressing in Peter the person of Satan we are made aware of this connection. For Peter’s strong objection to Jesus’ suffering and death is very much a new instance of the same temptation, seeking the same outcome: to cause Jesus to abandon the way of salvation so that all should fail in it.

Now Peter may not think that he is doing the tempter’s bidding, he may not think for a moment that he is suggesting Jesus abandon his way and we all fail. And we may not think so either. But it is necessary that he, and we, should be aware that without Jesus’ passion his death and his resurrection, salvation cannot be nor will take place.

Salvation is the effect of Jesus’ passion and resurrection, it is not the effect of anything else. “*The Son of Man,*” teaches Jesus referring to himself, *‘must suffer many things and be rejected..., ... he must be killed and after three days rise again.’* He must; not “he might/may” or “it is inevitable that” or “it is likely that”, but no: he *must*. What this means is clear: If Jesus is to save us, if he is to turn our heart to God, if he is to fulfil what is said of him in the beginning: that he is to make things right and baptise the believer with the Holy Spirit (see Mk.1,8!), then his path must lie in the way of

suffering, cross and resurrection.

If Peter were to follow his own suggestion that Jesus' way should not do so, the salvation he is counting on would turn out to be anything but, and he would be of those who "forfeit their souls". We can understand at this point perhaps the strength of Jesus's rebuke, because we recognise Peter's need to be pulled back from this temptation, namely the temptation to have salvation his own way, a la Peter, apart from the cross of Christ and apart from the resurrection of Christ which follows the cross.

Peter later clearly came to see what role he had played in Satan's tempting scheme and how Jesus' harsh rebuke was designed to keep him in the truth. Mindful of this and of the fact that none are safe from this temptation he writes in his epistle to the churches the following: *"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of suffering."* (1Pt.5,8-9)

Now, these are surely first order issues, because in question here is 'What is salvation the effect of?' What do we think, dear friends?

Peter in his rejection of Christ's suffering and cross shows that he is guided by "merely human concerns", as Jesus attests him. What about us? What concerns drive our perception of 'salvation'? What do we think is the manner in which it comes about?

In speaking not just to Peter and the Apostles but to all of us, Jesus describes someone who has merely human concerns as someone who "wants to save their life". The point being, it is *their* life they want to save. That is: authority over their life is to be theirs (Gen.3), the goal, to be gained in their own way and strength, is to make a name for themselves (Gen.11), that is, to be who they want to be. And so the concern is to gain what delivers that. Peter looked for that in all that the world was offering, and he looked to God with the same eyes: having in mind merely human concerns.

But, dear friends, if we build salvation on the basis of our concern to save our own life, even if we gain the whole world in the pursuit of it, we shall lose it, says Jesus. Let this be said to us for the good of our soul, for the sake of life that really is that!

But how does salvation come about, then? We saw that Peter was in danger of going wrong here because he made salvation to depend on merely human concerns, on saving his own life. But what Jesus pointed out to him in such strong terms was that salvation is the effect of what God is concerned with. *"You do not have in mind the concerns of God,"* Jesus says to Peter. So it's not just knowing that our salvation is God's concern, but also that it depends on what God is concerned with. And it is these concerns of God that lead Jesus to his suffering at the hands of those who reject him, to his death on the cross and to his resurrection. God's concerns are about setting us free from sin, giving us victory over death and the fear of death and raising us to the new life of love, even everlasting life.

What God is concerned with in respect to your salvation is all gained in Christ's suffering, his death and his resurrection. And all of that is ready to be given at Pentecost in the coming of the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Christ. And *there* is fulfilled what John the Baptist said in the beginning, namely that Jesus *"will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."* (Mk.1,8)

Dear friends, there is much here to ponder, and the period of Lent and Holy Week will give occasion to search more of the treasures marked 'God's concerns'. But we end here looking out on a horizon of faith which features suffering, death and resurrection as the way in which our salvation comes about, in which our journey is with God and for God, in which through faith in Jesus Christ we no longer live and die for ourselves but for him so that *"whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord"* (Rom.14,8) Through his way to Golgotha our suffering, rejection of faith, the experience of death,

weaknesses and vulnerabilities, as we believe in him are not signs that our redemption is failing but that it is underway. And the truth of that is to be found in Christ himself, by faith. *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”* Amen

**With joy we meditate the grace**

- 1 With joy we meditate the grace  
of our High Priest above;  
His heart is made of tenderness,  
it overflows with love.
- 2 Touched with a sympathy within,  
He knows our feeble frame;  
He knows what sore temptations mean,  
for He has felt the same.
- 5 Then let our humble faith address  
His mercy and His power;  
we shall obtain delivering grace  
in the distressing hour.

- 3 He, in the days of feeble flesh,  
poured out His cries and tears;  
and now exalted feels afresh  
what every member bears.
- 4 He'll never quench the smoking flax,  
but raise it to a flame;  
the bruised reed He never breaks,  
nor scorns the meanest name.

Words by Isaac Watts

Lord God, your concern for us, for all that you have made, fills us with awe and wonder as we behold it in the fact that you sent your Son and gave him up for us all. He has not shunned the way of suffering and was obedient even to death on a cross, to redeem us from our sins and from the fear of death and bring us back to you. Help us when we are tempted by seeking to save our own life to deny the cross and the way of self-denial to which it calls and for which it sets us free. Fill us, we pray, with your Spirit so that with a quiet mind we may go about the business of losing our lives for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and the salvation he brings us. And so we shall find it and give you praise, glory and honour.

- time of prayer / intercession –

***‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

Live in union with Christ Jesus as Lord, be rooted in him, be built in him, grow strong in the faith; let your hearts overflow with thankfulness.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you.

**AMEN**