

QUINQUAGESIMA

Beloved in Christ, today we find ourselves drawing towards the end of the Septuagesima season, that 3 week preparation for our Lenten penance which begins this week. Two Sundays ago the readings from the night office told of the history of creation, the fall of our first parents, and the unleashing of human sin. The, last week the Night Office reading spoke of the consequences of that sin: the destruction of the world in the great flood: Noah and his family being the sole survivors by which humanity would be reborn. Recall, if you will, that the Ark, is a symbol of man's redemption: that portal through which the animals marched into the world was a foreshadowing of the riven side of our crucified Redeemer through which divine life is poured into this present world. During the night Office this week the church tells once more the history of Abraham's divine call to be the father of God's Chosen People; it speaks as well of God's heavy demand that Abraham sacrifice his son, Isaac, a command which seems so be cruel and unjust. But, in point of fact, we are being led further along in this season's preparations for Lent. Isaac is another figure of Christ. The offering of Isaac, Abraham's only and most beloved son, demanded a *complete*

surrender of Abraham's *will* to the *divine will* of God. But in the history of salvation this sacrifice is a foreshadowing of the reality: the sacrifice God demanded of His own Son: perfect, divine, infinite – the effective remedy for Adam and the whole of sinful humanity. *This* sacrifice was driven on, not by cruelty, but an infinite justice tempered by a no less infinite selfless, self-sacrificing love of eternal measure.

Here then again, is the theme of this season: we were created, we fell from grace; the malice and consequences of sin caused not only the immense ruin of humanity in Noah's time, but indeed the inconceivable chain of sorrows which has been the lot of the human race ever since. The one and only redemption from all this was the blood ransom freely and lovingly offered on our behalf by the Son of God.

Beloved, this sacrifice is prophesied by Christ Himself in today's Gospel – followed at once by a divine proof of its author. And St. Paul tells us how we must act in the face of this sacrifice: we must truly love others with the kind of love that Christ exhibited on the Cross. We cannot indulge in evil behavior towards others, hurting them through ingratitude, manipulation, wicked judgments or hateful speech. The love of Jesus is

that shown forth in the compassion of today's Gospel miracle: and the same so beautifully described by St. Paul: it is that *without which we stand in the shadows of the gates of hell*.

The faith which saves is that real love which we have for God, *refracted and directed towards others*: it is patient, it is kind, it is not envious, nor filled with pride, it is not ambitious, it does not seek evil, nor does it rejoice in injustice. Love delights in truth, it suffers all, it hopes for all – and love remains forever. Love is virtuous – and we are so very often *vicious*.

We need to ask ourselves is this our faith? Not rejoicing at the misfortunes of others? Or rather, are not our very tongues the cause of their misery? Are our souls calm, or are that not outraged, too often, at the least contradiction of our wills so spoiled by moral laxism towards *ourselves joined to a ruthless hardness of heart in the requirements we impose on others?*

We who claim to hold the traditional faith – do we likewise, practice this traditional charity? Are we known for the love we bear others unconditionally? If not, then we have much work to do before reaching the glory of Easter. “O Jesus, Son of David, *Saving Victim*, if only we could see . . .”

O God of all goodness, Whose eternal love overshadows even the wickedness of our pride, be Thou our salvation. Help us, save us, for without You we are lost in the ruin of our sins.

Spotless Mary, Mother of the Living God, lead us towards Jesus that true Light wherein alone is to be found the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Teach us to drink the bitter chalice of a repentance equal to our sins by observing a Lent worthy of its name. This we seek so we may come at length to the true Easter joy: the possession of the Jerusalem above, the Eternal Kingdom of Love itself.