

Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." During this holy season of Lent we remember and give thanks that the Son of God came down from heaven to serve us by dying on the cross, shedding His holy precious blood for the sins of the world; for your sins, my sins and for the sins of all people. Jesus Christ serves us with His innocent, bitter suffering and death, purchasing us and winning us from sin, from death and from the power of the devil; that we would be His own and live under Him in His kingdom in righteousness and purity forever. Our heavenly Father has regarded us as valuable, He loves us, wants the best for us, desires to have a loving relationship with us; that is why He sent His only begotten Son unto death, that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life. We are precious in the sight of God, more precious than gold and silver. We are the crown of His creation and the jewels of heaven. With God our heavenly Father, it is all about us, everything He is and does and says is for our highest good.

Because we have been regarded as precious in God's sight, because we are valuable, we are free to regard those around us in the same way; acknowledging our neighbor's value, recognizing his worth, realizing our neighbor's needs and wants and desires, to listen to him, to forgive him, to have compassion upon our neighbor, to speak up for him, to act in mercy toward him. Because God our heavenly Father loves us, we have the privilege and the responsibility of loving our neighbor as ourselves; showing our neighbor that just as God loves us, so too does He also love them. Everything we do if for the good of our neighbor, that the glory of God would be revealed.

As we continue in our three-fold theme for Lent, this is what it means to show mercy toward our neighbor. This is what it means for us, as witnesses of Jesus; we who have been joined to Christ in His death and resurrection, we who are members of God's kingdom, heirs of heaven, having hope and finding strength alone in Jesus Christ. We are to accept the love of God our Father with thanks and praise and then turn around and be an instrument of that love toward our neighbor. As baptized children of God, we are to

reveal and make known the love of Jesus to our neighbor. We have been purchased and won from sin and death and the power of the devil and God our Father uses us, that the same can be said about our neighbor. All of humanity is precious in God's sight and we need to make that known to our neighbor. We are not to lord over our neighbor the promise that God our Father has declared to us, we are to humble ourselves before our neighbor that he too would receive the same promise.

On Sunday, we celebrated a "little easter" singing the alleluias for the first time since Transfiguration Sunday. We sang the alleluias, which now will not be sung again until Easter, rejoicing and giving thanks because Jesus has taken compassion upon the multitude in the desert, feeding the five-thousand. Like the five-thousand, we have been regarded as precious in His sight. Even in our sin, Jesus shed His blood to forgive us of that sin, making us His own. As witnesses of Jesus Christ, we make a bold confession concerning the mercy of Jesus toward us sinners, in what we say and do for our neighbor. We show mercy toward our neighbor by humbling ourselves for His needs, we become our neighbor's servant, we care for him, we love our neighbor as ourselves. We willingly live a life of suffering and pain and humility for the betterment of our neighbor. When one suffers, we all suffer. When one rejoices, we all rejoice. That is what it means to be a member of the church of God, a member of the communion of saints, joined together as one body in Christ Jesus, for the church and the world.

With a song in our hearts, we help and support our neighbor in his every physical need. We encourage and support those whom God has joined together as husband and wife; standing up for and defending the institution of marriage and family. We help to improve and protect our neighbor's possessions and income. We defend and speak well of our neighbor, we explain every situation about our neighbor in the kindest way, just as we would defend and explain every uncomfortable situation in our lives. We help and be of service to our neighbor in keeping his business, his job, his way of life, supporting him and encouraging that together we would give God alone all thanks and praise. This is what it means to show mercy to our neighbor.

In our reading this evening Saint James and Saint John asked to sit at the right and the left hand of Jesus in heaven. To most that does not appearing like someone who desires to show mercy to his neighbor, it looks like they are looking out for old number one. Jesus said, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" And James and John responded, "We are able." And indeed Saint James and Saint John received the cup of suffering; they were martyred for the faith they taught, they were baptized with blood in the suffering and death of the martyrdom they endured for the one true faith that they upheld and defended. Saint James and Saint John realized the grace of God which is for all people. They realized that Jesus has come to show mercy by His death on the cross and they willingly did the same, by dying rather than turning away from the love of Jesus which is for all people. They knew how important it was for the world to know Jesus' grace, mercy, and peace, which is for all people.

We might mock and look with disdain upon Saint James and Saint John because of their request, but in reality we should admire them and model after them, because they desired to be near their Lord Jesus. They wanted to sit not twelve seats away, not six, not three, but smack dab beside Him. But even better than right next to Jesus, James and John were in Him and He was in them. James and John were joined to the death of Jesus, they were joined to the resurrection of Jesus; just as we are in our baptism, that we would live before God in righteousness and purity forever, that we would humble ourselves for the needs of our neighbor showing them mercy.

The example of Jesus, willingly humbling Himself unto death on the cross for you and me, is an example we are to follow as we live before our neighbor as servants, humbling ourselves, giving our lives, being concerned for the physical and spiritual needs of our neighbor, that all people would sing God's praise. From Jesus we learn what it means not to be served but to serve, and to give our lives as a testimony to Jesus who gave His life as a ransom for many, a ransom for us all. Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father in His kingdom. Saint James and Saint John and all the company of heaven now sit, not

on the right or the left of Jesus, but on the throne with our Lord in the presence of God in His kingdom. This is the promise for you and for me and for all those who are baptized into Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords. This is what we look forward to; and as we watch and wait and pray, we fear, love and trust in God our Father above all things and we love our neighbor as ourselves showing them mercy. This is how it is in God's kingdom. This is how it is in Christ, for the Church and the world. Amen.