

✠ Acts 12:1-25 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Peter, James, and John, the closest disciples to our Lord, the notable pillars of the saints, are persecuted to show us that the Church of God is always under persecution. No matter how great a saint someone is, persecution comes to those who hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God.

James, the brother of John, the companion of Jesus is put to death by the sword of Herod, decapitated, as legend tells us. John, though not mentioned by St. Luke here, would have grieved the loss of his brother, and so was also persecuted by grief inflicted by the hands of evil men. Peter was imprisoned by Herod, who intended to have Peter publicly executed as a spectacle after the Passover, when the Jews would be available to take note and glory in Peter's demise and Herod's triumph.

Yet this is not surprising, for the Lord of the Church was also persecuted at the hands of wicked men; delivered over into the hands of men to be crucified. And a servant is not above his Master. Thus, the saints do not wail and bemoan such circumstances, letting the evil infect their minds and hearts so that they despair and their mourning turn to shame, but rather the saints of God, the Church of the Most High, remain on their knees praying.

They prayed for deliverance for Peter, as the text says. And no doubt they prayed that John the brother of James be comforted and assured of the Resurrection. And surely they prayed for healing among their own ranks, that such circumstances would not diminish their faith but be used for the glory of God and the advancement of the kingdom of Christ. For the saints of God always pray that the glory of God be made known among His people and among all people. Thus when we pray, we are to pray in this way: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

For the kingdom of heaven advances on the lips of His saints; singing praises to God for His glorious deeds and praying to God for deliverance from evil. For such deliverance is to the glory of God and such deeds speak of His wonderful love. Peter was not released except that God be glorified. James was not executed except that God be glorified. You are not troubled by temptation except that God be glorified in your deliverance from evil.

Take note of Peter, he neither grieves nor frets, he sleeps. Between two of the men who were most likely scheduled to execute him on the morrow, Peter sleeps. So soundly, it seems, that the brilliance of the angel did not wake him, but the angel had to rough him up to rouse him from his slumber. Peter has prayed, "lead us not into temptation," and has been heard as the Father promises to hear His dear children. The Lord has delivered Peter so that he does not succumb to the temptation of worry, thinking God is not in control. He has not succumb to the temptation of fear and shame, thinking that the blood of Christ cannot save him from His sins, from death, and from Hades.

And upon his miraculous escape, Peter tells the church what had happened so that God would be glorified and the saints would be strengthened. For such a blow as the death of James

was countered by the mercy of God in giving Peter back to those who needed his leadership, wisdom, and fortitude. For Peter had slept between the henchmen of death and had walked out unharmed. Not only so, but God give witness that His purpose will be accomplished.

You see, when we are troubled by the things of this world, no matter how mundane or spectacular they are, we face the temptation to count the blood of Jesus as secondary, thinking the forgiveness of our sins is nothing; treating the blood of God as a nicety and ancient relic rather than that which saves us from this valley of tears.

But the Christian rests in the promise of God in Christ; that for Christ's sake our sins are forgiven and we have been redeemed from sin, death, and the devil. We too will walk out from between the henchmen of death. The devil, the world, and our sinful natures, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come, fight against God and so we are tempted. But the peace of God will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

Such peace is the peace that our Lord Jesus leaves with His saints, with His Church. It is the peace of God that passes all understanding: that in the midst of violence and hardship, imprisonment and torture, death and sickness, we are at peace with God the Father of our Lord Jesus, and know that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Such peace is the peace of the Resurrection. James died and Peter was as good as dead, yet both had been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Both participated in that mystical meal that joins those who eat and drink with the One who gave His body and blood to be eaten and drank.

That same baptismal flood that covered their sinful heads has been poured over you and the same effect has taken place: you have been crucified and raised in Christ Jesus. The same salvific blood and the same holy body are given to you by the Lord of Glory, the Crucified One, for you to eat and to drink, that His body and blood should make you righteous and keep you in His kingdom.

And like Peter's miraculous escape, these things are boggling to the mind and disorientating to the senses. Water seems too weak and common to affect salvation, and indeed it is if it is not joined to the Word of God, that is, the promise of salvation in Jesus' name. So too, bread and wine do not lend themselves to be the agents of God unto life eternal. Yet joined to the Word of God, that it is Christ Himself that gives His own body and blood, now risen from the dead, the elements that seem common are holy and able to keep you in the holy Church of God. For God is in Christ reconciling you to Himself.

But the glory of God does not stop there. For God will not be mocked. The man who set himself over the Church of God, indeed, over the Lord Himself, would meet the fate he whimsically imposed upon others. Herod died the death of one who is diseased and rotted. Worms ate him and he breathed his last because, Scripture says, he did not give glory to God but took the glory to himself. The Son of Man will come to judge the quick and the dead; giving eternal life His holy ones who believe on His name living in His Church and partaking of His banquet. And He shall wreak vengeance on those who mock His name and persecute His Bride.

Thus are we to pray: "Hallowed be Thy name." Our names are not holy except that they have been written by another in the Lamb's Book of Life. Therefore there is only One who is holy, even Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory. To Him be all praise and honor, even now and

forevermore. For He visits His people and redeems them. He is the horn of salvation raised up to bind the brokenhearted and set the captives free. In Him is life and all who dwell in Him share in His life of righteousness and innocence.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠