

✠ John 11 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

We all have crosses to bear. And though they are different for each one of us, they are all cut of the same wood. They are all trials of faith. All the crosses we bear – family feuds, disappointment, rejection, betrayal, unwed pregnant daughters, disrespectful hurtful sons, cancer, Alzheimer’s, old age, and even the death of loved ones – are trials of faith so that the Son of God may be glorified and so that you may believe.

That is not to say that these crosses are not the result of sin and rebellion; they are. And more times than not, we are the ones to blame for the crosses we bear. And it is those times that we need to confess our sin and be healed. But when they are not our fault, when we didn’t cause them, they seem to be all the heavier. When it’s not your fault that your wife left you or that your daughter ran away with that boy or that your loved one died, then the cross you bear is almost unbearable. If you’d done something to cause it, then perhaps you can do something to fix it. But if it happened beyond your control – like death – then you can in no wise bring it under your control, and it hurts all the more because you are helpless.

Martha did not cause the death of her brother, Lazarus. He died because he was a sinner. Just as we all will die because we are sinners; for the wages of sin is death. Martha didn’t cause his death so she felt helpless and betrayed. She felt small and insignificant. She mourned and grieved because she could not control death. So when Jesus, one who had healed the sick and made well those upon whose door death knocked, came to her, she spoke what we would expect her to speak, what we often speak, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

True enough. Jesus told His disciples, “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.” If Jesus had been there He would have healed His sick friend. But the Son does nothing on His own, but only what He sees His Father doing. Jesus waited until He heard from His Father before He headed off to Bethany to wake the man who slept the sleep of the dead. Two days it took for our Lord’s prayer to be answered. “Father, my friend whom I love is sick and ill, shall I go and heal Him?” “No, my Son, wait for the appointed time.”

But the appointed time was too late for poor Lazarus; it was too late for Mary and Martha. Now their brother lay dead and they could do nothing. The cross they bore was heavy and weighed them down under the sorrow and pain of living in this fallen world. But this cross, like all crosses, would be used by God to demonstrate the glory of His Son and to make His children depend more upon Him. It was to be used to make them believe.

Therefore, the Lord does not just raise Lazarus and rid these sisters of their grief and sorrow. He does not swoop in and make everything better all at once. That would do nothing but make selfish children more selfish. When a child demands a toy and gets it, all the child will have learned is that he has control over mom and dad. If God immediately gave into all our requests and desires, we would learn only that God does what we say. We would never learn patience, self-control, or humility. We would never be made into the image of the Son of God, living in perfect obedience, but would continue in the image of the father of lies, always

seeking self-promotion and wealth that spoils. Though we ask for scorpions and serpents, He gives us fish and eggs. For your heavenly Father knows what you need and will provide according to His riches and mercy.

Your heavenly Father is too concerned about you and loves you too much to give you everything your heart desires. For all too often our hearts are set on the things of the flesh, wanting to bring us self-glory. But the desire of the Son is only to glorify the Father; and so to Him He gives whatever He desires and thereby the Father glorifies the Son. What the Son desires is that you turn and be healed; that you leave behind your sinful passions, confess your sins, and seek the things above, for these things glorify the Father who sent the Son. He desires that you put your trust in Him, believe in Him that He is the One sent by the Father to undo the evil of sin; to restore life to the dead; to re-make His creation to what it is supposed to be.

And so He lets you endure, for a time, the crosses you bear. Not to punish you or to shame you, but to teach you to lean upon Him, to turn to Him, to cry out to Him for relief. God uses the crosses you bear for your betterment, to reshape you and mold you, as He would have you be; a child of God glorifying the Father through the Son. He is not a wasteful God. He uses everything to bring glory to His Son and to bring you closer to Himself.

If this means that you must suffer the slings and arrows of the evil one, suffering like Job, then God be praised. If this means that you suffer humiliation and pain, then God be praised. If this means that you suffer rejection and abandonment, betrayal and hatred, then God be praised. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord. For the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. And this glory is the glory of living in the resurrection.

Not in a resurrection that is to come, but in the resurrection that is now, which is Christ. He is the resurrection. He is your life. He raises you from the dead, giving you His life that will not wear out and will not die. Thus He says of you, "Our friend has fallen asleep, but I go to wake him." And in waking you from your sleep of death in the clutches of sin, He glorifies the Father who sent Him to do His work in the twelve hours of day; and the Father glorifies the Son by giving Him life to grant. And you are brought to faith, for the mighty words of the Son penetrate the stone-thick walls of your sinful heart and you hear His command: "Come out!"

He breaks the bonds that hold you fast. And He binds the strong man who is the devil, and plunders his house, taking you out and liberating you from the law of death. He brings you into the land of Israel, the land flowing with wine and bread from heaven, loosing your grave clothes and setting you free. So that though you may die you shall live. So that though you may bear that cross now, you will be raised from the death that it brings.

He lets you endure the cross now, that you may make the good confession with Martha: I believe, Lord, that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world. And I know that whatever you ask, God will grant. Praise be to God that the Son asks for you.

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

✠ AMEN ✠