

✠ St. John's Passion ✠

In Nomine Iesu

There is a theology prevalent among modern Christendom. It is the theology of the "empty cross". It is a theology that is somewhat ashamed of the death of Jesus Christ. True, it does not deny Jesus' death, but it wants to emphasize Easter and the Deity of Our Lord to the exclusion, or at least the severe minimizing, of Our Lord's humanity, suffering, and death.

In this cross minimalizing theology the atonement is a victory in terms that the world can fully understand: death is defeated by the resurrection. Jesus lives in victory. Lex Luthor is in jail. Everyone lives happily ever after. America loves Easter eggs and candy, but doesn't go much for talk of consequences and the price of sin or of a love so extreme that a Father would condemn His Son to win a Bride.

Our Lord's kingdom is not of this world. His victory is a scandal and a stumbling block. Obedience and submission are seen as a defect. His victory on the cross is rejected as defeat and weakness. There is no beauty in Our Savior that we should desire Him. He is despised and afflicted. We rightfully hide our faces in fear, shame, and disgust. Yet He is steadfast and faithful in His love for us. He does not turn away no matter how faithless and depraved we have been. He seeks Peter's gaze in the courtyard. He is ready to pronounce His peace.

Whether the world likes it or not, whether some churches like it or not, the Father's gracious will is known and believed in the forsaking of the Son, in the draining of the Cup of Wrath, in the substitutionary death died for renegade, uncaring sheep. This is the Day that the Lord hath made: the Day the builders rejected the Stone, the Day that our salvation was won, the Day that Jesus died. Today is Good.

Foolish though it seems, death was defeated in His submission, in His seeming defeat, in His agony, sorrow, and pain, in His death. He emptied death into Himself, took the full brunt, suffered all that it had to give until there was no more. It killed Him, but there is none left for us. The accusations against us are removed. The tempter's skull is crushed and the grave loses its sting because God bled and died, because He became a Man to be a worm and no man. Such is love, and such is our redemption and hope.

There is no Easter without Good Friday. Easter is the vindication, not the victory. It proves that Jesus is innocent and His Word is true. It shows that the Father has accepted the Sacrifice as payment in full. Death is dead and the devil is impotent. The Savior comes out of the belly of the earth to bring peace to Nineveh, to accept us sons of Esau back into the fold and return us to our fathers Noah, Abraham, and Isaac.

He is not merely God. He is also Man or it wouldn't matter at all. He is the Man who suffered torments and tortures to make us men again, to restore us to our place in creation, to join us to Himself in the unity of the Father and the Son. Our future, our resurrection, is assured in His Resurrection and the reign His Life begins. But Easter is not the ransom. It is the proof and the delivery.

So we are not ashamed of the cross, of the sorrow and grief known by Our Lord, by His

agony and struggle in the desert and the garden. Nor have we yet moved on, tired of the sacrifice and ready for the party. For our victorious life in Christ is lived as His life was lived: under the cross and to the world's thinking this is no victory at all.

But the student is not above the Master. The victory is over death and damnation. We are at peace with God. He loves us again. We are not without sin. We have not yet overcome that. So we struggle and we suffer. We endure temptation and know some failures. We don't always watch and pray. Sometimes we sleep. Our selfishness has hurt us and those we love. We have secrets and shame that we want no man to know. We need not ask concerning the betrayer, "Is it I, Lord?" Because we know that it is. Our victory is not in our own righteousness or will, but in His.

So we run to the cross. We love the cross. We love what God has done for us. We praise Him for the forgiveness and healing He gives us through the death of His beloved Son. For by this Holy Cross the world is crucified to us and we to the world and our sins are no more. We know why Jesus suffered these terrible things: He suffered them because of our sins. But more importantly we know for what purpose He suffered them: to rescue us out of death and Hell. He suffered and died for our salvation. He was lifted up from the earth to draw us to Himself. He has revealed Himself there as merciful, gracious, and faithful. We have looked upon the agony and death of Jesus and known love. In this Holy Faith, in the expectation of things to come and the confession that God is good, we wait for the Victory to be revealed.

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

✠ AMEN ✠