

Worthy is the Lamb that was Slain

Revelation 5:8-14, Laetare Sunday

March 14, 2010

Beloved of the Lord..... Colossians 3:1-4 says, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” While it is impossible for Christians to forget about heaven because we know our Savior, I’m afraid that in our day to day life we all too easily forget that we don’t really belong here on earth, but heaven is our true home. What is heaven like? It is, of course, filled with hundreds of thousands of happy angels and saints who sing with the greatest of joy, having perfect happiness and peace of heart. God describes heaven like a garden with a river trees and plants, yet it is also the “city of God”, teeming with life and people whose hearts yearn to be reunited with those saints still left on earth. Heaven should always be on our mind. When we or our loved ones endure sickness and hardship here, we should remember nobody ever suffers there in heaven. Our bodies are glorified there. Above all things the greatest joy of heaven is that our blessed Savior from all sin is there, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. We will see Him there face to face, and our hearts will rejoice. There in heaven “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” This is why the saints in our lesson sing a new song, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain”

I. The harps and prayers of the saints. John’s Revelation is a book filled with pictures and symbolism. It is not to be taken literally. Christ is not literally a lamb, but symbolically a Lamb, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Likewise the symbolism behind the 24 elders is likely the combination of the 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament and the 12 apostles of the New Testament. Together they represent the whole number of the elect, the Holy Christian Church on earth and in heaven. The four beasts represent either the angels of God who carrying out God’s commands or as Luther believed, they are the evangelists, who preach the Gospel all nations.

In John’s vision the Lamb of God now takes a book from God who sits upon the throne. The book itself represents God’s predetermined counsel and will for His Church on earth. Nothing here happens by chance or accident, but all goes according to God’s

gracious plan for His believers. Even when the forces of evil prevail, we remember according to God’s counsel they have a predetermined end and “all things work together for good to them that love God.” As God set bounds a limits for the devil concerning Job, so God sets bounds and limits for our enemies. Though the devil be a dog, he is still a dog on a leash.

What now about the harps used in song to praise the heavenly Lamb? This too is figurative. Luther held that these harps represent the lovely words of the Gospel whereby the Holy Ghost comforts our grieving hearts. When we are sick, when we suffer trial and temptation the Holy Spirit reminds us “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee”. Jesus said, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” God never gives us more than we can bear and He gives us strength to carry our cross. This cross leads to glory. In heaven we shall see the Lamb of God face to face. Thus the music, the singing, the joy of heart in heaven is infinitely better than any Gospel hymns we sing here on earth. They sing a new song on heaven, a perfect song sang from a perfectly joyful heart filled with a perfect love for the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. Here on earth the notes we sing are so limited that even animals can hear sounds and pitch which we do not hear. But in heaven it must not be so. In heaven there must be far more beautiful and angelic notes which we could never dream of nor imagine. Nor is heaven a boring place as many imagine. There is not only song, but conversation with the saints, food and drink at the marriage feast, a garden like Paradise, and I imagine new, beautiful, and exciting places to explore: a new heaven and earth.

II. Worthy is the Lamb. Immediately now after the Lamb takes the book the beasts and elders fall down and worship the Lord singing “a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.” Let us now focus on that word “worthy”. Why is this Lamb worthy? To understand His worthiness we must begin with our own unworthiness and also Holy Communion.

Only those of the Holy Christian Church know how unworthy we are of the salvation given us by Christ the Lamb of God. When we come to church every Sunday, or when we approach the Lord’s Table, we come to God loaded with sin. What are our sins? We have loved sons and daughters, wife or husband more than God. When our neighbor was suffering or hurting we failed to show true compassion of the heart. In the lesson of the Good Samaritan we are that Levite and priest who pass by on the other side,

when our neighbor lies naked and half dead at the side of the road. Moreover even our thoughts are evil continually. We have indulged our flesh with lustful thoughts and put the worst construction on everything. We have permitted our soul to be proud rather than humble. In our hearts we have murmured and complained against God like the Israelites. Instead of being filled with faith without fear, we were faithless filled with fear like the disciples. "O fools of heart and slow to believe"! Even when we pray and confess our sins to God saying "I a poor miserable sinner"...our minds are elsewhere and we give God only lip service without true repentance of heart.

For all these reasons and a thousand more, we are not worthy of the forgiveness of even one sin. Yet this is the very thing which makes the Lamb of God worthy of all our praise. Worthy IS the Lamb that was slain! Though we are unworthy, He is WORTHY because on the cross of His own crucifixion He made all our unworthiness His own, that He might bring us unto God by His blood. What is then a worthy communicant? Such is one who knows his own unworthiness, one who is truly sorry for his sins, yet also knows God, with His own body and blood has placed His forgiveness of sins in this Sacrament, "given and shed for you for the remission of sins." While those who are not sorry for their sins eat and drink to their own damnation, those who are sorry in their heart for their sins truly receive Christ's body and blood as a sign, a token, a holy seal from God, that all truly is forgiven. Jesus does not turn away those who confess their sins, but warmly invites all penitent sinners to His heavenly feast saying, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." Indeed, that is why the Lamb of God came to this world, to be slain for our sins, that He might bring us to God, reconcile us with God so that we faith become little lambs of God, sheep of His pasture gathered closely about the pierced feet of our Good Shepherd who says, "fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!"

III. The personal union of Christ. Now briefly, when we speak of the Lamb taking the book from God because He is worthy, we are speaking of Jesus according to His human nature. Needless to say since Jesus is God, He need not take or be given anything. As God from all eternity Jesus already possesses all power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessing. But when we speak of God's everlasting union with man in the person, the body of Christ, we do indeed speak of Jesus being GIVEN all "power and riches and wisdom and strength", for in His body all

the fullness of the Godhead lives bodily. God in the Word GIVES all glory to this Man, that we who are men might give all glory to this Man who is God. Jesus AS A MAN is the great I AM of Scriptures who AS A Man said, "Before Abraham was, I AM". Thus when we speak of Jesus being exalted, we are to see that this MAN named Jesus is far above all men, for He is the True and Almighty God far above us. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

Finally let us not overlook the truth that through the Lamb that was slain, God has made us kings and priests before Him and "We shall reign on the earth." How do believers reign? We reign, we rule this whole world through Christ. Since He is the One Mediator between God and men, our prayers through Him are all answered and we rule the whole earth. Thus the "golden vial full of odors" are the prayers of the saints which through Christ ascend up to heaven as a sweet smelling savour. God hears our prayers and through Christ rules this entire earth in the best interest of His saints, His believing children. Thus even when we are sick and weak in body upon our bed, we are yet kings and queens, precious in God's sight, the apple of His eye, the very hairs of our head being numbered. We are not in any way helpless, but by our prayers through Christ we are yet the rulers of this earth able to accomplish great things for the bible says "we shall reign on earth!"

Thus in conclusion dear weak and weary Christian, rejoice that Christ is now and ever shall be the everlasting strength of your soul and heaven is still your true home above. Jesus came to take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven. His eternal love for you which began before the foundation of the world is so certain and sure, that He in the fullness of time He by His own blood purchased and won you as His own, making you kings and queens before Him. Therefore run your race with patience and set your eyes on your heavenly home above. His yoke is easy and His burden light. "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!" Amen.