

Remembering and Forgetting Sin

John 21:15-19, May 1, 2011

Quasi Modo Geniti, Easter Sunday I

Beloved of the Lord.....Peter's threefold confession of Christ took place after his threefold denial. On the night of Jesus' betrayal, just a few hours after Peter received his first Holy Communion, Peter publicly denied Christ three times and fell from grace. When we have and receive Holy Communion, we confess our sins and do not deny them, and we also confess that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. By giving us His own body and blood, Christ assures our hearts with His forgiveness. We should commune often for Jesus said, "This do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me."

Why should we commune often? Because through Communion our soul is strengthened, namely our faith that through Christ all our sins are truly forgiven, even erased from the memory of God. Our catechism then asks the question, "What is the benefit of such eating and drinking"? That is shown us by these words, "given and shed for you for the remission of sins; namely that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." We approach the Lord's Table then *Chiefly to receive forgiveness of our sins and thus to be strengthened in our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, We obtain strength for a holier life; and bear testimony that we are of one faith with those who commune with us.* In Holy Communion we first remember our sins, and then through the blood of Christ we remember God has forgiven and forgotten all our sins.

I. Peter again remembers his sins. The background of our lesson this morning, is Christ's appearance on the seashore of Tiberias to the disciples who were fishing in a ship. They were Peter, Thomas, Nathanel, James and John, and two other disciples, seven in number. All night they had caught nothing, yet this Man from the shore greets them saying, "Children have ye any meat?" Telling Him "No", He instructs them to cast their net on the right side of the ship. They then catch so many fish the net should break, but it doesn't. Peter, realizing this Man is none other than the risen Jesus, dives into the water and swims to shore. The other disciples come in the boat after and they find Jesus already has a meal of fish and bread prepared on a fire of hot coals. They eat. They are filled. They are satisfied. Psalm 23 says, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul."

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" Here we must recall that proud Peter had once

said to Jesus before all the other disciples, "Though all *men* shall be offended because of thee, *yet* will I never be offended." Later proud Peter did the very thing he said he would never do. He denied his Lord three times and fell from grace. Peter fell because he was arrogant and proud about the strength of his faith. God recorded the fall of proud Peter, so that we will learn not to brag about the supposed strength of our faith or dare to say "I'm a better believer than my neighbor over there." Whenever our faith is in ourselves and our own strength to do this or that our faith is not in God who by His grace will uphold and strengthen us to do this or that. We must not think of ourselves as strong, but weak, for then Christ alone is our strength. Thus Paul writes, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." Similarly, if God has granted and allowed things in your life so you feel weak and helpless, it is only so you will better learn God is your strength and "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

In a similar manner, the name Peter means "rock" and Peter truly was a rock when he confessed "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." But in our lesson today notice Jesus addresses Peter as "Simon, son of Jonas" because Peter behaved as a son of Adam, a son of man when he previously denied Christ. "Lovest thou Me more than these" struck Peter even more severely. Before Peter though he did. Now Peter knows better. The Bible says, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

But when was Peter truly restored to faith? This is hard to say for we cannot look into his heart and only God knows. Nevertheless after Christ's resurrection Jesus had suddenly appeared to the group of disciples behind closed doors saying, "Peace be unto you." The Bible says, "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." This would include Peter. Jesus then breathed on them the Holy Ghost saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Peter must have by this time put his trust and confidence again in Jesus and the remission of all sins. Nevertheless what we see in today's account is a very personal yet public conversation, apparently very necessary for Peter. As He publicly bragged about his faith and the publicly denied Christ, so now before the disciples he would three times humbly confess Christ before the disciples and never deny Christ again. Peter would suffer a martyr's death. "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not." James 1:12 says, "Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

II. "By the law is the knowledge of sin", and by the law we too remember our sins. Putting ourselves now in

Peter's shoes, it must have been very hard to hear the same question asked of Peter three times. The Bible says, "Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me?" In the threefold yet same question, Peter cannot but be reminded of his threefold denial. By the third time no doubt the dreadful memory of his sin in the past came rushing to the forefront of his mind. Not only did Peter remember his sin, but the Lord knew his sin also. What can we learn from this? "By the law is the knowledge of sin" and by the law we too like Peter remember our sin. Did we love our Lord when we took His name in vain? Did we love our Lord when our eyes lusted upon that which was forbidden? Did we love our Lord when we cursed and swore at our neighbor? Did we love our Lord when we proudly said within our heart, "Well at least I've never done that sin." Did we love our Lord when we were drunk and had perverse thoughts? Did we love our Lord when we dishonored our parents before our friends? Did we love our Lord when we were bitter against our children? Did we love our Lord when we skipped church, or skipped Holy Communion so we could sleep in? Did we love our Lord when we committed that sin in darkness when no one but the Lord was looking?

III. The Gospel tells us God has forgotten all our sins. Beloved of the Lord, these questions of the law strike our heart and conscience like an arrow. Like Peter the memory of our past sins rushes to the forefront of our mind. It makes no difference if we committed the sin yesterday or 20 years ago, we remember and we cannot forget. Yet God does not preach the law to us to destroy us, but only to destroy our pride, that proud Peter within us. When we are humbled we begin again to thirst for Jesus, to desire his forgiveness. Jesus in no way wants us to despair but when we remember our sin He desires we turn only to Him in repentance and faith for "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" and "the broken and contrite heart God does not despise!" On the surface in our text I do not find any Gospel at all. But I do see that Jesus is standing there speaking to Peter only in love. There is no anger in Jesus' words, but only gentleness and mercy for "God is love" and Jesus does use that word LOVE. When Jesus says to Peter, "Do you love me Peter", there are also the unseen words, "as I have loved you."

"As I have loved you" dear Christian....."as I have loved you." Christ's love for Peter was beyond all doubt. Peter had seen Christ crucified and Peter had known the love of Jesus which could not be denied. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Thus when Jesus said, "Feed My lambs" and "Feed My sheep", Peter understood. For he himself had been fed the Gospel Words of his Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. He himself had been given the sweet and full remission of sins, and Jesus had

called him into the ministry to give this same forgiveness to others. "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." When we hear almost 2000 years later, these same precious words of Jesus, "Feed My sheep" and "Feed My lambs", we ought to find great comfort. For Jesus says "These are MY sheep Peter, and these are MY lambs Peter. I lived for them and died for them and rose again because of their justification."

"They do not belong to you Peter, but they belong to Me. I purchased them. I won them over from the power of the devil by My body on the cross, by My holy but shed blood. Feed them Peter. Give them the green grasses of my pasture. Lead them to the still waters. Restore their soul in, by, and through ME. Remind them Peter that I have blotted out like a thick cloud their transgressions. Teach them Peter that though their sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as wool. And if the memory of their sins haunts them Peter, remind them that by My body and blood not only does God forgive them all their sins, but God forgets and cannot remember their sins. "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more", thus saith the Lord.

Finally beloved of the Lord, in these Gospel Words can't we hear Jesus speaking to us? Does it matter that He spoke these words long ago to Peter? Isn't He still speaking to us today? What is Jesus saying in the Gospel? He is saying this: By the power of My blood, I truly forgive you for taking My name in vain. I forgive you for not honoring and obey your father and mother. I forgive you for being bitter against your children. I forgive you for your drunkenness, your rebellion, your lust and coveting. I forgive you for your adultery, and the perverse thoughts of your heart. I forgive you for loving this world more than Me, yea I forgive you all things.

Knowing all this is true dear Peter, "Follow Me." Follow Him by keeping and obeying His commandments in love. Follow Him by suffering all things for His sake. And finally follow Him by forgiving and forgetting the sins of your neighbor. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." To forgive is to forget. Amen.