

Trinity 10

I take as my text today from the 19th Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel:

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it....

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

The passage we read today from St. Luke is the continuation of his description of Jesus entering into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, ending with Christ's cleansing of the Temple.

Now, in just four verses, 41 through 44, Luke paints a picture of Jesus filled with such deep emotion:

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,

Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side,

And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

What a powerful vision of our Lord; what emotion.

This is one of my many favorite passages because, in just a few words, we have what we may call definitive proof of his human nature: yes, he is God, but he also is truly man, and that is one of the Holy Mysteries.

In taking on our nature, Jesus took on our infirmities as well. He felt all the emotions that we mere mortals feel. And real tears fell from his eyes, proof indeed, of the extent of God's love for us and the length he would go to make us whole again — he, God, would take upon himself our flesh in the Miracle of the Incarnation.

Now, picture that particular moment in time:

Jesus is approaching Jerusalem. He has been greeted by crowds along the way. Now, the path becomes rugged as it descends the Mount of Olives to a point where, in the distance, the whole city of Jerusalem appears quite suddenly.

In that day, what a magnificent sight it must have been: the Temple-tower and the Temple-courts with the city as a backdrop; the Kedron and Hinnom valleys joining together. It would have been truly breath-taking.

Here, Jesus pauses. Gazing upon the city in the distance he reflects on its terrible future. With tears streaming from his eyes, he laments, *O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!*

He laments not only because he knows the destruction that is to come but also because he knows why it must come about: *because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*

Here was the Messiah they had longed for, only to be rejected.

The Messiah had been among them, preaching, performing miracles, and they didn't know him. Not only did they reject his presence, they despised him.
and they put him to death.

Had the Jews recognized him as the promised Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem that was to come within 40 years could have been prevented. That was the tragedy of it all.

Blinded by the minutia of the Law, by the splendor of the Temple, by the gloriousness of riches and wealth, their hearts were hardened. Where was their love of God?

But, alas, collected wickedness as a nation was too great and all mercy had been exhausted. The time was approaching when Jerusalem must perish; indeed, in the year 70, Jerusalem was laid to waste.

The historian, Josephus, reports that Titus built a wall around the whole circumference of the city, a wall that was nearly 5 miles in length. The wall was completed incredibly in ten days. The professed design of this wall was *to keep* the city *in on every side* in order that he, Titus, might compel the city to surrender by "famine,"

Jesus wept, his tears the tears of God at the sight of the Chosen People rebelling against Him; His, the tears that flow when the heart is breaking.

Those tears have not ceased as our Lord sees the pain and suffering of his people who continue even to this day to sin, to rebel against his will.

There is an overwhelming beauty in that emotional outpouring of Jesus as he gazes upon Jerusalem. It is a beauty that transcends all eternity. It is the beauty of divine love expressed through natural passions so moved as to provide proof of the truth of our Lord's humanity.

Even today, in witness to that divine love, we see the patience of God; we see his appeal to us to accept his love.

At the same time, we see our fallen nature, that is, our sinful rejection of his love, the result of our own free will.

And, we see the consequences of our sin.

As God loves us, so he wants us to love him. His delight is not in our ruin but in our repentance. His desire is our salvation.

As we hear in Matthew 23, verse 37:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

In tenderness and affection, Christ would take us into his protection, where we would find refuge and refreshment, if only we would turn to him for shelter, for comfort and warmth.

Come unto Me all ye that travail and are heavy laden and I will refresh you.

Jesus opens his arms and reaches out to us in love. But how many souls today are hardened by the rigors of life or so lured by the riches and pleasures of the world that they lose sight of the joy and peace that comes through God's Grace and through his Love for each of us.

What has happened in this day and age that has caused so many to distance themselves from God, from the love expressed through his Son, Jesus Christ?

Could it be that, for so many people, there is just no room in their hearts for God's love; no time in the busy-ness of everyday life to devote even a moment to think upon God and the salvation he offers us through his Son?

Could it be that for some a *fear of God* in the negative sense, that is, being literally frightened of God, to the point that they try to put him out of their thoughts; out of their lives? Do they imagine only a God of Wrath and not a God of Love?

Could it be that we Christians do not put enough emphasis on the *fear of God* in the positive sense; that is, fear in the sense of awe and reverence, and devotion to God in response to his Love?

Could it also be that we Christians spend so much of our time telling each other what sinners we are, the retribution we all face, and painting a pretty hopeless picture of our lot, that we can not get past all of that to see the love, the promise, the hope offered in Christ Jesus?

Or could it be that humankind sees itself as the pinnacle of creation, which rightfully it is, and that, therefore, there could be nothing greater, proving, perhaps, the old adage that *a little knowledge is a dangerous thing*?

Without a doubt, the events of our times are telling — disregard for sanctity of life; indulgence in self-aggrandizement; denial of individual responsibility whether for one's actions or condition in life; and rejection of even the most basic moral standards.

Media pundits and commentators, politicians and leaders in all areas and levels of society seem to be driven by a deep-seated resentment that often reveals itself as hatred.

A pretty rough assessment, not that we human beings aren't a pretty rough lot, indeed.

Regardless of our roughness, we must rise above the world and those who would drag us down into the pit. We must come to the realization that we were created for good not evil; we must acknowledge the source of all life; we must allow true humility to guide our relationship with our creator and with each other; and we must embrace the Law of Love, that is the Law expressed in the commandment to love God and to *love thy neighbor as thyself*.

The Apostle John, for all that he endured, provides us an example: his most endearing words, *Little children, love one another*.

As our Lord wept at what was and what was to come, seeing the Jewish nation reject the time of their visitation by rejecting the ministry of John the Baptist, by rejecting his own ministry and that of his Apostles, we are reminded that for each generation, the time of visitation is now

Even more to the point, we are reminded that the time of our own, personal, visitation is now: the time to accept the salvation offered to us; the time to respond to God's unfathomable Love; the time to be washed and cleansed by his Tears.