

“Christ Crucified Because of You, and For You”

The cross of Jesus Christ is it a reminder of His suffering and death or is it “my consolation” as we just sang? Do we want the body of Jesus on our crosses in church to show us His death – or does an empty cross somehow show that He is not dead, but alive? Put another way – is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ Law, or Gospel?

Which is it? It’s both. Let me put it another way. Jesus Christ was crucified BECAUSE of you – and Jesus Christ was crucified FOR you. Both are necessary for you – for the Christian who lives by faith in Jesus Christ – who lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord – both His Law, and His Gospel.

As Hearers of the Word – tonight we walk with Jesus from the upper room to the garden – back into Jerusalem to Annas and Caiaphas – to Pilate and the soldiers – out of the city once again to Golgotha and the cross – to a garden once again, and a tomb.

And as we walk with Him, we are amazed because He goes willingly. “Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Is. 53:7).

In the Hymn of the Day that you will soon sing, Jesus says it this way: “Yes, Father, yes, most willingly I’ll bear what You command Me.” And again, “All this I gladly suffer.” Amazing. Truly amazing. All BECAUSE of you, and FOR you.

Jesus, the Son of God (true God and true man), willingly goes to the Garden of Gethsemane – knowing that Judas will find Him there. And when the betrayer comes – with a band of soldiers and lanterns and torches and weapons – Jesus doesn’t put up a fight – rather, He tells Peter to put the sword away. He doesn’t resist. He doesn’t try to run away. He doesn’t walk right through their hands – but allows Himself to be bound, and be led away.

Jesus willingly goes to stand before Annas, and then Caiaphas – high priests who are supposed to mediate between God and man – but instead, they speak to God on their own behalf, to do their own will.

Off to Pilate and the soldiers He willingly goes – still bound, still being led around like a sheep. The charges and accusations against Him hold no water – but they’ve come to the conclusion they desire – and now, they need the Romans to do their part.

It’s not much of an interrogation. Questions about whether He is a king, and His kingdom. Jesus largely remains silent, but when He does speak, He speaks the truth. He doesn’t get into a power struggle with Pilate – but speaks the truth when saying that Pilate would have no authority over Him unless it had been given to him from above. And so, He willingly He submits to this governing authority – because He desires to do His Father’s will.

The flogging, the mocking, the rejection, the unjust sentence – He doesn’t cry foul, He doesn’t raise objections – He willingly suffers it all. Condemned to death by crucifixion, He goes willingly – He goes as the Passover Lamb to be sacrificed – to Golgotha, to the cross.

Why would He endure all this? BECAUSE of you. BECAUSE of your sin. The sentence handed down by Pilate is NOT UNJUST – not in the eyes of the heavenly Father – for His justice demands that the wages of sin be paid – and what our sin has justly deserved ... is death.

Jesus has no sin of His own. He hangs from the cross – BECAUSE of you – and FOR you. Over and over again He is taunted by others – “save yourself and come down from the cross” – but Jesus stays, BECAUSE and FOR you.

Even the ones worthy of being put to death because of their sin confess the truth. “We are justly receiving the due reward for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:41).

That’s not the first time we’ve heard that Jesus is innocent – everyone knows it – the chief priests and the scribes – Annas & Caiaphas – Pilate, His wife – one of those crucified with Him – the centurion who oversees the crucifixion.

But here He is, hanging from the cross – willingly giving Himself into death. It is our sin that deserves death – we ought to be the ones hanging from a cross. And that’s why Jesus is there, BECAUSE of our sin. That is Law – and the Law always accuses us – it always condemns us sinners.

But Jesus does so willingly! He takes your sin as His own – He takes your place under the condemnation of God’s Law – He takes your place on the cross, and in death. As we say in the Creed – “who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven” – and willingly makes His way to the cross, to death – so that YOU may live. FOR you and FOR your salvation – that’s good news – that’s the Gospel!

St. John makes a point of telling us about the blood and water that flows from Jesus’ side after He has been pierced by the soldier’s spear. Is this Law, or Gospel? It is Law in that, it shows us what our sin has done – and yet, it is Gospel – for the blood of Jesus Christ washes away all our iniquity, and His blood redeems us from sin and death.

John bears witness – his testimony about the blood and water is true – he tells you the truth, so “that you also may believe” – that you may believe that Jesus died BECAUSE of you – and that Jesus died FOR you.

When you behold the cross of Jesus Christ – it is indeed an instrument of brutal torture and death – but there is more going on here than meets the eye. Listen to God’s own Word, revealing what He is up to.

What does God say as He hangs from the cross? “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And to the one who confesses that he deservedly hangs upon a cross, He says – “Today you will be with me in paradise.” (St. Luke 23:34, 43)

And finally, with His last words, He preaches pure Gospel into your ears. “It is finished.” All that is demanded by the Law – all the debt that sin has racked up – the sacrifice necessary to atone for sin, to turn away death and give life “It is finished.” “It is finished” FOR you – FOR your salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and your minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.