

“The Feast of Victory”

Scan the horizon of Holy Scripture and you will see many mountain peaks. Mt. Sinai on which God gave His holy Law. The Mountain of Transfiguration where Jesus’ divinity shines through. The Mount of Olives, where the God-man Jesus sits upon a donkey and rides into Jerusalem as the King of Israel.

The greatest of all mountains is Mt. Calvary – where the Son of God is lifted up as the atoning sacrifice for all sin. There, on that mountain, redemption is won – death and the grave are conquered – and opened to us is the way of everlasting life.

Dearly beloved, today you are invited to another mountain – a mountain where a feast has been prepared for you. On this mountain the resurrected Jesus makes an appearance, showing His victory over death. He invites you to this feast – to eat and to drink, and live with Him forever.

Isaiah writes: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine.” Isaiah was referring to Mt. Zion (the highest point in the city of Jerusalem) – but there’s no need for you to hop on a plane and fly to Israel – because for YOU today, Mt. Zion is right here!

Right here, in the very midst of us, the resurrected Lord makes an appearance – He comes to us in His Gospel Word and Gospel Sacraments. Right here, today, He spreads His feast before you.

Isaiah continues: “And He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.”

It’s true, that death covers all people. It’s an inescapable fact of life that we will all die. It’s been said that, “All of life is lived at the graveside.” From the moment you are born, you take one step closer each day, until death wraps itself around you, and you are put in the grave.

Why is that? Why must we die? Why haven't we evolved into a creature that will never die? Allegedly we are supposed to be moving towards some higher form of being – but no matter how high we think we are – death brings us low.

Death is not a mystery for the Christian. The Scriptures clearly tell us where death comes from – that “the wages of sin is death.” The Apostle Paul says: “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). Did you hear what God says? He says that ALL have sinned, and therefore, ALL die.

Now, you can deny this truth. You can pretend that you don't have any sin. You can try to justify yourself. You can call sin a religious gimmick, a guilt trip used by those who desire to manipulate you and control you – you can say whatever you want ----- but you cannot escape death. Death is the ultimate proof that you are a sinner – for, “the wages of sin is death.”

Isaiah says that sin and death are a reproach – and they are. They are foreign to God's creation. He created you to live, not die – but the enemy, the devil, has snuck in and planted the seed of disobedience and pride – leading us away from the Word of life, and into death.

From our perspective, it looks as though the devil has won the day, as sin and death abound – but God says that where sin and death abound, there is an abundance of His grace. The Lord God promises that “He will swallow up death forever” – “He will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth.”

In Christ, it is no longer the promise that “He WILL swallow up death” – but rather – He HAS swallowed up death. This Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger – was wrapped in the shroud of death – paying the wages that our sin had earned – and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures.

Now, the resurrected Jesus stands in the midst of His Church as she proclaims: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Today, on THIS mountain, Jesus wipes away your tears. He takes away your sin and its sorrow, so that you may rejoice in His salvation. And even though you know that death will come to you because you are a sinner – you live in hope, because in Jesus your sin is redeemed and your death is swallowed up forever.

“It will be said on that day, ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, that He might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

All that Isaiah promised now stands fulfilled. Today, these words are in your mouths. Today, you are saved – all because of the life, suffering and death of God’s beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

“This is the Lord, we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

Dearly beloved, come up onto Mt. Zion, to the feast that the Lord has prepared. Sit at Table with the resurrected Christ – a Table spread with the richest of foods and the best of wines – even His very own Body and Blood – eat and drink His victory over death, and receive His life everlasting.

Rejoice, for the Lord is here on THIS mountain. Rejoice and be glad, as you feast in His victory. Amen.

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