

“The Glory of Christ and the Christian”

“You do not know what you are asking.” James and John – you have no clue – you don’t know what you are getting yourself into.

And so it is for all the disciples of Jesus Christ – all Christians, who follow Jesus. Do you realize what you are doing parents, when you bring your child to be baptized? Are you sure you want them to be catechized and grow up in the Christian faith? Do you really know what it means to be a Christian?

James and John are disciples of Jesus Christ. They are part of the Twelve whom Jesus called to “follow me.” They’ve been with Jesus for some time now. They’ve heard His preaching and teaching. They’ve seen His miracles, and the crowds. They think they have a pretty good grasp on the kingdom of God.

Not all that long before our text takes place, James and John had been arguing with the rest of the Twelve about “who is the greatest.” Now, they see their shot, and they take it. They get a jump on the others and come to Jesus with a request.

It’s a funny sort of request, isn’t it? They properly address Him as “Teacher” – and then comes their request – one that no teacher would grant without restrictions. “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

This reminds me of the request of the chief priests and the scribes when they bring Jesus before Pilate. Just do what we want – don’t ask any questions – don’t inquire about the charges that have been brought against this man.

“What do you want me to do for you,” Jesus says to James and John. “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” A right-hand and a left-hand man in His kingdom.

“In your glory,” they say – showing what kind of kingdom they expect. More miracles, more crowds, more success. And there they would sit – in places of honor, and power, and prestige. They would be FIRST among many (actually SECOND, but only to Jesus). They would be served by others. Jesus, Teacher, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

You too are disciples, “followers” of Jesus Christ. What is it that you want Him to do for you? What thoughts do you have regarding His kingdom? Do you wish to sit upon His right or upon His left in His glory?

Sadly, we don’t know what we are asking – we don’t know the true glory of the kingdom of God. We bring our children to be baptized because Christ promises salvation to all who believe and are baptized – but we tend to treat it in a “once saved, always saved” kind of way (just get baptized and you’re going to heaven no matter what).

Christ commands that disciples would be made of all nations by baptizing them and teaching them all about Jesus and His kingdom – so, we bring our children to be catechized. But are we just jumping through hoops – or are we teaching them that this is the way of life for the Christian, from womb to tomb? Do we bring them to catechism to stay in Grandma’s good graces – or, do we want our children to stay in God’s good graces?

What a glorious thing we have made of Christianity! It’s so easy to be a Christian! Get baptized – show up when you want, for what you want – and expect every privilege as a member of the congregation. Have nothing to do with hearing Jesus’ Word or receiving His sacrament – but when it comes time for a wedding or a funeral, just assume the pastor and church will do “whatever [you] ask.” What a glorious kingdom in which to be a Christian!

James and John should have known better. They are on their way up to Jerusalem with Jesus and the rest of the Twelve – and Jesus has told them plainly, what lies ahead. “The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He will rise.”

Three times Jesus has told them that this is what is going to happen. As His disciples, they know where this leads – they are following Jesus into His Passion

We too should know better – but we’ve led a pretty sheltered Christian life – free from persecution and suffering – little or no backlash for our beliefs – and pretty low expectations from the church.

But it looks like times are a changing. Indeed, Jesus says that in this world we will have tribulations. The Scripture says that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion searching someone to devour. He seeks to devour you, the Christian – to devour your faith in Jesus Christ, so that you are devoured eternally in the agony of hell.

Jesus has told us what lies ahead, and we are walking right into it. Rejection, mocking and persecution are rising against those who dare to call out the sin of abortion, same-sex marriage, and the purposeful confusion over gender. Confess that All Lives Matter, and there will be backlash. Point out the tyranny of the governing authorities, and you will be persecuted.

The “Equality Act” currently before the Congress will make illegal certain teachings and activities of the Church. Belonging to the Church might look more like it did in the Early Church when Christianity was an illegal religion – when Christians met under the cover of darkness in house churches – when you needed a sponsor to be brought into the church to learn about Christ and to receive His gifts – when an open confession of Jesus as your Lord and Savior usually meant death.

You may think I’m preaching that “the sky is falling” – but nothing could be further from the truth. Dearly beloved, I am preaching to you the GLORY of Christ’s kingdom. You want to see His glory, His kingdom? Then look at Him as He sits upon the throne of the cross, with crown, and title, and a right and left hand man – ruling and reigning over sin and death.

Yes, you will drink from His cup – you will suffer with Him, be persecuted, mocked, and maybe even put to death. But you have One who, though He is Great, has become your servant – the eternal One, who comes even now to serve you!

“Glory be to Jesus” – who went to Jerusalem, shed His blood, and gave His life as a ransom on behalf of the whole world. Glory be to you – who, though you suffer, are covered in His blood, ransomed from the devil, loosed from all sin, and preserved in Christ’s kingdom – a kingdom of victory and life – a glorious kingdom indeed! Amen.

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