

## Return to the Church

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Holy Week / Communion of Saints; Bride of Christ; Blood; Water; Pierced Servant / Zechariah 12:10–13:1; Psalm 69:16–21; 1 Corinthians 12:12–14; John 19:28–37

Notes

via livestream

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- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Resting King. Amen.

Why are you here?

The question is a little forward, I admit, but please don't be offended. I'm not trying to make you uncomfortable. I am asking, rather, to nudge you to think about how you came to faith; how you were led to become a member of the Church; how you joined this particular community of faith. And honestly, I hope to make us all consider what it means that God has called us to be members of His Body and how He uses us to encourage and support one another as we live out our faith.

As we journeyed through Lent we focused on God's call, especially His call through the prophet Joel to return to Him, to turn from our sins, to trust in Christ, and be saved. The imagery of returning has come up again and again as we have looked at the events of Jesus' Passion, examining the various sins committed and considering how we transgress God's Commandments in our own lives. That part of it has been sobering and difficult. But the rest of Joel's message has offered hope and comfort: "Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and He relents over disaster." We have seen that God's relenting over disaster involved sending His own Son into the world. We have been comforted to hear again that our salvation has been secured for us by His all-availing sacrifice on the cross.

That sacrifice is front and center on this day, as we gather together having experienced Good Friday yesterday and awaiting the joy of Easter Sunday tomorrow. The events of Good Friday are the starting point for our Gospel today. The death of Christ is retold with few words but massive effect in John's Gospel:

**English Standard Version Chapter 19**

30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

We start there, because that is the place where everything comes together. On the cross, weighed down with your sin, pained by the departure of God's presence, Christ finally completes His earthly mission. We do well to pause and simply reflect on this scene for a moment in order to set the stage for the call we will hear today.

John emphasizes on more than one occasion that Jesus did what He did "to fulfill the Scripture." He was carrying out a plan that His Father had put into motion way back in the Garden of Eden. Finally, it was coming to fruition. What Satan corrupted, Jesus is putting right. "It is finished."

Something, surprising happened next. The Jewish leaders, intensely concerned about the Scriptural law, at least where the Passover was concerned, asked Pilate to break the legs of Jesus and the two criminals. They wanted to speed along the process of death and avoid the negativity of having the bodies of Jesus still hanging on the cross during the Sabbath. The soldiers discovered that Jesus was already dead, so they did not break His legs. Instead, a soldier jabbed a spear into His side, and blood and water came pouring out, confirming that He was dead.

That wound—our Lord's pierced side—is filled with meaning.

That wound brought the whole episode to a crushing end. The apostle John and Mary, Jesus' mother, looked on, devastated. The disciples had scattered and had no idea what to do with themselves; their leader was dead. They looked on Jesus, dead on the cross, and they mourned for him. They mourned for Him the way you would mourn the loss of a child or a parent or a dear friend.

They wept bitterly over Him. They wept the way you would weep if lost your firstborn child. That day, the mourning in Jerusalem was like the mourning we experience on 9/11, as we tried to make sense of the loss of life. That day, the mourning in Jerusalem was like the mourning our country went through after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Everyone mourned. Families gathered close together. But even at that, each person felt alone. Wives and mothers drifted away from their families to cry privately in the bedroom. Youth curled up in their beds to try and make sense of the tragedy.

The day that Jesus died was a dark, dark day. No one quite understood what to make of it.

But on that day, a wound was opened in Jesus' side, and blood and water poured forth from it. Something amazing happened. A fountain was opened for us. A fountain of blood and water and that didn't mean death, but life. A fountain of holy blood and holy water that would give birth to the very Bride of Christ. A fountain that would provide everything needed to "wash your robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb." A fountain that would finally, eternally, crush the head of Satan and reconcile the whole world to God.

When God created Adam, He determined early on that "it was not good that man should be alone," so He set out to make a helper fit for man. He had created all manner of animals and beasts, and He brought them to Adam to see what he would name them. But none of them was a suitable helpmate. So God put Adam into a deep sleep and did a little surgery, taking a rib from Adam's side and He created a woman, Eve. "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

From a wound in Adam's side the bride of Adam was made for him: a suitable partner, someone he could be with for his whole life; someone for whom he could give of himself; someone he could love and cherish; someone with whom he could share joy and companionship.

Today we remember something similar, and it starts with a wound in Jesus' side.

Because from a wound in Jesus' side, the Bride of Christ has been made for Him: a suitable partner; someone who will be with Him forever; someone for whom He had already given of Himself; someone He loves and cherishes; someone with whom He shares joy and companionship.

You are that Bride. We are the Bride of Christ.

God has called us into the Church, into a community of believers who make up the very Bride of Christ. That's why you are here! He has called you into this community intentionally and for good purpose.

Because as a part of this community, you get to serve the Lord and serve your brothers and sisters. In this community, the fullness of Christ dwells, and the Holy Spirit works. In this community, you get to encourage and support one another. We get to lift up one another. To rejoice with one another in the good times. To weep with one another in the bad times. To teach one another about God and His great love for us.

As we come together today to look "On Him whom we have pierced," we see the flood of blood and water, and we realize that it is a "fountain opened for all of God's people, to clean us from sin and uncleanness." This fountain gives birth to the Church, and God calls us together into this community for His sake and for ours. He calls us on this day to Return...Return in repentance to the Church.

May we rejoice in our calling and always support and encourage one another as we live out our faith in Christ together as the Body of Christ.

In the name of Jesus, our Crucified and Buried King. Amen.

- › Now may the God of peace which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.