

Readings of Passion Sunday

Hebrews 9: 11-15

Brethren: when Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation, he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God. For this reason, he is mediator of a new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 8: 46-59

At that time, Jesus said to the multitudes of the Jews: Can any of you charge me with sin? If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears the words of God; for this reason, you do not listen because you do not belong to God." The Jews answered and said to him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed?" Jesus answered, "I am not possessed; I honor my Father, but you dishonor me. I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it, and he is the one who judges. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." (So) the Jews said to him, "Now we are sure that you are possessed. Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? Or the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' You do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know him, and I keep his word. Abraham, your father, rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad. So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM." So they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area.

Jesus Christ, the Eternal "I AM"

Passion Sunday (TLM) – Hebrews 9: 11-15 / John 8: 46-59
Ave Maria Catholic Church, March 26, 2023 - Fr. David M Vidal

The Jewish people said to Jesus: *"You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?"* Jesus then said: *"Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM,"* (John 8: 57-58).

"I AM" is God's name. This is the way in which God spoke to Moses from the burning bush when Moses asked to know the Name of God: *"God replied to Moses: I am who I am. Then He added: This is what you will tell the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you,"* (Ex 3:14). With this name, the Lord sent Moses to the Israelites, enslaved in Egypt, and to the Pharaoh-oppressors: *"I AM sent me to you,"* (Ex 3:14).

With this name, God led his chosen people out of slavery to make a covenant with Israel: *"I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me,"* (Ex 20:2-3).

This name, "I AM," is the foundation of the Old Covenant. This name is also at the foundation of the New Covenant.

Our Lord Jesus comes to us. Some people claim that He is John the Baptist, others say that He is Elijah, and others suppose that He is Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Jesus asks his apostles: *"But who do you say that I am?"* (Mt 16:15) Then, Peter answers: *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,"* (Mt. 16:16).

Jesus is not John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Jesus is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The Eternal "I AM" who is with us.

However, our faith in Jesus must be tested.

Before Peter's confession, the apostles found themselves in the middle of a storm, in the middle of a lake, and in the middle of a dark night. The apostles were terrified. They saw Jesus, who was walking on the water. They thought He was a ghost and cried out in fear, but Jesus said: *Take courage, it is I,*" (Mt 14: 27).

Then, Peter said those astonishing words: *"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."* And Jesus said: *"Come."* (Mt 14: 28-29).

Peter got out of the boat and, walking on the water, came towards Jesus: but on hearing the wind, he became afraid; he began to sink, and then he cried out: *"Lord, save me!"* Jesus

reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying: *“O man of little faith, why did you doubt?”* (Mt 14:30-31).

After Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, his faith was also tested. Jesus announced his passion: *“Jesus began to show his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.”* (Mt 16:21)

Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, *“God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.”* Peter was ready to accept a glorified Messiah, but he firmly rejected a suffering Messiah and Redeemer.

Jesus turned and said to Peter: *“Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do,”* (Mt 16: 22-23).

Today, we hear the words of Jesus in St. Matthew’s gospel: *“Before Abraham came to be, I AM,”* (Jn 8:58). And we also read in St. John’s gospel that Jesus proclaims: *“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM,”* (Jn 8:28).

On the cross, we see the manifestation of the divine “I AM” of the New and Eternal Covenant. The sign of the cross not only proves our faith but also increases our love. Because on the cross, we discover the Eternal “I AM,” the Son of the living God, offering his life for us. As we read in St. John’s gospel: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life,”* (Jn 3:16).

As we begin this *Passiontide* and approach *Holy Week*, let us consider, through the different scenes of the Passion, how Jesus Christ not only suffered for us, but He greatly desired to suffer for us!

Contemplate Jesus’s love and determination. He won’t stop until He gives up his life for us on the cross. This was his decision when he entered into the world. As we read in the letter to the Hebrews 10: 5-7:

“When he came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. Then I said, ‘As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God.’”

Peter tried to stop Him. The apostles insisted so many times that He would not die, that He should not go to Jerusalem. But Jesus insisted. Contemplate Jesus on the Mount of Olives, when the crowd went for Him, “they fell to the ground” at the strength of his voice. (Jn 18.16). He could have fled, but He did not want to. Consider when He stood before Herod or when He faced Pilate. He could have insisted, and He would have won His freedom, but

He did not even try. Then, when He was hanging on the Cross, He could have descended from it, but He embraced it.

Why did Jesus do this? There is a reason.

As evening drew near, before the Sabbath at Passover, Jesus was taken from the cross and placed in the tomb. Then, on the third day, He came among his disciples to say to them:

“Peace be with you! . . . It is I myself!” (See Lk 24:36-37, 39). He is the divine “I AM.” He is the eternal “I AM” who goes to the passion for us, dies on the cross for us, and rises on the third day to offer us eternal life.

If Jesus did that for us, we could ask ourselves: *‘What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What will I do for Christ?’* During this *Passiontide*, let us reflect on the wonderful works of Christ, let us pray, and let us answer those questions. Amen