

APPOINTED GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM THE 9TH CHAPTER OF MARK'S GOSPEL

Can you imagine what it would be like if that were your child? What would you do? What could you do? Your son, your daughter, rolls around on the ground and foams at the mouth. A demon has taken away his/her ability to hear and to speak. That same demon throws your child into the fire trying to burn them to death. It throws your child into the water trying to drown them. The thought itself, is chilling, isn't it? You awaken each day wondering what the day will be like, because all you could do is stand there, and watch, helpless to do anything.

But, you are not without hope. You have hope because you are a child of God by grace. And not only are you a child of God by grace, but your child, too, is His child by grace. Although it seems to your reason and senses that God seems to have forgotten your child -- His child -- you continue to believe that He has loved him unto death, even death on the cross. AND SO WE CRY TO HIM IN FAITH WITH ALL BOLDNESS AND CONFIDENCE, BECAUSE HE HAS COMMANDED US TO PRAY WITH THE SURE AND CERTAIN PROMISE THAT HE WILL HEAR OUR CRY OF FAITH.

That is, after all, what the Gospel is all about. Jesus, true God and yet true man, takes on our suffering and death that we might have life in His name. God, in His Son Jesus, takes on our suffering and death that we might have life in His name. "Greater love has no one than this," Jesus says, "that someone lays down his life for his friends" (Jn 15). You believe that God loves you; in fact, He loved you so much that He sent His Son to

lay down His life for you, and because the very Son of God did indeed do that, you are His beloved child. And as His child, the Psalmist says, “you will yet see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Ps 27).

And yet, on this side of heaven, there are those days. Those days when you wonder if you can go on, when you wonder if God is punishing you or if He is punishing your child for something one of you did or did not do, or, if He has forgotten you altogether. You know, the day when your child was sick and the doctor said, “We don’t know. We have to run more tests.” The day your beloved spouse died, the day you had to worship with him/her for the last time on this side of heaven, the day you sat at the kitchen table -- ALONE -- and realized this was your future. The day you learned you didn’t get the promotion at work, but that so-and-so co-worker did. The day your child called to tell you the drunk driver ran the stop light and hit the car your grandchild was in. On those days, from the very depths of your soul, you cry out once again with the Psalmist,

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide Your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me (Ps 13)?

You hear the words of our Gospel this morning, and you see yourself, don’t you? No, your child was not demon possessed, but you’ve had days like that. Days when you have had confidence and joy in God’s grace and mercy, and on the other hand, even in the next breath, fear, and panic, and near despair. Helpless before his son, the father could only cry, “I believe; help my unbelief!” Dear Saints of God, faith trusts that God hears our cry of faith, even when it seems to our reason and senses, that God is silent.

II. Faith believes the promise of God, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (H3 13). God was there for this father in Jesus and He is there for us

in Jesus. Think of the grief and troubles He bore to the cross. He had no sin of His own but took on your sin and the sin of all the world. “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us,” is how the Bible says it. Jesus took on our guilt, our suffering, our punishment as his very own. In untold agony upon the cross, He spoke, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned -- forsaken – me.” The Good News of the Gospel is this: God the Father abandoned His only-begotten Son to the death of the cross as punishment for our sin. And because the Father abandoned His Son, Jesus has endured all the anger, all the punishment, all the death of God so that now God will never abandon, forsake, you.

III. The father’s confession, “I believe; help my unbelief,” is the daily life and struggle of the Baptized. It was the struggle of this father. It is your struggle and mine. In our sorrows and troubles, faith relies on Jesus. In the book of Hebrews, we read:

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (He 12).”

Jesus is the author of our faith. In the water along with the Word of our baptism, God the Holy Spirit works faith in us so that, in faith, we are one with Jesus. We died to sin in Jesus and have been raised to new spiritual life in Jesus so that we walk, not by the doubts and weaknesses of our flesh, nor the lusts and desires of our flesh, but by faith.

But, it is not always easy to walk by faith. Faith knows its weakness. Faith sorrows over weakness. But, faith always trust, always hopes, always finds comfort that Christ is with you even in your dark hours, your weak minutes, your days and night of anxious doubt.

In his Small Catechism, Luther teaches us,

“God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

When it seems to us that God is silent, then we must all the more with confidence draw near to His throne of grace, “that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (He 4).” Trusting in faith, we hold God to His promise, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you (Ps 50).” “Ask,” Jesus says, “and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you (Mt 7).”

We have this confidence and assurance because Jesus is not only the author of your faith; He is the finisher of your faith. He who began His good work in you in the new birth of your baptism will bring it to completion. Through the Word of the Gospel and the eating and drinking of Christ’s body and blood, God continues to feed the faith He began at our baptism that truly we may walk by faith and cry to Him in faith.

Dear Saints of God, if you ever find yourself saying, “If only I had a stronger faith,” if you are weakening under the weight of the cross, if sorrows surround you, then remember your baptism, go back to the Word of God, come to the Lord’s Table to feast upon His Body and Blood. The sorrows and troubles God permits in our lives help us to see the weakness of our faith and drive us back to God’s Word so that we may grow like Christ and unbelief be driven away.

God is present in His Word and uses His Word, the spoken Word and the visible Word of the Sacraments, to do His work in us. Today is Christian Education Rally Sunday. More than anything, Christian education

focuses on teaching God's Word to His children -- children of all ages, for it is through His Word, that God increases our faith and drives out unbelief.

And so, we cry to God in our need, even when our emotions and feelings tell us God doesn't care. We cry to God in the faith that He who has commanded us to pray will hear our prayer and deliver us. Don't take my word for it. Take the word of the father whose son was demon-possessed. Or better yet, take the word of the son himself.