

SET YOUR FACE LIKE A FLINT

Sermon **762**

Palm Sunday

March **24, 2013**

888th Week as Priest

714th Week at St Dunstan's

Supply at Epiphany-Tallassee

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and Afrom the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In a sense, the long journey from Galilee was finally coming to an end. An eternity, it must have seemed, since Jesus came out of the wilderness and was baptized by John in the River Jordan. For three years, he experienced the immediacy of need, the emergency of circumstances, the pain and suffering of an ever-growing multitude of the disaffected, the lonely, the diseased, and the hungry. He healed them of their infirmities. He drove out demons. He performed signs and wonders. He fed thousands. He even raised the dead back to life.

Surely our Lord was exhausted by now. With nowhere to lay his head, and nobody to confide in—only the urgent voice of his own conscience, and the steady presence of his Father, sustained him in the great effort.

Jesus had set his face like a flint. Flint, by the way, is a hard stone that has been in use since the Stone Age to make weapons and tools. It breaks into sharp edges. Struck against steel, it produces fire. All of these ideas are relevant to Jesus, but here I think the expression means that he was sharply focused on the hard work that lay ahead. And he was fully committed, and he was completely obedient to the will of his Father.

But there was more: Jesus knew all of the prophecies by heart, and he knew in the deepest and strongest way that he was the fulfillment of those prophecies as they were faithfully recorded in the scrolls of Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah. Their words flowed together like a powerful river in the desert, across the centuries, up to the gates of the City Jerusalem.

And he was being swept along in the current—both guiding their movement and being battered and beaten—riding alone on the crest of that great wave.

Jesus knew there was no alternative, no other, safer, lesser path to take. The Son of God must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise. Do you understand this? Jesus knew precisely what awaited him in the city that kills the prophets. The sins of the whole world, and his agonizing shameful death as the only price that could be paid.

He must have remembered with terrible recall the three temptations set before him by the Evil One. But the greatest of those, without doubt, was the offer to avoid altogether that agonizing shameful death—the betrayal, the arrest, beatings, trial, crucifixion, and death. “If you will only worship me,” said the Accuser, “then all this will be yours.”

It would have been so effortless to have taken his Father's throne without cost, without sacrifice, expiation, ransom, or atonement. But Jesus knew that without his own suffering and death, we would not be saved from ourselves. We would have had no need of faith, or responsibility, or right action. We could have easily blamed it all on Jesus, since he proved himself unwilling to die. And we would have, make no mistake. We would have

second-guessed that Messiah. We would have doubted his integrity and his courage. Or we would have just left it all to him—the mission, the ministry, the steadfast love, the faith, the hope. **But** either way, if he had fallen into temptation and taken the throne, we would be forever lost, damned to hell for eternity.

But he had set his face like a flint. **He** knew the welcome that awaited him. “**Blessed** is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

And he knew how quickly the hosannas would fade into silence, and then false accusation and bitter hatred. “We have no king but **Caesar**. Crucify him! Crucify him! Give us **Barabbas!**”

The truth is that, without **Christ** as our Lord and Savior, we are *hopeless*, every single one of us. **And** when I say that, I mean *all* of us—Jews, Pharisees, Scribes, **Disciples**, **Followers**, **Christians**, **Episcopalians**, all of us. We could no more maintain steadfast love, strong courage, and constant devotion than we could raise the dead back to life. We have no power of ourselves to help ourselves. That much is all too plain in the sacred stories. We must have a Savior. We must have nothing less than the Son of **God** to deliver us. *And only he could be the Savior*. Only he could deliver us from the way of sin and death.

All of this is given. We know the story as well as we know the stories of our own family. **But** now it is time to examine ourselves, our souls and bodies, in the context of the Passion **Gospel**: Where would you belong in the story? **Are** you one of the happy palm-waving crowd, those who quickly become his accusers, his jury, his kangaroo court? **Are** you Pontius Pilate, in a position of power far above your own ability, and just eager to go home at the end of the day and drink wine until you’ve forgotten your hundred decisions and indecisions? Perhaps you are one of the disciples, full of empty convictions and broken promises, and nowhere to be found when our hero is in danger? We should all hope that we might be with the women who stood by the Lord when all had run away. They were there at the Crucifixion, and they returned to the tomb to anoint his body. They, besides Jesus himself, are the only heroes to be found.

It occurs to me that we have been all of these players, at one time or another in the Passion Play—Roman soldier, angry onlooker, cowardly disciple, brave follower. **But** the Passion Play is not over yet. It is played and replayed each year in **Holy Week**. We have a chance to set our faces like a flint this year. We can be strong and of good courage. With **Christ**, and through **Christ**, and in **Christ**, we can stand and be counted among the faithful. **As** a part of the **Body of Christ**, we can stand together and stand firm. We can proclaim **Christ Crucified** and **Christ Raised from Death**.

Now is the time. This is the week. This is the fullness of our time. Let us set our faces like a flint. Let us be willing to suffer with **Christ** in his death. **And**, in **God’s** infinite love and mercy, let us be raised with **Christ**. *Amen*.

1,128 words