

It's the oddest thing, that we hear at the end of today's Gospel isn't it? "**Jesus hid Himself.**" It is why on this day, and until Good Friday, the crosses are veiled. That seems backwards. We are getting *closer* to Good Friday. If at any time we ought to direct our gaze upon the holy cross, to see the Lord's body nailed to those blessed beams, it is now! But we shield that image from our eyes for these two weeks.

"**Jesus hid Himself.**" If at any time Jesus ought to stand His ground, surely it is after having said that He is the one whom Abraham saw and rejoiced in, that He is I AM, Yahweh, the eternal Son of the Father without age, without beginning or end. He stands in the House of His Father. The work and duties of all the priests who are there are what we call "types," little pictures of Him. All the worship and ceremonies of Israel were visual promises of the Messiah's person and work. That's the main point of the whole Letter to the Hebrews, and you hear that in today's epistle. Just before the appointed reading, the author to the Hebrews goes through a brief description of the duties of the Old Testament priests and says, "**This...is a picture...only a picture**" (Heb 9:9).

Christ, the author to the Hebrews tells us, is the "**High Priest of the good things that have come**" (Heb 9:11). His service, His liturgy, is the final and complete one. He secures not a momentary cleanliness from ritual impurity, but "**eternal redemption**" (Heb 9:12). Through Him comes the cleansing not just of flesh, but of the conscience. All that was promised by the prophets and hoped for by the believers in the Old Testament had arrived. The true and final Lamb, which Abraham told Isaac would be provided by God Himself (Gen 22:8), now stands before the priests of Israel, proclaiming to them who He is: the long-promised Seed of Abraham, through whom all the earth would be blessed (Gen 22:18); the Seed of the Woman, who, in crushing Satan's head, sin and death would be undone (Gen 3:15).

But rather than rejoice in the completion of their ministry with the coming of the Messiah and His service, rather than hear Jesus' word and keep it, the priests and religious leaders call Jesus a Samaritan, accuse Him of having a demon (Jn 8:48). He proclaims that He is I AM, the almighty God of Israel, head by them at Sinai, seen by Moses in the Burning Bush, worshipped and adored in the Tabernacle, who forgave and saved them through the blood on the Mercy Seat. But rather than rejoice and sing, at this they pick up stones to throw at Him (Jn 8:59). It was these same to whom Jesus had said just a little earlier, "**Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone**" (Jn 8:7). Having heard Jesus say in all clarity who He is, that He has come to save sinners, that in Him there is deliverance from death, they, in unbelief cannot abide His words, and show that they imagine themselves to be without sin, without need for salvation. He announces that He has come to forgive and save them and they seek to kill Him.

Like with the Jewish leaders in today's Gospel, there's a real temptation from our flesh to get mad at God when He wants to give us His promises. Generally, it's not because Jesus says who He is. We don't accuse Him of blasphemy and try to stone Him. But we do get tired of taking refuge in Him. There is that part of us that want to wallow in misery and self-pity over our difficult circumstances, that wants to keep nursing our hurts from other's sins against us, to complain about how Easter this year won't be the same, that makes us hesitant or even refuse to be consoled by the objective truth of Christ's death and resurrection for us. We get bored with the message of the sacrifice of the cross and the forgiveness of sins. Repent. That is the first step on the path to unbelief. There is no sin, no problem, no cross or trial to which Jesus and His sacrifice is not the answer.

That "**Jesus hid Himself**" is a warning. It is a warning against despising Him, taking Him for granted. Though they were surrounded by the promise of the final payment and sacrifice for sin, the temple elite clung to the shadows rather than the reality. Rather than repent, they kept looking to themselves for righteousness, trusting in that rather than in the only Righteous One. That the crosses are veiled for a time is a reminder of our unworthiness of the Lord's sacrifice. We forget it, treat it casually, fail to seek our true comfort and life from it. And had we been in Jerusalem, we too would have added our voices to the cries for His death.

But Jesus also hides because it was not yet His hour. He does not hide because He is scared, afraid to die and wanting to save His own skin. He hides because He had yet to show that His coming resurrection is for us as well by raising Lazarus from the grave. He had yet to institute the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar as the means by which we

receive the fruits of His sacrifice. He had yet to pray for His Church in His prayer in the Upper Room, had yet to show His willing obedience to His Father's plan in the prayers offered in Gethsemane. All the Scriptures had to be fulfilled; the prophecies of Judas' betrayal and despair, of all the disciples scattering. He was not to die at the hands of a frenzied mob casting stones in the temple, but deliberately on the Passover, cast out of the city as the scapegoat bearing all the sin of the world, hung on a tree as a curse for us, shown to be true Lamb, lifted on the spit of the cross, roasted in the Father's wrath.

His liturgy, His saving service as our High Priest, is done through His own blood. It is not taken from Him, but is offered by Himself, willingly. The words of the introit are His as He speaks of His altar of the cross: "**I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy.**" From that altar of sacrifice He does not shrink. He does not listen to the cries of mockery, beckoning Him to come down from the cross and then they will receive Him as the Messiah (Matt 27:40, 42–43). His glory, His majestic service, is hanging not in priestly garments, no royal robes, but in naked shame, clothed only in stripes, bruises, and blood. From that is your eternal redemption. From that comes His Word that in believing in Him, laying hold of Him, you shall not taste death. And so what is veiled today, difficult to see, will be unveiled not in cowering shame but in boasting glory in the solemn liturgy of Good Friday.

As the Lamb of God lay on His altar, taking away the sin of the world, we look in adoring eyes upon His sacrifice for us. There we see the answer to every trial and trouble, to every sin and all our shame. And we take the words of the Psalm on our own lips, as we gladly go to His altar here, to receive the exceeding joy, the sweet taste of salvation, as lips and hearts are sprinkled clean and cleave to Christ not just by faith but in body.

As painful as it is in these days to have quarantines, quotas, and chaos fall in this part of the church year, as much as Holy Week and Easter will be affected and changed under duress, Christ's Word remains the same. His truth, who He is and what He has accomplished for us, are not affected in the least bit by any of this. Rather, they remain steadfast and unchanging in midst of all this. That is why you have been urged to make use of God's Word in your homes. To sing hymns, pray, and read God's Word. That is why we have not eliminated or reduced worship opportunities, but expanded them, offering more times through the week where Christ's people may gather to hear His promises, come before His altar, and receive the blood that secured your eternal redemption.

This is how it ought to be at all times for us. In God's Providence, this affliction has taken place when even weak Christians have a sense that we must be about the things of God because it's Lent, almost Holy Week. We are driven by this holy time to desire the things of God. Hearing God's Word, taking hold of it and keeping it with a believing heart, is the mark of a Christian, not just during Lent or Holy Week, but always. Christ is teaching us, in a country that increasingly sees no need for His Word, to love it, to love Him.

Until His coming again in glory He remains hidden. It is not yet the final hour when all flesh shall see Him. But we know where to find Him. We know where He speaks, and what it is that He says.