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ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται

Garbė Dievui aukštybėse

Χριστός Воскрес!

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Holy Wednesday 2015

1 Peter 2:25 *“For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”*

Passion narrative: **Matthew 26: 31-75**

The passion narrative places Peter outside the praetorium. He has opportunity to speak up and defend Jesus. Instead of defending Jesus, he is offended and ashamed. He does not want to be *“caught dead”* as one of Jesus’ friends. While he warms himself by the fire, his “inner fire” to defend Jesus grows very cold! Three times he is

asked, **“Are you one of Jesus’ disciples?”** Three times he denies it!

He was not timid in his denial. He was very bold in his denial of Jesus. There was no mistaking what Peter was saying. There was no misunderstanding it! He is “Peter the denier!” With “oaths” and “curses” he denies any association with Jesus: **“I swear to God, I don’t know the man!”** (Mt.26: 72, 74). In other words, Peter is saying, **“I do not have anything to do with Him!”**

As the denials spew out of his mouth, the rooster crows a second time. A thousand roosters could have screamed themselves to death and still Peter would have remained defiant. He does not even realize what he has done by such spoken words. Peter does not recognize the damning results of such statements. All he knows is that he cannot distance himself from Jesus fast enough.

Then it happened! We call it the “moment of truth” – Peter remembers! Finally, his sin hits him – like a rock was dropped on his head. Peter suddenly **“remembers the word which Jesus had said, ‘Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times’**” (Matt. 26:75). The text says that Peter went out and wept bitterly.

He realizes what he is – he is a “lost and condemned sinner.” No one made him do it. He did it all on his own. It is the “word” from Jesus which brings it all into perspective. Peter now knows what he has done. The ramification of what he had done “hits him” like an arrow piercing through the heart. But that is what the Word of God does – it pierces the heart and demands a response. It does not return to Him void. Peter breaks down – he runs away – he sobs – the text says he weeps, “uncontrollably.” The word of Jesus always does something to the hearer. There is never a neutral effect. It either makes a stony heart even more cold and unmoving or it softens the hardened heart in faith and trust. Either way, the heart is never the same!

This text also serves as a mirror of our own lives. It reminds us that we, too, are *“lost and condemned sinners.”* Do not begin to think that we are any better than Peter. It is true – we are Christ’s disciples – we are baptized! And yet, how often do we, in our words and lives, deny our baptism? How often are we the one offended by this poor, beaten, and mocked Jesus? How often have we joined in with the culture of this world, because we did not want to be known as a follower of Jesus? Or, because we were afraid of what that might mean to our comfort, social standing or family life?

The typical scenario goes something like this: *“Aren’t you a Christian? What happened to all this talk about you being baptized?”* Maybe it is the authorities, seeking to exercise new repressions. And like

Peter did, you also, *swear* that you are not a Christian – either by your silence or by your spoken denials. And, when the congregational membership list is read, your name is on the list – but you insist – *“I don’t know that Jesus! I may be on the list, but I never go to church! I have never had anything to do with Him!”* And if we do not say it, we imply it, by our action – or inaction! **There is a Peter who lives inside of all of us!**

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Prayer Requests, Praises, and Thanks

Many Siberian pastors serve multiple congregation parishes. Pray for safe travel as these dedicated clergy travel to provide care for their parishioners.

Also, pray for the laity as they travel to attend liturgy.

Pray for the Lutheran catechumens throughout the world as they learn the Christian vocation.

Pray the Litany

No, we are not any better than Peter. Just like He did for Peter, the Lord Jesus does for us. He gives us “rooster-crow” after “rooster crow,” – warning after warning – as we are “stuck in the mud and muck” of sin. He gives warnings to us to **show us** our sin. He provides them to **reveal** how far we have fallen – **all for the purpose of leading us to repentance**. He *breaks* our hearts. He *shatters* our life and sometimes puts our hopes and dreams on hold. Sometimes He allows what **we** think are “bad things,” to happen to us, so we can receive only His good and gracious mercy. He does this, to tear us away from trusting in ourselves – so that we can cling to Him, as our only hope and salvation.

Did you wonder what Peter was writing about in the epistle reading for this Wednesday of Holy Week, when he wrote: **For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps** (1 Pet 2:21)? Jesus was not some kind of super-hero or mentor that we are given to imitate, or else be lost forever. What Peter was referring to was the “**example**” Jesus has given in His Word and Sacraments as a constant defense against temptation. It is by this “**example**” that we are saved and preserved in the faith. It is not something that we “**go do**,” it is all about what **He** has **already** done and continues to do, **for you**.

Jesus prayed for the disciples (which included Peter). He prayed that Peter’s faith in divine mercy would not cease. And in the midst of such *ugly, self-absorbed sin*, Peter “**runs away**.” But do you remember what happened **after** the resurrection? In Mark’s narrative he tells the women to “**go tell Peter**.” They were told to tell Peter and the disciples to meet Him “**in Galilee**.” This is, also, what Jesus said in our passion narrative read this evening. It was “**in Galilee**” where Peter is restored. There, Peter confesses Jesus three times – just as he had denied Jesus three times.

Peter is restored! Jesus has paid for Peter’s denial in His own suffering and death. This is why Peter was able to include this in his epistle, which was read earlier: “**for by His wounds you were healed** (1 Pet. 2:24). He has placed Peter into the Apostolic Office to “feed” Christ’s holy Church. Peter is “**preserved in faith**.” But Jesus in His high priestly prayer – and even today – does not pray **just** for Peter. He prays **for you**, also. He prays for the whole world, (a world damned by sin) that it might be saved – and as the “*one, holy Christian and apostolic Church*” still does, today, in the holy liturgy.

We know where to go. Like the disciples, we have been told to go to **our** “Galilee,” to be restored. That is where Jesus promises to be – **for us** – to save and preserve **us**. Our “Galilee” is where the Font waits to wash us daily of our sin and clothe us with the righteousness of Christ. Our “Galilee” is where the Word of Holy

Absolution is preached and bestowed – by the laying on of hands and apostolic Word – on people struggling with the curse of sin. Our “Galilee” is where the Holy Supper is given to feed us a holy meal – a “*medicine of immortality*” – where we are freed from, not **only** the sins we commit, but **also** from, the **effects** of the sins placed **onto us** by others.

What Peter is telling us is that there are no longer any sins left to haunt us. They are all covered by Christ’s “wounds.” This is all accomplished in Christ’s death – imputed to us by His Holy Gifts. Our “Galilee” is the **Holy Liturgy** where heaven and earth meet to bestow such gifts – in a most mysterious way – for the purpose of *keeping and preserving* Christ’s Holy Church. And since you are baptized, that also includes **you**. So rejoice! “**For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls**.” (1 Pet 2:25). “**You have returned**” because He, “*the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls*” has *called you* – Jesus has “**returned**” you **from** your sin, to live **with Him** in the waters of Holy Baptism.

In Jesus name! Amen! ❖❖❖



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