



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

Holy Week Devotions (April 11 – 15, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 20:1-5

¹ The LORD answer you in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you!

² May he send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion.

³ May he remember all your offerings, and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices.

⁴ May he grant you your heart's desire, and fulfill all your plans.

⁵ May we shout for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God set up our banners.

May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.

These verses, scholars tell us, were often spoken by a priest to a king in a worship service prior to going into battle. We can see here petitions for protection, for help and support, for favor and finally, for victory. We can also hear in these petitions the hopes of those who would fight alongside the king, and ultimately all those whose lives and homes depended on the success of their king going into battle. One cannot help but think of this prayer as something we might pray for President Zelensky of Ukraine, as he and his generals continue to lead the fight against the Russian invasion begun over six weeks ago. We pray that God's favor would rest upon those who have been unjustly targeted in this war of aggression, and we pray that ultimately, a just and lasting peace will soon come.

Prayer

God of the Nations, wars and rumors of war continue to plague our globe. In Ukraine, millions flee and thousands lie dead because of a war of aggression. Bring aid, healing, and comfort to the refugees world-wide; give strength, resolve, and courage to those who fight; and give wisdom and a desire for peace to all those who negotiate an end to this horror. Help your Church world-wide to come to the aid of all in need, and give us courage to stand up to aggression wherever we encounter it. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Hebrews 10:19-25

¹⁹Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Growing up, as I did, in a family of eight – three boys, three girls, Mom and Dad – there were more than a few times that I was accused of “provoking” my siblings. Usually this meant teasing them, or needling them, or being just generally annoying. Of course, I pleaded innocent of all charges, but I am sure of one thing, I was never *commended* for my actions. Without exception, provoking my siblings was looked upon as a no-no. In this passage we are actually *exhorted* to provoke our siblings in Christ, not to annoy them; rather, to encourage them to love and good deeds. The original Greek for this word comes from the root for “sharpening,” and so what we are being asked to do here is to “sharpen” one another, i.e. to make us all more effective witnesses of the Gospel and more compassionate servants of Christ. Also we are exhorted to encourage one another to gather regularly for worship, not neglecting this practice, since it is in gathering together that we gain our strength as God’s people. It turns out, each one of us is important in “sharpening” one another for God’s work through us.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for calling us into your community of faith. Thank you for making us your children in baptism. Help us to find our role in this family of God, and use each of us to stir up one another to love and good works, until that day when you shall call us all to our Heavenly Home. In Christ’s name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Judges 9:8-15

⁸The trees once went out to anoint a king over themselves.

So they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us.'

⁹The olive tree answered them, 'Shall I stop producing my rich oil by which gods and mortals are honored, and go to sway over the trees?'

¹⁰Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us.'

¹¹But the fig tree answered them, 'Shall I stop producing my sweetness and my delicious fruit, and go to sway over the trees?'

¹²Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us.'

¹³But the vine said to them, 'Shall I stop producing my wine that cheers gods and mortals, and go to sway over the trees?'

¹⁴So all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come and reign over us.'

¹⁵And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon'

This simple parable was once told to a group of nobles who had chosen a tyrant as their leader. As the parable makes clear, whenever trees elect the bramble to be their king no good will come of it. Indeed, "the cedars of Lebanon" (i.e. the nobles) did pay for their poor choice with their own lives. We hear regularly these days of the awful price nations and peoples pay for choosing leaders whose only goal is to gather power and wealth to themselves. The most obvious example of this today is Vladimir Putin, but other autocrats also reign elsewhere, and still others wait in the wings. This ancient parable would remind us that leadership that has the welfare of the common person in mind is a treasure indeed, and as people of God, we are called to be part of the process for electing such leaders. It may even be the case that some of us are called to be those leaders.

Prayer

God of All, the history of the world is littered with the wreckage of failed leadership, and the suffering that has come because of it. Come to the aid of this world you have made and raise up leaders who will steward its resources well and care for the people entrusted to them. Grant us wisdom in electing leaders and courage to walk in the ways of truth. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

AMEN.

Maundy Thursday

I Corinthians 11:23-26

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

These words are certainly familiar to anyone who takes Holy Communion regularly. They are often referred to as “the Words of Institution,” for these words, or something similar to them, Jesus used to institute his Last Supper with his disciples. In giving First Communion instruction to 5th graders I would often point to verse 26 in this passage and give them a scenario: Imagine that it was illegal to be a Christian, and you were in the middle of an illegal worship service which included Holy Communion, and the police came in amidst the communion service. Would your participation in that service be evidence of your faith? I Corinthians 11:26 says it would. When you eat this bread and drink this cup, you *proclaim* – that is to say, you tell the world – that you believe that Jesus died for the sins of the world and for yours. Taking the bread and cup is not merely an act of individual piety; it is also an act of public witness. You are saying, “I am a Christian. Christ is my Savior. I am a believer.” On Maundy Thursday we take the bread and cup and therein we proclaim our faith.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Savior of the world, we praise and thank you for your great sacrifice for us all. We stand in awe of the love you showed for the world on the Cross, and the gifts you continue to give us in the bread and cup of Holy Communion. Draw us ever closer to you and make us bold proclaimers of your love. In your precious name we pray. AMEN.

Good Friday

Isaiah 53:10-12

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.

When you make his life an offering for sin,

he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;

through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.

¹¹ Out of his anguish he shall see light;

he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.

The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,

and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,

and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;

because he poured out himself to death,

and was numbered with the transgressors;

yet he bore the sin of many,

and made intercession for the transgressors.

These ancient words of the prophet Isaiah are often read at Good Friday services. Even though these words were written to the Hebrew people centuries before Jesus came on the scene, Christians have, from early on, seen the sacrifice of Christ reflected in these words. What is clear is that the righteous person mentioned here is “pouring himself out” voluntarily. No one is forcing him to do this. This one called the Righteous Servant is willingly numbered with transgressors even though he, himself, is guiltless. He bears the sins “of many” and prays on their behalf. It is this marvelous sacrifice that leads Christians to see Christ here. As Jesus said in the Gospel of John, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.” (John 10:17-18) It is this great sacrifice that we contemplate at Good Friday worship. It is this great love that we sing of when we sing, “What Wondrous Love is This.” We can only stand in awe of this great sacrifice.

Prayer

Loving Lord, Savior of the World, your great sacrifice and love stand before us and leave us speechless. The Cross on which you died stands as a witness to the sins of the world, and even our own sins. Forgive us, dearest Savior. Grant us true repentance and the will to live lives of faith and love. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.