

Twelfth Passion Sermon

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**Christ Commits His Mother To The Care Of John. — The Soldiers Do Not Break The Legs Of Christ, But With A Spear Pierce His Side, From Which Blood And Water Flow.**

**Martin Luther, "Twelfth Passion-Sermon," Matthias Loy, ed., *Dr. Martin Luther's House-Postil, or, Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year. Volume 2. Two Volumes. Second Edition. (Columbus, Ohio; J. A. Schulze, 1884), pp. 231-249.***

**John 19, 25-37.**

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy Son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was a high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken. And again another Scripture saith, They shall look on Him whom they pierced.

**S**t. John, toward the end of the passion history, relates three things, about which the other Evangelists do not write, but which are, nevertheless, very important in point of doctrine and consolation. These also must be considered, that we may have the whole of this history before us.

The first of these things is, that Christ, while on the cross, commends His mother to John, and also John to His mother, so that they might be inclined toward each other as are a mother and her son, and that they might love and

in every way assist each other. John tells us too that he immediately took the mother of Jesus into his care and treated her as if she had been his own mother.

This narrative is generally regarded as an illustration of the fourth commandment, which says: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." With this accords the fact that John lived longer than the rest of the Apostles, namely, sixty-eight years after the resurrection. Although this explanation is not improper

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as far as it goes, it is still too narrow; for that which the Lord does and says here upon the cross dare not be regarded as done and said for only a few individuals. Christ intended His works and words to embrace the whole world, but especially the Christian Church.

That, therefore, which Christ here says to Mary and John alone, we must regard as a command for all Christians and for the entire Church. Since Christ hangs upon the cross and, by His death, saves us all from sin and death, we must be toward each other like a mother and her son, who in all things sincerely love, aid and advise each other. This is the meaning also of the command which the Lord so often repeats during the last Supper: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you;" "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." The love between a mother and her children is the deepest and most sincere that can be found.

The Lord uses the words "mother" and "son" with special reference to both parts of the Church, viz., to those who teach the Word and to those who hear. Even as a mother nourishes her infant and diligently cares for it till it is grown up and has become strong, so honest pastors also labor and take pains to teach the people and render them good Christians. Thus Paul calls his disciples, whom he had reared as with a mother's trouble and toil, children, 1 Cor. 4; Gal. 4; 1 Thess. 2. The Church cannot be properly conducted unless they who exercise the office of the ministry have for her the affection of a mother. If they have not this love, the result will be indolence, indifference and unwillingness to suffer. The Lord very explicitly teaches this in the 21. chapter of John. He there commands Peter to preach, but not until He had three times asked him: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" By this question He meant to say: Unless thou lovest the lambs as a mother loves her children, whom she tries to rescue from the flames even at the peril of her own life, thou wilt never be fit for a preacher. In thy

office as pastor, trouble, toil, ingratitude, hatred, envy and many a cross will be thy lot. Now, if the pastors have no motherly heart, no fervent love for the flock, these shall receive poor care indeed.

On the other hand, again, they who have not received the command to preach, but stand in need of information and instruction, must deport themselves like sons, suffering themselves to be taught, led, nourished, and cared for in other ways, thus conducting themselves toward their teachers as a pious child conducts itself toward its mother. True, children's love for their mother is not as great as the mother's love for her children, even as the proverb says: *Amor descendit, non ascendit*, that is, love moves downward, not upward. Still, nature prompts pious children to honor their parents, and to serve them and yield to them in everything that they desire and need. When this is the relation between mother and son, between pastor and congregation, then all is well.

If, however, the ministers of the Church are lacking in motherly affection, or if the hearers are void of childlike fidelity, it is out of the question that things should go right and that God should be pleased. This we have sadly experienced in the case of [some Christian leaders], for they have no such motherly love. They think that the office was given them merely that they might be great lords and live at their ease. Therefore, they not only take poor care of the sheep, but they even, to their heart's content, skin and butcher the lambs in life, property and soul, as we only too well see. Again, we frequently find the deficiency in the hearers, that they, like ill-bred children, do not properly provide for their pastors. This is the case, among us, with peasants, with citizens, and especially with the nobility, who deal so closely, stingily and niggardly with their pastors, that seldom one is found who willingly gives to the ministry as much as he should. And this is done in spite of St. Paul's pointed and earnest admonition, not to communicate sparingly of our carnal things unto them that communicate unto us spiritual things. Such ingratitude cannot fail to injure the

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cause of the Gospel, neither can God's punishment fail to come upon such perverse children.

We should, therefore, carefully observe and take to heart this command of our Lord Jesus, who, upon the cross, shows such tender solicitude both for the teacher and the disciple, that is, for the whole Church. Teachers and pastors He exhorts to motherly love, and pulpits and congregations to childlike faithfulness, gratitude and obedience. If both parties obey these blessed instructions of our dear Lord Jesus, all will be well and God will bless and give success. So much for the first point.

The other two points, that no bone of Christ was broken and that His side was pierced with a spear, do not appear to be of much importance. Since, however, the Evangelist John adduces the clear testimony of the Scriptures, that Moses and Zechariah had prophesied these things many centuries before they took place, and since the Holy Spirit speaks nothing that is useless or vain, we are bound to confess that these two facts are of great moment, however much they may have the appearance of trifles. The holy Evangelist John, according to true apostolic custom, confers on us a special blessing by everywhere quoting and interpreting Scripture so appropriately.

Moses, as we have already heard, wrote the clear command that no one should "remain all night upon the tree," for God had said that this would defile the land. As this was the day for the preparation, and as the Sabbath would begin with the setting of the sun, the Jews besought Pilate to have the bodies removed from the cross, so that they might be buried yet by day, before the beginning of the festival. Pilate gave his consent. But as they found the two malefactors yet living, the soldiers, as John says, hastened their departure, at the command of the Jews, by breaking their arms and legs, as they were hanging on the cross. They intended to do the same with the Lord Jesus, but He gave up the ghost before they had finished with the two malefactors, and therefore "they

brake not His legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side," from which, to the astonishment of all, both blood and water flowed. These two things, as I have said, seem of little importance, but John testifies that they were not mere accidents, but that both of them had been foretold, the one by Moses, "Neither shall ye break a bone," the other by Zechariah, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced."

Now, it is true, indeed, that what Moses says, Ex. 12 and Num. 9, refers to the passover. How, then, could it occur to the Evangelist John to say: "These things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken," and what does he mean by this? He would simply teach us to look upon the Lord Jesus on the cross as the true Passover, of which the old passover in the law is merely the type or symbol.

When God desired with violence to weaken the might of Pharaoh in Egypt and to frustrate his obstinate wantonness and design, and to save His people Israel, He commanded His people, the Jews, in each house, in the appointed night, to slay a lamb of the first year and roast and eat it, but to strike its blood on the door-posts. The destroying angel was to pass over that house on whose doors he should see the token of the blood and smite none of its inmates. But where the token of the lamb's blood on the door was wanting, there the angel was in that night to smite throughout all Egypt the first-born both of man and beast. As Moses had told the people at God's command, so it came to pass. In the morning dead men and beasts were found in the houses of all the Egyptians, the destroyer having spared the Jews alone, because their doors were marked and protected by the blood of the lamb.

Let us now turn to our Paschal Lamb, Christ Jesus. He desires to punish Pharaoh and all Egypt, that is, sin, death and Satan, and to rescue His Christian Church from tyranny. Therefore He suffers Himself to be slain like the lamb of old,

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and to be sacrificed upon the cross, so that He might sprinkle us with His blood, and so that the destroying angel, who, on account of our sins, had brought death upon us, and had received power over us, might pass over us and do us no harm. Paul, 1 Cor. 5, refers to this so beautifully: "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us," that we might be partakers of His blood, and that Satan, death and sin might have no authority over us and no power to do us hurt. This it is that John wishes us to learn here from his statement that Christ, like the paschal lamb, had no bone broken.

We would, however, consider here also the other particulars which the Jews had to observe with reference to the passover, so that when we see how perfectly the passover harmonizes with Christ, we may find more consolation in this sacrifice made for us, and take greater interest in the Lord Jesus.

The lamb was required to be without blemish, a male of the first year, healthy and strong; no other lamb would have answered the purposes of the passover. Now, as lambs one year old are very prolific, so this Lamb, the Lord Jesus, brought forth and built up His Church. The Lord Jesus is also without all blemish and deficiency, for He is the Son of God, and His flesh and blood is not sinful like ours, but He is holy altogether.

The Jews were directed to take the lamb from the sheep, or from the goats, on the tenth day of the month, and to keep it by itself until the fourteenth day of the month. In this way Christ was taken from the fold of God, that is, from the Jews, who were God's people, and for this reason He is called the Son of Abraham, or of David. He was separated for the special office of preaching God's kingdom among His people, the Jews, during the four years preceding His passion.

That the lamb had to be eaten in the evening, indicates that Christ should come in the latter times, when the Jews were no longer to be the people of God, and when the law and ceremonies of Moses were to cease. It is for this reason that

the Lord sometimes compared His Gospel to a supper, and that the Apostles called the days of the New Testament "the latter times" and "the last days."

The lamb dared not to be eaten sodden or raw, but roasted. Throughout all Scripture, fire is an emblem of suffering and affliction. The lamb roasted with fire is, therefore, a type of Christ, who suffered death upon the cross. We dare not partake of Him raw, that is, he who would receive Him at all, dare not be careless, secure and profane as our Epicureans are, who think that they can believe and do as they please, and still be good Christians. These do not partake of the lamb properly, and cannot do so any more than they can who eat it sodden with water, that is, they who do not keep the doctrine pure, but adulterate it with human teachings and traditions, as [some do].

Unleavened bread and bitter herbs had to be eaten with the lamb. Thus Paul says: "Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven," refusing to check sin and to amend our conduct; "neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness," Dealing in hypocrisy and not heartily repenting; "but with the unleavened bread of sincerity," keeping a clear conscience and living in the fear of God; "and truth," sincerely, not hypocritically, asking God's blessing and earnestly desiring to regulate ourselves according to His Word. This is the unleavened bread.

The herbs signify the holy cross; for, as Paul says: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

No part of the lamb was allowed to remain, but the whole of it had to be eaten, or else that which remained was to be burned with fire. Neither should a bone of it be broken. Just so it is with Christ, He who would be a true Christian dares not eat one part and leave another part uneaten. He must accept and believe everything that Christ says, and must not, like the fanatics and sects, eat His words piecemeal. Arius was satisfied with everything else, only he would not be-

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lieve that Christ was eternal God. The Anabaptists reject the baptism of children, despise this, the original institution, and fancy that they have found a better. The Sacramentarians of the present day accept everything Christ says, and think themselves excellent Christians. But it is not to their liking that Christ said, when He took the bread, "Take, eat; this is my body," and when He took the cup, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament," and this they do not want to believe. They do not like the taste of this and so they leave it uneaten, in spite of God's command that the whole of this Paschal Lamb should be eaten, or else the remainder burned with fire. And more than this, they even break the bones, that is, torture, crucify and mangle at pleasure the Word of the Lord Jesus, only so that they may give their scandalous error some plausibility. Thus we find that [many who purport to be Christians] eat only that part of the lamb that suits their taste, and let the parts that they do not relish remain, and break them to pieces.

What must be done with the blood has already been related, viz., the blood of the Lamb is to prevent sin, death and hell from hurting us, and, for all time to come, to hinder Pharaoh and the Egyptians, that is, Satan and the world, from oppressing and subduing us. Christ was sacrificed that He might make us free, John 8, and undo and destroy the work of Satan.

Of all this John would remind us when he says: "These things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken." He wishes us to regard the passover as the faithful picture of the entire benefit and of the real fruit of our Lord Jesus' sufferings. He wishes us to see that Christ was sacrificed for us and that His blood is to deliver us from sin, death and the devil, which constantly oppress, alarm and coerce us in the same way in which Pharaoh retained and vexed the children of Israel in Egypt. The blood of our Paschal Lamb, Christ Jesus, has abolished this servitude. We now have peace, and, fully free from every burden, we shall pass from dangerous

Egypt over to the land of promise and to life eternal.

We shall now consider the third point, which the Evangelist evidently regarded as very important. He not only introduces the testimony of the Prophet Zechariah, who had prophesied concerning this piercing of Christ's side; but he also uses many and solemn words to affirm the miracle, that blood and water flowed from the dead body. This was unnatural, because when a man is dead his blood is cold and does not flow; and it was still more unnatural for both blood and water to flow from a corpse. Therefore John says: "He that saw it bare record, .... and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." He thus calls our attention to this miracle as one of great importance, so that we might diligently study it and finally learn from it to believe; that is, that we might through Christ and His death, as was said above when speaking of the passover, have the hope of the forgiveness of sins and of everlasting life. This is the chief design of this narrative as given by the Evangelist, with whom, as we shall soon see, the prophet completely corresponds.

First of all, however, let us rid ourselves of the idea that it was merely a casual circumstance that one of the soldiers thrust his spear into the corpse's side. The soldier, of course, did this in ignorance of any exalted signification the act might have. Still it was done by God's special arrangement, else the Holy Spirit would not have prophesied concerning it through Zechariah so many centuries before. We see that the Lord retained the wounds in His body after the resurrection, and that He showed them to His disciples in particular as a mark by which they might recognize Him. This piercing of Christ's side and this gushing forth of blood and water were not, therefore, mere accidents, but they were intended to mean and to accomplish something.

We must here be on our guard, lest we imitate the example commonly set by rude people, who say: It is none of my business what flowed

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from the Lord Jesus' side; it is enough for me to know that He died on the cross. Let us not think in this way, but let us honor the Holy Ghost and contribute to our own comfort by carefully learning what was accomplished by this piercing of Christ's side with the spear, which John so faithfully relates and which Zechariah had foretold so long before.

In the first place, it is certain beyond all dispute, that it is unnatural for a deceased body to sweat or bleed. As soon as blood grows cold it no longer flows, but it stagnates. The dead body before us now, however, is different from all other dead bodies, and hence things take place in it that do not take place in any other body. True, Christ's body was flesh and blood like our own, and it died as ours must die. Yet, His flesh and blood were sinless, and therefore He died in such a way that even in His death a sign of life remained. The blood in all other bodies is soon cold and stagnant, but in the body of the Lord Jesus it remains so warm and active that, as soon as His side is pierced, it rushes forth as from a living body's opened vein. John wishes us to observe this carefully, and to learn from it that it is the true nature of the blood of our dear Lord Jesus to flow and live and be efficacious even after He has died. Neither was the blood of the paschal lamb used while the lamb lived, but after it was dead and had been eaten.

The angel went by night through Egypt and smote all the first-born, but the houses of the Jews which were marked with the blood of the lamb he spared, and in them smote none. And thus the blood of our dear Lord Jesus continues still to live and flow, having neither become stagnant nor grown cold. It flows and gushes after He is dead, and all who are sprinkled with it have the forgiveness of sin and are children of eternal life.

"We should mark this well, for this unnatural flowing shows that the blood of our dear Lord Jesus, as that of the true Paschal Lamb, retained its influence and power and virtue even

after Christ's death; that it should flow upon, sprinkle and mark the faithful standing by the cross; and that Satan, death and sin should let alone all upon whom they find this mark, and not have power to hurt them. Such is the true nature, power and virtue of the blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and such it forever remains in His Church even after His death.

Besides the blood, however, water also came out of Christ's side. This, no doubt, was to serve as an indication that the blood of Christ would sprinkle only those who were baptized in His name. Our Lord Jesus Himself says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Blood and water go together. Where Christ's blood is and operates, there the water of blessed Baptism also is; but where the water does not flow, that is, where there is no holy Baptism, there the blood of Christ is also wanting, nor does it flow there nor sprinkle any one, as it is the case among the Turks and Jews and heathen. Evermore must blood and water flow on together, and neither be separated from the other.

We must mark this well, for it has great value. It is not of great import for those who died under the Old Testament and who did not live to see Baptism; for they had their own Baptism and were saved by faith in the blessed Seed. Nor is it so important on account of infants who die in their mother's womb before they can be brought to Baptism; for their parents and the Christian assistants of those in travail bring to Christ the offering of fervent prayer in the hour of danger, and they are, without a doubt, accepted graciously. But the value of this token of mercy is our own, and we should not despise it and not prevent ourselves nor our families from accepting it. Where the water of this Baptism is, there too must be the blood of Christ, for water and blood come from His side together; and we have already seen the value of this blood, viz., it defends us against the destroying angel, cleanses us from sin, and causes us to live forever. The prophet, in such per-

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fect harmony with the Evangelist, beautifully indicates this in Zech. 12, where he says: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."

It cannot be denied, in the first place, that the prophet here speaks of the time of the New Testament and of the grace which should come upon us through the death of Christ. This grace, moreover, consists in God's pouring upon us "the Spirit of grace and of supplication," that is, God, through His Holy Spirit, brings comfort to our souls, so that we trust in His mercy and compassion through Christ, and call upon Him in every time of need, and seek help from Him, as children seek help from their father.

In the second place, John here throws upon us the light of his true apostolic spirit, when he says that the piercing, of which the prophet proceeds to speak, was done on the occasion of the crucifixion. The prophet tells us what shall be the result of this piercing, in these words: "They," mark you, they who have the Spirit of grace and of supplications, — "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. This mourning and this bitterness mean nothing else than the thorough recognition of the sins for whose sake Christ suffered on the cross. Our looking upon Him who is pierced and our mourning for Him and our being sorrowful, indicates that He is innocent and that He suffered all for us.

His suffering thus, however, causes us to perceive our danger and distress, to desist from carelessly participating with the world in sin, to deplore our sinful heart and wicked life, to ask God for forgiveness, and to cling to the sufferings

of Christ and console ourselves with them because He, being holy and obedient, did not deserve to die, but still took upon Himself and suffered death because He loved us so unspeakably.

It is necessary for us that we should pity, mourn and lament in the way stated above, and it is necessary for Christ to have our sympathy, grief and tears, or else He can have no Christian Church. The Church alone, as Zechariah says, looks upon the wounded Christ and weeps for Him, but not like the women at Jerusalem, for they wept for Christ in such a way as to overlook themselves. The tears of the believers, of the Christian Church, flow because the sins are seen within them, for which Christ suffered death. Thus the prophet plainly points out to us the fruits of Christ's suffering. And soon after, in the 13. chapter, he says: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

How closely the prophet unites the spear-thrust and the fountain, that is, the blood and the water, or holy Baptism. Now, if we would interpret this narrative correctly, we must say: Blood flows from the Lord Jesus' side for the washing away and forgiveness of my sins. The Lord Himself testifies to this when He takes the cup in the Holy Supper. But water also comes forth to show that His body is an open fountain. But why is it such? "For sin and for uncleanness." Baptism applies to us the blood of our Lord Jesus, for which reason Paul expresses this by saying, we are baptized into Christ's death, that is, we are baptized that the death of Christ might be our own and for our good, so that, being delivered from sin and death, we might live forever.

The holy fathers say some beautiful things about this. Augustine says that John uses the word "pierced," — "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side," — to show that the door of life was thus thrown open as it were, through which

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door came to us the holy Sacraments of the Church, without which Sacraments it is impossible to enter into that life which is the real life. He speaks of Sacraments, in the plural, because he refers not only to Baptism, which is represented by the water, but also to the Holy Supper, in which we drink Christ's blood. Chrysostom speaks after the same manner, saying: Whereas the sacred Mysteries here take their origin, thou must approach the holy Cup as if thou wast about to drink from the Lord Jesus' side.

The Sacramentarians dare not quote this passage of Chrysostom, for they boast that the whole of the old Church believed as they do, viz., that in the Lord's Supper there are only bread and wine, and not the body and blood of Christ. Now, how does this boast harmonize with the words of Chrysostom? They surely cannot be so blind and frantic as to say that wine flowed from Christ's side, and yet they say that in the Holy Supper we do not drink the blood of Christ, but merely wine. They must admit, on the testimony of Chrysostom, who says, thou must approach the holy Cup as if thou wast about to drink from Christ's side, that the ancient Church discerned not only wine, but also blood, in the Sacrament of the altar.

It is this flowing of both water and blood from Christ's side, that is said to have given rise to the custom of mixing the wine used in the Supper of the Lord with water. Cyprian vigorously defends this custom as a special ordinance of Christ, and the Armenians were condemned as heretics for not complying with it. Since Christ,

however, did not command this to be done, and since the words of the institution tell us merely that Christ took the cup and gave it to His disciples, it is not necessary to hold this custom as essential.

We therefore let this matter rest and confine ourselves to the doctrine taught us by the holy Evangelist, which is, that the blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ shall forever retain its power and efficacy after Christ's death, and shall preserve us from death and sin, provided we are baptized with water as Christ commanded. In Baptism we find the blood of Christ in reality, even as blood and water flow together here. Where the blood is, there is the water also, and where the water is, there also is the blood, and it accomplishes its purpose, which is to wash away our sins and to make us perfectly clean, even as Zechariah says when he prophesies concerning the open fountain "for sin and for uncleanness."

We should, therefore, thank God for the ineffable mercy and compassion, by which He has led us to this fountain, to be baptized in the name of His Son, and thus to be cleansed from our sins in the blood of Jesus Christ. We may now hope, through the Spirit of grace, to receive from God all good things, and can now call upon God in every hour of need, through the Spirit of supplications. And the final blessing of Christ's death shall come upon us in the end, when we leave this world of sorrows and enter life eternal. May God bestow this upon every one of us. Amen.