

Birkenhead, Sunday 21st July 2024

9th Sunday after Pentecost

“The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, and His ordinances sweeter than syrup or honey from the comb; therefore, your servant is careful of them¹.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

Although we are celebrating the 9th Sunday after Pentecost, the same psalm is used by the liturgy to describe the state of our soul both today, and on the 3rd Sunday in Lent. We heard on that Sunday the words of the Lord: “Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it².”

The offertory was chosen to describe our soul, keeping the Word of the Lord, as we were seeing its benefit for ourselves, as we could contemplate them in Our Lady. You may notice that these words are also said every Saturday during the year, when mass is said of Our Lady on Saturday.

Echoing these references from the divine liturgy, today’s offertory seems to have a bitter colour, because of the Epistle and the Gospel we just heard. In the first, St Paul warns us against sin, which diverted some of the Hebrew people from God’s path. In the second, Jesus cries over the City of David, Jerusalem, because it couldn’t acknowledge the time of its salvation.

In Lent, this offertory sounded like an absolute confidence in God’s promise, that, if we were to listen to Him and keeping His Word, we would be blessed forever. Today, we still have this promise in our mind and heart, but the souvenir of our sins, makes it more difficult, as we find ourselves unworthy of such a promise.

We are therefore in need to reaffirm this confidence, just before the renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross. We know about our sins, but we also know that this sacrifice grants us the forgiveness for them. The benevolent attitude before the Lord and His teaching will obtain for us his grace for a true atonement for our sins.

At the difference of Jerusalem, who rejected its salvation, and that why Jesus cried over her, we do not want Jesus to cry anymore because of our infidelities. We saw how they badly injured the Lord during the scourging at the pillar; we heard the sound of the hammer hitting the nails and crushing the holy bones of Our Saviour. We also saw the Blood and Water poured out of this Sacred Heart who loved men so much and only received ingratitude in exchange.

The Holy Church, Master and Teacher, knows how to receive these words from the Lord. She knows how to live from them. Each of her members who enjoyed the difficult fulfilment of the precepts of the Law, also enjoyed the sweetness of the given peace.

¹ Ps., 18, 9-12. 9th Sunday after Pentecost, Offertory.

² Lk., 11, 28.

Obedience brings us peace. Obedience in silence offers us peace with joy. Joy of the sons of God who imitated their Holy Saviour, who now reigns in glory, after the tribulations of His Passion and death. This is the joy the Church is singing in this offertory antiphon.

Yes, we should fear that such punishment announced by Jesus about Jerusalem might happen to us. But we should also never forget that this punishment would happen only if we do not follow Him till the end. I can't believe that, here today, one of you is desiring anything else than to follow Him. I can't believe that one of you would prefer the torments of an eternal flame. Therefore, you are mandated to hope with strength and confidence, that eternal joy will be given to you after the tribulations of this life. You are commanded to believe that the fulfilment of the Law, even in the darkness of the Faith, will bring you joy.

“O You who govern the heavenly realms, the sole consolation of those who suffer; You who weep over the doomed walls of sad Jerusalem: Deliver us from true ruin, let our weeping forestall yours. O soul a thousand times unhappy, designated by these tears, it is the last of your days, lamentable for ever, that you are celebrating here! Do not hide from me, for your misfortune, these times to come: do not expose yourself to the punishments of that fateful day. Do not let yourself be squeezed by the enemy's entrenchments, pressed by anguish, trying to find a place to hide. Thrown to the ground, walls destroyed, do not groan, crushed under your ruins: For having, unaware of the Lord's visit at this hour, greedily followed your pleasures. Write: I have sinned, I acknowledge my crime, may I be mercifully forgiven. To you at last we run, wanting to escape these evils: Lord, give yourself to us for refuge; We will give you thanks in all ages³.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

³ Sequence excerpt from the manuscripts of Epternach and Prum Abbeys, in Dom Guéranger, *Liturgical Year*, 9th Sunday after Pentecost.