

Exaudi John 15:26-16:4 May 23 – 24, 2009 "Your Mother, The Church!"

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Here, in part, is what St. Peter heard in the upper room: **“The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor Me.”** Here, in part, is what St. Peter passed on to his children: **“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.”** Legend holds that the fiery trial, the not-so-strange thing, that killed Peter was that he was offered in service to pagan gods, to whom he would not bow down and pray. Little did those murderers know, since they did not know Jesus and thereby the Father, that their god was, in fact, the devil. But such brutality, such scathing hatred and ignorance, serves the backward-seeming Kingdom of God, where the poor, the mourning, the meek, and the hungry are blessed, where suffering exhibits acceptance, where fiery trials of persecution and being killed for the Truth is not strange, where the Victor wins by defeat and Life overcomes by death.

Can you imagine some backstabbing betrayer, some milk toast bureaucrat, sitting in the crowds watching Peter’s martyrdom saying, **“Well, it really is a shame, but he brought it on himself. He should have been more winsome, more tolerant, nicer, gentler, kinder. He should have been more like me: confessional and successful.”** Well, He probably did some dumb things. After all, he was a man like us. He was not perfect. But He had before denied our Lord at the home of the high priest. He had felt the burden of the Law. He could not again deny the One who died for him, by tolerating prayers to Caesar! By the grace of God in Christ he would not compromise the truth. His death was not a disgrace, shameful, or a failure. The Spirit of Truth was upon him, guiding him into the way of the cross, purifying his faith in the glorious, tortuous flames of martyrdom. What they meant for evil, God used for good, for Peter’s good, and for the Church’s good. His Holy Mother, the Church, was pleased and thankful for her son.

“What would your mother think?” is a pretty good litmus test for ethics and morality. When you teach 7th and 8th graders the 6th commandment, that is the one about marriage, adultery, fornication, God-given sexual identity, living together, and the like, they always want to know how far they can go, how much kissing, touching, and hugging is appropriate. I tell them that they should not do anything that they wouldn’t, or couldn’t, do in their mother’s presence. They know that means a pretty chaste, clean, quick kiss. And if there is a way to make adolescents squirm in their chairs, that’s it. It conflicts their desire to please the flesh with their desire to please their mothers. Mothers are law-givers, guilt-producers, rule-makers. But they are also providers, protectors, nourishers, and lovers.

In reading about slavery in the American South, no abuse makes me so sad as the accounts of selling children away from their mothers. Christian men justified those acts by misreading the Bible, by Theologizing. It was convenient, expedient, seemingly necessary for the economy, for prosperity. It was the modern rage, the latest scholarship, the foundation upon which America was built. It was the American way. For their own gain men turned their backs on the obvious moral truth. Their churches made bland, neutral statements to condone it. And as sad as the forced separation of mother and child is, nothing is so sad as a mother gone bad, as a mother who

fears her children or promotes herself by lying to and using them. Mothers who abuse their children and attempt to buy them back between fits of rage with gifts, candy, and lies are the most heartbreaking cases. Adult children learn to distance themselves, but not youth. They do not have the emotional equipment. Like flies to the flame, they return again and again. They want nothing so bad in this life as their mothers to love them, as their mothers should.

Even as adults, our desires for this life are pretty simple, though we often can't see them for the clutter of our entertainment pursuits, our endless quest to banish boredom. All we want is: our beloved to love us; our children to outlive us; men to respect us. That really is it. And in that order. When those things are stripped away, by tragedy, malice, or guilt, then we see what matters in life. When your wife walks out on you, all of the sudden it is abundantly clear that motorcycles, sky diving, and bar hopping with your buddies are not nearly so much fun as drying the dishes with your beloved at your side. A good mother disciplines her children. She strives to teach them to appreciate and treasure the things that matter in this life, so that they won't lose them by their own foolish misdeeds.

In these last weeks of Easter, the Church, our Holy Mother, would have us know the Theology of the Cross. She strives to teach us so that we not be scandalized by the hardships of true pilgrims traveling in this foreign land. She doesn't want us to lose the only thing that really matters by our own foolish misdeeds. So following our remembrance of the Ascension, where the Second Person of the Holy Trinity returned to His Father as a Man, as one of us, exalting our nature, opening up heaven for us, She draws our attention to the fact that always before glory comes the cross. **"Don't think it strange,"** she says, **"that you must suffer fiery trials and the world's scorn. Don't think it strange that you fail to draw the crowds of a Taylor Swift concert or have the following of mildly pornographic television drama or sitcom. Don't think it strange that you are brutalized by false priests and mocked and ridiculed for desiring and even insisting upon pure doctrine and practice. Don't think your Mother, for all Her discipline, does not love you. She knows when you need the piercing Law instead of sweet Gospel. Though it pains Her, She gives you, She teaches, what is best, what you need. That you would be prepared for what must come. And your failure to please the world is no shame or embarrassment to Her, but the mark of Her true children."** And so it is that still today God allows the violence of the world to overcome His children. They are persecuted for not joining in with the world's mad lust and games. They are tortured and ridiculed, threatened and cajoled for teaching the Truth. And some martyrs bleed on the inside. At times God allows this cruel world to even strip away our greatest desires - our spouses, our children, our friends. He drives us ever closer to Himself. And in the end, we will see that He never took anything from us. He only removed it for a time that we would not be distracted from the one thing needful, from His perfect, sacrificial love that has saved us. His discipline is harsh, but necessary. He prepares us through suffering, through fiery trials, so that we will not fail the final test.

Thank God for mothers who pray for their children, who bring them early to the life giving waters of Holy Baptism for birth from above, who read to them from the Holy Scriptures. Thank God for the love that caused His Incarnation, His martyrdom at Pilate's hands on a cross of shame, His glorious resurrection out of death, and His ascension to the Father for us. Thank God for the free grace that has washed away all our sins, our shame and regrets, for the constant,

steadfast care of God that keeps us in this faith. Thank God for providing for us the Church as Mother, where He provides for us, feeds us, speaks to us with words that death cannot remove. May She ever be praised.

In +Jesus' Name. Amen.