

Lent 4

Psalm 89:1-37; Colossians 1:12-24; Ephesians 2:4-22; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Hymns 561, 454

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

In a time of war, we are given numerous opportunities to witness the brave heroes.

We hear of those who selflessly go off to confront an enemy in order to protect people whom they have never met.

And when soldiers go off to war, too often it happens that, in the course of their duties, they make the ultimate sacrifice.

They give up their lives in the line of duty and leave behind only a memory and the thanks of a grateful nation.

During the ceremonies that follow, it is often noted that this person died willingly.

"They chose to enlist or re-enlist. Often they choose to receive special training.

"They knew the risks and willingly went forward."

These ready explanations might make outsiders feel better, but they often ring hollow to the families actually dealing with the loss.

For those close to the hero know that no man is an island but that each lives in family.

For every soldier who is fallen on the battlefield, there is a mother who grieves at home...a father who feels the loss...a spouse whose world is turned upside down.

And while, with brave abstractions strangers can pontificate about how stolid and brave they were, we are spared the tougher duty of facing the hurting family.

Those grieving often lash out in uncomfortable but understandable ways.

"He was young and strong and smart and good. What a senseless way to die!

"What a ridiculous reason to die! ...and for what!?"

"A line on a map? A convoy of toilet paper? To protect a politician?"

It is not uncommon for the families of fallen heroes to be filled with bitterness, anger and resentment toward the lesser men who never volunteered for battle.

...Those who reap the benefits of their loss in undeserving lives.

And for this reason, not many of us truly want to go and face the families of fallen heroes. It is much safer to adore them from a distance.

It is precisely this reality which nags at us when we contemplate the crucifixion.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the greatest news that the world has ever known.

In Jesus, Satan has been overthrown, death has been defeated, sin's power emptied.

For this reason, we speak about the crucifixion of Jesus often and in great joy.

We call the event by the name Good Friday.

But there is an ever-present rub -- a troubling reality.

We know that Jesus is not an island unto Himself.

Jesus is not a solitary God but a person of the Holy Trinity.

He lives in family with Father and Holy Spirit.

And, as such, His suffering and death do not happen in a vacuum.

But what happens to Jesus affects the Trinity.

What Jesus suffers, the Trinity suffers.

When Jesus dies, His Father experiences loss.

This we explored last week by looking to Abraham and Isaac.

What we want to know today is this: How does this make the Father feel toward me?

We could content ourselves with glib assurances that Jesus did this willingly.

...that Jesus signed up for this. ...that Jesus wanted to do this.

But like a grateful civilian we are more apt to admire the Father abstractly and from a distance than to actually go to Him and face the one who gave His Son for us.

After all, the death of His only-begotten Son was a horrid thing.

It was not glamorous, clean or painless; but hideous, dirty and agonizing.

Nor was it a death for an obviously good cause -- like dying to protect the president.

Rather, we were the cause.

...both in the sense that it was our fault and in the sense that it was for our sake.

In light of this, is the Father upset with me for killing His only-begotten Son?

Is He filled with anger and resentment at the cost of Your freedom?

Many fear this to be the case. Perhaps you do too.

You believe, well enough, that Jesus died for your sins and rose for your justification.

You accept His forgiveness gladly and gratefully.

You rejoice to know that Jesus is God and so has this power to save you.

But as regards the Father, you would just as soon keep your distance.

That way you can benefit by the death of His Son without chancing to feel His wrath.

You can, after all, think on Jesus and visit His cross without directly facing the Father.

But that would be to miss the whole point!

That would be to leave you cowering behind fig leaves and still separated from God.

It would leave the wall of division still in place and leave you as an outsider looking into the Holy Family without actually getting to participate.

And THAT would be to cast away the best and greatest gift of the cross.

For Jesus' death for your life was not something done independent of God the Father.

Far from it! The Father Himself willed it!

It is precisely "*the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.*"

Therefore, Jesus is the very "*image of the invisible God.*"

This is not good cop vs. bad cop.

This is no soft-hearted Jesus who does for you what His sterner Father would not.

This is, rather, the Father Himself who wants--who longs--who desires to offer His only-begotten Son for you.

And so, far from being upset with you for causing this, He rejoices in your blood-bought freedom and life.

Therefore, the cross of Christ in no way ought to drive you to keep your distance from the Father.

Rather, the very purpose of Jesus' cross is to draw you to the Father.

"Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us."

Beloved in the Lord, let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness. AMEN.