

Judica with the Rite of Holy Baptism for Lydia Mallon and the Rite of Confirmation for Joe Mallon  
6 April, Anno Domini 2025  
St. John 8:42-59

Beloved of God,

The peace of Christ be yours this day and may He grant us His Holy Spirit as we meditate upon the divine Word so that we might be filled with the truth and walk according to His will.

There is a very important piece of information that is necessary to grasping the full weight of today's Gospel. About 10 verses prior to the pericope, the Holy Spirit tells us exactly who Jesus was speaking to - the Jews who had believed in Him. With as heated as things got, you might have imagined that Jesus was talking to the Pharisees. Instead, the sharp accusations of Jesus were laid against those who had in some way or another actually believed in Jesus.

Why does that matter? Because it would be easy to sit on the sidelines like spectators cheering Jesus on as He routed the Pharisees, giving them what they deserved. But when the recipients of these vicious blows from Jesus are those who believed in Him, we are no longer on the sidelines but right in the middle of the firefight. The issue at hand was the lukewarm faith which Jesus also rebuked in His letter to the church in Laodicea that we read in Revelation. Our Lord is pointing out that there is no fence sitting when it comes to the things of God. You cannot have the parts of God's Word that you want and do away with the parts you find inconvenient or uncomfortable. Jesus had told these particular Jews "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32) Neither the truth nor the God from whom it emanates are buffets - a little of this, a little of that, but definitely not that. There is one God and one truth about that God. You either receive in faith the whole God or you receive none of Him. Part of God is none of God.

That's not what these Jews were interested in but Jesus loved them enough to expose the deceitfulness of their hearts to them. As their God and Savior, He couldn't stand quietly by and let them skip merrily into hell because they were deluding themselves. Their faith wasn't genuine faith. They liked a lot of things about Jesus but any notion that they were sinners was over the line. They were descendants of Abraham. They didn't need liberating. They were not slaves to sin. They had the law of Moses and the rules of the rabbis. These were life and salvation.

How quickly faith can turn to unbelief! And it's always the same stumbling block - Jesus. Jesus' doctrine is an offense to every part of us that wants to hold on to some kind of self-righteousness or self-determination. We are to one degree or another okay with the Law because it puts us, we think, in the driver's seat. It leaves things at least to some degree in our control. Thus we delude ourselves into thinking that our outward keeping of the Law is all God is concerned about and since we aren't as bad as Hitler, we are righteous.

But Jesus' very existence, God in the flesh of sinners forgiving sin and eating with sinners, is an absolute affront to our imaginary goodness, let alone the sinless Son of God hanging on the cross. Those who always fall back on "Well, I was baptized when I was a kid. I went through confirmation. My grandparents took me to church." will find Jesus offensive because He demands faith now. The Son of Mary demands that we bow our hearts, heads, and knees in humility and count as less than worthless before God anything good we have done. Jesus' pierced hands and feet leave no room for the God you have fashioned in your heart after the vain imaginations of your fallen reason.

Today, praise be to God, Lydia has been washed in the waters of Holy Baptism. God has driven out the spirit of evil that she inherited from Joe and Brianna and made Lydia the temple of the Holy Spirit, just as He did for each of us when each of us were baptized, including Joe and Brianna. But baptism isn't magic fairy dust nor is it a license to live according to the sinful desires of your flesh because now, no matter what, you will be going to heaven. Baptism bestows a gift. It is God

claiming the sinner as His own beloved child and giving to the sinner the promise of eternal life through the forgiveness of all their sins. We, like Lydia, have been baptized into Christ. Not a generic Christ. The one and only Christ. We have been Baptized into His death to sin and His resurrection to eternal life. We have been baptized into the confession that we renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways.

But like all gifts, Baptism can be rejected. We can, and many have, despised the benefits that God has bestowed upon us as He forgave us the guilt of our sin and covered the hideousness of our evil with the white robe of Christ's righteousness. We despise our Baptism verbally by making a different confession which denies the Word which God Himself has spoken. We can let that faith wither and die by not feeding it with the Word and continual prayer for God's help and protection. We can return to the vomit of the sin from which we were rescued, creating for ourselves a Jesus who justifies what we want - our covetousness, our anger, our idolatry.

Likewise, in a short while, Joe will stand before God, His angels, and this congregation as Reagan did just last week, and make public confession of the true faith and vow faithfulness to that truth even if it means death because he has come to know and believe that there is no other truth, no other Christ by which he or anyone else can be saved. But simply being confirmed doesn't save you. Whether it is today or decades ago, what saves you is the faith which you confess NOW. Do you still believe what you confessed at your Baptism or at your confirmation, (which of course is the same faith)? And if you still hold to that confession, do you walk according to that confession, putting to death the deeds of the flesh and striving to walk according to the Ten Commandments?

If not, return this day to the faith you once joyfully confessed. Drop any delusions of self-righteousness and cling with Father Abraham to the Lamb who has been offered up in your place, who died your death, who paid the debt you owed. Put away the sin that so easily entangles. Cut it off. Remove the sources of temptation. It doesn't matter how inconvenient it may be or how weird or overzealous your

friends or coworkers or even your family may think you are.

Jesus warned those who had believed in Him. Faith is serious business. All who dare to walk the path of faith will suffer the withering attacks of Satan, the hatred of the world, and the torment of the desires of the flesh just as Christ our Lord did. But all who walk this path, who abide in all that Christ taught, will the joy of Abraham and the peace of God which Christ has revealed to us.

Each of us needs Jesus in all of His fullness each and every day. It was a living and active faith in the promises of God that drove Abraham on towards Mt. Moriah to offer in the obedience of faith that which was most precious to him - his beloved son Isaac, the child of promise. God grant in His mercy that by His Holy Spirit we would this day live in full accordance with the life given to us in the waters of Holy Baptism, hungering for the righteousness that Christ alone bestows.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.