

“Meditating on Christ’s Passion”

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Prophet Isaiah speaks as if he had walked side-by-side with Jesus His whole life – from the time He “grew up before him like a young plant” – to the time when He was “oppressed ... afflicted ... [and] like a lamb is led to the slaughter.”

The mention of a lamb brings a certain picture to our minds – but Isaiah paints another picture. “His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and His form beyond that of the children of mankind.”

It’s a sight we cannot comprehend. What is this that we are looking at? We are appalled – and we consider Him “stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.”

Through God’s Word, we view the Passion of the Christ – from His birth to His death – and it appears to be a horrible, gory, disastrous injustice. But this is in fact the Lord’s will --- it is the revealing of “the arm of the Lord” --- the very power and strength of the Lord God Almighty.

Having heard of our Lord’s Passion through the prophesy of Isaiah, and the Gospel of St. John – how are we to view Christ’s Passion?

Many of you have seen the vivid depiction of the Passion of the Christ as portrayed in Mel Gibson’s movie by the same name. It is quite graphic – maybe even more graphic than we imagine when listening to the biblical accounts.

But even with all this focus and attention – we must be careful that our meditation on Christ’s Passion is pleasing in the eyes of God.

Some use the Passion of Christ as an opportunity to vent their anger at Pontius Pilate, or the Roman soldiers, or the Jews. There is a certain satisfaction in this for those who are in the habit of complaining about other people. But that is a meditation on the wickedness of others – not on the sufferings of the Christ.

Some meditate on the Passion in such a way that they think it will protect them from all harm and danger – as if their meditation is some sort of amulet or good-luck charm that will ward off suffering. In other words, they use Christ's suffering to escape their own.

Others feel pity for Christ and lament His innocence – as if their loud weeping and wailing for Jesus could somehow provoke Him to be merciful towards them. But they are like the women who followed Jesus from Jerusalem – to whom Jesus said – “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.”

To meditate upon Christ's Passion aright, you must view it with a terror-stricken heart and a despairing conscience. First and foremost, you must see in His Passion the wrath and penalty of God for sin. And if this is what the innocent Son of God endures – then what do you deserve as a rebellious sinner?

To meditate upon Christ's Passion aright, you must understand that YOU are the one who is torturing Jesus – that it is YOUR sins which have brought this wrath and punishment upon Jesus.

The hands that pierce Christ's hands are your hands which have stolen, punched, and harmed others in many and various ways. The crown of thorns which adorns the head of the Crucified One is a reminder of your evil thoughts.

Yes, to understand Christ's Passion aright – you must understand that you have crucified Him.

Martin Luther said that “the main benefit of Christ's passion is that man sees into his own true self and that he be terrified and crushed by this Here the passion of Christ performs its natural and noble work, strangling the Old Adam and banishing all joy, delight, and confidence which man could derive from other creatures, even as Christ was forsaken by all, even God.”

Confessing one's responsibility for Christ's suffering and death – and forsaking all hope of merit or worthiness in yourself – is only part of the proper meditation upon Christ's Passion.

Most importantly, you must understand all that Christ endured was “FOR YOU.” He was wounded for YOUR transgressions – He was crushed for YOUR iniquities – the chastisement that brought YOU peace was upon Him – and with His stripes YOU are healed.

Having been set free from a terror-stricken heart and a despairing conscience by all that Christ has willingly and lovingly done FOR YOU – Luther says that now you view Christ’s Passion differently.

“Now, if pain or sickness afflicts you, consider how paltry this is in comparison to the thorny crown and the nails of Christ. If you are obliged to do or refrain from doing things against your wishes, ponder how Christ was bound and captured and led hither and yon. If you are beset by pride, see how our Lord was mocked and ridiculed along with criminals. If unchastity and lust assail you, remember how ruthlessly Christ’s tender flesh as scourged, pierced, and beaten. If hatred, envy, and vindictiveness beset you, recall that Christ, who indeed had more reason to avenge Himself, interceded with tears and cries for you and for all His enemies. If sadness or any adversity, physical or spiritual, distresses you, strengthen your heart and say, ‘Well, why should I not be willing to bear a little grief, when agonies and fears caused my Lord to sweat blood in the Garden of Gethsemane?’ He who lies abed while his master struggles in the throes of death is indeed a slothful and disgraceful servant.”

Dearly beloved, when your conscience assails you, and the reality of your sin burdens you – meditate on all that Christ has done FOR YOU. He has taken all your sin – died its death – paid its penalty. “It is finished,” He says. I forgive you. You are free.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.