

Jubilate Sunday (4th Sunday of Easter): April 17, 2016

“I Have to Listen to Whom? Really?”

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia! Our text this morning is 1 Peter 2, especially these words, “**1 Peter 2:11-12.**”

Today is Jubilate Sunday. It is a day to rejoice, but our texts before us don't sound all that much for rejoicing. As the French say, “c'est la vie,” “such is life,” and you know what? Life's not fair. We might be able to imagine a fair and just world in which perfect justice is meted out to everyone, whether rich or poor. But we can't find this world. The endless pursuit of justice is just that: endless. It goes on and on because it can't be found. The reason is really very simple. Justice in this world requires justice in every heart. As long as this world is inhabited by sinners true justice will always elude us.

If you want to understand injustice, don't look out there. Look inside. Examine your own heart. Examine your own life and conduct. St. Peter tells us to avoid fleshly lusts that war against the soul. Fleshly lusts are those things that we think and want that place our desires above the needs of others. Fleshly lusts war against the soul because the fleshly lusts come from our fallen sinful nature. This nature is rebellious against God. It refuses to submit to God. It lives to serve itself. It won't humble itself under God or man. It seeks its own. Whether in sexual immorality, defiance of authority, or in holding on to vices of various kinds, the flesh refuses to submit itself to God. Since it won't submit to God it won't submit to human authority either.

Only the Christian religion teaches the truth about original sin, but anyone with common sense can see its fruit. You don't have to be a Christian to recognize sin for what it is. Even the Gentiles – those who don't know Christ – know what is honorable when they see it. Only the insane have no conscience at all.

Unbelievers have a conscience and by means of that conscience they can discern right from wrong at least in a general sense. They can see if Christians are living lives that agree with their creed. And since unbelievers live under the judgment of their own conscience they live their lives standing in judgment of others. Only Christ can set you free from judgment. Christians, whom Christ has set free from God's judgment, nevertheless live their lives under the judgment of this world.

Every single day of our lives we are being watched, examined, studied, and judged. The gospel of Jesus Christ offends proud and impenitent people. This is why proud and impenitent people love to stand in judgment of Christians. We represent Christ. We see Him very differently than unbelievers see Him. We see Christ as our Redeemer who has freed us from judgment. When we hear the gospel of Christ we hear good news that tells us that our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. But to impenitent sinners Jesus stands as an offense and His cross is a scandal. Those who refuse to repent of their sins despise Christ and His Christians. They look for hypocritical Christians they can judge. When they find Christians who live to satisfy their own flesh they can point out this hypocrisy in an attempt to discredit the Christian religion. They seek to silence Christ Himself. It matters what people see when they see us. Everywhere we go, whatever we say, whatever we do, we go, say, and do as Christians.

Now you might think this is too big of a burden to bear. But there's something we must always keep in mind as we face the judgment of this world. The world may be judging us but God is not judging us! That makes all the difference. God isn't judging us! We are free! There is nothing we need to get from God that He hasn't already given us. Do you want to be at peace with God? Listen to the words of Jesus that He spoke on the day He rose from the dead: "Peace to you." "Peace to you," He said. He fought the war to end all war on the cross and by bearing the anger of God against all sinners He established peace between God and us.

We have peace with God and peace of conscience and peace of mind. We have received mercy. Christ has removed our sins from us. He has led us into a freedom in which no one can judge us because God Himself has judged us to be righteous for the sake of the innocent life and sacrificial death of Jesus. All this St. Peter teaches us in two little words, "As free." We live as free Christians. We live under grace. The forgiveness of sins from God to us is not merely a pious hope or an uncertain wish. It is the bedrock reality upon which our souls rest and find their peace with God. Nobody in all creation can enslave us again. We are free!

And it is precisely because we are free before God that we can submit to every human authority. We do it for Christ's sake. Arbitrary rules, unjust laws, unfair taxes, and incompetent people in positions of power cannot master us or dominate us or drive us. We are Christians. We are free. We can obey stupid rules; honor

those in authority even when they ought not to be in authority; put up with unfair criticism and even abuse. We can do it because we have lost nothing when we do it. We have nothing to lose. We've already lost it. We lost our lives when we died with Christ and the lives we now live by faith are the life of Christ Himself. He is our life. The Church has only one, supreme, high authority – not you, not me – it is God Himself.

Why do people fight? They fight because they think there's something worth fighting for. People fight for bad reasons such as revenge, pride, and money. Or they fight for noble things such as honor and love. St. Peter encourages us not to fight at all. No, he's not teaching us to embrace pacifism. He's not telling us to become Mennonites and to swear off every use of force against evil people. After all, he tells us to submit to the human authority that punishes criminals by means of violent force! He tells us that God Himself appoints the government to punish evildoers. If God works through the sword it can hardly be sinful to take up the sword in a just cause. Policemen, soldiers, and even the executioner are all servants of God.

What the apostle is saying is that we can and should submit to authority – even when it is unfair and unkind – without complaining about it. Jesus suffered patiently. Jesus was abused and mistreated. And it was in the worst miscarriage of justice in the history of the world that God's mercy triumphed over justice by meeting its demands. It is because we are joined by faith to the crucifixion of Jesus that we are free. It is because we are joined to the cross of Christ that we always see true justice fulfilled. The boss shows favoritism. The policeman is a bully. The government official is an officious and incompetent bureaucrat who steals our precious time. The parents don't understand our problems and the teacher is completely unfair. There are so many things to fight, to oppose, and to complain about.

What does the apostle say? He says, "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust."¹

¹ 1 Peter 2:17–18

They don't need to deserve your respect. You honor them because you fear God. You don't fear them. You fear God. This doesn't mean you are scared of God and want to run away from Him. It means just the opposite. It means that there is nothing you fear more in life than losing the favor of your God. And this means that you treasure the gospel of the forgiveness of sins that Christ bought for you so dearly and gives to you freely. It defines who you are. It sets you above any human authority as a lord and master. God sees all sin and judges all sinners and does His will as He sees fit without consulting any human authority. He answers to no one in heaven or on earth for His decisions. He establishes and overthrows all kingdoms and nations of this world and sets the boundaries for every human exercise of authority.

He answers prayers and He loves and protects and sends His angels to defend the smallest and weakest among us. This is the God who has chosen to love us with an undying love. This is the God who has chosen to send His dear Son to take upon Himself all of our sin and guilt and to take it away on the cross. This is the God who, for Christ's sake, sees no sin in us and neither judges us nor condemns us. He is our God. We are His and He is ours. As St. Peter writes immediately before our text, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."²

This, then, is the context for St. Peter's encouragement in our text to put up with what is unfair and unkind, taking it patiently.

Sometimes we suffer specifically because we are Christians. Christians get a bad grade or lose a deserved promotion simply because they confessed the truth when the truth needed to be confessed. Think of the Christians who have really paid a price. Persecution and murder from the pagan Romans, the Muslim Turks, and the atheistic Communists remain unavenged to this day. Meanwhile, Christians are blamed for every crime in history while the great contributions to charitable institutions from Christians are ignored.

² 1 Peter 2:9–10

But what we do as Christians is never ignored. Just as God treasures us as His holy nation He also treasures what we do as Christians. We don't need to fight and beat an unfair system. There is nothing to be gained in fighting for our sinful and foolish pride. We died to sin. We were crucified with Christ when we were baptized. We live a new life and commune with Christ Himself. That's our identity, our goal, and our purpose in living. What do we have here? As St. Peter reminds us, we are pilgrims here. We are only traveling through.

And as we travel through, we put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by submitting to human authority. The ignorance that is silenced is the attacks against the gospel that Christians confess. When we honor as God's servants those who are in authority over us we silence critics of our Christian faith. The apostle says to fear God, but to honor the king. We don't fear the king. We honor him. He has no power over our lives. Our lives belong to the One who set us free. When we submit to human authority we do it as free Christians.

It's amazing how much status means to people. Children learn at a pathetically early age to judge each other by the kind of clothes they wear or the social status of their friends. Rank, status, and human approval are so very precious to the flesh. But, in the end, they are utterly worthless. We live here as sojourners and pilgrims. Our citizenship is in heaven where perfect justice and perfect mercy combine to bring us perfect love and perfect joy forever and ever. It was for heaven that Jesus bought us and it is to heaven that He leads us. We are free! No earthly power can bring us this freedom and no power on earth can ever take it away. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!