

O God, as You baptized children, let us consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to You in Christ Jesus, so that we might live the abundant life of humble service to You and our many neighbors You place in our lives. [*Grant to our confirmands the desire to hate their lives in this world enough to honor you all their days.*] Amen.

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him." Now is My soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a Voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered, "This Voice has come for your sake, not Mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself." He said this to show by what kind of death He was going to die.

In Christ Jesus who hated His life in this world, so much so that He willingly laid it down for us all, dear fellow redeemed (*and especially you our dear confirmands*):

In our Rite of Confirmation this question is asked with all seriousness: "*Do you ..., as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?*" To which the confirmand replies: "*I do so intend, with the help of God.*" But in our day and culture, suffering death for confessing Christ seems rather unlikely, so this vow can appear easy to make. [*Be assured confirmands this is not some sentimental promise. You will be actually vowing to die for Christ if necessary.*]

Throughout the world Christians continue to be the most persecuted religious group in the world with over 90,000 followers of Christ being killed in 2016, which equates to one death every 6 minutes. It is estimated that in 2015 105,000 were killed for Christ. Primarily this takes place in Africa, so again we may seem safe taking that vow here and now. However in the history of the Church, martyrdom is nothing new and will continue to the end of the age.

Jesus knew this would challenge His Church and so prepared us who follow Him in this life for this possibility.

You need to understand that it is well worth any personal sacrifice in this life trusting what Jesus teaches us here that **Serving Christ Even unto Death Honors the Father Who Sent Him.**

## I

These "Greeks" mentioned in our text were part of the Palm Sunday crowd entering Jerusalem for the Passover festival. We are told that the excitement of the crowd was especially stirred up because of the report Jesus had just raised a man to life who had been dead and in the grave for four days. The Pharisees observing these strangers said in frustration: "Look, the world has gone after Him."

These foreigners came to Philip and politely said: "Sirs, we wish to see Jesus." We are never told that they gained a personal audience with our Lord, but as Philip and Andrew approached Jesus with this request, He spoke of His imminent suffering and death that would be experienced by the end of the week. He does it in relatively positive terms. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." The fruit Jesus' suffering and death produced would be the conversion and saving of many throughout the world, which Jesus mentions at the end of our text: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." The "lifting up" is the familiar expression of the day for execution by crucifixion.

You would think that someone receiving a criminal's punishment would not draw anyone to himself, but it would in Jesus' case since it would achieve a great and eternal blessing. Jesus said: "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."

Do you love your life? That is a way of asking: *Are you loving your life in this sinful world so much that it has become your all in all?* If so, you will eventually lose it, death will rob you of all the pleasures of this sinful world. But if, by God's grace you hate this life willing to lose it all, you will have a life that goes on to all its abundance into everlasting life. You have been called to follow Jesus in this life, which may mean death at the hands of His enemies, but it will also mean you will follow Him into everlasting life.

## II

Entering Jerusalem that day was not a carefree joyful journey for Jesus. It was a mournful entrance even with the joyful reception. His soul was troubled, but He was not turning back. It was the Father's will that He experience the suffering and death, which all sinners deserve, so that full payment would be made for absolutely everyone. As He said: "For this purpose I have come to this hour." Then He asked His Father to be glorified by His obedience unto death. The Father responded: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

In His obedient Son the Father's name was glorified because His plan of salvation put into place already from eternity was now about to be completed. From Jesus' holy conception in the womb of the Virgin, to His birth in a Bethlehem stable, to His family's flight into Egypt, to His growing up in Nazareth, to His three years of public ministry, the Father was glorified in Jesus' perfect obedient fulfillment of presenting a holy sacrifice for the entire human race. Now the glory of the Father's saving will would be found in the crude arrest, unjust trial, brutal beatings, cruel execution, unceremonious burial, culminating in the triumphant resurrection.

Now you, who boldly confess a faith in this holy One sent to save you, follow Him into death and unto life everlasting. By your new life in Christ you honor the One who sent Him. Examine your life of service as you enter upon this most holy of all weeks. Do you find that you hate your life here more than you love it? Or are the works of the sinful flesh driving your life so that service to neighbor is neglected and even worse makes your neighbor your victims? How have these things manifested themselves lately in your life: envy, jealousy, pride, greed, lust, fits of rage, strife, disrespect, slander, gossip, grudge holding, betrayal? No doubt you do not have to go back too far to find these things, which dishonor the Father. *[As you learned, all such sins are to be acknowledged and repented of as you rightly examine yourself to receive the body and blood of your Lord in the holy Supper. In addition you are to seek to amend your sinful life.]*

The works of Christ, which glorified His Father by saving you from your sins and death, do not provide a license for you to sin. He saved you FROM sin, not TO sin. Hate your sinful lives, my fellow redeemed and walk by the Spirit who promises to produce these fruits for your neighbors: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. When these things appear for your neighbors through your life in Christ, the heavenly Father is honored and glorified.

Serving Christ unto death means living the abundant life, which continues into life eternal. Serving self will eventually come to a permanent end in death, both here in time and in everlasting death. Do you wish to see Jesus? You find Him right where He says He will be found in the Word of the Gospel and in the Holy Sacraments. He is with us His Church until the end of the age. Through these blessed means your Lord forgives all those works of the flesh that can haunt you spiritually and strengthens you, so that you now eagerly seek to produce the fruits of the Spirit.

Do you want your neighbors to see Jesus? Through the fruit our Lord produces through you in your daily interactions with those neighbors, they find His love extended to them in all that you do and all that you say. The Father in heaven is then truly honored and you are eternally blessed for Jesus' sake. Amen.