

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*

On this Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity, the Eucharistic Propers share a common theme. This theme is best summarized by the following words from the Epistle to the Galatians:

*"...if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."*

The theme of this Sunday is Justification, or in other words, being made righteous.

We can also express this theme in the form of three questions: *How are sinners justified? Where does righteousness come from? Is it from obedience to the Law of Moses or by faith in God and the Promises He made to Abraham?*

In today's Epistle, Saint Paul writes to the Galatians concerning these very questions. These questions were of great concern for the people of God in the first-century and they ought to remain so for us today.

- We ought to question what justification is and how we are justified.
- We ought to understand the Mosaic Law and its importance.
- We ought to desire the inheritance promised to our forefather, Abraham.

In order to understand our own religion, we need to understand our roots in Judaism; for, a Christian faith uninformed by Judaism is a faith that is not very Christian at all.

In our midweek study here at the parish, we have been discovering together the Jewish Roots of our religion. In that study we are seeking to understand how our faith is truly the fulfillment of Judaism. The Christian Faith is in fact the completion of the Jewish Faith. Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism. It is the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law. It is the fulfillment of the Prophets. It is the fulfillment of the promises God gave to Abraham and to his Seed.

Just a moment ago, when I asked the question, Is righteousness through obedience to the Law of Moses or through faith in God and the Promises He gave to Abraham, did any of you wonder why I did not mention faith in Christ? Listen closely to what I am about to say next, for it is crucial to our understanding of the Faith itself and it is what Saint Paul is explaining to the Galatians in today's epistle.

The reason I did not explicitly ask if righteousness is through faith in Christ is because **such a question cannot be separated from the promises given to Abraham on account of his faith**. Now, before you become confused, let me explain what I mean by this. What I mean to say is exactly what Saint Paul says in today's Epistle, **that the promises of our inheritance were given to Abraham and to his Seed and that seed is Christ**. Allow me to further explain...

Jesus is both the inheritor of the promises given to Abraham and the fulfillment of the promises. It is through union with Christ that we ourselves become sharers in these promises. As Saint Paul explains in a different epistle, *"[If we are the children of God]...then [we are] heirs; heirs of*

*God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."*

In Christ, we become joint-heirs of the promises given to Abraham and to Jesus, who is his Seed. By placing our faith in Christ, we become justified, just as Abraham was justified by faith and not by the Law. To be justified is to be made righteous; and, this is an important part of Saint Paul's writing in today's Epistle. Paul argues that justification is by faith and not by the Mosaic Law, since Abraham was counted righteous even before the Law was given to Moses. The Apostle writes, *"...the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect."*

The Law came later than the promises that were given to Abraham and this Law could not disannul the promises. For, as it is written in the First Book of Moses, "...[Abram] believed in the LORD; and [the LORD] counted it to him for righteousness."

Saint Paul taught the Galatians that our justification comes through faith in Christ and not through observance of the Law. But what is justification and what does it mean to be justified? As I mentioned earlier, to be justified is to be made righteous...but how exactly are we to understand this?

Many believe that justification is some sort of legal or juridical action on the part of God. They believe that justification is when God simply **chooses to declare someone who is really guilty of the Law to be no longer considered guilty**. This sort of justification is understood as being **only a declaration of innocence**. Thus, it is a nominal distinction rather than an ontological reality. It is a title rather than a reality. No doubt, you have probably heard something like the the following at least once in your experience as a Christian in the United States. This statement summarizes this misunderstanding of what Justification is. It goes something like this, "*When God looks at us He only sees Jesus. God cannot look at me because I am a sinner. God cannot be in the presence of sin.*"

Sadly, even though this understanding is so widespread in America, it is not the teaching of the Church. It is not the teaching of Saint Paul. It is not Jewish, and, quite frankly, it is not Christian either.

It is true that we are justified on account of our faith in Christ, *but this does not mean when our Heavenly Father looks at us sinners, He sees only Christ and it certainly does not mean that God cannot be among sinners*. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth! Just look at Jesus, the Son of God! Is Christ not the One who came down from heaven so that He could be among us? Did Saint John the Evangelist not write, "the Word was made flesh, **and dwelt among us**"? Did not he also write, "**...the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ**"?

You see, if we are to understand what it means to be justified, we must understand what it is not. We must understand that God has not merely declare us "not guilty"...He has come down to us in our low estate. He has eaten and drunk with us sinners. He has partaken in our humanity so that we may partake in His divinity.

As Saint Gregory Nazianzen once encouraged the faithful, "*Let us seek to be like Christ, because Christ also became like us: to become gods through him since he himself, through us, became a man. He took the worst upon himself to make us a gift of the best.*"

This morning, each of us are called to follow in the footsteps of our forefathers, Abraham, Issac, Jacob, and all of the saints of God. We are called to place our faith in Christ, who is both our King and our God. If we do this, if we allow God to make us holy, not simply by saying we are when we are not, but by Him actually conforming us to the image of His Son, we will one day find ourselves living as the inheritors of the promises of Abraham. One day, we, with Lazarus and all the faithful who have fallen asleep in Christ, shall find ourselves in the heavenly Promise Land. One day, we shall be holy even as He is holy...not because we have been forensically declared such, but because our faces shall shine with the glory of God.

May God give us the grace we need to allow Him to change us. May we believe that God has not turned away from us but that He has come down from heaven to be not only among us but one of us. May we believe that He has come to heal not only the Jews, but all of the nations, which shall be blessed by the Seed of Abraham. For as Saint John Chrysostom once said while explaining why the Law of Moses was given, "*...the Jews were not even conscious of their own sins, and in consequence did not even desire remission...the Law was given to probe [Israel's] wounds, that they might long for a physician.*"

May we, alongside our Jewish brethren, long for the physician of our souls, so that we may all be one in Christ. May we place our faith in Christ, the Seed of our forefather, Abraham.

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*