

Dear friends in Christ!

What do you do when you get some wonderful news? You are happy, you maybe shed some tears of joy, maybe you want to celebrate! May do all of that. Now how about something that grants you eternal life? Well, now we are talking. It should maybe you happy, shed tears of joy, and yes you want to celebrate, and all of that to a new level! A level that is multiplied by the news you are receiving. And you can't be quiet about that! That's what the prophet Isaiah, in our Old Testament reading for today says happens when God's reconciles his people with him.

Perhaps you are familiar with St. Augustine of Hippo and his history. Considered as one of the significant "Church Fathers" who left a legacy for the church. But his life wasn't always a shining example of faithfulness. For many years, as a young man, Augustine was far from faithful. He abandoned his mother's Christian faith to follow various false religions, he devoted himself to self-serving pleasures, he even fathered a child with a woman who wasn't his wife. And as he broke one commandment after another, he continued provoking God's anger.

But one day, all of that changed when the Word of God came to Augustine to show him how he had offended his heavenly Father but showed him the Savior who had died on the cross of calvary to reconcile him with God. Before long, he was baptized by a bishop named Ambrose, and legend has it that to celebrate his baptism, Augustine and Ambrose worked together to write a song praising God's goodness and proclaiming his mighty deeds for all to hear. We know that song as the Te Deum (LSB, pp 223–25), which to this day, is renowned as one of the greatest songs in the history of the church, and which you can find it in our hymnal as well. Augustine wrote it because Jesus had reconciled him to God, and Jesus' reconciliation just made him want to sing.

Have you had such an experience yourself? I mean the desire to sing songs to God, praising him for your salvation and for Jesus who made it possible, to the point that you can't be quieted?

I think we should do that today, don't you think so? Although Lent as a time of penitence and reflection can be a bit deterrent on having a joyous and loud celebration, but as we reflect on our sinful condition and on some of the specific sins we are struggling with, and by which we have grieved our heavenly Father, may you be gathering momentum for a greater celebration on Easter Day. One of the wonders of our Lenten journey is that it helps us to really realize that our sins deserve nothing but punishment and eternal condemnation. But it also points us to Jesus who welcomes

us like prodigal children who have been reconciled to the Father for the sake of his one faithful Son, who endured the cross on our behalf.

Be prepared to burst into joy on Easter Sunday then. Plan to sing lots, plan to shout for joy! Not even the quite ones can keep quiet at the news of Jesus victory which is also ours. His victory over sin, death and the devil. Because if you are forgiven and given a new life in Christ, your heart should burst into singing joy. In exorbitant singing joy that no one and nothing can prevent from taking place. For Jesus has reconciled us to the Father. And the reality is that Jesus' reconciliation makes Christians want to sing. Jesus reconciliation makes Christians confess with the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."

This is Isaiah's message to God's people that upon their repentance and forgiveness they will sing for joy!

This is Isaiah's message to a sinful people who had tested God's patience. This was Isaiah's message to a rebellious people who although were God's people did bad in God's sight. And by their own actions alienated themselves from their Creator, from their God, from their Lord. Yet a people who were suffering the consequence of their own sin. Even though they were God's people, yet by their disobedience and rebellion, by their own doing they brought themselves grief and death.

Now, to our benefit, we can learn from their history, we can learn lesson of life and relationship with God, and certainly what happens when we don't do as God desires for us his people.

Unfortunately, today some still use Israel's history as a banner for their cause. Zionism is a case in point. But what they don't learn from their story, is how Israel has been suffering because of their sin, even to this very day.

Just go back a couple of chapters from our today's text and see what Isaiah's charge is. He charges them, actually God charges them with all kinds of injustices and testing God. "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?" (Is. 7:10–13). The prophet asks. You are wearying my God! Isaiah says. They didn't fear God, even though they claimed to be God's people!

As you see is not the same to claim you are Christian but not live like one. Don't be fooled, just because somebody says believes in God and is a Christian, doesn't mean he or she is.

One of the injustices Isaiah charges them with is this: "Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, ² to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! ³ What will you do on

the day of punishment, in the ruin that will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth? ⁴ Nothing remains but to crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.” (Isaiah 10:1-4)

For those sins and others God says “They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upwards. ²² And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.” (8:21–20)

Now, if we are to learn something from the first Church, from the history of the People of Israel, is that God doesn’t treat sin lightly. God proclaims it: “The soul who sins shall die.” But how is this possible? How can a God who is all love threatens the sinner with death? This is question many ask even today.

There is a branch of theology today called Universalism which believes that all people regardless of their faith or past actions will ultimately be reconciled with God and achieve salvation, based on the fact that God is love. Because it is inconceivable that a God who is love will punish the sinner, after all he created us. How is he going to destroy his creatures? So no matter what, any sinner, all sinners will ultimately be in heaven. The Bible School of Chicago stand for this kind of Theology and one of their theologians believe that hell is nothing else but a “purgatory” where all sinners will have the to cleanse themselves, to purge themselves, that’s hell according to them. That kind of doctrine sounds wonderful, doesn’t it. Especially when we do have a heart for the lost, it eases our worries, it does make sense. So go ahead sin today, do whatever you like that no you will not be threatened with hell. But isn’t that what how satan tempted Adam and Eve at the garden of Eden? “Did God really say that... no he knows you are not going to die” the serpent told them. But God says, the soul who sins shall die. And God does not change his mind as we do. What he says it stands.

That’s the truth we need to learn from the Israelites. And recognize that it is our sins that condemn us. The same people of Israel recognize that, they said: “Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?” (Ez.33:10b)

But all through the Scriptures though, we see that God doesn’t not want our demise. And yes, in his love he doesn’t want any soul to die but be reconciled with God and obtain salvation, salvation from their demise.

Not, it is in the midst of this demise and decadency, darkness and gloom that the God News is heard. That God is taking the initiative proactively bringing Israel to be

reconciled with God. And this is the plan, through the Messiah he will bring reconciliation between him and his rebellious people.

And when the Mesiah will come, on that day, Isaiah says, God's anger will be turned away from their sins (v 1). And on that day, when the sin that angers God is removed, there will be peace with God.

And the aftermath of that peace, of that reconciliation, will cause so many hearts to shout for joy, to experience an exhilarating singing that no one can shut. And what they are sinning is a new song, a song that recounts God's marvelous works, that recounts the victory of Jesus. That recounts the peace, the peace the world cannot give. A song that says: "I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me." "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."

This is the song of those who repent and receive the forgiveness Jesus has won for. It is certainly true that God loves his creatures, that's why he sends his Son Jesus to be the reconciler, but it is only upon repentance and forgiveness that we receive the fruits of the cross. It is not an entitlement, it is not a given, but a free gift that comes because of his love for us. And that is what makes us sing. For he is our salvation, for he delivers our souls from our own dooms. For he gives us a new life, life that by his grace and love will be spent in Heaven for eternity.

So, how are feeling today? Downcast, ashamed and oppressed by our sins? Guilty and conflicted? Rejoice, rejoice then that your Saviour is about to be crucified, is about to be the cause of our reconciliation with God, and for that reconciliation to take place, he becomes our forgiveness and our fount of salvation.

Have you been deceived by universalisms? Or maybe by the teaching of others that have left you confused? Bring them to Christ, bring the to the fount and source of your salvation. And sing with Isaiah: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."

His anger is no more for those who have confessed their sins. For Jesus took on himself God's anger, and with his life God's is at peace with us. Sing it out! Whether it's Isaiah's song or Augustine's Te Deum or whatever hymn you remember best that rehearses all the mighty works of your Lord Jesus.

Sing that message to your fellow Christians. Sing it to the people who aren't even part of the church. Because Isaiah is here to tell you that your Lord Jesus has reconciled you to your heavenly Father. And doesn't that just make you want to sing? Amen.