

Concordia Theological Monthly



M A R C H



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HOMILETICS

Outlines on Ranke Epistles

JUDICA

1 PETER 1:13-21 (read vv. 13, 14 or 17-19)

Christians concentrate during Lent on the Passion of their Lord, but ordinarily in secondary services of the church; the Common Service even in Lent continues to be an Easter celebration, as is every other Sunday. But what of Passion Sunday— is it not finally engulfed in the mood of the Passion? Yes, but also that is an Easter mood, the victory that is the believer's because of the redeeming work of Christ. This text points out the fruits of that victory especially for the daily living of the Christian, his conquest over sin.

Christ's Passion Means Our Life

I. *What God plans our life to be*

A. A life of hope (13, 21).—The life apart from God goes nowhere, stands still, rots in its own corruption. But God's man is to "hope to the end"; ever greater gifts of God are coming to him.

B. Such hope takes hard thinking and a clear head (13).—The cult of "doing what comes naturally," of undisciplined surrender to whim and passion, fights against hope. But God's man rather keeps uppermost in his mind whither he tends and what his resources are for the journey and for its battles.

C. A life of obedience (14).—This is obedience not just to standards, principles, ideals, conscience, but to God (vv. 15-17). God plans that we live that behavior that carries out His will; but it is always to be behavior given by obedience to Him, wrought by Him, done for His sake. The apathy toward God in modern materialism, "living as though God did not exist," is not God's plan. This means forsaking the "former lusts," namely, giving in to the will guided by flesh and desire and being guided by "ignorance"—not just of the moral code, but of the will to belong to God.

D. A life of holiness (15, 16).—This is the comprehensive term for all of God's purposes for the life of His people. For it denotes being set apart to Him, in inner will and heart as well as surface behavior. It was the core of the O. T. covenant that God not only was distant from all evil but also was committed to the good of His people; that therefore His people were to be committed to Him and His

purposes (Lev. 19:2) and therefore were to be far from the sins of the people without God. Hence this apartness and consecration must reveal itself in every domain of life.

II. *How God makes that life possible*

A. God makes this life possible. Without Him it is beyond possibility, for men are born into the world without His will and Spirit. Hence it is all-important for people who want to live God's life to think clearly about God's means for it. The Epistle to this point has discussed it, and the text looks back; but the text itself restates God's means for fulfilling God's plan.

B. We are redeemed (18, 19).—The word denotes the paying of a price for the release of a captive or the settlement of a bankruptcy. The price, prefigured in the O. T. sacrificial system and the Passover, is the blood of Christ, His own life given up into death. It will be well not to get caught in the false antithesis between "ransom paid to God" or "ransom paid to the devil." For the devil is not the richer because this price has been paid! And God—He sent Jesus, offered Him up, through Him covered the sins of the world, planned Him to be the Redeemer before the world was (note passive in 20)! God is wrestling for the lives of His people, and in Christ God Himself invades the scene of their death that He might bring life again, the life that does His will.

C. We believe in God (20, 21).—The redemption happened on the cross; but that was not just an act between God and His Son, but a showing of God's plan, a demonstration. Cf. Rom. 3:21, 25, 26. The purpose of that demonstration and telling, that "Word of God," or "Word of Christ," is that we might believe; our faith is from God through Christ (21). God's raising Him from the dead is a part of that manifestation and Word that works faith, God's glorifying Him speaks, over and over again, the fact that He died to redeem us. Thus Passion Sunday is still an Easter!

Hence our faith and hope is in God, and we call on the Father in respect and awe and fear, knowing His clear and holy judgment; and through Him we use our allotted time of life not in the stupor of animal "living it up" but in the onward march of hope, in the upward look of faith, thoughtfully disciplining life to carry out God's plan. He has a high investment in us and an eternal purpose; hence the bonds that bind us in obedience to Him are strong, and we tighten them every day by the remembrance of Christ's Passion.

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PALM SUNDAY

1 PETER 4:1-6

Confirmation Day. Day of joy and celebration. One of high points in a Christian's life. No lack of zeal and courageous determination. At such a time joy needs to be tempered with realities of the Christian struggle, and zeal needs to be specifically directed. Confirmation is not so much a graduation as it is a preparation for battle in the front-line trenches.

We find this out soon enough. The Christian life often runs counter to the way of life enjoyed by friends and neighbors. To be different from the crowd brings ridicule, abuse, even exclusion. "Suffering for righteousness' sake" Peter calls it in an earlier chapter of this Epistle.

The people to whom Peter directs this first Epistle were involved in just such a situation. Becoming a Christian in Jerusalem was not without its difficulties. But there was a large congregation to give support and encouragement. Now, dispersed far and wide, these same Christians found themselves deep in enemy territory and under severe fire from their heathen neighbors. When they tried to be Christian citizens, neighbors, servants, wives, husbands, they were subject to revilings, abuses, unjust accusations, and persecution.

To them and to us Peter's word of encouragement is:

Arm Yourself with the Example of Christ's Suffering

- I. *"Since, therefore, Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought"* (v. 1, RSV)
 - A. The example of Christ's suffering in the flesh. "When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten" (1 Peter 2:23). Remember the abuse and false accusations when Jesus associated with sinners, forgave rather than judged, opposed the false leadership of Pharisee and priest.
 - B. This suffering of Jesus came to a climax on the cross. "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). Agony in the garden. Crown of thorns. Cross. Our Lord willingly was obedient and suffered and died for our sins.
 - C. "Arm yourselves with the same thought" (v. 1). Just thinking about Christ's example is helpful. But what Peter refers to is a set of mind, a determination to be obedient despite suffering.
 - D. This willingness is not self-created, but prompted and strengthened by the Spirit of God. Atonement involves Christ's presence in our lives through the Spirit whom He sends.

II. "*For whosoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live . . . no longer by human passions but by the will of God*" (vv. 1-3)

- A. When God's Spirit fills our heart, the flesh no longer dominates us (v. 2). Atonement means victory of Christ over the rule of sin, death, devil, world, *flesh*. Christian life is in a real sense a struggle between Spirit and flesh (Gal. 5:16 ff.). In this sense we cease from sin.
- B. Keeping apart from "what the Gentiles like to do" is hard on the flesh. Suffering. We ought not to underestimate the fondness of our flesh for the sins listed in v. 3. To resist such temptations involves a crucifying of the flesh. And it is particularly difficult when our status in the gang and our acceptance by the crowd is involved.
- C. It may be comforting to note that the longer our flesh is under such discipline, the less power it has over us (v. 1). Such suffering is an ally in ceasing from sin. Yet victory is by God's grace. Pray for Spirit-filled lives.

III. "*They are surprised . . . and they abuse you*" (v. 4)

- A. Separating ourselves from what the Gentiles like to do meets with surprise—at first. Amused comments, gentle ribbing. Something new and different.
- B. But soon surprise gives way to abuse. A Christian's life is soon revealed as more than peculiar notions. It is a direct challenge to the heathen way of life. Then real battles begin. Now faith is tested and courage challenged. Cross-bearing starts here. A suffering which many of us did not bargain for cuts deeply into our pride. Sacrifices are involved. Arm yourselves with the example of Christ's suffering.

IV. "*But they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead*" (v. 5)

- A. Injustices and persecutions of this kind not only hurt, but they seem to go unpunished. This makes our suffering seem useless. In anger or defense, we are tempted to strike out against our persecutors.
- B. But we are reminded that they will give an account. Judgment is certain. Even death is no hiding place (v. 5). And this account is not to us but to God. He is ready to judge the living and the dead (v. 5).

The admonition of Peter in our text has been the experience of the

church. The host of saints and martyrs have gone through temptation and persecution armed with the example of Christ's suffering and a set of mind given by the Spirit. It is not a coincidence that two of the favorite confirmation hymns are "Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus" and "Jesus, Lead Thou On." These hymns voice the faith and prayers of Christians already long in the battle. With humility join this mighty host today, and arm yourself for battle with the example of Christ's suffering.

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MAUNDY THURSDAY

1 CORINTHIANS 11:26-29

Sugar a gift of God to man. Yet to the diabetic it is detrimental. Nothing wrong with sugar, but man's condition at fault.—So the Sacrament of the Altar is God's great gift to the church. Yet a spiritual condition may exist which makes his communing a sin. Something wrong with the individual, not with the Sacrament. God intends it to be a blessing, but it must be used correctly. Therefore the theme:

Be a Worthy Communicant

I. *Do not partake of the Sacrament unworthily*

A. The essence of communing unworthily

1. There is such a thing as communing unworthily (vv. 27, 29), even though many would give the Sacrament to any and all.
2. Wrong notions of some as to what unworthiness really is: they feel they are not good enough. If that were meant, none would dare partake (Eccl. 7:20; Is. 64:6; Phil. 3:12; Ps. 143:2).
3. Its real nature: to partake of the Sacrament in a spirit, in a manner, and under conditions contrary to the spirit, purpose, and blessing of the Sacrament itself.

B. The damage of communing unworthily

1. It is a crime against Christ's body and blood. Cf. Thayer on the Greek term for "guilty" (v. 27). Such a person makes the Sacrament a profane, common thing.
2. The unworthy communicant receives damnation, or judgment. To begin with, not yet eternal damnation, though it will lead to it, unless repented of (v. 29).

C. The situations which therefore demand self-examination

1. The Corinthians: divisions, heresies, impatience, gluttony, and disrespect (1 Cor. 11:17-22).
2. In our own lives: purely routine Communion — without any thought; as a mere habit or custom ("Everyone goes during Holy Week"); in actual unbelief, superstition, or impenitence. Cf. Cat. Ques. 323 and 326. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, VII, 68, and Epitome, VII, 18.

II. *Make sure that you partake of the Sacrament worthily*

A. The essence of communing worthily

1. Faith (v. 28). Let a man examine himself. Cf. 2 Cor. 13:5; also Cat. Ques. 322. A complete trust in the Savior's merits. "Simply to Thy cross I cling." F. C., Ep., VII, 19.
2. A recognition and acknowledgment of our sins. The words "for the remission of sins" require this (Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:8,9). Words of the General Confession. This is not always easy, especially if we make it personal, but it is necessary. The temptation is to "hide among the crowd" and to say, "We have sinned," instead of saying, "I have sinned."
3. A sincere intention to amend the sinful life (Prov. 28:13; 2 Cor. 5:15,17). Without this intention we dishonor the Sacrament and make ourselves guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (v. 27).

B. The blessings of communing worthily

1. The assurance of sin forgiven. V. 26: "show the Lord's death," i. e., proclaim the Lord's death. Your very action by which you commune is an eloquent sermon as to the centrality of Christ's death. Cf. 1 Cor. 2:2. His death means reconciliation, forgiveness (2 Cor. 5:18-21).
2. Strength for a more Christ-centered life. V. 26: "show the Lord's death till He come." Christ's death a most powerful incentive and motivation to a Christian life (2 Cor. 5:15, 17). There is a crying need in our day for the Christ-centered life (Matt. 5:16).

In the light of the foregoing we understand the apostle's admonition to examine ourselves. This will result in (a) a keener sense of need, (b) a more frequent Communion, and (c) a fuller measure of joy from our Communion.

GOOD FRIDAY

REVELATION 5:1-14 (read vv. 1, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13)

The traditional name for this day is "Good Friday." It was a bad day for our Lord, crammed with shame, torment, and death. Yet His bad day becomes our good day, and the text before us tells us why. For here we see the reasons why

IT'S INDEED A GOOD FRIDAY

I. *Because a book is opened* (vv. 5—7)

A. This book defined in the context of the Sacred Scriptures

1. Ezek. 2:9: A book that predicts suffering for God's saints.
2. Is. 29: A book that tells the future history of God's church. This seems to be the content of the book referred to in v. 1 of the text. This is the history of a church oppressed and a church triumphant.

B. The book defined in Revelation

1. A book of life (13:8; 17:8; 20:15)
2. A book of judgment (20:12)
3. A book of prophecy (22:7). This is the point that must be stressed. The question is this: Will God's saints, now so much oppressed and in sorrow, come out the victors? This book in God's hand holds the answer, an answer that must be known by us who struggle and sorrow. Only one who could open that book is the Lamb, and He possessed that power *because He was slain* (v. 9). That's the reason He has become Custodian of the Book of Life (Rev. 13:8). The book is opened, the answer is given: VICTORY! Rest of Revelation shows this triumph of the church, of you and me. Death of Lamb enables both the revelation of that victory and the victory itself. Cf. Rev. 12:11; 17:14.

NOTE: Use material in A. and B. 1, 2 primarily as background for book concept.

II. *Because a Lamb has been slain* (vv. 6, 9)

A. That Lamb described

1. In the text (vv. 5, 6)
 - a. "Seven horns." This seems to be a symbol of power. Cf. Luke 1:69. This is not the weak Lamb led to the slaughter, but a Lamb with horns like a mighty bull,

- a Lamb that has taken all our enemies and tossed them to the skies and trampled them under foot.
- b. "Standing." The standing Christ, ready for redemptive action. Cf. Acts 7:56. Cp. also Heb. 9:12, 24. The standing of the Victim-Priest before God's throne, presenting the sin-atonement offering of His own blood.
 - c. "Seven eyes." Could be either the roving, piercing eyes of Zech. 4:10 or perhaps the "seven spirits" of Is. 11:2.
 - d. The Lamb that is at the same time a Lion. On this Good Friday there took place a tremendous battle between two lions, the Lion of Judah and the lion from hell. The former won, and His triumph becomes ours.
 - e. The Root of David. Cf. Is. 11:1-3. Out of the stump of the remnant of Israel comes a Branch that marks the beginning of a new Israel, a new, perfect, and everlasting tree whose leaves shall never wither. Cf. Rev. 22:16, where Root concept is connected with Dayspring idea. Promise of future glory and greatness seems prominent in both.
2. In the context of Revelation
- a. The Lamb is at same time the Shepherd who guides to springs of living water (7:17). He's not just a Lamb that has laid down His life for us, but a Shepherd whom we must follow. Cf. Rev. 14:4, where it is said saints follow Lamb wherever He goes. Cp. also John 10:27, 28.
 - b. The Lamb is also a King and a Conqueror of evil earthly powers (17:14). Right here is the reason for the victory of God's church revealed in the unsealed book, in the entire Book of Revelation, and in our own personal lives. The Lamb has won!
 - c. The Lamb is also the Bridegroom (19:7). Two points to stress here: 1. The comfort of being wed to Him. We're headed for the marriage supper of salvation (19:9). 2. The challenge of being wed to Him. We must be utterly faithful to Him alone, our one and only Husband.
 - d. The Lamb is the Temple (21:22). Cp. Ezek. 37:26-28; John 1:14 (the Word dwelt — *pitched His tent* — among us); Heb. 9:11; 10:20 (I personally feel that in these two passages our Lord's flesh is alluded to as a "tent" by the writer). Our Lord is God's second and more perma-

nent Temple, in which He meets us to forgive our sins and to dwell with us as *our* God.

- e. The Lamb is the Lamp (21:23). Cp. John 1:4,5. The Light gives promise of both *life* and *victory*. For darkness couldn't overcome it, put it out (John 4:5).

B. The blessings of His death

1. The "Passover" of death. Link with blessing of slain lamb in first Passover.
2. Iniquity is borne away (John 1:29).
3. Reconciliation (v.9). This is the heart of it all. In fact, this is the very core of forgiveness. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:19.
4. Reign (v.10). "Earth" here — perhaps "new earth" to be created. We shall reign, provided we suffer with Christ. Cf. Rom. 8:17.
5. Our privileges as priests (v.10). Cp. 1 Peter 2:5,9.
 - a. To offer up spiritual sacrifices, that is, to offer up our own bodies and not just goats or bulls as the Old Testament priests did (Rom. 12:1). This is our Good Friday sacrifice, our lifelong sacrifice in response to the Lamb's Good Friday sacrifice for us.
 - b. To publicize the Lamb's praises, that is, to be His personal publicity agents (1 Peter 2:9). Like our Lord, we are both "lambs" that sacrifice ourselves to God and "priests" who fulfill the double priestly function:
 - aa. We bring men to God.
 - bb. We bring God to men. Not only must we bring God's Gospel to men; we must reflect that Gospel in our lives. We must be living, loving messages from God to men.

III. *To sing a "new song"* (vv. 9, 11-13)

- A. The singers (angels, v.11; men, v.8; and all creation, v.13). No one is excluded from singing this song, no grief dare close any lips from shouting this anthem. Even animals, birds, and fish are in the chorus. For they, too, have reason to be happy. They share with man, their lord, in the liberation from the prison of corruption, a liberation accomplished by the Lamb (Rom. 8:19-22).
- B. The content of that song (vv. 12, 13). Perhaps the "newness" of the songs stems from the fact that "new creatures" sing it.

Old evils are gone; now there is nothing but good—even in pain (Rom. 8:28). For this is a “new song” even if it is in the midst of “groaning and travailing” (Rom. 8:22). The “old song” was: “Good Lord, deliver us from all evil”; the “new song” is: “He has delivered us.”

- C. The reason for that song. God’s deliverance as pictured in Ps. 40:2, 3; Ps. 98:1; Is. 42:1-16; Ps. 144:9, 10; Ps. 149:1, 4. Note especially the Isaiah passage and Ps. 40:2, 3.
- D. The method of singing
1. With lips. That’s important. Cf. Heb. 13:15; also Ps. 96:1-3. The “new song” must contain notes that are sung to others, notes that tell of God’s great deliverance through the Lamb.
 2. With life. Again note Heb. 13:15, 16. Our sacrifice of praise is twofold: (1) fruit of our lips, (2) a doing of good and a sharing with those in need. We must live our “new song” and not just sing it. Once again Rom. 12:1 might be mentioned.

This is indeed a good day to sing a new song. True, we are sad that Christ, the Lamb, was slain. For it was our sins that slew Him. Yet how glad we are that He died! For by that death we have been delivered from all evil. That’s why it is a good day to sing a “new song.” That’s why it is a Good Friday.

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HERBERT E. HOHENSTEIN

EASTER DAY

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28 (read v. 20)

In our hymns, Introit, and lections we have thrilled to the news that Jesus is alive. “He lives! He lives! He lives!” The service is replete with Hallelujahs. Our text presses us to thrill a bit longer to this fact and to follow it through to the logical conclusion.

Christ Is the First to Rise from the Dead

I. *Christ has risen from the dead!*

- A. This is a fact about which we can be certain (v. 20)
1. Consider the evidence Paul and we have. So many vacillate when they think about this. But recall 1 Cor. 15:4-8; Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20 and 21. The number of these appearances and circumstances surrounding them preclude deception.

2. Paul was sure, and we can be, too! Paul was sure Jesus' sacrifice was enough, He was God, He was alive after His crucifixion. He spent his life telling this at any cost. His confidence was unshaken to the end (Phil. 3:7-11). We have at least as much cause for certainty.
- B. At this moment the risen Jesus is ruling in heaven (vv. 25-28)
1. Although He shared in this might and majesty from the first moment of His conception, He has entered with His glorification into its unrestricted use (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, VIII, 85).
 2. Jesus aims to have every knee bow before His Father. He wants this especially and primarily as a result of His followers' witnessing to His vicarious death and resurrection (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46-48). Unbelievers will ultimately be compelled to bow.

II. *Our bodies, too, shall live again!*

- A. Without Jesus it would not be so (vv. 21, 22)
1. Adam sinned and lost "life" (Genesis 3). Explain. Recall quickly the beautiful life of fellowship with God in Eden.
 2. We would be Adam's spiritual heirs. We would have his likeness (Gen. 5:1-3). Sinners — alone — lost. Can you who have known Christ so long imagine today and tomorrow without Christ?
- B. But because Jesus rose, we have eternal life (vv. 20-24)
1. We have it *now*. "We" are the believers. Pardoned and acceptable with God. Access, approach (Gospel and prayer).
 2. We shall experience it at its best after Judgment Day (Phil. 1:20-24), with improved, spiritual bodies like that of Jesus — a face-to-face fellowship and joy with Him and the Father.

At one of the greatest moments in history (Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection are the big three) a stirring in a tomb outside Jerusalem — Jesus lives! No more is the possibility of eternal life and a resurrection of the body a matter for philosophical speculation (e. g., spring, the metamorphosis of the butterfly, incompleteness of rewards and punishments and achievements in this life, etc.). Jesus promised He would rise; He did rise. He has promised we shall rise; He who could promise and raise Himself can and will raise us, too.

QUASIMODOGENITI

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-57

One of the most distressing personal facts that we must face is that we are aging, deteriorating creatures. We are subject to innumerable destructive forces. All of us are candidates for death. Few things can unnerve us more thoroughly than the discovery that we are in serious danger from sickness or injury. In reality, we are defeated by death from the moment of birth. There is nothing we can do to stop the relentless process that has been set in motion against us. In this text St. Paul assures us that

In Christ We Can Be Victorious over the Terrifying Forces

- I. *Physical corruption and death are tokens of our spiritual condition, as the Law affirms*
 - A. The life that we possess by nature has been corrupted by sin. It has become merely a flesh-and-blood existence, for as a result of our sinfulness we are not fit for the inner rule of God's Spirit. Neither in this life nor in that to come can we have a share in the kingdom of God (v. 50).
 - B. As a sign of this condition our bodies have lost their original attributes of perfection and immortality. Our physical existence mirrors our spiritual state. We have become subject to all kinds of weaknesses and infections and finally to death itself. (All textual references to corruptibility and mortality. Psalm 90 on the connection between physical and spiritual conditions)
 - C. The Law spells this out very powerfully. With devastating directness God tells us that corruption and death are the result of our sinfulness. As we face these unpleasant realities, they are made even more fearful to us by the wrath of God which they represent (v. 56).
- II. *Christ's death obtained and His resurrection proclaims complete victory over corruption and death*
 - A. At the end of time we can enjoy complete victory over corruption and death. Both those believers who are alive at the end and those who have been raised from the dead will experience a thrilling and an instantaneous change. Corruption will be stripped away, and we shall be clothed in incorruption. Mortality will be removed, and we shall put on immortality (vv. 51-54). We can look forward to this with the utmost certainty.

- B. God gives us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 57). It is the result of our sinfulness that we must go through the torment of death. The power of sin is in the condemnation which the Law pronounces on us (v. 56). However, Christ has done away with sin. He took it upon Himself. He absorbed the corruption of sin in His own body. He suffered the condemnation of the Law when He died in our place on the cross. By so doing, Christ gained the victory, and He offers the victory to us (Heb. 2:14).
- C. More than anything else His resurrection proclaims this victory to us. Until He rose again, His death appeared to be defeat and failure. However, by rising again and showing Himself alive He demonstrated the fact that His death gained the victory over death and that He gained that victory for us (1 Peter 1:3).

All this has great meaning for us as we live in our corrupting bodies and as we prepare for the grim experience of death. Christ has gained the victory! How much easier it is for us to endure sickness, old age, disfigurement, and death if we know that they will soon be replaced by incorruption and immortality! How thankful we can be for this victory! But we can be thankful for something else, too. In our physical frailties we have a constant reminder of our ongoing spiritual needs. They are a valuable warning to seek strength for these needs now so that we can claim the total victory hereafter.

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