

How To Repay God? Romans 11:33-36

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly beloved, in the Gospel lesson, we read these words: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.* (John 3:16-17 ESV)

Nicodemus did not understand exactly what that meant at the time. Nor did Peter like Jesus' explanation about what would happen to Him in order to save the world. In fact, Peter's unwillingness to accept the fact that Jesus was going to suffer and die to purchase forgiveness, caused Jesus to call Peter, "Satan."

But Jesus **DID** suffer at the hand of evil men. They **DID** scorn Him, beat Him, spit upon Him, whip Him, finally crucify Him, and He **DID** die. But that was God's plan to bring salvation to a world desperately caught up in sin.

To be honest we have a hard time with this as well. Why would God give His Son to pay for our disobedience? Why would He give Him to suffer in our place? We must simply sit back and make St. Paul's words in our Epistle our own, *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

Dearly beloved of God, you know what? God knows what you need. He knows you, even better than you know yourself. He knows how difficult it is for you in this world. Last week, we had the confirmation of our young people who had gone through 2 years of rigorous instruction in the teachings of the faith. Mostly, they did it because their parents and grandparents said, "You're going to be confirmed and this is what you have to do to be confirmed." What is really funny, is that maybe one of them heard such things as, "You think Pastor Jerabek is tough? You should have seen what we had to memorize to be confirmed. And then we had to do such and such *IN FRONT OF THE WHOLE CONGREGATION.*" And then comes the best line, "Just be thankful you did not take instruction back in my day. We had to walk to class – uphill – both ways – even in ten feet of snow."

So last week, we confirmed 5 young people. Their lessons were given to teach them that no one knows the mind of the Lord, no one has been His counselor, and nobody can repay Him. Hopefully they understood the basics, but that there is much beyond our human comprehension.

Nicodemus did not understand how a man could be born again. It is my prayer that you all understand how it takes place. That God calls you by name, and by the miracle of water and the word, God unites you to Christ's death – you die in Christ, and you die in daily contrition and repentance. You are born again, and in Christ you are raised to new life in Him.

Today, we are a gathering of sinners. A simple examination of the Ten Commandments has taught us this. There are none that we have not broken. We have failed in every conceivable way.

Today, we have confessed our faith in the Athanasian Creed. We know that our God is One, and yet, there are three persons. We know of the sacrifice God made, that the second person of the Trinity took upon Himself human flesh and died in exactly the manner He foretold to Peter. He came into the world, not to condemn it but in order that it might be saved by Him. Finally, the promised Holy Spirit comes to us as well, by God's grace, building us up in the true faith to trust not in ourselves, but in the deeds of Christ.

While we confess this faith, it is also true that it does not seem logical to us, there are things that are beyond our understanding. We confess that this is our God – and that from Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things.

But we like to consider this, "Since God has done all this, how might we repay Him?"

Have you ever received an incredible gift, something so valuable, you were shocked and amazed? Did you repay the gift? You all have mothers, have you repaid them for giving you life? Indeed, can you repay them for that gift?

Imagine someone desiring to give you a gift. They invite you to their home and prepare a feast for you, ready to welcome you as the guest of honor and to bless you by presenting unto you a priceless gift. Instead, you choose not to come.

Of course, you have your excuses – the house of the host is too warm, they don't have air conditioning... The meal is going to be too early in the day... You were planning to go up north on that day... You decide it is the only day you have for yourself, so you skip it and make other plans.

Would you do that? You were going to receive a gift worth thousands of dollars, would you really not come as the guest? What would you be saying to the host and the giver of that gift if you decided to blow him off and not come?

Now, let's turn this upside down and look at it this way. How would **you** feel if **you** were the one who planned a great party, bought an expensive gift, and the guest of honor decided to go fishing instead and never came to claim the gift? Or, how would you feel if they came and then tried to pay you for your gift, as if they could purchase your generosity – as if to buy the present you graciously gave to them?

God is the host. He has purchased prepared the meal and spread it on the table. He has an incredible gift to give you, a gift that cost Him the life of His only begotten Son. He does not do this so that you may repay Him. He invites you to come, to receive, and to rejoice. He does not need anything from us, in fact, there is nothing we can offer to Him that is not stained and contaminated by our sinfulness.

But that sinfulness is exactly why He invites us to the celebration, for our sinfulness is what He wants to take care of for us. That which would keep us out of His heavenly kingdom, He cleanses from us. He gives us His name. He removes from us the stain of sin. He feeds us and nourishes us with His grace, and builds us up in the true faith, faith that trusts the works of Christ, which are ours by the grace of God.

He graciously desires for us to receive and relish the marvelous gifts of the forgiveness of our sins, the gift of an eternal home in His kingdom and salvation – all gifts beyond price.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the highest form of worship is to receive with joy the gracious gifts God desires to give you. There is no way you can repay Him for the precious blood of Christ that was shed to purchase the gift, simply receive it.

How do you repay God? You do not! You simply and joyfully receive the great gifts He desires to give to you – gifts beyond value – the Word which frees you from sin, and the meal which grants you God's grace.

Today we confess together holy, apostolic, catholic faith. We confess with those who have gone before us, and those who will come after us, all one in faith through the same Spirit who works within us all.

You now understand the great gifts God desires to give you. Do not try to repay Him. Do not try to give Him anything for His gracious work for you, to you and through you. And, as you all love expensive gifts, come often to receive God's gifts of His grace, and in so doing, you give Him glory.

Dearly beloved of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – from him and through him and to him are all things. Today and every day, to Him be all glory forever. Amen.