

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Your song is indeed, “Love unknown.” It’s unknown because there is no love so perfect and profound as the love God has for you in Christ. The first stanza of the hymn of the day sums this up well: “My song is love unknown, my Savior’s love to me, love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be. Oh, who am I that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh and die?” That’s the thing, isn’t it? Think about that. The Lord who loves you is the Lord who takes on your sin and the sin of the whole world. His death is the death for those ones who turned against him and, as the Gospel reading today shows, picked up stones to kill him. He died for sinners.

St. John, by divine inspiration, recorded, “Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.’”

Sin renders people foolish before God and you are no different. This is why “love is unknown” because in your sin you not only don’t you know and understand the gospel, but you can’t stand to hear it. Here in the reading the Jews knew what Jesus said but they couldn’t bear to listen to it. Jesus calls them out and tells them to whom they belong and there are no innocent parties in this world. They are of their father, the devil, and want to kill the Lord of life who came to redeem them. You heard a similar thing from Jesus a few weeks ago when Jesus said, “whoever is not with me is against me.” These men are against Jesus. Those who remain in the stubbornness of their sin are against Jesus. That’s the foolishness of sin which takes such a great, living, and loving God and utterly rejects him, wanting him dead. Those harsh words to them are meant to warn them and you calling all to take note of your lives and look at how you hear and view your Lord. You listen to Jesus and ask yourselves, “who is my father?”

The Jews thought they had a righteous answer and wanted to claim Abraham as their father. True, they maybe had a blood lineage, but Abraham was not their father. They totally missed the point and it’s eternally deadly. They were concerned with the things of this world and didn’t see where true eternal sonship comes from and who gives it. Jesus said, “Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” Abraham, that same man in the Old Testament reading who was told to sacrifice his son, trusted in the promises of the promised Messiah. In terms of the instance in the Old Testament reading, his trust in those promises of God was also a trust that God raises the dead as the book of Hebrews, in chapter 11, comments on that event in Genesis 22. “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”

The Jews who stood before Jesus, wanted to claim Abraham as their father so that their race and lineage would be superior to others on the one hand, and they thought they were righteous before God because of their lineage on the other. Their unbelief, though, was the thing that denied their sonship of Abraham and their place as God’s people. Abraham looked to the coming Messiah and, even in death, he is living because God gave him life. Now, that very Messiah is right in front of the eyes of the Jews and rather than rejoicing, they sought to kill him. They could not bear to listen to the words Jesus spoke to them. They were no real sons of Abraham. The sons of Abraham cling in faith to Jesus.

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So where does that leave you? The Lord is here, and he is speaking to you today. Only by God's grace, through the eyes of faith do you see Jesus for who he truly is and what he has done. It's only by the Holy Spirit does one say, "Jesus is Lord." It's nothing short of a miracle, then, when you believe the Gospel. God, though, is in the miracle business. That's what he does even as he himself has been crucified and is risen from the dead. He has worked this all in your life. Remember your baptism in this way and what God has done for you. Your sin has been washed away. You have been rescued from death and the devil, and you have been given eternal salvation in Christ. This means that God gives you the answer to "who is your father?" The devil is not your father. No, the Lord is your Father for you are baptized into the name of the Holy Trinity. The Son has redeemed you and call her his own. The Lord has done this all for you.

This is this love unknown that you do now know and love. The Lord's glory is not in himself rather it's in your redemption. The people in the Gospel reading wanted to kill Jesus but it wasn't time for that yet, so he hid himself and went out of the Temple. That's why the images of Jesus are veiled this day as the church enters this next part of Lent called "Passiontide." The focus is on the Lord's suffering for you. Jesus is the Suffering Servant. He is as the Epistle reading from Hebrews says, "When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." Jesus provides the sacrifice for you and is the sacrifice himself for you in your place. That's your Lord who is before you today as you listen to him. His heart was set on saving you and this he did willingly. This is the song of love unknown but, you see, you dear Christians, you do know of this love, and you love him. Loving him is hearing and loving his words. There is a confidence in all of this as you behold Jesus speaking these bold words because he did this all for you.

God is your Father as you sit here this morning for you are in the Son. Who you are is found in Christ who has redeemed you and covered you with himself. St. Patrick's prayer is fitting on this day when you see all this and who you belong to as a child of God over and against the devil, his lies, and his children. Every day you "arise and bind yourself to the strong name of the Trinity" and call upon his strong name who has saved you and will guard and keep you as his own. This is your strength as the baptized people of God who bear the name of your God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Knowing who your Lord is and who you are, the words of the Introit today have as the antiphon, "Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! For you are the God in who I take refuge." The name of this Sunday, Judica, comes from the first word of that Psalm in Latin and traditionally has been translated as "judge me, O God."

It may sound a bit odd for you to pray to God to judge you but as you fix your eyes on Jesus you do pray this because you trust in those promises you have on account of Jesus and his work for you. Clinging to your baptism you can and do say to God for him to judge you because you know what he will say to you on the Last Day as you stand before his seat of judgement. He looks at Christ and says to you, "Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy I have prepared for you." You know this for God says to you right this very instant, "your sin is forgiven, and you have eternal life." God is your Father, and you are his children.

Dear people of God, take refuge in Jesus and in the words he gives. "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." Jesus is the "I AM." He is the one true eternal God who revealed himself to Moses and has taken on human flesh. He is the one who was promised of old, and he is the one who is your Redeemer. Lift up your eyes this Sunday for your redemption draws near. See and behold this great love God has had for you in Christ and still has you. Baptized into Christ you are his dear son, and your Lord is your

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Father. Rejoice and cling to Jesus. Ready your hearts for the coming weeks as you listen to your Lord's passion. Draw near to him and find refuge in his wounds and see him vindicated on the third day as he rises victoriously from the dead. In all of that, see your salvation accomplished and given to you freely and fully. Your song is love unknown but fixing your eyes on Jesus you know what you have in this unknown love. Hearing his word, baptized into Christ, and feasting at his Supper what you have in Christ is forgiveness, life, and salvation now and forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.