

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

In his murderous zeal to have sole reign over Israel, Saul, contrary to the promise to spare the Amorites, slaughtered them anyway. After a three-year famine in Israel, David sought the face of the Lord. The Lord told David that the suffering was a consequence Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites. He had stained Israel's house with blood.

To make restitution, David asked the Gibeonites, the surviving relatives of the Amorites, what they would require of Israel. They asked that seven male descendants of Saul be publicly killed and their corpses exposed. David did as they asked. Then the bones of Saul and Jonathan were buried at Kish, in the tomb of Saul's father. After that, God answered the prayers of Israel.

His enemies vanquished and buried, David wrote "The Lord delivers me from my enemies. You also lift me up against those who rise up against me: You have delivered me from the violent man." These Words of Psalm 18 began our Mass this day/night. In joy David proclaims "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple... Great deliverance He gives to His king, and shows mercy to His anointed, to David and his seed forevermore."

In this world the children of God have enemies. It was not like that in Eden. In heaven there are no enemies either. But a murderous invader slithered in. And that enemy made the pinnacle of God's creation, man, into God's enemy. So you, children of that fallen man, are beset by enemies. And truth be told, led by your fallen flesh, you have provoked strife with others.

At work and in society, at school and in our government, in our families and even at home discord mars the lives of fallen men. And more, you war against your flesh, as you are tempted to demonstrate by your sins that you have remained an enemy of God. Like Israel stained with the blood of the Amorites, your sin has marked you, and the just consequences are suffering and death.

As David could not end the famine in Israel, so are you powerless to deliver yourself from sin. But in His mercy, the God who delivered David delivers you. He is the Promised Seed in whom David rejoiced. But while David was delivered from his enemies and saw their bodies placed in the tomb, the Seed of David gave Himself over to the hands of His enemies. He was not delivered from death.

So the Words of Psalm 18 echo His Holy Passion: "The pangs of death surrounded Me, and the floods of ungodliness made Me afraid." He was beset by His enemy, as the multitudes cried out for His death. He submitted to their lies and to their unjust sentence. The suffering David was spared David's Seed endured to the full.

God did not deliver Him from His enemies. He was not delivered from the violent man. And while David wrote in triumph "You also lift me up above those who rise against me", the lifting up that the Seed of David endured was cruciform.

What the Psalmist wrote was fulfilled not by David, but by David's Lord: "The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and

cried out to My God..." But while David's prayer was heard and answered, David's Seed was forsaken. He cried out "My God...", but He was forsaken. At His death, the earth quaked. So the Psalmist wrote "Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken..."

Like those descendants of Saul whose lives were demanded as satisfaction for Israel's debt to the Gibeonites, so did the Seed of David, the Seed of the woman, give His life for the satisfaction of your debt with God and men. And although He is the Lord of Life, His body was placed in the tomb.

David exclaimed "The Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His sight." But David's righteousness was not his own. It was won for him, just as your righteousness was won for you. The Christ, the Seed of David, covered Himself in your sins.

He was lifted up between heaven and earth, made to be the greatest sinner of all time, condemned by God and men. And because He bore your sin, because He endured your punishment, you can declare with David "The Lord delivers me from my enemies... The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer." Because He was lifted up, you are delivered.

So you, dear Christian, you, forgiven in Christ, you, redeemed of the Lord, you purchased by the Blood of the Lamb, you may proclaim with David "You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your Right Hand has held me up, your gentleness has made me great!"

And so too did the Psalmist prophesy "The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted!" The Lord who died for you does live. He is your Rock and your Salvation. And He is exalted, risen and ascended, the Right Hand who held you up now seated on His heavenly throne. So you may rejoice with David, and declare "As for God, His way is perfect; the Word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all those who trust in Him."

To you who trust in Him, you given faith by the Spirit of God through His Word, to you He freely gives His righteousness. His way is perfect, and He leads you and guides you in that way. And He is a shield to you, a Comforter, a Protector, an Advocate with the Father.

He covers you with His Blood in Holy Baptism, that Blood bespeaks you righteous in Holy Absolution, and this day/night your Lord, your Strength, your Rock, your Fortress and Deliverer gives you to drink of His Blood, that you receive His forgiveness and life.

But now, for a time, the altar is violet. We meditate on His Suffering, His Passion, on the great price He paid for our sins, what He did for you. Soon you will hear of His Triumphant Entry, His procession from trial to cross to tomb. The Words of the Psalmist describe what your Savior endured "He made darkness His secret place". But faith knows that while His death is the end for your sins, death is not His end. So in reverent joy the Words of the Psalm are your words: "The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted!"

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