

“All Believers are the Bride of Christ”
Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27; Acts 16:9-15

The text for our meditation is taken from the book of Revelation 21, which was read before.

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together”.
Amen

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Today we hear about marriages and weddings, about brides and bridegrooms. Today we hear one of the angels of Revelation say to St. John the Apostle, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (v9b). Several times in the Bible, the Church, that is all believers, are called the bride of Christ. That is you and me! We are the bride of Christ. All people who believe in Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, in this world and those in heaven above, are called the bride, or wife, of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Today, we remember by whose hand we are the Bride; for a bride is not a bride unless there is a bridegroom, and we are not forgiven and righteous in God's sight except that the Lamb of God, that is Jesus Christ, has taken away the sins of the world, including yours and mine. So today is the day we hear and say, "Here comes the Bride, big, fat and wide." That is the tune by Wagner that we call "The Wedding March" or the "Bridal Chorus."

How fitting those words put to the first line are to describe the essence of what is being said in our reading from the Book of Revelation. "Here comes the Bride." She is big. She is fat and rich in forgiveness and gifts. She is wide, including those who have believed the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, from every tribe, and language, and people, and nation. Where the Church is there is the Lord Jesus Christ. The work of the Church is Jesus' work through her. The Church of Jesus Christ is the place where we were given the second birth of faith in the waters of Holy Baptism. This is the place where the saints have gathered in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in love to care for one another.

It is here that we have been fed with the forgiveness of sins and the bread of life. It is this place and these people who have raised us, and nurtured us, and taught us, and made us accountable to one another. It may not have always been a fun place. It may not have always been a happy place. But, it is a safe place, a true place, a caring place. Look at the picture that we are given in Revelation.

The Bride of Christ is picture as the holy city of Jerusalem. Not the Jerusalem of the Middle East that has not been the place of the "Peace of the LORD," as its name is supposed to mean, but has been the place of constant fighting throughout its history. No, it cannot be that place. This Jerusalem pictured is the New Jerusalem, the new creation, the new city, the new Church, where sinners, made new in the blood of the Lamb will gather. This is the Bride, big, fat, and wide. She will be built on the foundations of the teaching of the twelve Apostles which is the word of God that has given life to the believers of the New Testament. She is a loving and nurturing Bride who willingly takes in the kings and nations who bring their best gifts to Her.

We have seen the Bride, the Church, in all Her glory, in all Her size, and in all Her beauty. She is big, fat, and wide. Filled with Her children from all places and all times, kings and nations gathered into Her. She lives with Her loving Husband, Jesus Christ who forgives Her and makes Her beautiful, and they live happily ever after. And so, the question of this day is how all this loving, nurturing, and caring happen? How does the Holy Church care for us?

Look at our first reading from the 16th chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. We hear how St. Paul was urged to go from Troas to Macedonia, how he was moved to expand the mission from Asia to cross over into Europe. St. Paul went to the city of Phillipi, and there he found the place where few Jews of the city gathered on the Sabbath for prayer. There Paul spoke to the women who gathered. "One who heard was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul" and she was baptized and her whole household with her (Acts 16:14-15a).

There was holy Church, the Bride of Christ, who through Christ was bearing children, giving birth to Lydia, giving birth by Baptism to Lydia and her household. And, that is just about all we know about this event. Lydia's name is only mentioned twice in Scripture, only here in this 16th chapter of Acts, and we really do not know much about her.

We do not know her age, her wealth, her marital status, who made up her household, whether it be her children and husband or other family members. We do not know any of that. But, we do know the really important stuff. That Lydia was in business as a seller of purple cloth, a rather expensive cloth at that. She was devout enough to be at a place of prayer on a Sabbath day. She listened and believed the words of forgiveness and life through Jesus the Messiah that Paul spoke.

Just as Paul was moved by God to go to Macedonia, Lydia was moved to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and she was baptized along with her whole household. And, new Christians were born. The first recorded European Christians were given birth that day. It is great to have these two readings side by side. Here is the Church, the Bride of Christ, big, fat, and wide, in all Her beauty and in all Her care and nurture as She gives birth to new believers in Jesus Christ, to new Christians, to new children of God. We have seen Her in Her heavenly glory as She lives with Her Husband, our Lord Jesus Christ. We have seen Her in action as She gives birth through the life giving word of God to Lydia and her household. And now, so many years and generations later, we see Her at work in and through us.

Certainly, if anyone can start to understand the difficult work of the Church in Her mission as She bears and nurtures children for the Lord, perhaps it is mothers and grandmothers. Next Sunday is mother's Day and I think is properly to compare the Church to mothers because mothers want their children to live and thrive, to grow up right, and loving, and responsible, and loyal. And, that is exactly what the Church wants too. We want people, young and old, to be gathered at the Baptismal font where they will be brought to faith in Christ. We want people to be fed with the Word of forgiveness and life in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We want people to grow up with a clear understanding of who this Jesus is and what He is all about. These are important things. We want everyone to be loving, and responsible, and loyal.

And, how will the children grow up straight and right apart from their mother? How will you, how will those you love, grow up straight and right apart from their mother, the Holy Church? Where will the children be fed? Where will they run to for comfort and encouragement? What will they be taught and by whom? Who cares for you but your mother, the Church, who stands beside Her Husband the Lord Jesus Christ?

Look at motherhood. Look at the Church and see how She is like motherhood. At the moment of birth, a mother is tossed between intense pain and joy. There is always that tension as a mother rejoices over the growth and accomplishments of her child but laments the ever widening distance between them. It is a consuming sacrificial love that mothers have for their children. How many mothers have not lost their lives in the bearing of children? How many mothers would not gladly take the place of their suffering children? Mothers often show the kind of love for their children that our Lord shows to us. That they will be the stern one, the unpopular one, the complained about one because there is something bigger at stake than fun and entertainment, they want the best for their children.

They are the ones who bundle up the kids on the cold days, teach them to clean up their messes, tell them to eat their vegetables, teaching them how to pray and show their little ones Christ in their lives, because there is something bigger at stake than fun and entertainment, there is Jesus, there is forgiveness, there is faith and eternal life. How many of you are here today because of a mother or grandmother who patiently taught you about Jesus? How many of you are here today because you saw the Lord Jesus alive and well in your mothers and grandmothers? How many generations of Christians were nurtured in the only saving faith of Jesus Christ because the Holy Church was active and working at the knees of their own mothers and grandmothers at home?

How did the Holy Church act and speak through our mothers as they protected us from danger, gathered the family around the table, and taught us to pray as they tucked us in at night? Mothers care for their little ones even when it is painful, so that their children live to reach adulthood and bear many children too.

So, how many grey hairs did you put on your mother's head? How many sleepless nights did she have to endure

because of you? Just as nobody ever said that motherhood would be easy, nobody ever said that the work of the Church would be easy either. Failure will undoubtedly be our constant companion. Even though we want to be loving, it is tough, it is painful, it is difficult.

We constantly wrestle with the questions, "are the children growing up straight and right, and are they faithful and loyal, are they eating the right things?" And then we hear the gracious, kind, loving words that our Lord speaks through Holy Scripture to us today, "Here comes the Bride, the Church, us, you and me, made beautiful in the forgiveness and life given to us by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And we thank the Lord God almighty that this Bride is big, fat, and wide. This Bride is big in the giving out of the forgiveness of sins purchased and won for you by the holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death of the Lamb who sits on the throne and gives Her light and life.

She is fat and rich in the blessings of eternal life and salvation through Jesus Christ Her Lord. And, She is wide enough to gather people from Asia, and Europe, Latin America and from every other tribe, and language, and people, and nation. Because of Her Husband the Lord Jesus Christ, She is big, fat, and wide. Wide enough to even gather in you and me. Amen.

"The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour". Amen