Quinquagesima Sunday
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IN NOMINE JESU

Luke 9: 51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.

THE STEADFAST FACE OF JESUS

One of the most interesting things to think about and to arrest the imagination is the face of Jesus. No one knows just what He looked like. No one can say with certainty whether He was tall or short, whether His complexion was light or dark, whether His hair was curly or straight, whether His eyes were brown or blue. Every artist has his own conception as to what Christ looked like. But, even so, there must have been far more in the face of Christ than any artist could portray. The Christ who lived in Palestine was every inch a man, but He was also completely divine, and divinity can never be painted. You can no more picture the true and complete Christ than you can see God with your two eyes. The artist may try to indicate divinity. Halos and unique lighting may say, Here is something that is not of this earth, but they cannot do justice to the heavenly. The Christ in art is therefore always the Christ born of the Virgin Mary, but never the Christ conceived by the Holy Ghost. However, when we with the eyes of faith gaze devoutly upon the face of Christ, we see not merely Him whom Mary called Son, but especially Him of whom God was speaking when He called out on the Mount of Transfiguration, This is My beloved Son. Through the eyes of faith all the majestic radiance of Christ's divinity comes beaming down on us, as we look at His face. Today we would see clearly and unforgettably the steadfast look on the face of Jesus, as St. Luke tells it.

The incident in which our text is set seems to have occurred a few months after our Lord's Transfiguration. It was late fall before the spring of Christ's crucifixion. The Savior had only a few more months for teaching and preaching, healing and helping, before the opposition of His enemies would come to a head in that deafening cry, Crucify Him! It was now the beginning of the end. Everything that lay ahead for Him in the city of Jerusalem and on the little hill outside of the city walls was clearly known to Him. The outcome of the trial was no secret; nor was He unaware of all the horrible details concerning the manner in which the sentence of His death would be carried out. With high courage He begins

the slow, steady march from Galilee south to Jerusalem. The words of Isaiah might well have been His marching song, The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like flint. As Luke reports, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. Nothing could dissuade Him; nothing could delay Him. At the next Feast of the Passover, to be celebrated in the city of Jerusalem in the springtime, He - the Lamb of God - was to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. He would be there! The look on His face was one of unswerving steadfastness!

We need not be surprised at Christ's unfaltering determination. In the counsel of eternity a just and loving God had decided on the great plan for buying back sinful men from Satan and Hell. In the economy of God all bills must finally be paid in full. The price of redemption was shocking: Christ, the Son of God, would take on Human form, would lead a holy life, and would die at last for the sins of the whole world. The crucifixion at Calvary was to be the climax of redemption. God Himself set the time and the place for the momentous occasion. All the particulars of the plan must have been known to Christ. So we can say that already in eternity the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.

When the first human pair, Adam and Eve, had soiled the holy innocence in which they had been created, God revealed for the first time that the seed of the woman, namely His Son, would be bruised in crushing the head of Satan. As the prophets through the long centuries of the Old Testament told always more of God's work of redemption and described with increasing detail the life of the promised Messiah, they indicated also what was to be the final and fatal crisis of His life. Isaiah wrote of Him as One despised and rejected of men, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, brought as a lamb to the slaughter, cut off from the land of the living, pouring out His soul in death.

In the fulness of God's time the Messiah was born in the village of Bethlehem, just five miles south of the place where He was to die some 33 years later.

When the Star of Bethlehem dropped its bright ray on the birthplace of the Savior, the dark shadow of the cross was resting on it too. The ray of the star merely called attention to the birth of the Christ-Child; the shadow of the cross gave it meaning. An artist has tried to express this thought in a unique picture of the first Christmas. His painting shows the Infant Christ being brought from heaven in the arms of an angel. A host of happy cherubim surround the Holy Babe. But that is not all. More careful study of the canvas reveals a sad little angel following the rejoicing multitude at a distance. He is carrying a cross. Most of those who followed Christ did not become aware of the cross until His body was nailed to it; but Jesus never lost sight of it. He steadfastly set His face towar it.

The redemption of the world: that was the supreme enthusiasm of His life That was His highest hope and His fondest dream. That was the one big purpose tha overshadowed everything else - and never for a moment did He lose sight of it. He might puase for awhile in Jericho or He might spend a few weeks in Capernaum, but Jerusalem was the ultimate goal. He might spend time and energy along the way driving out disease, restoring crippled limbs, opening blind eyes, unstopping deaf ears, cleansing the temple, stilling the tempest, feeding the multitude, raising the dead; but to die for the sins of the world was the compelling reason behind His coming down to earth. Once, when the disciples were concerned because they thought He was hungry, He answered, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work. He would not be satisfied until He could say to His Father, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. No wonder that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.

Christ repea tedly told those who wanted to call themselves His disciples Follow Me! On one occasion He said, Learn of Me! In his first letter Peter encourages us, Even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps. The looks we see on the Savior's face, inasmuch as they are expressions of the inner quality of His life,

are not merely to be admired. They are to be reproduced on our faces, not artificially but as true expressions of the inner quality of our lives. The steadfastness of purpose with which Christ carried out the work given Him by His Father should be in clear evidence also in our life, for our heavenly Father has given us work to do too.

The professions of loyalty to Christ and His work made by His disciples were impressive, but their lives, especially during the hours of His Passion, were sadly disappointing. Why, they were ready to give their lives for Christ! At least they said they were. But they fell asleeep and then fled like frightened deer. Later there came a time when their lives, too, were impressive. It must have been thrilling to see the steadfast look on the face of once faint-hearted Peter when he with uncompromising determination told the authorities, though the threat of death was hanging over him, We cannot but speak of the things we have seen and heard.

There is a legend about a stranger who came to Nazareth some years after Christ's death. When he heard about the Prophet of Nazareth he asked Mary, What did your Son teach? She answered, Why, to give all your life to Him in love and faith and to be willing to die for Him. The stranger curiously put another question to her, Has anyone ever tried it - to live the way He taught. When Mary sadly responded, I don't think so, the stranger said wistfully, Might be interesting to see what would happen if they did. Henry Varley said, The World has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him. No one has ever been able to follow Christ with perfect steadfastness, but the pages of history are brightened by the lives of those who accepted Christ's design for them and with surprising steadfastness patterned their lives according to it.

Saul of Tarsus, once hated enemy of Christ, met Jesus on the way to Damascus, and became,Paul, devoted servant of Jesus Christ. He found in his surrender to the will of God the loyalty to which his life belonged and want on to liv

one of the truly great lives in all history. He gives us the secret of his success: I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Our professions of steadfastness and loyalty to Christ are often admirable. We promise everything:

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord to Thee

. . . take my moments and my days,... take my hands and feet...take my voice and my lips,...take my silver, my gold, my intellect,....take my will and my heart.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all, for thee.

But there is so little in our lives to show that we mean it. How fervently we sing the beloved hymn:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride, (But do we?)
Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood. (But do we?)
Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a tribute far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all. (But does it?)

When three men wanted to become followers of Christ, but with reservations, He told them, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. Lot's wife wanted to go to Zoar, but she looked back at blazing Sodom and never arrived at Zoar. Abraham traveled steadfastly toward the promised land and to the promised land he came. As Christians we must beware along the way. We must be on our guard. We must set our face steadfastly like Christ did. As we move onward through life and ever closer to our eternal home, may we often see that steadfast look on the face of Jesus and may it help us in an unsteady world to remain loyal in our faith and devotion.

Amen.