

1st Sunday in Lent: March 5, 2017
“Purell Jesus”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

You may not know this about me, but I am a bit of a germophobe. Our culture has become so aware of germs and their effects, that there is hand sanitizer everywhere. In many places, it is no longer soap and water; one simply douses on the liquid warfare to destroy 99.9% of the germs on your hands. It is not necessarily a bad thing to eat with clean hands. I sure enjoy keeping the bad germs out of my mouth, because I don't really like feeling sick. It did get me thinking this past week, as I studied through the text for this first Sunday of Lent, on how our culture has “Purell-ed” Jesus.

I think one of the saddest, and truly most horrifying things, we as mankind have ever done is to try and sanitize Jesus. Just what is sanitized Jesus? He is a God. He is deemed as Savior. We say He was human, and tempted as we are, yet we do not teach or comprehend what Jesus, what God as one of us, truly would look like. We have this unrealistic picture of Jesus, that He is a God who only can deal with me, who only wants me, who only loves me, *after* I get my act together. I have to pick myself up, clean myself off, and get myself back together; then I will come to the church. I will get my life in order, then I will ask for help. Do you realize how odd this is? The 3 Articles of the Christian Creed make it abundantly clear that I cannot create, I did not redeem, and I by my own reason or strength cannot believe in Jesus, come to Him, or make myself holy.

Growing up, I was only given the clean-cut pictures of Jesus. Now, to be fair, I'm sure I was told otherwise. I see the nice pictures. I see the clean crucifixes on the cross. Everywhere I look in the church, I see beautiful art, hear good stories, see people acting one way all dressed up; but then I leave the building and it seems as though the veneer wears off quickly. People in the pews act differently, Jesus doesn't seem to be there in the real world, and life is so complicated and messy, that there is no way God would want me out there! I don't see how a God can even exist out there! God must be protected and I am His sentry! Right?

Wrong. This is where I was mistaken. I was not the one keeping God; it is the other way around. By sanitizing Jesus, we miss who He truly is. Early in my ministry, I once said to someone in deep distress, “I know what you’re going through.” “No, you don’t!” she shouted in her pain. “You couldn’t possibly know what I’m going through because you’ve never been there!” It makes such a difference in our care for one another if we can say, “I have been there,” so that we are truly able to sympathize. When we endure a trial or tragedy in life, we may receive some comfort from well-meaning people who pity us. But when they can honestly say, “I have been there,” we feel a deep sense of kinship which consoles us.

In every trial or temptation we endure, we can say with confidence, “Jesus has already been there.” He can sympathize with us in all our tribulations because He has been tested in every way just like us, except that he never gave in or gave up. He is our caring Brother. Therefore, we can approach His throne of grace with confidence, casting all of our cares and anxieties on Him.¹

It is not the most fun thing, or the easiest thing, to think about Jesus being tempted in every way that we are. To think of Jesus being tempted to worry about things out of His control, to think of Jesus being tempted with lust and members of the opposite sex, to think of Jesus being tempted to seek power and glory, to think of Jesus being tempted to think of Himself before anyone else, is just not the picture I want of my Savior. That describes me, not Jesus. Yet, what does it mean to say, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”² Jesus can truly sympathize with us, because He suffered all the trials of being human in a sinful world, though He Himself did not sin.

To think of God, in this way, is so vile to human disposition, that we search for many ways to Purell Him and destroy 99.9% of who He truly is. In Jesus day, the Epicureans thought God was completely detached from human affairs; this has survived in the teaching of the Deists. God created the world, and now lets it run on its own. God is watching, but is not involved. The benefits include man doing whatever he wants, man being the top-dog and the supreme authority on pretty much everything. The downside includes, God is not directly involved.

¹ 1 Peter 5:7

² Hebrews 4:15

Then there are the Stoics. They believed the primary attribute of God was apathy, the absence of feelings or emotions, and they strived to be similar. This has hung on today in groups who stress heavily only the Sovereignty or the Kingliness of God. He is a supreme judge and ruler who operates with computer-like efficiency.

But the message of Scriptures is that God loves us so much He sent his Son down from the glories of heaven into this dark world. Jesus became man in order to endure the full range of our human experiences, though without sin. He was made like his brothers in every other way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest.³ He learned obedience through his trials, and having been perfected in this manner, He became the source of our eternal salvation.⁴

He was and is flesh of our flesh, and since Jesus has walked in our shoes, he now sympathizes with us. He understands us and feels our pain with us in our times of struggle. And during His earthly life He underwent the severest temptations that have ever come upon any man. It was not merely that the temptation came near Him without really assailing Him. It was rather so that His entire being, body and soul, was sometimes shaken to the very depths, as when He declared His soul to be exceeding sorrowful unto death, and when He found Himself forsaken of His heavenly Father, not to speak of the attacks of the devil which beset Him time and again.⁵

So He can indeed be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, He can indeed have sympathy with our weaknesses; He knows what it means for weak flesh and blood to battle with dangerous enemies. There is no aspect of human existence except sin of which Jesus does not say to us, "I have been there." Because he himself has been tempted, he is able to help us in our temptations.⁶

Our great high priest has not only suffered *with us*, he also suffered *for us*, making atonement for our sins. In the Garden of Gethsemane in reverent submission He drank the bitter cup of suffering which contained the sin and shame of all humanity. On the cross of Calvary He showed us the full extent of God's love. Our

³ Hebrews 2:17

⁴ Hebrews 5:8-9

⁵ Cf. Matt. 4, 1-11; Luke 4, 1-13; Matt. 16, 21-23; 27, 45. 46; Ps. 22, 2-21

⁶ Hebrews 2:18

great high priest offered himself, the unblemished Lamb of God, as the perfect sacrifice.

After our great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God, finished offering the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people on the first Good Friday, he ascended through the heavens into the heavenly sanctuary.⁷ The curtain of the earthly temple was torn in two, allowing all people access to the Holy of Holies. This signified that Christ's atonement has made it possible for all believers to enter God's presence directly.⁸ Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus passed from the sight of His disciples, going through the heavens in triumph to be seated at the right hand of the Father. Now He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.⁹

This fact should therefore serve as an inducement to us to place all our trust in Him with all cheerfulness. We have a non-sanitized, human, bloody, sacrificial Jesus who has washed us in the blood of the Lamb in Holy Baptism. It is then we can approach with confidence to the Throne of Grace. Here we approach His altar, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help in time of need. Ordinarily no sinner would dare to come near to the holy and righteous God; however, through the merit of Jesus, we are enabled to enter upon this sacred act, approaching the very throne of the great God Himself, with all cheerfulness and confidence.

We come to Him as dear children ask their dear Father. He hears all prayers and answers them according to His good and gracious will. We can approach God's throne of grace with the confident faith that we will receive compassion and comfort, strength and support for every time of need.¹⁰

When we see Jesus in this way, when we hold firmly to the faith we confess, we cannot but help others in their time of need. With the love of Christ, we sympathize with them in their weaknesses, as they experience testing and temptation similar to what we have experienced. We reach out with compassion to all who need the touch of Christ's love. Above all, we help others by leading them to our suffering Savior, Jesus, the Son of God. He is the source of our eternal salvation, our help in

⁷ Hebrews 4:14

⁸ Matthew 27:51

⁹ Hebrews 7:25

¹⁰ Hebrews 4:16

every time of need, who gives us the confident hope that one day we too will pass through the heavens to join our great high priest in glory everlasting.

We don't make ourselves right, and then come to God. We see our sin. We see our need for a great High Priest. We seek His forgiveness. We don't sanitize Jesus; He sanitizes us! He does not just destroy 99.9% of sin, death, and the devil; He cleanses us 100%!

“Love's example, hope's attraction,
Faith's beginning and its end,
Pioneer of our salvation,
Mighty advocate and friend;
Jesus, high in glory raised,
Our ascended Lord be praised!¹¹ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

¹¹ 529 Since Our Great High Priest, Christ Jesus: stanza 4