

Take up the chalice of salvation: A message for Easter
By Bishop Milan Lach, SJ

“The Lord awoke as if from sleep.” We sing this psalm verse before receiving Communion on Holy Saturday (Ps 77:65).

The church understands this psalm, as it does all of the Old Testament, as a prophecy about Christ.

The Resurrection account by the Evangelist Mark, proclaimed earlier in the Holy Saturday Divine Liturgy, is the first liturgical announcement that the Lord is risen. In response, we sing Psalm 77, adding: “He is risen and he saves us!”

However, the Communion hymn leaves out the following verses of the psalm: “Then the Lord awoke as if from asleep as one powerful and drunk with wine/He struck his foes from behind, and put them to everlasting shame.”

This image is startling. Our iconography and liturgical life depict Christ as a king, a symbol of honor and authority.

Why would this chosen psalm verse depict him as a ferocious drunk, in a way that would be unbecoming of his divinity?

Rather, it puts us at the heart of the Christian paradox. Christ is constantly criticized by his persecutors for not being the kind of savior they think he should be.

Some deride him for eating with sinners and tax collectors, and describing him and his disciples as drunkards. Others deride him on the cross, urging him to save himself.

Ultimately, Christ chooses to save us through his humiliating death, which is part of the logic of God, for St. Paul tells us, “through weakness power reaches perfection” (2 Cor 12:9).

While the psalmist describes our savior to be asleep and a drunkard, it is in his death and resurrection that he is most powerful and clear-minded. We see the single-hearted passion of our savior, a mighty warrior, who goes into battle on our behalf. In this moment he is doing what he came to do: to defeat the Enemy, sin and death, once and for all.

We, the church, are his prized possession for whom he fights. His battle trophy is our salvation. In recognizing the privilege that God has bestowed on us, by fighting on our behalf and trampling down death by his death, how shall we respond?

The psalmist asks a similar question: “What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me?” (Ps 115:12). I would suggest that we commit to live the response that the psalmist offers: “I shall take the chalice of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord” (v. 13).

We take up the chalice of salvation by participating in the services and receiving the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

We offer that chalice to others by loving our brothers and sisters and getting more involved in parish life. In this way, we can accept our savior’s invitation to join him in the victory he has won for us.

Let us submit to his saving plan for us, so that we can be a strong church, like the muscular warrior who goes into battle for the sake of the life of the world.

Let this Pascha renew in our hearts a fidelity to Christ’s call. In this way, we can be the church that proclaims the message the world desperately needs to hear: Christ is risen! Indeed, he is risen!

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