

O FELIX CULPA!

A Sermon for EASTER

St Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.

"O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!"

My dear brothers and sisters, this line from the Exsultet – the Church's expression of joyful praise in the Holy Spirit to God the Father for the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ captures the heart of the feast we celebrate. We all rejoice because our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Throughout the season of Lent we celebrated our conversion through fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Today we celebrate the victory of our Lord over sin and death. The readings we have heard all point to the Divine wisdom of God, his supreme power and his boundless love that he demonstrates in his mercy towards his weak and sinful children. The Exsultet, in a very profound way, expresses the thanksgiving of the Church and the entire creation to God for the gift of his Only Son as our Saviour. But when we listen to what we are singing, we are led to pay close attention to the mystery we celebrate. **"O Happy fault."** What does this mean except what the Apostle Paul teaches: **"In everything, God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose"?** (*Rom. 8: 28*). See what I mean, dear brothers and sisters, the sin of Adam and Eve cost us the loss of God's friendship (Cf. *Rom. 3:23*). We became slaves to sin. But God demonstrated his unconditional love when, in order to ransom slaves that we were, he sent his only begotten Son to die for us.

What I have just said is, in a way, stating the two major events that mark our enslavement and our redemption, our sin and our justification, our fall from grace and our salvation and dignity as children of God. For when God made Adam, he intended that he should be a friend and enjoy the bliss of Paradise. But because Adam sinned, Christ Jesus came to us and gave his life on the Cross and rose from the dead so that we, the children of Adam have now been given the free gift of adoption as sons and daughters of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Cf. *Rom 8: 17*).

In the lives of the Chosen People, the People of Israel, we see this foreshadowed in various forms. We easily recall the misery of their enslavement in Egypt and the glory of their deliverance; their suffering on the journey through the desert and the joy of coming to the Promised Land. We recall this played out in the life of Joseph, the son of Jacob. His jealous brothers thought that they were punishing him by selling him as slave to the Ishmaelites, who sold him to a high Egyptian official. But it was this same Joseph that God used to save the children of Israel from starvation. The wife of his master tried in vain to seduce him and then lied against him and he was jailed. But God turned this unmerited suffering to its good and Joseph was, not only released from jail, but promoted.

"O necessary sin of Adam!" We read in the New Testament about the conversion and call of individual followers of Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, we read about the call of the first four disciples and how Simon, overwhelmed by the presence of Jesus the Christ and the attendant miraculous catch of fish, declared, "Depart from me, Lord, I am a sinner" (*Luke 5: 9*). This was the same Simon, who, in his weakness denied his Lord three times. But it was also he that the Risen Christ made strong and judged him faithful; so faithful that he gave him the authority to be shepherd over the one

flock of Christ. Saul of Tarsus in his misguided zeal for the faith of his ancestors fiercely persecuted (the Body of) Christ. But it was the same man, “the foremost of sinners” (Cf. 1 Tim 1: 16) that Christ made the foremost Apostle of the Gentiles and one of the foremost defenders of the faith he once strove to annihilate. All through history we read again and again about great sinners whom the Omnipotent God turned into great saints. And this, dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, is a true source of consolation for all of us. For no matter how deep we have sunk in iniquity, no matter how far we have wandered from the home of our loving Father, we have hope in the Risen Lord who has washed our sins away with his blood and given us a higher dignity by his resurrection from the dead.

We are often tempted to view the situation in the world from only human perspective. We see glaring injustice and hypocrisy in international politics and policies. We see darkness in some of the decisions on moral issues by parliaments and clear disregard of the laws of God in the ways nations are governed. But the true perspective is really the perspective that God has given us by raising his Son from the dead. The light of the Risen Lord chases away the darkness of sin in the world.

The current economic crisis in the world has made some people, including some among us here, to lose their means of livelihood. In a way, the situation seems to have rolled a huge stone over the door of hope for a bright future for many. But today we celebrate the Risen Christ; we celebrate the One who emerged from the tomb after the angels had rolled away the stone at the door of his grave. He invites us to put our trust in him. He will roll away all stones – all obstacles - from our lives and restore our hope.

Rejoice then with me! Together let us sing our joy to the Risen Christ, our Lord and our God.

*“Regina caeli, laetare, Alleluia!
Quia quem meruisti portare, Alleluia!
Resurrexit sicut dixit, Alleluia!
Ora pro nobis Deum, Alleluia!*

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