

“The dark mystery” John 10:22-30

At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Perhaps we all have wondered about the attitude the world has against the Gospel, against Jesus, against the true God. Because once you have tasted that the Lord is good, we can see how strange it is that people not only are indifferent, but also hostile to the message from God that we are to deliver.

What a wonderful message it is! True God reveals Himself, He reveals what kind of God He is, and what His attitude towards us is. All people have this built-in sense that there is someone higher, some higher being.

We also have this strange phenomenon called our conscience. It is a strange thing, this voice within us, that argues with us, that speaks against us, that accuses us when we have done something wrong, and it doesn't leave us be, when we don't want to do what we know to be the right thing.

Anyhow, when people combine the sense or knowledge that there is some higher being with the experience of our conscience that tells that we and our lives are being evaluated, it naturally leads to a certain kind of image of this higher being, or let's call him God.

The image that naturally arises in the one of a judge. The One to whom we will have to give an account for how we have led our lives. On the one hand it is true, but this not the whole truth, and not even the most important part of it. For it gives us a wrong idea about who God is and what He expects from us.

But now the true God has come and revealed Himself as He is. We don't need to live with false ideas. What a wonderful revelation it is! Yes, He is the Creator, and He is your Creator. He has formed each one of us, and every minute He provides for us the life-force that makes our hearts tick.

He is this benevolent Creator, who has created everything to share it with us, and He has created us to live in this loving fellowship with Him. However, He doesn't want to force us into relationships with Him. He even gave humanity the freedom to reject Him. And then He showed the depth of His love and

commitment to us. Even as we rejected Him, He decided to come closer to us that we could ever imagine, He came as one of us. As Jesus from Nazareth. And what would be the greatest and the most self-sacrificial expression of love?

Yes, when you give up your life for someone whom you love more than yourself. This is exactly what our God has done for us in Jesus, for each one of us, for every human being. And there is more...

Because He has created us to live in this loving fellowship with Him, now He sends His people as His messengers with this incredible message: "Return to me, freely, for I want to be your God, I want to bless you, I am the only One who knows what you truly need, and I long to provide for you!"

As our God sends His messengers, as we speak this kind invitation to others, these are not only our human words, God Himself as the Holy Spirit accompanies this message and gently knocks at peoples' hearts:

"Don't harden your heart today, open it up, let me in, and I will give you more than you have ever imagined. I will give you myself and all that is mine, and not only in this age, but also and especially in the age to come."

That's how our God reveals who He is and what He desires for us. He is not after our outwardly good lives. He is after us. It is not about observing some moral principles. It is about being open to receive His love and to respond to it.

Why would anyone reject such invitation? Why would anyone reject such God?! Fine, some may doubt the existence of such God, fair enough, then go and research whether it is true or not. But simply reject? Why?

It doesn't make sense, does it? The short answer is – because of the state of our hearts, because of our sinfulness. And this is a frightening reality. The truth is that we can't understand how scary and deep a mystery our sin is, and what power it holds over us. Our today's reading from John helps us to reflect on it at least a little bit. So, what was going on?

As Jesus was walking in the temple the Jews surrounded Him and demanded to answer their question. "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Sounds like an innocent question.

But was it? We can read earlier in John's account that Jesus had already many times spoken openly about who He was. This wasn't the first conversation that took place between Him and the Jews.

And this wasn't the first time when their conversation ended the same way as this time. We didn't read it that far, but verse 31st tells us that when Jesus said these words, the Jews picked up the stones again to stone Him.

Why? Because they [and people in general] preferred to stick with their natural ideas of God as a judge and themselves as good people. People hate to hear that our imaginary goodness means nothing before God.

When John speaks about “the Jews”, he has in mind religious leaders, Pharisees, scribes, or we could say – the best and the most moral people of that time. When we read historical testimonies about how seriously they took their holy living, we can easily feel embarrassed with how little we do.

They really put their hearts into doing everything in the right way. Imagine that you are so serious about obeying God’s rules, as you understand them, that you orient everything in your life, every aspect of it trying to do the best you can.

That you are dead serious about avoiding every sinful action, every sinful speech and even every sinful thought. And that you do this not for a day or a week or a month, but that is how you lead you live, totally, fully devoted to your God. Have you ever been so serious about your Christian life? I haven’t.

If you could think of outwardly perfect people, pious, pure, holy people, that’s what many of the Jews were. Many of them could reflect on their lives similarly as Paul the apostle did writing to Philippians: “As to righteousness under the law, [I was] blameless.” (Phil 3:6)

Imagine how good and accomplished one feels in their holy living if they can say things like that. Probably you know people, who think similarly about themselves. That they are such good persons, citizens, spouses, parents, colleagues, friends, or even church members, etc. This God, who evaluates our lives, He is supposed to be happy about them.

Now imagine, how offensive it can be, that Jesus comes and instead of praising such holy people, He says that they are not good enough, that they all need to repent, and unless they repent... they will all perish.

That everything that they thought to be good about them, isn’t enough. That unless you turn to this Jesus and follow Him, there is nothing good to expect on the Last Day. And it is even harder for people today.

Today so many voices in our society teach that you even don’t need to strive to be good and virtuous, you are good enough as you are, and let no one dare to doubt it or expect you to improve!

What was even more shocking for the Jews, this man who claimed to be the Son of God, He said that He had not come to save good people, but sinners. What? And it seemed He meant it.

For this Jesus, instead of spending time with good and holy people, He ate and drank with real scum, with prostitutes, and with tax collectors, and the like. So, such people are good for this Jesus, but good people, who spend their lives serving others are not! Doesn’t that seem offensive?

The dark mystery of our sinfulness... Because we can’t understand how deep it goes, because we can’t see our hearts as God sees them, we don’t want to accept the verdict that we can be found good on the last day only by God’s grace and

only if we stand together with Jesus. And this is really tragic – because we are blinded by our sinfulness, and because we are extremely offended by God’s evaluation of our hopeless state, we can’t hear, we don’t want to hear, we refuse to hear the Good News, the Gospel, – that our God loves us passionately regardless of our sinfulness, that He desires to restore us, to purify us, to renew entire creation, for us, and then to have us with Him forever.

Unless the Holy Spirit has melted our hardened hearts, we can’t even hear, we don’t want to hear about God’s love and grace. Thus, we reject the loving and gracious God, who comes to us. We crucify Him... just to silence Him.

How foolish is it?! To reject God’s grace only because we don’t like His assessment of our situation. Picture how foolish it would be for someone to refuse live saving medicine offered as a free gift by a caring doctor only because the doctor said you are sick and will die unless you take the medicine.

More, you would not only reject the doctor, you would be hostile to everyone who speaks about him. Sounds absurd. Sound incredibly foolish. But this is exactly what this dark mystery of sin does to people.

This is what it did to the Jews who had gathered around Jesus. This is what sin does to so many of our loved ones, when we try to bring them the message from the loving and gracious God. This mystery of sin holds them as captives.

Nevertheless, it is true. We are sinners, much worse that we can comprehend. But we are also loved by our God, loved beyond our wildest imagination. Our God is infinitely better than any human mind could ever devise.

He keeps coming to us, keeps calling us to Himself, keeps searching for the lost, keeps sending His messengers to the ends of the earth and to every house in our neighborhood. He doesn’t give up on anyone, we may, but He doesn’t. How grateful we need to be that Jesus didn’t give up on us and that the Holy Spirit has brought us into His family.

Let’s hear once more what Jesus said to the Jews and what prompted them to stone Him. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

[It was like saying: “Stop resisting, come to me and I will give you rest!”] My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

When we see Jesus, we see the Father. When Jesus gives up His life for us, we see the loving and friendly heart of our Father who is in heaven. As soon as we respond to God’s invitation, as soon as we admit that we need His life-giving medicine to save our lives, He pours it over you. Our God isn’t after our good works, we do them simply out of gratitude to Him.

He is after you. After each one of you. Jesus knows that on our own we stand no chance when He returns in His glory. Unless our sinfulness is covered by His holiness and innocence. This is why He wants us to accept His gifts.

This is why He doesn't give up on anyone, and keeps sending His messengers to the hostile world. We can't fully understand the dark mystery of our sin, and therefore we can't fully appreciate the grace that God has shown us.

But let's us rejoice in that little bit that we can understand, – we are here by God's grace, and Jesus has promised that no one will snatch us out of the Father's hand.

And let's keep the message going out, so that the Holy Spirit can keep knocking at the hearts of our loved ones in order that one day we all can be together without sin, without death, in eternal joy and blessedness. Forever.

Amen.