

Hy 21:1,3
Hy 1B
Ps 22:1,6,7
Ps 132:8,9,10
Hy 52:1,2,3
John 19:17-24
Genesis 2:25; 3:6-12, 21
Revelation 7:9-17
John 19:23a "When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His clothes."

Yarrow, April 2, 2010

Beloved Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Spring brings out lighter clothes than winter customarily has, and Good Friday is traditionally the time to start wearing the new outfits. That puts the subject of clothing on our minds today.

The Lord God puts the subject of clothing on our minds in a different way. We read a sizable section of John 19, and quickly enough skip over what the Holy Spirit tells us in our text. Yet we skip this little tidbit of information to our hurt. Nothing is recorded in Holy Scripture without a purpose, and that includes that the soldiers took Jesus' clothes from Him at His crucifixion on that Terrible Friday so long ago. Here we're taught again the glorious gospel of our complete redemption. As we set ourselves to enjoying the styles of the new season, here is material for us to work with in how we dress ourselves, and material too for us as fathers and mothers to work with as we dress and raise our children.

In a culture that has a fixation on clothing and how to display nakedness while being dressed, I proclaim to you the good news of Christ's nakedness.

I summarise the sermon with this theme:

CHRIST ON THE CROSS WAS STRIPED OF HIS CLOTHES SO THAT WE MIGHT BE ROYALLY CLOTHED.

1. The curse of Christ's nakedness,
2. The blessing of Christ's nakedness.

1. The Curse of Christ's Nakedness

We're familiar with the events surrounding our text. Jesus had been taken to Pilate, unjustly sentenced, and handed over to the Jews for crucifixion. Pilate had an inscription with the charge against Jesus printed on a board and nailed to the top of the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The soldiers dug the hole for the pole, fastened the criminal onto it, then manoeuvred the pole to the hole and dropped it into it. There He hung now, "the King of the Jews."

That being done, there wasn't much else for the soldiers to do. With the actual crucifixion finished, all that remained was guarding the cross against rescue attempts until the criminal was dead. And that could take any number of hours.

From literature existing outside the Bible, we know that the Roman soldiers attending a crucifixion could divide among themselves whatever material goods the criminals they crucified took with them to their cross. The criminals were lost men; whatever they had they would no longer need anyway, including their clothing. Besides, being the rejects that they were, nothing was lost by humiliating them before the public eye. There is no reason given in Scripture to think that the soldiers acted differently with Jesus than with other persons they crucified. In the eye of our mind we may

tend to see Jesus-on-the-cross girded with a loin cloth (as the Pope's crucifix has it), but there's no Biblical warrant for that. The Scripture says plainly that "when the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His clothes" and divided them among themselves.

We find it awkward, embarrassing. Yet the Holy Spirit has told us this uncomfortable tidbit for a reason. So we need to pay attention to it. Yet we mustn't focus on the soldiers; they're just men who do the done thing. We need to pay attention instead to the God of heaven and earth who so leads history that leaving the crucified hanging naked was the done thing. Why would the Lord God subject His Son to such shame? Remember: the Son was with the Father in glory from all eternity (John 17:5); in fact, all things existed through Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ (Colossians 1). Why, then, would the Father allow such humiliation for His Son? What gospel is there here?!

To understand the reason why, brothers and sisters, we need to go back in our thoughts to Paradise. From our reading in Genesis, we know that when God created Adam and Eve He gave to them no clothing; they, by His ordinance, did not need them in the Garden as they went about their daily tasks. That's what the Lord tells us –"and the man and his wife were both naked"– and then God adds "and [they] were not ashamed" (2:25).

What does that mean, that they were not ashamed? Does this refer to the fact that they were not embarrassed before each other? In itself that's quite true. But that's not unique; that happens today within a healthy marriage too. No, Adam and Eve lived before God, and God came to them regularly and they spoke together; yet even in God's presence Adam and Eve were not ashamed. The reason why they were not ashamed to appear naked before God was this: they had nothing to hide from God, they were themselves perfect and righteous and holy. Everything they did was most pleasing to God, all of it reflected perfectly the task that God had given to them in creating them. There was with them *no sin*. And therefore had they nothing to be embarrassed about; they could stand openly and freely in His holy presence as they were. It is that *openness* that they could have before God that was symbolized by their nakedness. They were not ashamed before God because they were perfect before God, and because they were not ashamed before God were they not ashamed before each other or the rest of creation either.

That changed with the fall into sin. The first thing we read after their sin is this: "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (3:7). They knew it, they were uncomfortable with that nakedness, and so "they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons."

But again, beloved, the question is: before whom were they uncomfortable with their nakedness? Was it simply that now they were embarrassed before each other? Not so, beloved. We read nothing to the effect that each went their separate ways. But we do read that when God came they hid themselves from Him; that is, they were embarrassed before *God*. And why did their nakedness bother them when God came? That's because they knew that God tolerated no *sin*. It's what God had earlier said to them: in the day you eat, in the day you sin, you shall *die*. They had sinned, made themselves sinful, corrupt, polluted. So they could not stand in God's holy presence any more; they knew that God's sentence of death awaited them. That's why they tried to hide from God, to cover themselves with clothes and disappear behind the trees. They were conscious of their nakedness, conscious that they are open books to God's holy eyes, exposed. Their sinfulness, their inner corruption, made them most uncomfortable with that reality, and so they make for themselves skirts from fig leaves in that desperate attempt to hide their corruption.

But it didn't work. God came to them, sought them out, discovered them behind the bushes and the fig leaves, saw through their leafy masks to the corruption beneath. And God, being as He is

“of purer eyes than to behold evil,” and not being able to “look on wrong” (Habakkuk1:13), agreed with Adam and Eve; these sinners should wear clothing to cover their nakedness, their sinfulness, their corruption. “For Adam and for his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). That’s to be clear to our minds: God ordained clothes as a result of our fall into sin.... That is why God was not pleased with Noah’s drunken nakedness after the flood. For with his nakedness Noah displayed no shame for his sinfulness, his depravity.

That’s also the reason why the Lord at Mt Sinai forbade Israel from making a raised altar which the priests would need to climb in order to perform their sacrifices. For the people standing on the ground below could then see something of the priests’ nakedness under their robes – not fitting for those who would make sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of sins (Exodus 20:28). In fact, that’s also why God later commanded that the priests of Israel, when they did their work, had to wear under their robes “linen trousers to cover their nakedness”; these trousers had to “reach from the waist to the thighs” (Exodus 28:42f).

No, brothers and sisters, boys and girls, we do not wear clothes today because the temperature requires it, or the ultra-violet rays damage our skin. Rather, we today wear clothes because of our fall into sin, wear clothes because sin remains in us. In the face of the exhibitionism of our day, we do well to remember this cause of clothing. And hence make sure that we keep ourselves covered – not just in the presence of people, but in the presence of the God who is always with us.

“...for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them,” says the Author of Genesis. By so doing the Lord pointed up that He wished their sinfulness to be covered. There is, however, another side to the fact that God gave clothes to Adam and Eve. They had covered themselves because they had been afraid of God. And rightly were they afraid. But notice: when God came to Adam and Eve He *did not destroy them* outright! Rather, God had let them stand in His presence, be it after they were covered with clothes. Why did God let them stand in His presence, why not destroy them? That, brothers and sisters, was because *the Christ was going to come!* This was God’s promise: the seed of the woman shall triumph over the seed of the serpent, with as result that Paradise would be restored. This coming of Christ was foreshadowed by the fact that God took one of the animals He had created, and killed it, so shedding blood. That blood pointed forward to the shedding of Christ’s blood on Calvary. It was because Christ’s blood would one day be shed that Adam and Eve could now appear before God. But notice what happens next: God places the skin of the animal He killed over Adam and Eve as clothing for them to wear. Because of their sinfulness they need to be covered. Yet the very covering God makes for them reminds them daily of the gospel of redemption; an animal died that they might have life. So there is a very close connection between the clothing and the cross. Those garments God gave to Adam and Eve spelled out not only that there was distance between man and God; they spelled out also that God was *gracious*. For God covered depraved Adam and Eve so that He need not look at their nakedness, their sinfulness. More, with the clothing –prepared through the shedding of blood– God assured these two sinners that a Saviour was coming, a Saviour who would cover their nakedness fully, cover their shame, their sinfulness. Clothes: they were for Adam and Eve not only a daily reminder of their *sinfulness*; they were also a daily remainder of God’s *grace* for Christ’s sake. Clothes meant *distance*, but not *destruction*; *shame* and yet *grace*.

Now there is the Son of God, nailed to the cross of Calvary. Through the soldiers *God* striped all His clothes from Him, made Him as naked as were Adam and Eve in Paradise. Why did God do so? He did so, beloved, because on this cross *there should be no grace for Jesus*. This man was *the sinner*, the one who came to take the place of Adam and Eve, of Abraham and David, of you and me. Adam

couldn't stand by Himself in God's presence, and therefore he hid himself, covered himself. Yet God in mercy spared him for Christ's sake. Well, here is Christ now, and Christ is not going to be spared! Christ may wish the mountains to fall on Him and the hills to cover Him from the intense wrath of God, but God strips Him bare; there is no way that Christ can hide from the anger of this God. Christ becomes *the* sinner, and there is no mercy and therefore is He not to be covered up in any way. Nothing should stop the full load of God's wrath from descending upon Him. What was worst about the nakedness of Christ on the cross was not that His private parts were exposed to the jeering eyes of the crowds; what was worst was that which was symbolized by this nakedness: Christ stood naked before God, unclothed *while all our sins rested on Him*. That nakedness *demand*ed that He receive the full load of God's holy fury. That was the horror that descended upon Christ when the soldiers—nay, when God—stripped Jesus from His clothes.

Then we do well to notice, beloved, that the apostle John is moved by God's Holy Spirit to quote here Ps 22, to state that the Scriptures of Ps 22 is now fulfilled: "they divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots." Ps 22, we are to know, had its setting in the days when David fled from his son Absalom. We understand it: that flight was for David a moment of deep humiliation, a humiliation symbolized by the fact that the departing king travelled *barefoot* (II Sam 15:30), a mode of dress not fitting for a king. And why David had to flee? It was because of his *sins*. In his fleeing, his transgressions with Bathsheba, his adultery, his murder were laid bare for all to see. And the people around him did see, saw his sins, his corruption. Listen to Shimei: "Begone, begone, you man of blood, you worthless fellow!" says he. In that climate, David felt exposed, naked. The eyes of those around him looked right through him, saw his sins, his iniquity. And that's why David said of himself in Ps 22: "they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots." He's guilty, the evidence is there, and therefore is he condemned.

Now John quotes Ps 22, and this is what he refers to. But John does more; by referring to Ps 22 he presents Jesus as the greater David, as the one who was harassed out of Jerusalem, stared at, gloated over, pierced by human eyes to the deepest inside of one's heart. Ah yes, the soldiers physically divided the Lord's garments, fulfilment of Ps 22. But holy God Almighty saw right through Jesus and saw there only *sin*. And that's why *God* tears the coverings from this *sinner* on the cross and gives those coverings to another; the horribleness of the transgressions that were piled on Jesus Christ should all be exposed for heaven to see.

David felt himself exposed, his inmost being laid open. And so David cried out that God should not be far from him: "But You, O Lord..., hasten to help me!" And God came to his aid, rescued David, brought him back to Jerusalem. Jesus was exposed, physically so, spiritually so; God stripped Him, the God who piled those sins onto Him. But for that very reason could that Son of David on the cross *not* repeat the cry of His father David, could Jesus *not* implore God to hasten to His aid. For He was naked, heaven saw all His sin, nothing could cover those sins, and therefore could Jesus receive no mercy: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Jesus was naked, denuded so that there might be no reason for heaven to show Him any mercy; in His nakedness the sins piled onto Him were exposed to highest heaven.... And therefore eternal wrath poured out on Him too.

2. The Blessing of Jesus' Nakedness

And again I ask: *why* did the Son of God get this treatment from His Father? But now we know the answer: it was because of Adam's sin, Eve's sin. Christ was stripped bare because God had clothed Adam and Eve; Christ was rejected by God because God was pleased to have mercy on those sinners of the beginning. The skins of Adam and Eve foreshadowed the mantle of righteousness that Christ would obtain for them on His cross.

But His nakedness was, then, not just because of Adam's and Eve's sin; it was equally because of *our* sins! We were defiled, and so we could not stand before God. Because we needed clothing to hide our depravity in the sight of God, Christ was striped bare, and our sins-on-Him exposed before God so that the judgment we deserve might fall on Him. Put it this way: God stripped Christ, poured His wrath out on Him so that we might not be found naked. Christ was unclothed on the cross, so that we might be clothed before God. Christ was publicly shamed in nakedness, so that we might be publicly honoured by God. Such was the purpose for the Saviour's shameful nakedness: that you and I might not be found naked by God, might instead be clothed by Him eternally!

And the Scriptures leave no doubt on the point: Christ has been successful in bearing the humiliation and the shame and the rejection that we deserved. He who hung naked on the cross, the vilest of creatures on earth, that same Jesus is now "crowned with glory and honour" (Heb 2:9); God has highly exalted Him at His right hand (cf Phil 2:9; Acts 2:33). And if God has received back into favour one so vile as Christ was made to be, one so rejected as Christ was, shall God reject those for whom Christ was humiliated?! Surely, beloved, He shall not! Now has come to fulfilment that word prophesied ages ago by Isaiah: because of Christ has God "clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10). It's repeated in the revelation shown to John; John sees that great multitude of the saved from every nation and tribe and tongue, and every last one of them is "clothed in white robes" (Rev 7:9), all are holy, pure before God. And so, beloved, *we can stand* before God, not in our own shameful nakedness, nor in our fig leaves, but in clothes obtained from God, the white robes of righteousness granted to all the saints. The curse of Christ's nakedness has become for us the blessing to salvation!

This is a gospel, brothers and sisters, that affects concretely the way we dress in this life. If in church we hear the good news of Christ obtaining for us "garments of salvation", shall we come to church dressed in anything less than the best? Does the very nature of the gospel of Good Friday not dictate that casual dress, yes, any form of dress less than the best, is simply not fitting when we set ourselves to hear His Word in the preaching, simply not fitting when we make it our business to attend the table of the Lord? The principle is applicable for Bible study society and catechism classes too: the fact that Christ was stripped so that we might be royally clothed dictates that we dress ourselves appropriately when we come to study and to learn that wonderful gospel. In fact, since God in grace daily clothes us with the garments of salvation obtained by Jesus Christ, we understand that it will not do for us to dress ourselves in tatters, ever. Nor is there room for us to dress ourselves in styles that are distinctly worldly. Through our manner of dress we are to be readable letters of God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

The Scripture takes the point even farther. It's so telling that the Bible uses words belonging to the realm of *getting dressed* to describe the lifestyle of the Christian. The apostle Paul, for example, after he has told the Colossians that their life is hid with Christ in God (3:3), tells them to *put on* –it's the word for getting dressed– to *put on* compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, etc. And above all, *put on* love (vss 12ff). The point is: you have new clothes, you're dressed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ; well, then conduct yourselves as those who have received new clothes. You see: the gospel of Christ's nakedness affects both how you dress as well as how you live. And we understand that: how you dress affects what you do, and what you plan to do determines what you choose to wear. Well, you are clothed in Christ's righteousness, so live the part. More, you are clothed in Christ's righteousness, so dress that way!

It's true, beloved: clothing is much more than fashion. Clothing is a gift from God, not first of all as protection against cold or possibly sun, nor first of all to curb temptation (though in this sinful world these are factors). Rather, God gave clothes to Adam, God gives clothes to you, because Christ

would be stripped bare on Good Friday..., and Himself be clothed with glory and honour again! Our clothes remind of sinfulness; more, the clothes God gave to Adam, the clothes God gives to you and me today prefigure the linen robes of salvation (Rev 19:8) that shall drape over our shoulders on the last day. That's the gospel of clothes for God's people!

Spring is here, and with spring comes the season to try on the new. Enjoy doing so, beloved, in the awareness that the clothes God gives you symbolize the work and triumph of Jesus Christ on the cross. More, dress well because you believe that in Christ Jesus God has dressed you well – with robes of righteousness. You're on your way to the wedding feast of the Lamb!

In fact, think of these things when next you go shopping for something to wear.