



Apart from repentance and faith, the veil over the cross of Christ remains (points to veiled crucifix on the altar). But with repentance, confessing when we don't fully listen to God's Word and when we fail to live holy lives according to it, and when in faith we trust Christ's consoling word of promise, the veil is lifted and the forgiveness of sins comes pouring out to you as Jesus' blood poured out from the cross.

In repentance and faith, we can in good conscience cry out along with the Psalmist in the Introit, "*Judica me*"! That is, "judge me, O God!" Apart from repentance and faith, who in the world would ever ask God to judge them! For apart from repentance, apart from acknowledging all our sins, including those things that we do and don't even realize it, or those things we omit to do that we are supposed to do, God would judge us each according to our own iniquity! That's terrifying!

But, alas, when we pray, "Judge me, O God", He judges us according to Christ. Jesus asked the Jews in our Gospel reading today, "Which one of you convicts me of sin" (v. 46)? Jesus is the spotless Lamb who goes uncomplaining forth, bearing our sin. For our sin Jesus was committed; we are acquitted. When we repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, we can in the fullest assurance of faith say, "Vindicate me, O God! Judge me, O Lord" for God does not charge our sins to us, for they have been charged to Christ! God declares us righteous "when we believe we are received into favor and that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake" (AC IV). This is why there is no shame in repentance. I'm a liar. You're a liar. Repent with me, that we may receive forgiveness by believing we have sins to be forgiven of and that Jesus actually forgives them!

No one likes annual check-ups. It doesn't matter how old you are, you know every time you go in for a blood test, you know deep down it could be the time when the doctor says, "You have cancer", or "We need to do further testing." Many of you have heard those words first hand. And that's terrifying. We don't know what bumps or lumps the physician might find, or what might show up on a scan. But the Christian, by faith, has no such fear of this spiritual check-up. For in repentance and faith, we go to our Great Physician and He declares us innocent for Jesus' sake!

Believe it! Don't doubt it! When you doubt, you're like the Psalmist in the Introit that pleads, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" You need a boot to the butt. As the Psalmist exhorts himself, "Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." What could you be cast down for? Your hope is in God! Your hope is in He who removed the veil that you might look upon the Lord and live!

Those of God listen to God. Those of God hear God's Word and listen to it. You know the distinction. It's just like the parent who says to their kids, "Listen to me" and expects action not just in vain hearing. So also, listen to Jesus, who instructs you what to do in the 10 Commandments, and what to do when you don't. Repent and believe the Good News. As Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

Even in the case of physical death, Jesus is not lying, for God can never lie. The Christian never sees death. For the moment death comes for the Christian, it is but a portal to eternal life. A last breath is still a breath of life. When the earthly life ends, the eternal life begins. We Christians and all people see death in others. We have all seen a loved one die, if not in person, in a casket. But you will not see yourself die. Think about that. This is why death is nothing to fear. The closer we get to death the closer we are to *seeing* eternal life! Every day that passes is another day closer to seeing Jesus, and your loved ones who have died trusting Jesus!

Confess in the boldness of faith, "Judge me, O God". Don't lie to yourself! This is not putting the Lord to the test. This is trusting God's promise! In repentance and faith God judges you righteous for Jesus' sake. Those of God listen to God! In Jesus' name, Amen.