

**“Salvation: Secure and Sure”**

*“The Vulture Reveals the Coming Savior”*

Matthew 24:1-14, 26-28

March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010 ❖ Mid-week Lent 5C ❖ Holy Mother Rosary

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My Dear brothers and sisters in Christ; Grace and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What a joy and privilege it is to be here with all you in such a magnificent place, but, you know I've gotta be honest I don't really like vultures. As a matter of fact, I think they are rather disgusting animals. I find it rather difficult to find anything attractive about them and anytime I do think of a vulture I am immediately drawn to think of death, decay, or the picture of one pecking at a carcass on the side of the road. This strong dislike for the vulture always made me wonder, When I worked as a Security Officer at the Buffalo Zoo, as to why the powers to be decided to put the vulture exhibit almost smack dab in the middle of the property; as if it were some prize possession or something. Anyway, this occasion today led me to reflect on those days as a guard, and more times than not I avoided the vulture like the plague! I don't know what it was; perhaps I felt he was envisioning me as his next meal! And you know, quite frankly, I'm not sure what I would have done if he ever escaped... securing probably would not have come in to the picture AT ALL- you would have seen a flash of blue high tailing right out of there! My how I avoided that vulture and you know the irony of it all is that I now stand before you with the task of preaching about the significance of that bird. Go figure... Well, despite my “phobia” perhaps the vulture deserves a little more credit that I give after all. You see, what we learn today is that the vulture portrays a message... a reminder. Yes, the vulture tells of our coming Savior, which in turn for us is a message of hope and not disgust; a message that reminds you and me of our Lord's work on the cross and in the grave and his promise to come again to remove us from the evil of this world.

Now, in order to fully benefit from the significance of the vulture, we first must consider the reading from Habakkuk and the context around the verses we heard. And so, to set the stage, Habakkuk was upset at the conduct of the Israelites and subsequently upset that God was allowing such behavior to go unpunished. Naturally, however, this wasn't the case at all; in fact, God had a plan and that plan is revealed to us in verse six, listen to the words again: **“For I am rousing the Babylonians that fierce nation who march through the breadth of earth to seize dwellings not their own.”** Now, What a surprise that must have been to good old Habakkuk! God's answer to Habakkuk was to send the nasty-disobedient Babylonians to punish Israel. The Babylonians would seize, attack, and here it is, **“swoop down and devour Israel much like a vulture swoops down and devours it prey.”**

Of Course, this wasn't the answer that Habakkuk was looking for and as a result Habakkuk had another reason to lament. “How could God use evil people to swallow up people who are a little better?” But it doesn't end there does it? If our first reading this afternoon was to continue and we were to read a little further, we would learn that God's plan didn't stop there. In fact, the Babylonians arrogance and boastfulness over their victory resulted in God turning it around on them, sparing Israel, and eventually bringing forth one MAN who was mightier than Babylon could have ever dreamed! There was hope for Habakkuk and by the grace of God for the disobedient Israelites too. With that revelation, Habakkuk received a lesson in faith and learned to trust in God no matter the circumstances! Even though sinfulness seemed to be abounding and the world appeared to be

crumbling around him, in the end because of God's promise Habakkuk could boldly confess: **"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength..."**

And as we well know, God kept his promise and the good that he brought to a disobedient world came in the unexpected form of a baby born in Bethlehem to a virgin mother; a radical if you will, a servant who shocked many by submitting to suffering and death, and a King who although often rejected, stunned the world by rising from the grave. Yes, Jesus the Christ was the answer to Habakkuk's lament! This Jesus- the Anointed One, the Savior was the One God produced out of Israel. Now, in preparing for this message I learned an interesting fact about the vulture and its ability to produce projectile vomit as a defense mechanism. Kinda disgusting, but my dear friends, as we consider Jesus as God's solution to the world's problem, much like a vulture, He chewed up sin, death and the devil spitting them up in victory to defend a fallen people from the deserved consequence of disobedience you and me included!

And so, we who are too many times sinful and unclean through contrition and repentance can turn around- much like Habakkuk's changed his demeanor after learning God's good news! And as a result, by God's grace through faith, we become recipients of some hope filled promises; the promise of forgiveness, life, new living and eternal peace. The good news for us just as it was for Habakkuk and Israel, is that God doesn't leave us to despair because of our sin, rather he give his Son who died for our sake so that we might receive true liberation and be claimed by him once and for all when he comes again.

As we consider this account from Habakkuk, it's rather easy to see ourselves in both positions; as the disobedient people in whom Habakkuk lamented over and yet at the same time, as the redeemed and repentant person living in baptism, like Habakkuk we sometimes feel trapped in a world of complete chaos. Surely, as we read the news, watch television, listen and watch people around us we might easily draw the conclusion that God's creation has turned to complete disobedience and faithlessness- there's no hope! Perhaps, then it is easy to wonder as just as Habakkuk did, how could God allow such evil to continue. How could all these disobedient people go unpunished? And most of all, when is Jesus the one who redeemed us and promises true peace going to get us out of this mess? Give us a sign, please....

Questions like these and the desire for signs aren't anything new. In fact in the Gospel lesson the disciples wanted to know when Jesus would come again too. Now, maybe their desire had a different motive than ours. But, nevertheless conceivably like you and me they wanted some idea as to when Jesus would come again so that they might reap the benefits of being one of his own. Well, long story short, in the Gospel Jesus responded by giving warnings of what they protect themselves against, a whole list of signs, and He concluded that His coming would be highly noticeable. What Jesus told the disciples is that nobody will be able to miss his return. It will be accompanied by events like never seen before- **sun and moon growing dark, stars falling from the sky, trumpets sounding, His children gathered from all the ends of the earth, and His coming in the clouds with power and GREAT glory!** The point is, Jesus WILL come again, his return will be no secret, and yes, living in faith with hope in our hearts we can be sure that we won't be left behind- He will come to claim us as his own! How sure can we be? Well, yet again, the vulture helps us out.

Listen again to Jesus' words from the Gospel: **"Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."** In other words, when you see the vulture hovering in the sky you know something is dead below. If there isn't anything dead to munch on there aren't any vultures. In the same way, what Jesus

was saying, if you see all these things happening, that is, Sun and moon darkening, stars falling, an angel sounding the trumpet and the Son of man coming on the clouds then you can be sure that He has returned... it is as sure as a vulture hovering over the dead to eat!

The good news for the us, who confesses Jesus as Lord by faith, is that we won't miss his return; in fact it would completely contradict his promise. Our Jesus WILL come again and it will be apparent- God's promises are sure! The promised Savior foretold to Habakkuk came, has won the victory, Salvation is Secure and sure! And so it is, this Savior will come again to take us home away from the evils of this world to a place where we are sure to experience complete liberation and peace in the mansion prepared for us!

The vulture isn't so bad after all is it... maybe a few conversations or acknowledgments with the vulture at the zoo for me during those lonely shifts could have been beneficial after all. Ok maybe that's a stretch! But when it comes down to it; what a bird and what an attractive story it tells! As we consider the vulture on these last days in Lent what we learn is that God's promises are without doubt secure and sure! In Jesus God's plan was carried forth. And so, what this means for us is, despite the circumstances of our own sin and the world around us, we who are redeemed by the mighty one out of Israel are never without hope! And as long as we trust in him we can be confident that our future is secure and sure! Indeed, our Savior Jesus came He will come again.... You can count on it! And much like Habakkuk we can do no other than boldly proclaim with joy and hope in our hearts: **“I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength...”**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.