

## The Word of Reconciliation

Grace and peace to you from Him, who is, who was and who is to come, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Amen.

Our Reading is taken from the First Epistle of John and we read from Chapter One. (The Passion Translation Bible):

*<sup>5</sup> This is the life -giving message we heard him share and it's still ringing in our ears. We now repeat his words to you: God is pure light. You will never find even a trace of darkness in Him.*

*<sup>6</sup> If we claim that we share life with him, but keep walking in the realm of darkness, we're fooling ourselves and not living*

### Prayer:

Father God we ask that through your Spirit we will see your light and know You and Your Son and experience the love You have for us. Let us see Your light, let our souls be flooded with the rays of Your Son! Amen.

Dear Congregation,

The Apostle John tells us, in the beginning of this Chapter, that they, the disciples, who have been eyewitnesses of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord, want all to **know** Jesus, in the same manner as they, Jesus' disciples, knew Christ Jesus. For John the word "know", is a very special word. It means to have "true knowledge of God", a knowledge which gives you the assurance of your final home, there where Christ has prepared a place for you, with him and the Father, in heaven. This knowledge is not dependent on other people but is a certainty within the understanding of the children of God. He wants the Christians to know this Way, this Truth and this Life, as it was told to them by Jesus. This group, who knows God and His Son Jesus, walks in the Light of Christ. The group, who does not know this "Light", is opposed to those who know and profess Christ the Light of the World. John calls this group "the world", those who are in darkness, the children of darkness.

John, the beloved disciple, teaches and says: if we are Children of the Light, but we are

doing the same things that those who live in the darkness of "not knowing Christ" do, then we are fooling ourselves, for we do not listen to, neither do, as the Gospel of Christ, teaches.

Let us read what John wants us to know about being in the light. *<sup>7</sup> But if we keep living in the pure light that surrounds Him, we share unbroken fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, continually cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, we're only fooling ourselves and are strangers to the truth. <sup>9</sup> But if we freely admit our sins when his light uncovers them, He will be faithful to forgive us every time. God is just to forgive us our sins because of Christ, and He will continue to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we claim that we are not guilty of sin when God uncovers it with His light, we make Him a liar and his Word is not in us.*

Dear Congregation,

The Apostle John tells us that being **Children of the Light**, means that we do things in the open, in the light, for all to see, for we are not ashamed of our deeds, as they benefit our neighbour and honour the name of our Saviour. Because we want to walk in His way, we try to be light for others, and help them to see Christ's light. Therefore, we have this new relationship with our neighbours, one of trust and love, of caring more for the other, than for ourselves. A child of the Light's behaviour will not contradict the Word of God. John warns the readers and listeners that we have to repent daily of our wrongs and confess it to Christ, for his blood is sufficient to take our guilt and anxiety away. We will be forgiven, for we are always living in this dark world, even though we walk in the light of Christ's love. We should not allow the darkness to extinguish our light. However, when we have sinned, we have to flee to Christ and pray for his forgiveness.

This is the sign of his love: he died for us while we were sinners. He cleanses us as we confess and commit to his Word, asking him to keep us in his love, light and truth. We are taught that we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. God's grace through Christ's death saves us, and nothing of our own doing. We need to stay in his light and follow his example, not conforming to the world, but changing into the likeness of Jesus, practicing this love for one another. Changing into the likeness of Jesus and staying in his light, is an exercise we have to practice everyday.

Eusebius was an ancient historian, reporting on the times of John. He wrote accounts of John's life, told by eyewitnesses such as, Polycarp and also, St Clement of Alexandria. John, the beloved disciple, wrote the Gospel of John, the Three Epistles, and Revelation. Eusebius tells of the second general persecution that happened in 95 AC. The proconsul of Asia ordered John to Rome, where he was put in a boiling cauldron of oil and miraculously escaped death, according to the histories of the church fathers. John was then banished to the Island of Patmos, by the tyrant Domitian. He was one of the cruellest Romans, who killed many Christians in his time as emperor. Domitian died in 96 AC and the new regent revoked all Domitian's laws and edicts and lifted the banish orders, so the Apostle John came back to Ephesus in 97 where he found that the Apostle Timothy was martyred. John, the Apostle, was now very old; however, the church of Timothy asked him to pastor them after the death of Timothy, which he did, while preparing himself to write the Gospel by fasting, prayer and contemplation. In his 92<sup>nd</sup> year he wrote the Epistle that we are reading. He felt deeply concerned that the new Christian converts, due to persecution and the evil in the dark world, will be seduced by the heresies and wrong teaching that were prevalent in that time. He begs everyone to hold fast on the love of Christ, especially in these evil times. The beloved disciple writes with a style that

speaks and breaths God's love through Jesus Christ for us. Because of Christ suffering John was willing to suffer for this love, and the message of love of Christ. Despite the fierce persecutions that lasted for over 300 years Christianity grew.

Clement of Alexandria tells us about Saint John, now in his nineties, going to visit the churches in Asia, and finding pastors for the congregations. St John went to one of the Bishops that he ordained years before and presented a young man to him and asked him to train the young man up as a pastor. The young man stayed with the Bishop and he was trained and taught, baptized and confirmed and stayed in the discipline of the Christian life. However, once the young man was trained, the discipline became less as the Bishop thought that he was now a mature believer. Unfortunately, the ways of the world got hold of this man in the most devastating manner, and he became the leader of a highway robber-gang. When St John came to visit the congregation, much like our Bishop will visit us on visitations, he asked the Bishop to present the young man to him, as he thought he would be ready to be a pastor. The Bishop wept tears and said that he had died: he had died to God, for he is now the leader of a savage robber-gang, and he lives in the mountains with his dangerous gang. St John called for a horse and guard and set out to the mountains and was immediately captured by the guard of the gang, as he arrived at the foothill. Instead of begging for his life, he said, "It is for this that I have come, take me to your leader". The leader was armed, but when he saw that it was St John, he was ashamed and tried to escape the apostle's questioning, but St John forgetting his old age and feebleness, went after him and called to him that he should not flee from him, his spiritual father, for there is forgiveness in Christ. Eusebius writes that many tears flowed.

St John prayed and fasted for the young man and stayed with him, preaching, teaching and comforting him; assuring of Christ's forgiveness as he repented his deeds of darkness and his loss of the light of Christ's teaching. St John interceded for him before Christ and in the church and reconciled him to the church. After giving him the sacraments, he was re-instituted in the church; his life was turned around, renewed. For Christ is the Lord of Second Chances. Saint John practiced this love of Christ and was prepared to lay down his life for those around him, teaching them what the love of Christ looks like, not condemning the one who has fallen, but applying this new commandment, this love for one another. As he aged, he was so weak that he was carried into the church and would lie down on the stretcher and say in a soft whisper: "My little children; love one another!" This was his entire sermon. People asked him, why are you only teaching this precept? He replied: "Because it is a precept of the Lord and if you only do that, it is enough!" It is enough to love the children of God with the love that mirrors Christ's.

*Chapter 2: <sup>1</sup> My little children, I write you these things so that you won't sin. But if anyone does sin, we continually have a forgiving Redeemer who is face-to-face with the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

John showed the Christian church by his own example, how to be like Christ. Never losing hope, but going after the sheep, the one lost sheep and bringing that sheep back to the fold, with tears and with love, with fasting and with prayers. For the prayers of a righteous person have power. He admonishes and exhorts us to obey Christ's teachings. One must not lose heart, but come and repent when we sin, for Christ stands next to us and pleads, like an advocate for us, before the Father, and the Father accepts Christ petitions for us. Forgiveness has been bought

by his precious blood and obedience, for us, while we were sinners. Christ's sacrifice is our mercy seat; the blood was sprinkled to restore us to the Father in wholeness, like the blood of the sacrificial lamb was sprinkled on the mercy seat by the High Priest. For God so loved the world that he gave his Son. This is the love of the Children of the Light, they can intercede for the children who are still in darkness, and those who have fallen from the way, and with bitter tears and prayers they can offer them up to God, who restores them through his Son's gift of life and light.

The Apostle John tells us that we are growing to be like Christ. We are lights in the world, when we reflect, like the moon reflects the light of the sun, the brightness of the love of Christ in our lives, by conforming to his teachings.

*<sup>3</sup> Here's how we can be sure that we've truly come to know God: if we keep his commands.*

*<sup>4</sup> If someone claims "I have come to know God by experience," yet doesn't keep God's commands, he is a phony and the truth finds no place in him.*

The life of the Christian, this saint-and-sinner, child of the Light, is a life of obedience to the teachings of Jesus. And the teaching is simple: Jesus says, a new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you. In his example He laid his life down for his sheep and spoke tenderly to them. He forgave his enemies, even those who nailed him to the cross. He forgave his friends, even those who denied him. Repentance is what we need to bring to God and our neighbour. God has mercy, for Christ is mercy and restores us with his love, in the right relationship with God and people.

The apostle John, who loved the Lord with all his heart, strengthens our feeble flickering lights, encourages us to keep to the word of Christ, to follow his instructions so that fruit of love and light will be borne, the fruit that shows that we are keeping company with our Lord Jesus Christ.

*<sup>5</sup>But the love of God will be perfected within the one who obeys God's Word. We can be sure that we've truly come to live in intimacy with God, <sup>6</sup>not just by saying: "I am intimate with God," but by walking in the footsteps of Jesus.*

Jesus says: I am the Vine and you are the branches. When we abide in him, we cannot bear other fruit than the fruit of the Vine. This love for our neighbour will identify us as his children who spread his light in this dark world. Let us follow the example of Christ and look out for the needs of our brothers and sisters. This is the greatest love, bringing them to see, hear, feel and experience the love of Christ, and see Christ as the Light of the World. Amen.

**Father God**, we marvel at your love, lavished unconditionally on us, even though we are unworthy. Help us to be Christ's love in action. Amen.

**And now may the love of God, and the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ**, that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds, until Christ's coming in glorious Light. Amen.