

John 12:12-19

These Pharisees did not need to become so upset. Just give it time; the world would stop going after Jesus. There is so much else in the world to go after. Jesus cannot compete. The world goes after Cardinal's baseball games. The world goes after fishing, and hunting, and other recreational activities. The world goes after making a living. In fact, it really is the case that the world today goes after everything but Jesus.

What do you go after? What gets you revved up? What do you follow in life? What consumes your time? There's no need for us to pretend. Sitting down with the Bible, and getting up for church do not make our hearts pound with excitement. This is not Busch Stadium. We don't have beer and pretzels here. We don't cheer for home runs here. This is not a fishing hole. You don't cry out here when you haul in a big one. This is not even as exciting as your place of work; you don't get a paycheck for coming here. So why are you here? Because although the world does not go after Jesus, Jesus goes after the world. He goes after you.

Jesus goes after the world by riding on a donkey. What a strange way to go after someone. A donkey plods along. It's not a horse. It does not overtake very quickly the one it is pursuing. But it's sure, and it's steady. And, of course, it's stubborn. It has to be because we're stubborn. We go after everything in life - good things and bad things. But we do not go after Jesus. We stubbornly resist Him. But in mercy, Jesus refuses to give up the chase. He rides that donkey after us. He may not catch us very quickly. The only reason He does is because He out-stubborns us. His love is greater than our anger. His mercy is greater than our sinfulness.

Jesus goes after the world by going to a cross. What a strange way to go after someone. He pursues the world by giving up His life. He pursues you by dying for you. But this is how it had to be, for death and hell are in hot pursuit of you.

Death pursues everyone. We can see this. And eventually it catches us. It rides a horse. No one can outrun death. Death pursues us because we are sinners. Sinners die. This is the plain truth. And hell pursues us. Its jaws are wide open. Hell follows on the heels of death. Death pursues all who sin, and hell claims those who die.

This is why Jesus, in love, pursued you by going to a cross. He allowed death to pursue Him and catch Him. Jesus became the victim in your place. And He let hell swallow Him up. Jesus suffered the agony of hell on the cross for you. Death and hell have their victim. It's not you; it's Jesus. And so they cannot have you.

Death still pursues you, for you are a sinner. And it will catch you. But Jesus took the sting out of death. He died for you, and He rose again. God, therefore, forgives your sins. He forgives you. Believing this, death becomes merely a bed and pillow for you. You will die when death overtakes you, but you will awaken when Jesus calls you out of the grave. As He rose from death, so will you, for in your Baptism you die with Christ and you are raised to life with Him. And not even death can take this life away from you.

Hell still pursues you. But it cannot have you. Jesus makes sure of this. He keeps hell's jaws away from you. He does this by keeping you close to Him. You do not go after Jesus too well, nor do I. That's why you're here. Here He gives you forgiveness. Here He saves you. Here He gives you protection against the jaws of hell. He puts His own flesh and blood within you. He puts His words in you.

Now it might well be that you're wondering why Jesus does all this for you. "I do not go after Jesus much, if at all; so why does He bother to go after me?" Holy Week is before us. We pay closer attention to the narrative of Jesus' sufferings, death, and resurrection. And as we are drawn into these events in history, it becomes wonderfully clear that Jesus' mercy makes no sense to us.

Why did He go after a pathetic thief who was dying next to Him? This man was good for nothing. He deserved to be crucified. He deserved to go to hell. Why did Jesus go after him with such a beautiful promise: "*Today you shall be with Me in Paradise!*" Why did Jesus go after the soldiers who were crucifying Him? They were His murderers. But Jesus goes after them with mercy, praying, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

We really cannot make sense out of God's mercy; but we are called upon to believe it. There is no good reason for Jesus to go after you or me. We don't deserve it. We don't cause it. But it is the most wonderful truth in all the world. There isn't a soul in heaven who deserves to be there. Heaven should be a place only for God and His angels. But He wants you there with Him. And so He pursues you. He goes after you. And He does this in ways we think strange: a stubborn donkey, and a bloody cross.

There is no one Jesus wants in heaven more than you. And with you, He wants your family, your friends; He wants in heaven everyone who is close to you. And so Jesus goes after them through you. What a strange way to go after someone. Through a sinner such as yourself. Yet this is what He does. Riding His donkey of His Word and Sacraments, He has caught you. He has made you His own. Going to the cross for you, He has revealed His great mercy toward you and toward all other sinners.

Who is in your life right now that needs Jesus to go after them? Do you know Jesus' love? Do you rejoice that He has forgiven you? Then you are the one Jesus will use to go after that precious sinner. Come to the cross this Holy Week. But do not come alone. Come Maundy Thursday. Come Good Friday. Come Easter Sunday. And bring that one with you. They will not go after Jesus, but Jesus goes after them through you. Amen.