

“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18 NIV).

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV).

As we live our day to day lives, we often don't notice how much time is really passing and how quickly it is going. Of course, this is nothing new. Thousands of years ago Job lamented that his days were swifter than a weaver's shuttle (Job 7:6). David lamented that man's life is but a breath (Psalm 39:5), and Isaiah likened men's lives to grass that withers away (Isaiah 40:6-7).

This past week I came across an article in my files that made me realize how fast time is going. This is the tenth anniversary of the Hale-Bopp comet sighting that was visible to all of North America. I can clearly remember looking through my binoculars at it in the clear sky of the north woods. However, what really brought back memories was not so much the comet but the tragedy connected with it, for this is also the tenth anniversary of the Heaven's Gate cult mass suicide.

If you recall, the 39 people who belonged to this cult believed that a space ship from what they described as their “home planet”—their idea of heaven—was traveling in the tail of the comet to pick them up. This group believed that they were not part of this world either physically or mentally and that they needed to board this space ship to attain their next level of consciousness. The problem they had was with their boarding passes, for they believed they could board the space ship only through mass suicide.

It's almost ironic that this mass suicide happened one week away from Easter. While these people religiously watched the X-Files on TV to formulate their thinking, they rejected God's revealed way of salvation in the Bible. While these people believed in ships from outer space to take them to their “home planet”, they would not believe in the man Christ Jesus who came from heaven to die in their place so He could one day take them to the real heaven. While they believed that entrance into a better existence was through mass suicide, they rejected the gift of faith in Jesus death that gives Christians entrance into the Kingdom of God right now! While this cult believed that their human bodies were only vehicles or containers for harboring their true “essence” here on earth, they denied that the true “essence of God”, that is, the true body and blood of the crucified and risen Christ is given today in the humble earthly means of bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins.

Tragically, about the only thing they got right was their idea that life is eternal, but even that was only half right, for they thought eternal life guaranteed eternal happiness. Sadly, this group has now found out the hard way that once we have been conceived, we will live forever—like it or not! They now know the reality that life after death means living in the presence of the true God in perfect bliss and harmony or living forever totally separated from Him in hell.

Ten years ago almost everyone thought the people in this cult were insane. And, indeed, there did seem to be a major mental imbalance in their thinking, but that mental imbalance was not the root cause of their insane ideas. It's something much more basic than that, and it's something that has little or no credibility in our post-modern world today. It's what God calls sin, and the only thing that separates our sanity from their insanity is the grace of God.

One of my professors at the seminary, Rev. Dr. Walter Maier II, said that sin is the only real form of insanity. He said that one really has to be "insane" not to believe that he has eternal life in heaven simply by believing in Jesus Christ.

How hard is it to recognize that we sin every single day? How hard is it to understand that our life is a breath that moves faster than a weaver's shuttle? How hard is it to know that all of us will die and the guilt carried in our conscience will have to be reckoned with? By nature, all of this is impossible for us to believe, but God has revealed through His Word and in His writing it on our hearts (Romans 2:14-15) that sin has to be dealt with. So if we answer in the affirmative to any or all of these questions, does not one really have to be "insane" to reject the promise of free grace given to us through Christ Jesus? By nature we are all completely insane in spiritual matters. By nature there is no difference between us and the Heaven's Gate cult.

What a gift of grace we have been given that we can actually recognize our sin by nature; that we can actually believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of that sin; and that we can assemble in God's House to hear His Word and receive His Sacrament for the salvation of our souls.

The annual remembrance of the Passion Week of our Lord is at hand. It was on the bloody cross of Good Friday that all of mankind's sin was forever dealt with by the Lamb of God, and it was in the light of Easter morning three days later that the cry went out, "He is risen!" announcing to the world that death and the devil had indeed been defeated! To those who are perishing, Christians are the ones who are insane. To them, our remembering Christ's death on Good Friday and our celebrating His mighty resurrection from the dead on Easter Morning makes us insane, but that is not insanity. It is the power of God!

God grant us all to treasure and hold fast to the truth of our Lord's death and resurrection throughout these coming weeks and more importantly throughout our life here on earth. For you and I do not have to wait for a "space ship" to take us to our "home planet". We already took that "ride" in the waters of Holy Baptism and our boarding pass was Christ's death for us! (Romans 6:4).