



Jesus, I Will Ponder Now

Text: Sigismund von Birken (1626-1681)

Tune: Melchoir Vulpius (1560-1615)

As we begin Holy Week, we pray for God to be with us as we follow Jesus from Triumphal Entry, to betrayal, to trial, to crucifixion, and ultimately to resurrection. This week holds a striking contrast in tone. While on one hand we can look at Good Friday and truly call it “good,” we mourn our sin that made this necessary. We examine our conduct, pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us into a godly life, and eagerly await our exodus from this sinful life to the peace of heaven. “Jesus, I Will Ponder Now” is one of the best hymns to prepare us for the week, a fitting prayer for our meditations.

This hymn was written by Sigismund von Birken, who also wrote “Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus.” His was born at Wildstein, Bohemia, May 5, 1626, the son of the Lutheran Pastor there. In 1629, very early in Sigismund’s life, he was forced to leave Bohemia because of a severe oppression against the Lutheran Pastors who chose to stay faithful to their confession. The family settled in Nürnberg, where Sigismund attended the Egidien Gymnasium (honors high school). In 1643 he began studies at the University of Jena, studying law and theology, the latter reluctantly, at his dying father’s wish. However, just two years after beginning his studies he left and returned to Nürnberg to make use of his poetical gifts. He was admitted to the Pegnitz Shepherd and Flower Order, one of the many societies that emerged in the 17th century with the aim of unifying and improving the German language, especially in the area of poetry. Unfortunately this did not provide a living, so by the end of 1645 he became the tutor to the Brunswick-Lüneburg princes at Wolfenbütel. He maintained this position for one year, but resigned

after being crowned as one of the day’s premier poets. He went on a tour of Germany and in 1648 returned to Nürnberg and was once again a private tutor. In 1654 he was raised to the rank of nobility by Emperor Ferdinand III because of his poetic gifts. In 1658 he became a member of the Fruitbearing Society, another group whose aim was to standardize German and make it the standard language for scholarly and literary works. During all of this, he still held membership in the Pegnitz Order, and in 1662 became Chief Shepherd of the Order. When he took over, he made the group more specialized, giving it a distinctly religious tone. Throughout his life, Sigismund wrote 52 hymns, but only “Jesus, I Will Ponder Now” and “Let Us Ever Walk With Jesus” have found a lasting place in the Church’s song.

The tune used for this hymn is written by Melchoir Vulpius. Though little is known of his life, his compositions for the Church were of the highest quality. *The Lutheran Hymnal* contains five of his tunes, some of the most notable are the tunes for “Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good,” “Ye Sons and Daughters of the King,” and “Jesus, I Will Ponder Now.”

From start to finish, this hymn is a fitting prayer for Holy Week and any time we contemplate the suffering and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is important that we pray for the Holy Spirit’s strength for this meditation (st. 1), since reading the Gospels’ Passion accounts can be emotionally and spiritually taxing. As we “see how scourge and rod, spears and nails” wounded Our Lord (st. 2), we know that He endures this deep affliction—physical and spiritual—because of our sin (st. 3). So we contemplate His Passion with repentance. Repentance is not only sorrow for previous sin, but a desire to “shun every sinful pleasure” (st. 4). We pray for the Holy Spirit to do this good work in us. He also reminds us that we are forgiven and the sin is no more. Yet, our conscience still grieves us because we feel the enormity of our sin. In these times we remember: “If His Son so loveth me, God must have compassion” (st. 5). Because God has compassion, we bear our crosses in humility, knowing that He is with us all the way, until we “in heaven above sing Thy praise forever” (st. 6).