

JUBILATE / THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Text: St. John 16:16-22

ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

In our Gospel text appointed for Jubilate Sunday, our LORD speaks words of comfort to His disciples. In only a few short hours, JESUS will be arrested and dragged before a kangaroo court where He will be tried for telling the truth; though his accusers will call the truth a lie. JESUS' own people will hand Him over to the Roman authorities to be put to death by crucifixion. He was quite aware that the hour had come for Him to give His life for the life of the world. By this time the next day He will be "*crucified, dead, and buried,*" so He said to them, "*A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.*"

These words caused no small amount of confusion for our LORD's disciples. What could He possibly mean, "*A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.*" JESUS clears up their confusion with parabolic language, that is, an allegory, as He explains to them what true joy is and that, despite their sorrow, their greatest joy is still to come.

As the hymnologist writes, "*I'm but a stranger here, Heav'n is my home; Earth is a desert drear, Heav'n is my home*" (LSB 748). He is correct; this earth is not our home. This life, as we now experience it, was not meant to be. God's will and desire was and always has been, that His creation would have a much richer and far deeper relationship with its Creator than we now know. Did He not walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day and did He not give mankind dominion over the earth? God intended that He would be our God and we would be His children.

That is the way it was meant to be, but sin got in the way, coming between man and God. Sin laid waste to man's relationship with God, and even while God continued to love and provide for us, we began to hate Him.

Since the day of Adam's sin and mankind's eviction from the paradise of the Garden of Eden, we have been continuously on a pilgrimage of sorts. We have become strangers in an ever stranger land. We perceive something is not quite right. Our hearts and minds, indeed, our very spirits and souls, sense that something has gone terribly wrong. We look around ourselves and despair because we know that nothing here is truly as it should be, and though we struggle to repair the hurt and heal the wounds brought about by sin, (ours and the sins of others), if we

are truthful with ourselves, we know that our every effort to do so has ultimately resulted in abject failure.

So, in a futile effort, we attempt to convince ourselves everything is right with the world, or at the very least, we attempt to ignore everything that we know is very wrong.

Sure, there is the occasional war with its attendant devastation and death, and from time to time our world is subject to natural disasters which bring with them death, destruction, and ruin, but as long as it does not touch us here at home, as long as such events do not touch us personally, we can go on living our shallow little lives with little care for those who truly suffer.

However, imagine if you will, what life is like in Ukraine at this very moment. We watch the terrible events taking place in Ukraine on our TVs and shake our heads, then we pull ourselves up to the dinner table to enjoy our evening meal or turn out the lights at the end of our day and peacefully go to sleep. Or put yourself in the place of those mothers and fathers, husbands, wives, and children who have lost those they love to the cruelty of war or the arbitrary unpredictability of nature.

God's creation suffers and groans. It is subject to war, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes, to tsunamis, floods, and drought that destroy property and take countless lives. There are epidemics and pandemics caused by terrible diseases that result in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, even millions of people. Yet, even while the world shakes its head in disingenuous sympathy, life goes on for most of us as though nothing has happened at all. We may read about these events on the internet or watch them on TV, but when we push away from our computers, when we put away our phones, when we turn off the TV, we hardly give such things another thought because they have not affected us personally. Is it not, after all, the rule of nature that the fit and the strong survive while the weak perish and fall by the wayside.

Yet, are we not meant to do more than merely survive? Is there no more meaning to life than mere survival?

We were meant to live, to be abundant and multiply, to live in joyful communion with our God and the creation in which He placed us, giving us life. In this life, we are meant to love and serve God by loving and serving those who are incapable of or unable to help themselves. We are meant to love our neighbor and care for God's creation. We certainly were not meant to walk on past those who suffer as though they do not exist, nor were we meant to abuse this world in which we live. Yet, that is the condition of our world and every one of us is guilty to a greater or lesser extent of such sinful shallowness, carelessness, and negligence.

So no, this earth is not our home, and this life is not the life to which we should cling. At least it is not our home in the sense that we should not look forward to *another home and a better life, a home and life where things are truly what God intends them to be—as He has promised us they will be*. Yet, why do we hold so tightly onto *this* life?

Repent! Let go of this world with all its hatred, pain, suffering, sin, and death. Stop trying to make this world out to be something it is not. Your efforts to fool yourself and others may work for a time but fooling yourself changes nothing. The world and those who cling to it are spinning into chaos and darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

That, my friends, is the point of our Gospel text. Our focus is not to be on this life or this world. We are not to place our hope in worldly princes or temporal earthly kingdoms but on the returning CHRIST and His *eternal* Kingdom.

Our desire is to be for JESUS, our LORD, and SAVIOR. No other end can possibly satisfy a Christian save that which is found in CHRIST JESUS, the Eternal One. Our one and only hope is to be under His loving and gracious rule forever. Such is to be the joy sought out by God's children; a joy that no one can take from us.

This should not be taken to mean that we are to disengage from life and the world around us, to join a monastery or convent or some other religious or spiritual community and limit ourselves to a strict diet of so-called Christian music and Christian books, television, and movies. And certainly, we are not to seek out death. No! We are not to hide our light under a basket; we are to be the light of the world!

Indeed, our LORD has commanded that we go into all the world baptizing in God's Name and teaching all He has taught us, rejoicing in hope, with patience in tribulation, even as we continue steadfastly in prayer, waiting patiently for the day when we will see Him again. How is this to be done if we should remove ourselves from the world? How then, do we love and serve our neighbor?

Yet, there is a problem: we tend to be theologians of glory even when we know we should be theologians of the Cross. By this, I mean that we would gladly follow our LORD, even to the gates of Hell as long as everything in our lives is pleasing, comfortable, and safe. In this, we are especially adept at imitating Saint Peter who, promising to follow JESUS, even if it meant death, denied our LORD three times for fear he might be the next to be nailed to a cross.

Theologians of glory tend to call evil good and good evil. Comfort and safety are good, and suffering is evil. Not that comfort and safety are necessarily bad in and of themselves, but the theologian of glory will avoid any kind of pain and suffering at all costs because for the theologian of glory, pain and suffering for any reason means God does not love you because you have somehow displeased Him, or He just does not love you because you are not pleasing *enough* to Him.

This is a simplistic, even an ignorant understanding of God and His mercy. This understanding of God sees God, not as the cause of all things, but only those things which *we* define as "*good*." But friends, that kind of a god is not the Christian God. That kind of a god is only able to react as forces beyond his control act on him. In fact, it is hard to see how that kind

of god could be a god at all, and he certainly could not be the God of the Cross and therefore, the God of Holy Scripture.

Such glory loses sight of the One True God and His grace and mercy. Eventually, it loses sight of God altogether. Having lost God, it is no longer possible to hope for or even receive relief from God; for when God is lost, all is lost. For there is no other god or savior in whom one may hope. There is only one God, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, and He is eternal. To lose God one must be eternally bereft of all hope. For such a person, sorrow and suffering know no end.

It is, then, as JESUS said, *“A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come....”* In this world, you will have trouble. The Christian life, the life we live, is lived out in the *“little while”* of heartache and pain, sickness, suffering, and death, however, our focus is not to be on the *“little while”* of suffering in this life, but on the eternal joys which we have in CHRIST JESUS, which we will have to the full at His second coming.

It is for this reason that JESUS suffered the pain and death of crucifixion giving birth to His Church in Water and Blood that the sorrows and sufferings of this life would last for no more than a season and our joy in CHRIST and the promised life to come, would be everlasting.

Therefore, our LORD tells us that the pains and sufferings of this life are fleeting and transitory, they last no more than a moment and then are gone, and in their place will be joy, complete and unending joy; joy no one can take away from you.

So now, as you live through this *“little while”* of suffering, keep your eye on the prize—the long while, the never-ending moment in the unending Day of our LORD. For while the cursed sorrow and the devilish despair last only a little while, then comes the joy which knows no end and the peace which surpasses all human understanding. Is this not a blessing that far exceeds any temporal heartache?

Behold, this little while of suffering that we now know, even death itself, is nothing more than birth pangs—the travails of passing from the baptismal womb of the Church into the eternal light of CHRIST where we are released from the pains and sufferings of death and raised up a new life in CHRIST JESUS.

How long must you wait? How long is this little while? Does it really matter? It is but a little while after all. And when the time of this little while is fulfilled and JESUS returns for you on the clouds of heaven, all your suffering will be forgotten, and your unending joy will begin.

Until that time, turn with joy to the gifts our LORD gives to you in His life-giving Flesh and Blood; gifts given to forgive you, to uphold your faith and renew your strength for this present hour; gifts that sustain you until the life to come where all mourning, pain, sorrow, and suffering will cease; gifts given to keep your eyes on the promise that you will see JESUS.

In this, you may rightly rejoice, for it is a joy no one can take from you. In it can be heard a blessed Word that no devil or enemy of God can undo, for in it JESUS says unto you, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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