

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Autumn is beautiful. The changing leaves create a colorful backdrop when you walk outside or drive to a destination. The air is crisp and refreshing and there are smells of pumpkin, apple, and various spices. Yet the changing leaves contain an ominous stare for what lies ahead. They will wither and fall to the ground which isn't anything bad, but I hate yard work. There, I said it. I don't like anything that has to do with yard work, gardening, landscaping, or anything and everything in between. I don't enjoy it, it's far from relaxing, and it's just, well, it's not a pleasant experience.

Jesus uses a parable today to teach you something not about yardwork but about your life in him in these latter days. Listen again to your Lord, "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

The events listed to this parable are what Jesus is referring to and when you hear them, it sounds a whole lot like any given year, month, week, or day in the news. "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken." As Christians you see and hear these things just as much as the unbeliever. They impact you just as they do every other person in this world because you are, in fact, in this world.

Living as a Christian is not some pie in the sky abstract notion nor is it a life where you are secluded away in some village sheltering yourself from what is around you. You live in the estates of the church, family, and society and God has called you to various vocations in those estates. You are in the world, but God's word teaches you that even as you are in this world you are not of it in the same way as those who don't belong to Christ. In 1 John 2 God says through the pen of St. John, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

That passage from 1 John echoes what Jesus says here in the Gospel reading and what you are warned about as you walk by faith through this world and in it. Jesus said, "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The temptation is real for you to get weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness, and cares of this life. More than once, Jesus warns about this. Think about the Parable of the Sower when Jesus taught about the seed that fell upon the rocky ground and thorns. He said, "As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with

joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”

When the cares of this life, and that’s more than just worrying about things it’s getting caught up in the cares of this life to the point they distract you and have swallowed up your time, attention, energy, and money, what soon will happen is you will be unprepared for the Lord to return. “Out of sight, out of mind” when it comes to the things of God, the Church, the Bible, and what it means to live the baptismal life is the recipe for falling into unbelief and into hell. Rather than looking up “for your redemption is drawing near” as Jesus says, that is being concerned with the things of God and looking up through the ears of faith hearing his word and looking down in reading the Scriptures and in prayer, you are looking for every way other than where you have your redemption. Then, suddenly, the day comes, and Jesus returns, and you are found unprepared, not concerned, apathetic, or even hostile to Christ and what he teaches. Are there second chances then? Are there opportunities to reevaluate your life and priorities? Well, what does Jesus say? “For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

The answer is “no” for it will come upon all and you will stand before the Son of Man just as you have heard about the past few weeks at the end of the church year about the coming of Jesus and the Day of Judgement. The first reading puts that image of judgment before you as well in that last chapter of the Old Testament, in English at least, when Malachi prophesied, “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.”

The call goes out to you today, People of Zion, as your Lord speaks. He says, “repent.” He warns you so that you are not caught unaware. The warnings of Jesus, and all the Scriptures, are serious and something to heed as well as learn from as you go through this life. Don’t forget who God has called you to be and don’t lose sight of him.

So where does that leave you? Let’s go back to what Jesus says. Jesus says to you this very day, “Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” This is the Advent faith the Lord gives you and teaches you that you have as you go through this world. Even as you experience all these things in this life, in these last days, you do so as one who knows what is to come or rather who is coming.

When you see the events of this world and all that is sin, death, and the crafts and assaults of the devil you lament them and look to where redemption and deliverance is found. The Epistle reading says beautifully, “Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus is coming, he says through the Scriptures, be encourage and hope in him and for that day.

The eyes by which you view the world around you are the eyes of faith which is to say you see these things and you know and have God’s word which points you to the glory to come. You have Christ in all this life, who has saved you from sin, death, and the devil. You know your redemption is drawing near because your salvation has been accomplished. You can and do lift up your heads with confidence because you belong to Christ, you are baptized into him, and your sin is forgiven. You straighten and look forward for that day to come even as you proclaim his death by eating and drinking his body and blood in the Lord’s Supper.

Be encouraged and have hope for Jesus is coming. “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your salvation comes.’ The Lord will cause his majestic voice to be heard, you shall have gladness of heart.” That’s you the antiphon of the Introit is talking about. You are the daughter of Zion. You are God’s people, the church so “Behold, your salvation comes” God says to you people of Zion. Rejoice and be glad in your hearts for your Lord comes for you.

I still don’t like yard work but every year I know the leaves will bud and come back and I enjoy seeing them when they are adorning the trees and yes, even when they turn colors right before they fall. Considering all this your Lord has said to you this morning, you see your life in this world is lived in a way that Jesus fixes your eyes on him and what it to come. Heaven and earth will pass away but his word will never pass away. That’s something to cling to as his word is your hope. Look around and know “the best is yet to come” so “straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” It most certainly is for Jesus has come, he comes now, and he is coming again for you people of Zion. Come, Lord Jesus! Even so, come quickly.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.