

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

There are two “little whites” Jesus speaks about in the Gospel reading today. The first little while is what you heard a few weeks ago as Jesus was handed over to men, tortured, crucified, died, and was laid in a tomb. People saw him and wept and then they did not see him as the tomb was sealed. The world, those who wanted him dead, rejoiced as they thought they had ended the Son of God. They had killed him indeed, but God’s power is made perfect in weakness. Jesus has destroyed death by his death, and he has paid the price you owe God as he satisfied God’s wrath in your place on the cross. Proclaiming this he is raised from the dead and the sorrow of God’s people was turned to joy. They saw him again. Even Thomas, who doubted the resurrection at first, saw Jesus. This is the first “little while,” your Lord’s passion and resurrection.

You are living in the second “little while.” In this second little while there are three promises Jesus makes. Listen again to the words of the Lord, “When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” The first promise is you will have sorrow. The second is you will see Jesus again and your sorrow will be turned to joy. The third is no one will take that joy from you.

Understanding that you will have sorrow is to understand what it means to live in this world under the cross and in this vale of tears. There are no mincing words when it comes to these things and, in fact, trying to beat around the bush is to make things worse, denial or thinking you won’t face sorrow in this life doesn’t help anyone. It’s odd, though, to think about Jesus promising you will have sorrow in this world but that’s what he says. In saying this to you, he is preparing you to face it as one who see sorrow through the eyes of Christ and as only a Christian can do. It’s to see sorrow with the hope of joy.

Interestingly Jesus uses that image of a woman in labor to describe your life in this world as a Christian. So why this image used by Jesus? Well, labor is what it is, it’s labor, and there is pain associated with it. A woman in labor is a visible image of the curse given in Genesis 3 when God said to Eve, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.” Yet, amid this pain life comes forth from the womb. A person who was already living in the womb of his mother now comes to be seen. No longer is there any wondering what the baby will look like and if you have waited to find out the sex, you see if this baby is a boy or a girl. Through the labor, the pain, the travail, and yes suffering, joy is known, seen, and experienced as Jesus says.

The Christian life, your life in Christ is lived in this little while where suffering, sorrow, and grief are all around you. The reason is because sin is in this world and so too the devil seeks to devour you. The devil, the world, and your fallen flesh are the sources of temptation and all kinds of evil in your life that you face during this little while. Those things which are sinful and evil God guards you against and keeps you in his care and delivers you from them as he provides the way of escape, in the case of temptation, and as he has ultimately defeated sin, death, and the devil by the perfect life and death of Jesus in whom you are baptized and share in his victory.

Another element in considering the sorrow of this life, however, is also God himself. The Introit comes from Psalm 66 and in Psalm 66 this is said, “Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip. For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs; you let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.” Sometimes you face and bear crosses that God himself sends you. As Christians, God tells you that. Now, he never causes evil or is the source of sin, but he does try you, test you, and even lay burdens on you in ways which are not always pleasant. But when this occurs you come out of this refined and better off for it.

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The Christian life is a cruciform life, it's a life that lives under the cross and daily dies to sin and rises to a new life. It's a life too that looks at this world and knows that God is known in and through suffering even as your Lord is the crucified Lord who suffered for you. The Son of God, Jesus suffered, why should you as his children expect anything different? Understand too when God does give you times of trial or testing you receive them as children for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and this is a mark of your sonship as his children as the letter to the Hebrews teaches you.

The Epistle reading also teaches you and instructs you about this life as a Christian in this little while and how you are to conform your life as one who belongs to Christ. Listen again to those words of God written through the pen of Peter, "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God."

You are God's beloved Children whom he has born through baptismal waters. Those waters have given you life and there is great joy at this new birth and new life you have in Christ. In this little while of this life and as you suffer, you live in this world as sojourners and exiles. Those are telling in and of themselves when you think about what that means for you in this life. Yet you are still in this world, though, and God uses you and uses others for his order and good. This little while is marked by so much but the confession of Christ you have been given speaks volumes. Even as God's people call a thing what it is, you call evil, evil, and what is good, good the devil would turn this over on its head calling good evil and evil good. Christians rejoice in what is good.

So, in this little while even if you should be called evil or what you and the whole church's faithful confession be mocked or called evil, the Lord is good, and you are to rejoice in that good. You are free to live in that good and fight for that good. Your freedom from sin, death, and the devil, is no cover up for evil but a stand for righteousness and life as servants of God. You have life and rejoice in life. And this God to which you have been made a servant is the God who has died for you and the world and the God who gives you eternal life. Don't be afraid to call a thing what it is and don't be afraid to rejoice and fight for what is good even if you are hated for it, God said through the pen of St. Peter, "For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God." Jesus was and is hated but Jesus alone is the one who forgives sin and raises the dead even as he himself is raised.

Those other promises of Jesus then speak volumes as you go through this life, this little while. Listen again to what your Lord promises you. Jesus said, "So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." That's what Jesus places before your eyes today which gives you meaning, encouragement, and hope as you go through this life which has great sorrow, this life of labor. I'm reminded of stanza two of the great hymn "Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart." In that hymn, the faithful hymnwriter Martin Schalling, wrote beautifully, "Yea, Lord, 'twas Thy rich bounty gave My body, soul, and all I have in this poor life of labor. Lord, grant that I in ev'ry place may glorify Thy lavish grace and help and serve my neighbor. Let no false doctrine me beguile; let Satan not my soul defile. Give strength and patience unto me to bear my cross and follow Thee. Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, my God and Lord, in death Thy comfort still afford."

Going through this life is something which is lived under the cross. Lest we forget that the Lord reminds us with the image in the reading, "When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has

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delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also, you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” That’s a vivid image Jesus presents. Labor is labor and life in this world is lived under the cross. This life is a life of labor and toil. Adam in his sin was cursed to work the land by the sweat of brow with thorns and thistles and then return to dust even as he himself is dust.

When we try to define joy without understanding the ramifications of sin and living in the fallen world then we will never truly understand what real joy is for us. We keep in mind that we live in the “little while.” Our lives are to be looking at what is at the end of the little while and have that define our “little while.” To lose sight of the end though is to have a despair which is unfathomable. One of the ways we do lose sight of what is to come is when forget that Jesus says, “a little while.” Ask a woman in labor who is pushing for two hours how little amount of time that seems and she likely will punch you in the face. But think about how quickly a movie goes by and before you know it two hours of your life have gone by as you sat and watched things get blown up with awesome special effects?

There’s a reason why patience is a fruit of the Spirit. In our old fallen flesh we aren’t patient, we’re the opposite or at the very least selective in our patience. Think for example, what were willing to be patient for this but then we it comes to other things that require patience such as getting an education, learning to drive, getting married and living as a married couple, well that’s just unreasonable for us. Heaven forbid a church service go longer than one hour but we get our money’s worth and talk about a how great a game was when it went into overtime. Patience, godly patience, is a fruit of the Spirit, it’s a fruit of faith of Christ.

When you don’t look to the future and know what you have been given in Christ and is yours in the waters of your baptism you will lose sight of what is to come. The danger is real. Another element in this is what God wrote through the pen of St. Peter in 1 Peter 2, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

Just as we forget the glory to come and that this suffering and bearing crosses is but a little while we also forget or reject the new person God has created us to be in Christ. We enter back into the yoke of slavery to sin we have been delivered from and think “it’s ok” I have time I will live how I want. But in this case those words of Jesus call us to repentance “a little way” turn into “stay awake” don’t grow complacent for the days are evil and don’t be caught like the foolish virgins who stand outside of the wedding feast with no place in the banquet hall. With our hearts this way God warns us that our sorrow will not end and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Christian’s joy is not in sin and all sorts of ungodly things. There is no real joy in those rather the delight of the Christian and our joy which has been given to us delights and finds joy in God’s word and the things which he gives. So don’t be deceived with empty joy rather as we pray in Divine Service Setting I we have “repentant joy” which looks outside of ourselves.

Jesus promises you that third promise, “I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” Jesus is living, he is here now, and he is coming again. Notice too in what he promises that there is no mention of a little while in this joy. He says, instead, “no one will take your joy from you.” That means it’s no little while but a long, long while or rather eternity. Sorrow and lament are a little while whereas the salvation Jesus has accomplished and gives to you is and will be forever.

Rejoice dear saints of God on this Jubilate Sunday. With high delight let us unite in songs of great jubilation for Christ has burst forth from death and you have this victory dear saints of God. It is but a little while you have sorrow but rejoice amid the sorrow and see your Lord and his care for you. Find solace in his life-giving word and sacraments. You are at peace with God through the blood of Christ. Pray to him who hears and answers your prayers and sends the Holy Spirit, the comforter. For your Father hears and answers your prayers. Know that a little while is just that, a little while because you are children of God. And you know something? There’s a promise even in those words of Jesus.

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As a woman goes through labor and then rejoices as she holds her child in her arms be of good courage in this life of labor knowing for what purpose you endure and what awaits you. Dear saints of God, joy is on the horizon even as you look to Christ and see him crucified and risen for you and rejoice in him. Jesus is the crucified one and he lives and so do you and so shall you. Jesus said, “So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.