

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

Blessings to all of you, dear ones, on this Second Sunday in Advent. In our Gospel lesson for today, in Luke 21, we find our Redeemer teaching on the topic of Eschatology, or the last things, the end times, and that includes what will characterize them and what our response should be as the redeemed people of God. And You know, of late I've become increasingly aware, almost painfully aware, of something our Savior speaks of.

And if you know what to listen for and you're paying attention, it's hard to miss it in the things people say and do, and perhaps most tellingly, by what they don't say and what they don't do. It's something I think most (if not all) of you will recognize to one degree or another and that is this: that people in these gray and latter days are so weighed down in their hearts, so burdened and heavy in their spirit with various things. This is what I want to focus on in my homily to you today and to do so briefly and directly as our Lord does.

Jesus says this about the time leading up to the great day of His return: "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." It goes without saying that in these words from our Redeemer, there's great warning and exhortation, but I submit to you there's also great comfort in them too.

I. I'd first draw your attention to the fact that there's a communal dimension to Jesus' words.

a. When He says, "Watch yourselves," the Greek word means to be in a state of alert, of heightened concern, to be carefully attentive and to look out for something. In this case, He's speaking to His disciples.

b. Christ speaks to them in the plural and uses plural nouns and pronouns.

c. The point being, dear ones, that He's not just speaking to them as individuals, but as He so often does, He speaks to His beloved disciples also collectively, He orients them towards each other, so that they wouldn't selfishly look out for themselves alone as private individuals, but also for the good of one another. It's as if He were to say, "Watch out for, be on the look out for, be carefully concerned for yourselves one and all, lest your hearts be weighed down." And this, I think, helps us to think properly about what He's saying in its fullness.

II. Because Jesus knows the great difficulty and heartache and affliction of the end times are such that we can't bear them all alone, nor should we try.

a. Who are we to think otherwise? Especially when Jesus warns against being weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, Who are we to think that we can meet this deadly group of things, this unholy Trinity, as it were, without having our brothers and sisters in Christ looking out for us, invested in our lives, praying for us, and concerned for our wellbeing?

b. These things Christ highlights and says will weigh our hearts down—they certainly work in concert and compound one another. And we'd be fools to try and overcome by ourselves.

i. How easy is it to let all those cares and frustrations and anxieties you have at the end of a long day of work drive you into a state of dissipation, a state of unbridled indulgence in carnal pleasures, especially with respect to alcohol. binge Netflix, binge social media, and while you're at it, enjoy a third or fourth glass of wine, maybe more, until you're swimming in drunkenness. There can be any number of scenarios like this.

ii. And what's worse is when we make a habit of doing these things, weighing our hearts down, all the while we tell everyone at church that we're doing fine and our hearts are lighter than a feather, that we don't need anyone's help nor shall we give them any sense of how desperate our lives are really getting.

iii. I've even known Christians who've attempted to be completely anonymous in the Church, who think they should be able to come on Sunday morning, not say a word to anyone, not look at or even acknowledge anyone, they'll have the Lord's Supper and go straight home thinking this shouldn't cause offense because it's no one else's business, least of all the Pastors. Imagine one of your family members doing that at your Christmas dinner in a couple of weeks. What would you think?

III. Dear ones, we are members one of another here in the body of Christ, in the company of the redeemed. And we need to watch out for each other in these last days lest our hearts be weighed down and we find ourselves ensnared by the day when our redeemer finally comes to us on the clouds of heaven.

a. Now this doesn't mean we don't allow anyone to have some privacy but it does mean that we seek out ways we can bear one another's burdens and to be receptive when we see our brothers and sisters here doing the same...

b. those among us who attempt to show us the self-sacrificing love of our Redeemer, Jesus, the very Son of God Who couldn't stand to see us burdened with our sins and death and in

the captivity of the evil one. So He willingly took it upon Himself to bear our burdens and our griefs. Consider the lengths He went to and the weight He bore on the cross to purchase and win you from these things. So deeply does He love you and watch out for you and your wellbeing.

c. And this is the comfort in Christ's Words, "Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down." You have the assurance that within the household of God, you will have true Christians in the Church who hear His command in this text and are earnestly concerned for you, people who care for you because by the grace of God, the love of Christ dwells richly here among us.

d. And would to God that when you, then, look at each other in the eyes here in this place, as redeemed Christians, as those baptized into His love and into His body here, would that you perceive Your Redeemer in one another. Would that when you look into each other's eyes, you'd know that it's not they who live but Christ Who lives in them and Who moves them to come alongside you to bear your burdens with you and so fulfill His royal law—to weep with you when you weep, to rejoice with you when you rejoice, and if it ever came down to it, even to die for you.

e. Let no Christian think all of this too extreme. If you'd do this for your own flesh and blood family members, what would you not do for all of us whom Christ has incorporated into Himself, making us members of His own flesh and blood through Holy Baptism? What kindness would you withhold from your brothers and sisters in Him? St Paul says in Galatians 6:10, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

f. Do so in the knowledge that soon our Redemption and the One Who bore our burdens will be borne upon the clouds and together we'll be borne into eternal life with God and one another.

May God grant that we watch out for each other in these last days before Christ returns, and to Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.