

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

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.”

Jesus speaks these words in the Gospel reading today to comfort the disciples after he ascended into heaven. Jesus is preparing them for what is to come. He teaches them about the work of the Holy Spirit and the consolation he brings to the church as the Spirit bears witness to Jesus and hands over to them forgiveness, life, and salvation. We think about that today after Ascension Day this past week and looking to next Sunday which is Pentecost as we hear these same words preached to us after the Lord has ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus said, “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.” The thing about the Holy Spirit taught here in God’s word is that his work is to point to Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the Paraclete, literally the one who comes along side of us and comfort us. He does this through the word of God which preaches to you and through the sacraments. The Holy Spirit attaches himself to these means and this is where we see him at work. Searching for the work of the Holy Spirit apart the word and sacraments is against the Bible and not what God teaches us. Hearing this then, from Jesus, the disciples would bear witness about Jesus because they were his eyewitnesses with him from the beginning of his earthly ministry. Their mouths would be the proclamation of Christ as Jesus sent them out at his ascension to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations and making disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching all that Jesus had commanded.

Their work would be the Spirit’s work even as the same Spirit would be their comfort. The term for “bear witness” is the martyr word used in the Scriptures. Some translations will have “testify” or “testimony” and while that is a part of it there’s something important that goes along with this bearing witness. This word relates to a specific content or rather a specific person and it has a sense to it of saying favorable things. When the apostles would bear witness about Jesus their words would be about what Jesus had done even as they saw the events happen with their own eyes. The subject of their preaching was to be always a confession of “fix your eyes on Christ crucified and risen.” This is the same thing the Holy Spirit does as he used the Apostles’ preaching, the Holy Spirit never says, “look at me I’m the Holy Spirit” no, the Holy Spirit says, “look to Jesus and here he is as I am giving him to you.”

It makes sense, then, when Jesus said what he did next. Jesus said, “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.”

These words were to encourage, give them courage as they will endure much for the sake of Christ. The cost is great for following Jesus. The Christian’s life is cruciform; it’s bearing the cross. Suffering and the cross come with faithfulness to the extent that it’s sometimes a mark or sign of it. Jesus tells them in this specific instance they will be put out the synagogues, really excommunicated. Why? It’s because of Jesus and bearing witness to him. St. Peter in the Epistle reading expands on this as he had heard these words of Jesus with his own two ears and experienced first-hand what Jesus said would happen. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you

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share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

The sufferings the Christian endures are for the sake of and in the name of Jesus. This is what makes Christian suffering unique. When we think about the world, what makes our sufferings, as Christians, any different than the Muslim, Jew, or atheist? All these groups suffer illnesses, violence, and all die. Likewise, even things that the church rightly stands up against in our day, moral issues like abortion, homosexuality, or any number of other things one doesn't have to necessarily be Christian to oppose those or be persecuted for it. No, the issue Jesus is talking about here what St. Peter experienced first-hand is precisely because they bore witness to Jesus, they preached Christ.

For us today, it's the same thing. And really you look around and there is no lack of this from the world, the devil, and our own fallen flesh. To confess Jesus and be faithful to his word with our mouths and our lives will bring about suffering upon us and we may even be put out of places because we will not budge on this confession of Christ and his word. In this reading too, Jesus isn't talking about the Romans persecuting them, it's the Jews those who should have known better, they were the ones Jesus came to them, and they rejected him as the Messiah. Not only that, but they also thought they were doing God's work when they expelled the disciples from the synagogues and sought to have them killed. Paul before his conversion, when he was called Saul, thought he was doing godly things when he held the coats of people stoning Stephen to death or when he went off to Damascus to find followers of Jesus and have them arrested. He thought and lived those things but he was wrong.

So, what does all this mean for us today? You aren't apostles who are eyewitnesses to Jesus and sent out into the world to preach and baptized. You aren't first century Jews either who believe in Jesus and are kicked out of your local synagogue for confessing that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. I did see, however, a news story from yesterday that talked about the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem in particular the old city. Christians are increasingly being spit at, kicked, and so many other things by the Jewish population. It used to be that about a quarter of the population there in old Jerusalem was Christian now, due to persecution and other factors, it's down to about two percent. This treatment of Christians pertains to residents, visitors, clergy, lay, adults, and children.

But what about you? How does this all apply to you? Suffering for the sake of Christ and confessing him doesn't always look something public and contentious. It's seen in other ways in our daily lives. Think about how this confession of Christ and his church occurs in your life. Look at the different circumstances in your life where you are faced with a choice; either sacrifice for God, his word, and his church and suffer the consequences or go along with whatever direction or course you are being swayed by and these decisions, activities, and people now have taken priority over you and your lives. In many ways how you see being put out or "excommunicated" occurs as you miss out on promotions or opportunities at work. You can't play in a game or league, or you are no longer welcome in a certain group of friends or organization. Examine your life and ask what are you confessing in your life and what are you sacrificing for and what is the cost?

Listen again to these words of God from the beginning of the Epistle reading, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

God instructs you to know who you are. You are the body of Christ, the church, and as such you belong to the Lord. You are to be united in your confession of he who has bought you with the price of his own blood. You

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are to have a mindset that realizes the end of things is at hand ever since the ascension of Jesus. As Christians you are taught to see and understand the world differently. Don't lose your head about the goings on in life. Don't cower in fear but be self-controlled. Do these things for the sake of your prayers. Turn your gaze outward to Christ and pray to God at times and all circumstances for wisdom, courage, steadfastness, and for love of one another.

In the Old Testament reading, God describes what he would do in Christ and who you are as his people, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."

With that, know the days are short and see the example of the disciples who endured much for the sake of Christ. Take seriously this confession of Christ and his word because these are the things of eternity, they are unchanging amid all that changes at an instant. Examine your life and see that you have sinned in thought, word, and deed by what you have done and left undone. Turn from your sin and repent. If you suffer for being faithful, then count it as a blessing and rejoice that you have Christ and all that he has done and gladly have his name placed upon you. Whatever the case and circumstance, God calls you fix your eyes on Jesus. He calls you to go to where there are comfort and peace. He calls you to hear his word and receive his gifts knowing that these are where there are forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Dear saints of God, Jesus speaks to you today. He says, "Peace be with you, your sin is forgiven. Take heart dear child of God I am yours and you are mine." Ascended to the right hand of God Jesus rules and reigns as King which means he is very near and here right now. The Holy Spirit is at work in this place, and you have all that Jesus has accomplished freely and fully for you. Fear not for your Lord has made peace with the Father by his blood and he has conquered sin, death, and the devil. This is the last Sunday of the Easter season, and you gather as people who have eternal life. That means something every day and especially during this time in your life. Baptized into Christ you share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. There's nothing that has changed or will change about that. These are God's promises to you even now and you look forward to that day. Until that day you as the people of God hold fast this confession, this hope, will all steadfastness and endurance. You are not alone as the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel and gathered you together as the body of Christ. The consolation of God is yours and you have peace, a clear conscience, and a new life that lives in the world as people who know the future and the glory to come. Rejoice in Christ and confess him who is your life now and forever.

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