

Jubilate

3 May, Anno Domini 2020

St. John 16:16-22

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In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

It's hard to see Jesus on the cross, bruised and bloodied. It's hard to listen to the insults and the sound of the hammer driving in the nails. It's hard to hear God's Son cry out to His Father only to be rejected and crushed. It's hard to imagine that anyone would do that to another person, let alone someone whose entire life was spent preaching the grace and mercy of God and healing all kinds of afflictions. It's hard because there is nothing that looks less like God is at work than Jesus being blasphemed, mocked, and crucified.

And given how hard it is to consider even today, imagine how dark that day must have been for disciples. Sure, Jesus didn't make many friends with His preaching. But this was different. At no other time had the authorities actually arrested Jesus. And Jesus wasn't resisting. He was going to let them follow through with their desires even though they were completely and in every way unjust. He didn't defend Himself. He didn't call down the legions of angels to fight for Him. He didn't try to escape. He went out and met His betrayer. He stood silently like a sheep before the shearers. This little while of Jesus' Passion was going to be the longest while of the disciples' lives as everything they believed seemed to come crashing down around them. Their Teacher and Lord was destroyed as a criminal. They had run from Him like cowards in His darkest hour. Whatever joy they may have had was suddenly ripped away from them as the seal was set on the tomb.

And if there was any doubt about the fallen condition of the world, we don't have to look any further than Good Friday. The world loved what it saw. Nothing could have pleased it more. It didn't matter that everyone knew Jesus was completely innocent. He had to die. He ate with prostitutes and tax collectors. He healed on the Sabbath. He condemned those who appeared outwardly to be the most righteous. And who were those who took the greatest pleasure in the death of Jesus of Nazareth - those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt. Such people despise grace and any who would dare to challenge their righteousness. "How dare you suggest that I am evil! Don't you see how good I am? I'm certainly nothing like those sinners over there."

The self-righteous world has its finest hour of joy when the mercy and grace of God are obscured, when it is left free to strut around unchecked, puffing out its chest with pride at how tolerant and inclusive it is. In its folly, the only sin is claiming that there is sin and all who dare to do so need to be silenced. It does not tolerate being told that it is not its own god. Nations and peoples engage in a relentless yet hopeless war to throw off the rule of the true God. They fight to live outside the created order, contrary to the commandments of God, and free to indulge every sinful, perverted, prideful desire of their corrupted hearts. In our own day that means insisting that mothers and fathers are unnecessary because we have experts. It means mocking as backwards and ignorant any who disagree with the dubious science of evolution which robs humanity of any actual value as created and redeemed by God. It means using the state to silence the church by defining Christian doctrine as hate speech in hopes of intimidating it into cooperation. And Satan puts on the frontlines of this battle field all kinds of false teachers, many of whom claim to be speaking the Word of God even though everything they say is essentially the opposite of what God has said.

The world is indeed having its time of rejoicing. The Church looks pretty beat up. Some think the church is irrelevant because we have now attained such an elevated level of scientific knowledge. We read of studies showing that church attendance is dropping precipitously while the number of those identifying religiously as “Nones” is on the rise. Even the current pandemic is providing opportunity for those who don’t believe or understand the Gospel to put pressure on the church to change its practices because they unnecessarily put people’s lives at risk. “You can practice your faith as long as we judge it to be good and safe for you. Besides, what can be more important than staying alive?” We are only beginning to taste what many of the saints who have gone before us have had to endure as those who bear the Name of Christ and would confess Him openly before the world. The world thinks it’s winning and overcoming Christ and His Church.

But they are wrong. The sinful world’s time of rejoicing is coming to an end. The Lord Jesus was only dead for a time. He endured all the necessary suffering but then it came to an end. And as the disciples came to clearly understand, Jesus’ suffering was not His defeat. Far from it. It was actually His victory. What the world and the devil rejoiced in and gloated over was their own defeat. Death had been swallowed up. The sins of the world had been paid for by the shedding of the Blood of God’s only Son. Human eyes couldn’t see it. All that we could see was a brutalized man, executed by the Roman authorities. All we could see was the chief priests and the elders and the scribes getting what they wanted. All we could see was a religious movement meeting a very unfortunate end. All the disciples could

see was their hopes being strangely and cruelly dashed. So much for the kingdom of God when the king is dead.

But the King is not dead anymore. He is risen! He is risen, indeed! The soldiers guarding the tomb saw it. The women saw it. Peter and the other disciples saw it. Over 500 of the disciples saw it. They saw the crucified Jesus risen from the dead. The stone was rolled away. The seal broken. The tomb empty. The hope of the devil and his world dashed forever. The hour of the disciples' joy has begun and no one could take it away from them because no one could undo the resurrection. The joy of the disciples is eternal because the crucified Christ is the risen Christ and the risen Christ is the ascended Christ whose enemies - sin, death, and the devil - all lie vanquished under His feet. And with the nail marks in His hands and the mark of the spear in His sides, this same living Jesus will return in glory to put an eternal end to the suffering of all those who take refuge in Him and who receive in faith the righteousness that He bestows.

But until that day, Christ's little flock, the Holy Christian Church must continue to endure its little while of suffering. It must continue to suffer the hatred of the world and the relentless attack of Satan. Christians must endure the sorrow of still bearing sinful flesh with its passions that war against the soul. There is still disease and addiction and anxiety. There is still anger. There are still hurting marriages and families. But only for a little while. The suffering of God's children is not eternal. The day of the unmitigated joy of the Baptized lies ahead. Just as Christ had to endure the cross before attaining the glory of the resurrection, so to must we endure the cross of this world before we are able to bask in the eternal joy of Church Triumphant.

That is why our Lord has graciously bestowed upon His Church the precious Means of Grace. By the pure apostolic preaching our hearts are drawn away from the love of the things of this corrupted and passing world and toward the eternal things - the righteousness of Christ and promise of the Holy Spirit. On the night when He was betrayed, He gave to you His Body and His Blood as a continual pledge of your forgiveness and resurrection as often as you eat and drink. These gifts are to be your joy during this little time of sorrow when the darkness of the world seems to be closing in, when all earthly props are giving way, when chaos and madness are swirling all around. In these gifts and through them we have joy now because of the incomprehensible joy that awaits us when the Lord Jesus returns.

Dear Christian, do not be fooled by what you see around you or even in your own conscience. No matter how hard the world will seek to convince you otherwise, Christ Jesus has indeed risen from the dead. He is the victor over death and you with Him. And one day your faith in Him will be vindicated before the eyes of the whole world. On that day, your joy will be complete and eternal and our songs of great jubilation will never be silenced.

In the Name of +Jesus.