

Luke 23:27-43
Last Sunday of the Church Year
(Christ the King / Sunday of Fulfillment)
November 23, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold the days are coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us," and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You might wish that we would end the church year with a more *joyous* text. Understandably, the Return of Christ and the Last Day can sometimes seem terrifying, and don't we Christians want to be able to take *comfort* on this Sunday that hearkens to that great and final day? Last week, we heard Jesus warn: "See that you are not led astray!" ... but then he ended with words of *comfort*: "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near!" What comfort!

But where is the comfort in *today's* text? What do we make of it? In fact, at first glance, it seems a rather odd text to meditate on Christ's Return: Christ, on his way to the cross, says to the weeping women, "Daughters, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." On the cross, he says quite uniquely to the

thief, “Today, you will be with me in Paradise.” So, how are we supposed to draw comfort from that?

The answer is really two-fold:

The first answer is that, maybe we shouldn’t always *only* look for comfort. Sometimes, the Christian ought be sober-minded to receive exhortation, not *just* comfort. We struggle with that because we live in a society and age in which ‘feeling bad’ and ‘personal pain’ and ‘fear’ and anxiety are much greater evils to us than objective threats of death, God’s divine judgment, and eternal condemnation. For example, pastors regularly lament together that when they warn people to humble themselves before God’s divine judgment and repent of sins (and, therefore, what euphoric joy should be ours in God’s forgiveness of those sins!), it’s not uncommon that people deflect and say that the call to repentance “hurt their feelings, sounded mean-spirited, wasn’t gentle enough” ... as if that somehow means the person’s sin before God and neighbor is now excused, like some mistrial because of prosecutorial misconduct. Or, another example, in my various roles within our district, I’ve assisted in various occasions in which the need for repentance was deflected and re-cast as the need for “mutual healing.” No, sometimes, we just need to be sober-minded about exhortation, for the Day of the Lord is coming and – as we heard Jesus ask in our text a few weeks ago: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” What

does that faith sound like – not some love affair with Jesus!, but repentant humility before the holy God.

That doesn't mean exhortation is *always* about repentance and forgiveness; but it is always to be sober-minded about objective truth, not just about your feelings. In today's text, Jesus says, "Daughters of Jerusalem... weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold *the days are coming*... For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" And, that cryptic rhetorical question at the end there is believed by many scholars to be Jesus' warning that if the Romans do this to the innocent, what will they do to the Jews deemed guilty of rebellion (in 70AD)? That's the weighty truth of such exhortation, isn't it?... That the enemies of Christ and His Church will – in the age of the Gentiles – seem unstoppable in their pursuit to overcome Christ and all who hope in Him.

Thus, "Do not weep for me, but for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days **are** coming..." Last week, did we not hear the very specific prophecy regarding the desolation of Jerusalem... a prophecy in which Jesus said, "Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! (Sound familiar? We heard it again today!) For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people!"

Now that sober consideration leads us to ask the question, "*Why* does Jesus spend so much time prophesying the overthrow of

Jerusalem? Is it to give an analogy of what will come upon the Church?" Actually, probably not ... for (in last week's reading) Jesus used the word "desolation" for Jerusalem, which will never be true of Christ's Church.

Perhaps Christ fixates everyone on Jerusalem's desolation to focus us on the destruction of *the temple*, as Jesus says these words on the way to Golgotha and his messianic mission to replace the *stone* temple with the temple of his own *body*: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again." That seems to tie in nicely.

But, consider that Christ may prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem simply to give us a very plain, concrete example (*easy* to see its fulfillment 40 years later) that all His prophetic words are trustworthy and true. Consider that point: we very easily believe Jesus' **moral** words, his good teachings about Christian love toward neighbor and childlike faith in the heavenly Father. And we somewhat easily believe (perhaps wrestle sometimes) with his **sacramental** words regarding forgiveness of sins and spiritual benefits He promises in baptism and absolution and the Holy Supper. But, do we actually believe Jesus' **prophetic** words, namely regarding the End? Do we live daily life as if the call to stay awake for His return is some mere scare-tactic / manipulation to control the weak-minded, or as if the resurrection of all flesh is a fairytale ending, the Church's version of every story's "good guys always win" conclusion? Or, do we live daily life with the sober-minded certainty – the

certainty based on Jesus' prophetic promises – that this shall come to pass, just as He said it would?

Now, that's all the **first** answer as to how we might hear this text: divine exhortation. But there *is* a second answer ("two-fold"); namely, there *is* comfort to be had! – an objective comfort that can even produce a subjective comfort!

The objective comfort begins with the remarkable fact that – as Jesus was going to his death – He was speaking of His glorious reappearing on the Last Day. Consider that: it truly is remarkable that during Holy Week, Jesus taught about and focused on the *End...* not the cross, but the Second Coming. That was not just his focus as he taught on the Tuesday of Holy Week, but also in the Upper Room, and – as this morning's text shows – even as he labored along Jerusalem's streets toward his crucifixion.

His death was coming... but He spoke as one looking beyond, with *certainty* in His resurrection and His ascension and the second coming. And He could speak with certainty in His resurrection and the second coming because He *knew* that His sacrifice on the cross would be sufficient, the atonement would be complete, the Messiah's work would fulfill the Father's will, sin would be undone, death would be destroyed... and, if Death would be destroyed, it would of course not hold him, and he would rise, ascend to the right hand of the Father, sacramentally care for His Church, and one day come again to judge the living and the dead.

So, Jesus – even during Holy Week, even on the road to Golgotha – looked ahead with certainty to His second coming.

And yet, that's not even the *greatest* objective comfort of this text! The *greatest* objective comfort is that Jesus was on the road to Golgotha in the first place. Do we take that for granted? What comfort!... that the sacrifice of the Lamb of God was coming to its completion, and all the prophetic promises of God were coming to fulfillment, and the Messiah was going to die on the cross *for you*, just as God had said He would.

It's an odd comfort, to be sure. Were the women not *right* to weep? Would that not be our natural response? Would we be so heartless as to see what our sins were doing to our Lord and be stone-cold indifferent to His suffering? And yet, he went *willingly*; and He fulfilled His Father's will *gladly*; and He rejoiced that His substitute sacrifice would redeem us *fully*.

In short, the work of the cross produces not only redemption to be distributed in the forgiveness of sins; it also produces the certainty of the resurrection and the confidence of the Christian to look forward to the Last Day by raising one's head... because our redemption's full *realization* (and faith's *vindication*) – the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting – draw nigh. It's the *cross* of Christ – not just the *teaching* of Christ – that gives us the certainty that the head that once was crowned in thorns is crowned in glory now.

Now, there is even another level of *subjective* comfort here (that you can feel in your heart), that flows from this great truth and can be seen in this text. As Jesus goes to the cross, he *thinks on them, on the daughters of Jerusalem...* not just as a matter of salvation, but thinks on the suffering this world will bring them: “Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” Sometimes, we worry that Jesus can only sympathize with our need for salvation, as if – in answer to all our other suffering – he would simply always say, “Weep not! – for I am justifying you!” (That *should* be great comfort for us; but in the face of the world’s problems, we sometimes sinfully interpret it situationally irrelevant comfort for us.)

But Jesus specifically *sympathizes* with the daughters of Jerusalem as the future ‘victims’ of the wrath of the unrighteous: ‘What will *they* (the unrighteous Romans) do when the wood is dry?’ So, with the women, he sympathizes, as One who had recently wept when faced with the death and tomb of a dear friend, Lazarus... as One who in the very midst of knowing what it meant to endure, to suffer... as one who had even told his dearest disciples the very evening before this text, “In this world you *will* have tribulation.”

The Lord *knows* how to sympathize with you; he knows what crosses you bear, what trials you face, what daily life hardships you endure, even what enemies and what temporal death await you. As accurately as he could speak to the desolation of the City that was

coming upon the unsuspecting daughters of Jerusalem, he can speak to whatever is coming upon unsuspecting *us*. But, are we to live in constant anxiety of such things, any more than we are to live cowering in the face of the Last Day?... when the world's judgment means the Christian's vindication!

Despite all the suffering of this present life, we need not cower on the dawn of the judgment, for the righteous may straighten up and raise their heads... a Christ-distinction from those unrighteous who will cower and seek to hide their faces. Indeed, Jesus says of *them*, *They* will say to the rocks "Fall on us" and "Cover us."

That's not a description Jesus randomly 'made up' there in that moment on the road to Golgotha. The weeping daughters of Jerusalem would have known that quote, for they would have first heard it in the prophets, as Hosea warned of false-hearted Israel and impenitent Samaria, "And they shall say to the mountains, 'Cover us' and to the hills, 'Fall on us'" ... and as Isaiah echoed, "Enter into the rock and hide in the dust *from the terror of the Lord* and from the splendor of His majesty." And that which the prophets first proclaimed, and that which Jesus renewed in the weeping women's ears, so also the vision of Revelation echoes in its anticipation of the End:

Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains,

calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

Notice – for the unrighteous, they fear the *wrath* of the Lamb. And yet, *immediately* following that scene of John’s Revelation comes this comfort for the Church and her dear Christians – the elder tells John: “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The *same* blood of the Lamb the sight over which the daughters of Jerusalem wept... the same blood of the Lamb that dripped from Golgotha and, if you will, the angels gathered in the chalice, that you might receive the fullness of the Lord’s invitation, “Take, drink, this is my blood”... yes, by that blood, those coming out of the great tribulation have been made white in his righteousness, that they might serve God day and night in his temple, Revelation says.

How did *Malachi* say it in our Old Testament Reading: “Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who *serves* [God] (“they serve Him in his temple day and night”) and does *not* serve Him.” One who *serves Him*... those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb, the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. And that’s a distinction you shall see with your own eyes when the Son of Man

comes upon the clouds in great glory and reveals the sons of God, separating the peoples as a shepherd separates his sheep from the goats.

So, your hope is not in vain... even if we must bear our crosses and live daily life with the wicked always seeming to thumb their nose at God without any recourse. Nevertheless, because of the saving cross of Christ and its sufficiency, we may bear our own crosses without fear of what is coming, without tears of sorrow at the wicked's seemingly inevitable victory at our expense... but, rather, we may bear our crosses with defiant confidence in our own resurrection and our vindication, which now may seem distant on the horizon, but will come as suddenly and unexpectedly as a thief in the night, so that – already today – we can raise up our heads for our redemption draw nigh.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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