

Jesus says “**A little while, and you will see Me no longer.**” Earlier He had said “**I am going to the Father.**” The disciples are confused, they admit as much to one another. Jesus, knowing their confusion, gives an explanation: “**Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful.**” “**Truly, truly.**” That’s a translation of “Amen, amen.” We use that word at the end of our prayers to confess our confidence that what we ask is heard by our Father in heaven. It’s a sure thing, the Father has promised to hear us. Jesus uses it at the beginning of His statements. It indicates that what is about to come out of His mouth is something that you can particularly bank on.

They can count on Jesus’ words that they will be sorrowful while the world rejoices. The world, that is, the powers of unbelief and the tools of Satan’s machinations, will shriek and smile with glee. In short order Jesus will be taken away from them, hauled off from one phony trial to another, and even when it is plain as day that He is innocent, having no guilt in Him deserving of death, He will be hung up on the cross as a common criminal. And when it is all done, Jesus will lie dead in a tomb, cut off from the land of the living, while the leaders of the Jews will be satisfied that Jesus has been silenced. Pilate can breathe a sigh of relief that trouble will not rear its head. And the disciples are locked in hiding and scared. Their sorrow is expressed so tragically in the words of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “**We had hoped that [Jesus] was the one to redeem Israel.**”

Jesus is preparing the disciples for what it is coming. There’s no escaping it. “**Truly, truly,**” Amen, amen, “**You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.**” Imagine what that Good Friday night, what all that Saturday, was like for the disciples. Perhaps you don’t have to imagine. Many of you are well-acquainted with the sorrow accompanies life in this world, suffering major loss, the almost unbearable shock and pain, the simplest memory prompts weeping and lamentation. And the world urges you to just get over it. In addition to the waves of grief and the poor attempts to comfort offered by others, Satan attacks as well. Imagine the field day he had with Peter during those three days! Jesus Himself had said to Peter: “**Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat.**” We might render that today as, “Chew you up and spit you out.” The Evil One has his sights set on you as well. Times of sorrow present ample opportunity to get you to doubt God, to question His goodness, to abandon all hope in Jesus as the long-promised Redeemer of Israel.

We have a new appreciation for this text as we compare it to what the Church has been enduring these past weeks. In a sense, many have been unable to see the Lord. Now, it is true, that God is always present through His Word, is united to His people by their baptism into Him and by faith. And yet, there is something given here that is unique to this place. Places matter. God comes to us in a place, in His body and blood. And consider the very word “church.” It means “assembly” the public gathering together of Christ’s body. Yet this is precisely what has been unable to happen in many places, is still unable to happen in many places, and will continue to be unable to happen. As much as we give thanks for the availability of technology to get the Word of God out, any Christian recognizes that it is no substitute for the public gathering of Christ’s people, and there are some things that you just can’t do over the internet. Many of our fellow believers long to return here, and their absence for so long is painful for them and for us.

As much as we are pained in this time, what is all the more bewildering for us is to see those who are opposed to the church openly showing glee over this situation. We hear of officials leveling totalitarian restrictions specifically against churches, or presuming to determine the how and when of administering Christ’s Sacraments, as though when Our Lord Jesus took “the cup,” and said “drink of it all of you,” He added an exemption clause for health authorities. We expect such things to happen in various parts of the world, but not in this country, where those who make such decisions are to be accountable to the public whom they serve.

How do we approach such things as this? We are called to honor everyone, particularly those in authority over us. St. Peter in the epistle even says “**Honor the emperor.**” That is, the pagan Roman Emperor, likely Nero. It was Nero who initiated the first large scale persecution of the Church, in which Peter himself was martyred. But even as we honor those in government because of the authority of their position which is given by God, Peter also

admonishes us to **“Fear God.”** *We fear, love, and trust in God above all things.* When Caesar commands us to sin, or when he presumes to speak concerning the things that are God’s and entrusted to Christ’s Church, we honor Caesar, we are always to pray for governing authorities, but we obey God.

In this life, fear, love, and trust in God above all things often means sorrow for the Church. Every Christian bears sorrow of one kind or another in this life, and the most painful are those which are suffered precisely for being a Christian. Christians unable to enter the Lord’s house suffer far more than those who are simply unable to go to the zoo or library. They suffer not a mere inconvenience and frustration, but are unable to “see” the Lord whom they long to be with. This suffering can be used by Satan to create bitterness against the Church’s enemies, to foster apathy towards the things of God, to inculcate the notion of spiritual independence.

What is the answer to this? What is the comfort that Jesus gives to His disciples, not just in the Upper Room, but today? **“You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.” “You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”** Their sorrow over their Lord being taken away in death will turn to joy. This also is prefaced by “Truly, truly.” It’s a sure thing. And why is it that sorrow turns to joy? What gives this certainty? Jesus says **“I will see you again.”** A man who will, in short time, be dead, will see them again. This is not Jesus’ version of the popular attempt to comfort mourners: “They’re looking down on us.” Jesus is talking about seeing with the eye, the physical organ of perception. The thing that would normally quickly rot away, is going to look upon them. Jesus speaks here of His resurrection. *That* is the source of joy.

And so as we heard on the first Sunday after Easter, with the risen Lord in their midst, seeing His hands and side, hearing His word of peace, the disciples are glad. Mary Magdalene, weeping outside the tomb over the Lord’s missing body, has joy in her Lord coming to her, and saying her name. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus, not just emotionally downcast, but having lost their faith, are seen by the Lord. He gives them joy as He joins them, preaches His Word to them, igniting their faith, and then made Himself known to them in the Breaking of the Bread.

It is the preaching and sacramental presence of the risen Lord Jesus that gives His people joy. Here the one who bore all our sin, died for it, and rose again, comes to be with us. In the midst of our pains and crosses comes the one who bore the pain of the cross and overcame it. The worst that can be done to a person has been done to Him and He has triumphed. That victory is given already in midst of this life and its sorrows. You enjoy it already in part by faith. God does grant comfort and joy to His people. Because Jesus lives. Sin, Satan, and death, have already been put to flight. It is not a free-for-all for the Evil One. We mourn but not as those who have no hope. Peter’s sorrow and bitter weeping over denying his Lord was consoled by faith.

And in hope we look to the day when our joy will be full and complete, when it will never be weakened or taken away by trials, when we will sing with the Psalmist: **“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing...O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever!”**