

Sermon for Exaudi Sunday – John 15:26-16:4

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

The Church fights too much. We're the Church Militant, and that's what militant means. We're not the Church Triumphant, not yet. So it's necessary to fight. Heresies must come. False doctrines and false teachers must be guarded against. You'll have other sufferings and distress. No one escapes alive.

The Lord said, "...When the Holy Spirit comes, whom I will send 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." Bearing witness to the truth is what Jesus did on earth. Speaking the truth caused Him suffering, pain, and death. Christ sent the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the same truth: the Savior died for all and forgives all sins. The Holy Spirit defends the Word of God in the Church Militant today, even as you confess God's Word as true by the same Holy Spirit.

Bearing witness to the truth is painful. It's distressing. It causes divisions in the Church Universal, in friendships, in family. Who gladly tells their family that they believe in the 6-day creation? Who boldly stands up and tells their friends or co-workers that practicing homosexuality is a sin and harmful to all people? They will call you backwards. They will call you a bigot. They will call you stupid. That hurts. That's fighting for the Church militant.

Christ our Lord suffered for the truth. He faced scorn and rejection. In the midst of trial and tribulation, He glorified God. The Savior's glory was found hidden in suffering, hidden in death. Since this was true for the life of Jesus, would it not be true in the lives of His disciples- even His disciples today?

Prayers such as that "God would be glorified in my life," or that "I could give glory to God" are dangerous prayers. Why? Because heavenly glory on this side of eternity looks like shame. Cross and suffering-- the world counts these as failure and folly. But for you who bear witness to the truth, they are your glory. The words of St. Peter, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though some strange thing were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted by the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." If anyone of you suffers as a Christian, don't be ashamed.

When Christ sends the Holy Spirit, He will comfort you in your suffering and shame. How? The Spirit bears witness through the Word. The Word will comfort you. When the devil intimidates and frightens you, when the world imprisons you and kills you, the Spirit and the Word will comfort you. He will give you the courage to bear witness and speak. "When they deliver you over [to kings and princes], do not be

anxious about how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." {Matthew 10:19-20} When everything is gone—house, property, honor, body, goods, fame, child, and wife, still the “Lord Jesus Christ ... was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.” He did it for you, even when everything else is gone. He did it for you and all the baptized. Of what should you be afraid? The Lord is on your side, fear not! The Lord is your light and your salvation, whom should you fear? The Lord is the strength of your life, of whom should you be afraid? Entrust your soul to God’s loving hands. His hands await you, carrying you through this present suffering to Heaven’s glory. And we pray for that day we all may enter into this glory.

The earnest and fervent prayer of early Christian worship was for the Lord to quickly return to His church. Eager anticipation marked every Sunday. Every resurrection celebration could be the day that Christ the Bridegroom would fulfill His promise to His Bride the Church. The Lord said that he would return to rescue His faithful people. Sunday after Sunday went by, still no Jesus. Months. Years. Some of the faithful died without seeing the return of Christ. What would happen to them? Was Christ coming back? The Apostles reassured the first Christians that Christ would return, but not necessarily in the immediate future. What kept the church looking hopefully for the Bridegroom’s return? The same thing that does today. Sunday after Sunday, the faithful gathered and remembered the Bridegroom: “Take eat, this is My Body. Take drink, this is My Blood. Do this is remembrance of me.” Century after century, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ built her entire worship on and around the Communion with her Lord. Sunday after Sunday, she remembered her Lord in the upper room before His death. He is again truly present with you in Flesh and Blood. In this sacrament, you see Christ again. In this sacrament you hear His Words again. In this sacrament, He tells of His coming again in glory. In this sacrament you look forward again to the hour of His return. This is the truth to which we cling. This is the truth for which we fight.

The church fights too much. And I’m glad she does, for in this place, there’s something of great worth for which we fight. Today we are embattled for the truth in the Church Militant, but when Christ returns, we rejoice in the Church Triumphant. Here is true joy. In heaven, no one will kill you, slander you, or tell lies about you and what you believe. Here, the Son acknowledges you before the Father’s throne and prays for you. Here, the Lord stands to welcome you into His Kingdom of peace which has no end. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✨BJF✨