

Sermon for Jubilate (Easter IV) – John 16:16-22

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

“A little while and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” Jesus’ words here are an apt example of the Scriptures for us. The Bible is the depth of water in which a large elephant must swim, but a little lamb can walk through on foot. They are so mysterious that man can live out all his days and still not fully comprehend them. They are so simple that a child can grasp the message. God’s Son became man, suffered death on a cross, but rose again, and now sits at the right hand of the Father as Lord over all. In Divine and human natures, He now governs and preserves us against the Devil’s wrath and power of the whole world. We cannot hear this enough, much less understand it enough for it is truth immeasurable and inexhaustible.

Two little whiles Christ talks about for us. One, “a little while and you will see me no longer” (He was crucified, died, and buried) and two, “and again a little while and you will see me” (He rose again from the dead on the third day). The world loves that first little while. When Christ is stamped out, when His Word is forgotten and trampled, when the coming generations know little about God and virtually nothing of what’s in the Bible. In this, world has its little while of joy and celebration. The devil’s joy rejoices in someone else’s harm. He delights in another’s hardship. And we’ve known this “joy” too. We’re happy when things go badly for people we don’t like. We’ve lived and thrived on other people’s harm. It’s the devil’s beautiful fruit when our envious hearts are sad when things go well for someone else. We’d be glad to lose one eye if it meant our enemies had none. Repent. Don’t glory in someone else’s shame. It is the devil’s delight.

Have we not all too much listened to the father of lies? Have we not all too much trusted that he is our true father and that this world is our true home? This world is corrupted by sin, disease, and corruption. It is not our home. And the devil is not our father. God is. He made us His children in Holy Baptism so that we will live forever with Him.

Nevertheless, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful ...” The devil and the world have their moment. The vocations which God has ordained for us (father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker), if we try to lead a God-pleasing life according to them, suffering and sorrow comes with the territory. Try to do what is right and the devil will be right there to harass you. Marriage, parenting, even earning a living, do these piously and faithfully and the devil will remind you it’s still his “little while.” Our days are long and difficult when we face our hardship is too much, when our hearts will never mend, when our faith feels like it’s crumbling. In the midst of it, it’s not a little while, but a great while, even feeling like an eternal while. It’s hard to see anything differently.

Yet we must trust Christ's words: "... a little while and you will see Me," and "...your sorrow will turn to joy." In a little while sorrow will pass away. In a little while he will bring you His resurrection victory. So learn from Christ the patience of Christian endurance. Learn that your hope is in Him alone. Learn to offer up all your sufferings to Christ as sacrifices of praise and glory.

All that is to say: learn from Christ to shout for joy in the midst of this broken world. That is central to today's worship. Amidst these difficult words of Jesus and St. Peter about the harshness of the world and the Christian struggle in this life, [the Introit and the Gospel Verse] tell us to [shout for joy]. They don't tell us to plaster on a plastic smile and just be happy - that is another thing. Being happy comes and goes. Joy runs deeper than happiness. Joy knows how to frown and cry. It's not fleeting. Our Joy is Christ. He is our Rock and Foundation on which we stand. So long as we have Him, we have the promise of eternal life, of a blessed ending at the finish of a hard-fought struggle, of going home to our Father in heaven.

As Jesus Himself says, it's like a woman in labor: for that time all is pain and sorrow caused by the curse of the Law. Recall that Eve's pain in childbearing was the result of her fall into sin. So likewise with the whole Christian life, this world is broken and cursed due to the transgression of the Law and so is now full of hardship and pain. But like a woman in child labor we struggle toward a joyous goal. In the moment, no one can say whether she will recover or even die. All is anguish and anxiety, with no foreseeable end. But everything is concentrated into that moment when the child is born into the world. Sadness will not last forever. It will turn into joy. When our completion is reached, when we can look at our lives from the other side of them, then we will see the labor and the struggle transformed by the grace and joy of Christ.

So in your struggles and hardships, in bearing your crosses, and learning to repent with eyes toward Christ, you have this sure hope of eternal joy. And what is more, you even have a foretaste of your Father's kingdom. For Jesus has not left you as orphans. He has not abandoned you. No. He comes to you again and again and even today as He will feed you with His very Self, as He pours into you the Body and Blood that were broken and shed in His great struggle against the world. This Sacrament of the Altar is the sustenance and nourishment for us. As we labor against the world and long for the world to come, Christ is our salvation and He brings life everlasting. If you feel beaten up by the world; if you feel hemmed in on every side by suffering; if you sense your brokenness and know you need healing: come receive your loving Lord. Let him who has overcome the world fill you with his life - and you shall overcome it too, and your sorrow will turn to joy, and no one can take that joy away from you. Amen.

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