

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

“These things I have spoken to you”, saith the Lord, “that you should not be made to stumble.” Before going to His cross, before filling the tomb with His sinless Body, before taking up His life again, before ascending into heaven, before He took His rightful place at the Right Hand of the Father, the Lord comforted His disciples. He warned them. He spoke to them that they be preserved in the coming persecution. He knew what lay ahead.

As recipients of the Apostolic Teaching, the ceiling of our church is adorned with the symbols the Church has assigned to the Thirteen. Those symbols are above you, gilded in gold, and they recount the persecution of which the Lord warned: arrows, clubs, spears, swords, saws, and crosses. As the Lord warned, so did the persecution come. But the disciples were not persecuted simply for being themselves. They were martyred because the hands that shed their blood were the hands of sinful men, men who knew neither the Father nor the Son.

In a very real way, you are children of the Holy Apostles. And so you sit under their symbols today. It is their doctrine that you read and hear, their accounts of the life of your Lord that inform your faith. They, and their disciples, recorded the Scriptures they penned by the Holy Spirit, the saving Scriptures that you hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest – for that is what faith does, that is what faith hungers for – Christ, the center of both Testaments and of every Book of Holy of Scripture.

So the Holy Apostles, those who the Lord described as being with Him from the beginning, and their disciples, are the inspired interpreters of the meaning of the Words of Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets. And they are the human amanuenses and interpreters of the Words of Christ, the Words that your Lord taught your fathers in the faith, the Words you are taught from them, Words meant to give you strength and hope in times of tribulation.

As theological children of the Apostles, which is to say as children of God by faith in Christ, you too are heirs of the Promises the Lord made to the ones He sent. They are Promises for you, you who have not seen but yet have believed, you who hold the One, Holy, catholic and Apostolic faith, the orthodox faith, the faith presented in the Lutheran Confessions, saving faith in Jesus Christ.

In this there is great comfort, dear Christian. For you can trust the Word you have received, the Holy Scriptures. You can trust that it is the very Word of God, unaltered and inerrant, never contradicting itself, for it is the very Word of Truth, the Word inspired by the Holy Spirit. You can trust, that as your Lord promised, “These are they which testify of Me.” You can trust that the Spirit of the Living God inspired the human authors to write the very Words given them by God, and so are the Scriptures God’s Words, God’s Words for you.

You can trust that believing that Word, there is forgiveness, salvation and life for you. In that there is comfort now, comfort in tribulation, comfort in times of trouble, comfort in the sure knowledge of the resurrection of all flesh and the life of the world to come.

But just as you are the theological children of the Apostles, so too are you surrounded by the children of those who slew the Apostles. And as in the Apostolic age, those who reject God far

outnumber those who believe in Him. So all around you, you see the signs. These are the days in which the Prophet Isaiah foresaw the hail coming down on the forest, and the city being brought low in humiliation. These are the days of the Church Militant. The Lord warned the Apostles that they would be put out of synagogues, and put to death. He warned them that those who slew them would think they were doing a good thing, even rendering service to God. And so it is today.

For a time, we are spared martyrdom in our country, but among us the persecution of Christians has greatly increased, and in many countries Christians are martyred. In our country God is mocked, ridiculed and denied by the so called “intellectuals” of our time. Fallen men teach that happenstance, luck, billions of years, a tadpole and an ape or two are your creator; rather than a Holy God. The superiority of man over beast they explain by “evolution” and “natural selection,” rather than man being the capstone of God’s creation, into whom God breathed life, the reason the sixth day was “very good.”

“Male and female made He them” Moses records of that sixth day. But now the fallen world rejects that basic fact, male and female, deluding the people with the lie that they can choose their gender and change it on a whim. God said, “It is not good for man to be alone”, and for man God made woman, and woman only. The perversities of this fallen world are simply a rejection of God as Creator of all things, another sinful attempt to “be like God”.

And anyone who speaks clearly the Word of God, the Word of Love, the Word of Salvation, is accused of “hate speech”. And surrounded by such godless teaching, inundated with anthropocentric doctrines, daily overwhelmed with the perversity and debauchery of the unbeliever, grossly outnumbered by secularists, bombarded by television and radio that teaches the doctrines of sinful men, perhaps you have silently wondered whether God’s Word is the absolute Truth.

Repent. Forsake the sinful imaginings of the fallen men who deceive the world. Repent. Reject the false teachings of the one who first said “Has God indeed said...?” Trust in God. Trust His Word. Do not be deceived. The Lord warned His disciples, your teachers, that such a time would come. The Word of God is the only Truth. Theology is the true queen of all the sciences. The Apostolic Word is trustworthy; indeed it is the only saving Word. Hear then the Lord of Love, your Lord, the Lord of Life: “These things I have spoken to you”, saith the Lord, “that you should not be made to stumble.”

That you be converted, that you hear and believe, that you be fertile ground for the Seed of the Word, in that Upper Room on Maundy Thursday your Lord promised that the Holy Spirit would come. The Spirit that inspired Moses and David to write, the Spirit that gives life and love would come. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. He leads men into the Truth – He leads you into the Truth - to Christ, God the Son, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

And that Way is the Way of the Father, the Way of the reconciliation of fallen men to a Holy and Righteous Triune God. Many reject God, and so persecute and mock the Redeemed, the Holy Church on earth. The Lord warns you of that. But that persecution is temporal and fleeting, the redemption in Christ that the Spirit brings, and the life that He alone can give, is eternal.

And He has not left you as orphans. He has given you the Scriptures, the Prophetic and Apostolic Word. And more, He has given you the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that works through the Word of God to bring you to faith.

Through font and homily, through Holy Absolution and the Sacrament of the Altar, God brings to you the forgiveness, life and salvation your Lord won for you at Golgotha. The Spirit fills you and makes you fertile ground for the Seed of the Word. Believing, you hear, you eat, you drink, you receive Christ, and He strengthens you in faith that you withstand the attacks of the devil, the flesh, and this fallen world.

And by the same Spirit you are led to live a Christian life, and to receive with thanksgiving the blessings of God, blessings like a Christian family, brothers and sisters in Christ, and yes, the many blessings that God bestows through Christian mothers.

In love, the Lord brings you joy and hope in the face of tribulation, confidence in suffering and peace even in the face of death. The Lord is your Light and your salvation, whom shall you fear? When He says “Seek My face,” your heart, filled by His Spirit, says “Your face, Lord, will I seek.” Hear then, O Redeemed of Christ, the Word of your Lord: “...these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.”

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