

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

St. Mark writes that after Christ's Ascension, the Eleven went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. That is the will of God – that the Gospel be preached to the ends of the earth. And the Lord has promised to be with those who preach and teach and speak of Christ. The Apostles had the Divine imprimatur of miraculous signs to verify their preaching and writing. That there be no doubt, God accompanied their Christ-centered kerygma with supernatural manifestations.

The Evangelists St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke record what is called “The Great Commission”, the imperative to evangelize, the directive of Christ to preach and teach all men. And thanks be to God for that, for it is that Apostolic preaching that brings Christ to you. It is by hearing their Word, the Word inspired by the Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son, that saving faith was born in you.

So the Ascended Son of God would send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to testify of Him. And the Eleven also would bear witness. The Eleven were with the Lord from His baptism till His resurrection. They would speak of what He had done to redeem the fallen world. They would testify of His miracles and His teaching. And the Spirit of Truth would fill them and lead them. And through their preaching, and through the Mysteries of Christ, the Holy Sacraments, the Spirit would work to add souls to the Holy Church.

But the Eleven went out into a world hostile to the Gospel, the same world you live in today. Men ridicule and mock the Christian faith. Men deny God. Men worship false gods, gods like Allah and Buddha and the god of the Jews. But the pantheon of the unbelieving world numbers more than three false gods.

Fallen men make gods out of many things in their lives, as the created things supplant the Creator as the center of their lives and their desires. Sinful men even fashion idols from God-given blessings like vocation, as their career, or vacations from work, become more important than hearing the Word of God. Perhaps you have done the same. So although the Lord has commanded His Gospel be preached to the ends of the earth, fallen men forsake the hearing and the study of God's Word.

When the Lord sends the Eleven to do the work of the Church, He does so as sending sheep into a world of wolves. He warns them against stumbling. He prophesies that they will be thrown out of their churches. He foretells their martyrdom. He says that those who kill them will think that they are offering a service to God.

Can you imagine anyone thinking that killing another human being could be a service to God? Consider the 29 Christians killed by Muslims in Egypt just three days ago. And 10 of them were children. In April scores of Christians were killed and injured while worshipping in church on Palm Sunday. They were murdered by a man who prayed to a god that teaches men to kill. And this has become so common in our time that we are almost numb to it.

Some estimate that 900,000 Christians have been put to death for their faith in the last 10 years. Nero's atrocities pale in comparison. One estimate reveals that 600 million Christians were

prevented from practicing the Christian faith in 2016, a year we number as the Year of our Lord. And consider the recent attack by a Muslim in Manchester, England, that targeted children and teens, leaving 22 dead and 59 wounded in Manchester, England. But this should come as no surprise. The Lord said that it would happen. And He said to His disciples "...these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them."

So Christ's warning is a warning for you. Do not let the atrocities of murderous gods and their followers cause you to doubt. Expect that they will get worse. Expect that the persecution of Christians in our country will continue. Those who follow Christ will be treated no better in this world than the Lord Himself – and Him they falsely accused, wrongly tried, and unjustly put to death. But what men meant for evil, God meant for good. He died that your sins be forgiven.

"These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble", the Lord said. So put away your doubt. Put away fear. Do not fear those who can kill the body but not the soul. Their father, the devil, was a liar and a murderer from the beginning. And do not hate. Do not let their sin, their atrocities, their hatred cause you to sin. Rather pray for their souls. Be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all, have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

Pray that those who worship false gods, those who murder and harm, those who sin and transgress, might turn from their false gods and come to the knowledge of the Truth by the Spirit of Truth. And pray for your soul too, that you not be led into sinful anger, or to murder men in your heart. The True God is a God of love. He is a God of mercy and forgiveness, a God of life.

The only True God, the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, is in control. The calamities and atrocities and persecutions of this world serve to purify and strengthen the Church. By them dross is removed from the silver, and the Church learns to trust in Her Lord. He will put an end to all persecution and violence with the consuming fire of the Last Day. Until then, you are safe in His hands. You have His Word and His promise.

Until then, you have the Apostolic Word. You have the eyewitness accounts of the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection and the ascension of your Lord. And you have the Apostolic Doctrine, that teaches you that what Christ did He did for you – for your redemption, for your salvation, that your sins be forgiven, that you be sundered from the death and transgression of this fallen world, and grafted in to the holiness and life of the One, Holy, catholic and Apostolic Church.

Until the Day when the Lord returns, you have the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son, the Spirit that testifies of Christ. And you have life, life that cannot be taken away, life given to you in the rebirth and regeneration of Holy Baptism. You have the holiness and righteousness of Christ imputed to you by God's grace through the faith He has planted in you. And that faith He makes strong through His Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, as you hear His Word and receive His Holy Gifts.

So the Words of the Prophet Isaiah, Holy Words spoken by the Spirit of Truth through the Prophet, are fulfilled in the Holy Christian Church. The wilderness has become a fruitful field,

justice dwells in the wilderness, and righteousness remains in the fruitful field. The Church of Christ will endure, and not even the gates of Hades will prevail against it. Consider the proof that you enjoy this Lord's Day – 84 years ago yesterday this building was dedicated, and 135 years ago this coming week Zion Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Detroit was founded, to the Glory of God and to the Apostolic Mission to preach Christ to the ends of the earth.

God provides. He protects. And He works through His Church that the Gospel be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. For the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness: quietness and assurance forever; that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.

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