

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Today is a very important day in the life of the Church. Today, a turning point takes place in the Propers of our Prayer Book. It is a subtle change, but also a very significant one. The Propers are that section of the Prayer Book that contain the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel lessons for the current liturgical day or week. From this point forward, until the Feast of the Ascension, which this year falls on the 30th of May, all of the Gospel lessons will be taken from the 16th Chapter of the Gospel According to Saint John. Why is this? What does the 16th Chapter of John's Gospel contain?

The 16th Chapter of the Gospel According to Saint John contains some of the final words that our Lord gave to His disciples before He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot. For the next three weeks, as we continue our celebration of the Risen Lord throughout the remainder of Eastertide, we will ironically be taken back to that upper room where Jesus prepared His disciples for His death. We, with the disciples, in anticipation of the Ascension of Christ, will find ourselves being prepared for His going away to the Right Hand of the Father. "Yet a little while and ye shall not see me...says the Lord."

Through meditating upon the words of this chapter over the next several weeks, we will come to better understand the saying of the Apostle Paul: that if Christ be not risen, the Catholic faith is in vain. If Christ be not risen, then His death holds no significance.

We will come to better understand this saying, not only in our minds but in our hearts, for our very gathering together as the Church in this season of Eastertide is a testimony to the resurrection of Christ. As those who believe that Christ is in fact risen from the dead, we know that the faith is not in vain. We know that even in light of the sufferings of this life, that we shall have joy in the next because Christ is risen.

As the Apostle Paul knew and believed, so do we and all of the saints, that the faith is not in vain...Christ is risen from the dead and death no longer has dominion. The Faith of the Church is not in vain and neither are the sufferings that she undergoes unto her salvation. The Church must suffer for the sake of the Gospel, but only for a little while. The temporal sorrow of the Church will shortly be turned into the eternal joy of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is because Christ is risen, that we are here today. His body was truly raised from the dead and is now seated at the Right Hand of the Father. Our Risen Lord is the reason we have come together this morning and are now reflecting upon His blessed passion, precious death, and mighty resurrection as we prepare for the upcoming Feast of His glorious ascension. From out of our Easter joy, we can with boldness proclaim the words of our Lord: "Yet a little while." For in just a little while, we shall be with the Lord. In just a little while, the birth pangs shall be over and we shall remember the travail of this life no more.

What is it that Jesus would have us to hear this day? How would He prepare us for His Ascension to the Right Hand of the Father? Today, He gives us the same message that He gave unto His disciples on the night of His betrayal: “A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me.” This short phrase is not one that is easily understood. To quote the disciples on that dark night, “What is this that he saith unto us...we cannot tell what he saith.”

With this brief phrase, Jesus says so much. With this phrase, Jesus speaks of both His Death and Resurrection and also His 40-day appearance and Ascension to the Right Hand of the Father. Jesus says, “you will not see me” (1) I shall be in the grave and (2) I shall be seated at the Right Hand of my Father. He also says, “you will see me” (1) I will visit you after my resurrection and (2) I will return for you at the Last Day, to be with you as my Bride forever.

Today, Jesus bids us to take our sorrows in this life and allow Him to transfigure them into joy in the next. Gently, He reminds us that this life is temporal and transitory...that it only last a little while. In the words of the Psalmist, “heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” This is why, today, in the Gospel, Jesus says to His disciples and to us: “A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.”

Now, all of creation groans, but this is only for a time. Yet, a little while, and all shall be well. Christ is risen from the dead, He has become for us the first-born among the dead, and in due season, all those who sleep in Him shall rise from the dead and be with Him forever.

Saint Peter in today’s Epistle reminds us that we are but mere sojourners in this world, awaiting the perfection of all things at the Last. He calls us “strangers and pilgrims” and urges us to spend the very brief time we have on this earth striving after holiness. He bids us to allow God to transfigure us, to form us into the Image of His Son, to make us partakers of the divine nature.

On this Third Sunday After Easter, as we remember the brevity of this life, may we be comforted by these words of Christ, “Yet a little while...” for by them we are reminded also of the brevity of our suffering. We are reminded that after this brief, transitory life, we shall attain the perfect, should we remain faithful unto the end.

In Saint John’s Revelation, he writes of that great day when sin, death, and suffering will be put to death forever and joy will abound world without end. Saint John, during a time when Christians were undergoing great suffering and persecution on account of the Faith, reminded the Church of what Jesus said on that night before His betrayal while at the same time revealing the vision He was given: Just a little while and “God shall wipe away all tears from [our] eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for [on that day] the former things [will pass] away.”

Jesus is coming, and by the measure of eternity, He is coming soon. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Jesus is coming as we confess in the Creed to judge the quick and the dead and that dreadful day will be upon us before we know it. Are we preparing for it? As we wait on Jesus, as we call upon Him in our suffering throughout this life, are we asking Him to give us the grace we need to undergo that suffering unto our salvation? Or rather, are we allowing our suffering to discourage us...to keep us from growing in the grace and knowledge of our Risen Lord?

As we close our meditation upon the Gospel this day, ponder these words of Saint Maximus, a man who spent a great of time deal reflecting upon the role that suffering plays in our salvation. He says, "If God suffers in the flesh when He is made man, should we not rejoice when we suffer, for we have God to share our sufferings? This shared suffering confers the kingdom on us. For he spoke truly who said, 'If we suffer with Him, then we shall also be glorified with Him' (Rom. 8:17)." Suffer, we must...but only for a little while. Sooner than we know it, our suffering shall end. In just a little while, the Bridegroom shall return for His Bride, the Church, and all shall be well.

Ask yourself this day, how am I suffering, and, am I suffering in such a way as to become holier, to become refined like precious metal under the intense heat of fire? May each of us unite our sufferings to the Lord's as we anticipate the Feast of His glorious Ascension and His return to judge both the quick and the dead. And may we not tarry, for we have only a little while to wait.

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