

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT / POPULUS ZION

Text: St. Luke 21:25-36

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

In the revelation of JESUS CHRIST to His blessed Apostle, Saint John the Divine, we are told that when the time is full and all things have been accomplished, the Bridegroom, that is, our LORD and SAVIOR, will return to claim His Holy Bride, the Church.

As a child of God, such news should fill you with excitement and joyful anticipation, for even now you are a member of that Bride and a citizen and priest of Heaven, the very Kingdom of God. Therefore, you should not react in fear as the world does upon seeing the signs of the approaching end of days. Instead make ready. Our LORD has given you a glimpse of what is and what will be. Therefore, *“look up... lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”*

But how do you react upon hearing the Words of our LORD JESUS as He speaks of His imminent return and the attending signs? Do JESUS' Words fill you with fear and dread at His revelation of the last days of creation? Are you filled with expectation or fear? Are you excited, or does the prospect of the shaking of the heavens and the foundations of the earth frighten you? Or are you filled with peace? Which should it be? After all, we pray *“Thy Kingdom come...”* do we not? Are we not to truly desire God's Kingdom to be made manifest among us, or are the words of this prayer just so many Gospel platitudes?

Maybe what JESUS describes is just a little too much Kingdom for your tastes. *“God, we want Your Kingdom, just not the roaring waves and the fiery heavens. We would prefer none of that scary stuff. We kind of like things the way they are. Oh yeah, and that judgment stuff, well can you not be so much like... well, can you not be so much like God?”*

Or perhaps you do not exactly believe what you hear. Maybe you believe that JESUS' Words are nothing more than hyperbole or a metaphor for the wrath of God, that our LORD's return will not be all that bad. Or maybe you believe JESUS is simply speaking melodramatically of the Day of Judgment, but again, the coming end of things cannot possibly be all that bad. After all, God is love, right? Why would He do such things or allow such things to happen? Or maybe this is all some grand scheme to deceive and scare you into attending worship and giving all your treasures to the Church.

Let me assure you, JESUS' Words are true.

Today, JESUS has revealed to us the signs of the ending of the age at the coming of the SON OF MAN and the approaching Day of Judgment. And just as we confess of God's Kingdom, Judgment Day, too, will come of its own accord on a day and at a time which our God has appointed.

The last Day cannot be avoided by ignoring it. You cannot wish it away. You can hope all you want that somehow that Day will be different than what our LORD has promised, but it will do you no good. All that you can do is open your eyes and ears. See and hear that the Day is coming quickly. As we just confessed in the Nicene Creed, *"...and He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead..."*

Rest assured then, that God's Kingdom *is* coming, and so too, His judgment. *"The hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime."*

But what are the signs that this day is near?

There is a storm on the horizon. Its lightning flashes a warning across the heavens and its thunder shakes the very foundations of the earth. This storm will devour the heavens and stars will fall from the sky. The sun and the moon will no longer give their light. All things in heaven and on the earth, will be swallowed up by an all-consuming fire. All things will pass away. But one thing will not pass away; the Words of our LORD, JESUS, will not pass away.

So, as I have already implied, there are really only two possible ways to view these "signs" as JESUS calls them: first, they have already appeared and nothing has happened, so, therefore, these words are fantasy and cannot possibly be true. Such would be the opinion Saint Peter speaks of: *"...scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.'"*

Or second, those signs that have already occurred point to the certainty of CHRIST's return and the veracity and truth in JESUS' Words. As Saint Peter concludes: *"For this they willfully forget: that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same Word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."*

The difference between these two views is, of course, the difference between faith and unbelief, between those who hold on to the Words of the LORD, which will not pass away, and those who hold on to the things of Satan and this world, which our God promises *will* pass away. These two responses are depicted in today's Gospel. There are those who, when they see the signs of the end of the age and the total upheaval of creation, will faint with fear and apprehension over what is coming upon the earth. On the other hand, there are the faithful, to whom JESUS speaks these words, *"Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."*

The ungodly will cower, hiding their faces as the very fabric of the universe begins to unravel and tear apart. Their haughty, vindictive pride will fade and their knees will give way. But those who believe will rejoice because they will recognize in these signs that the Kingdom of God is near and their redemption is at hand.

Though these signs foretell the impending doom of this age, though they stand as a prelude to God's final, righteous, judgment, of all things, all those who believe in JESUS as their SAVIOR will sing with joy and shout with thanksgiving at the approaching of the Day. Those who are not hearers of the Word will have anguish, perplexity, fear, and fainting. But those who *"hear the Word of God and keep it"* are blessed by the Words of JESUS; Words which offer comfort and hope. For these universal cataclysms point to the coming of the SON OF MAN.

God's Word reveals to us many signs of the coming of the end of the age, signs which are being presently fulfilled, even in our own day. It speaks of wars and rumors of wars. It says that lawlessness will abound in society, that the love of many will grow cold. It warns against false prophets who will come passing themselves off as Christians, but all the time teaching deception and leading many away from the true faith. It even tells us that the true Church will be hated and persecuted for holding firmly to the teaching Her LORD has given to Her.

But JESUS speaks here of the moaning and death throes of a dying world; a world that has been in the throes of death since the fall of man. The whole of creation has shaken and groaned and suffered since the curse of the fall.

Yes, the world is dying. I can see it every time I look into a mirror. I often wonder just who that person is that looks back at me? When did he start looking so old? When did his hair gray and his belly grow? What happened to that buff guy my beautiful wife married? My back and shoulders hurt when I get up in the morning. My knees complain with pain when I ascend or descend stairs. My vision, believe it or not, was once 20/7; now I wear bifocals. I live every day on a regimen of pills for various maladies. Friends and family I thought would always be there for me are long gone, called to their own

personal Judgment Day, for death is every individual's Last Day which no one can escape. Does this at all sound like you?

These are all signs of the fall and death of the world. The entire visible realm of creation has been made subject to decay and disorder caused by the fall and our own personal sins. So, too, these are also signs of our own impending death; a death, as I said, we all must face.

So, JESUS speaks to us, warning us about the "*last things.*" The teaching and miracle-working Prophet, Priest, and King, our SAVIOR, our God and LORD, has entered the city of the prophets and God's temple to give His final teaching before His rejection and His greatest miracle—His resurrection from the dead. He comes to announce that the Kingdom of God is at hand and our redemption draws nigh.

This Kingdom of God is, even now, among you. Your Redemption comes to you through what the LORD has instituted to be the worship life of the Church: preaching, Baptism, confession and absolution, and the LORD's Supper. With these, JESUS' purpose is to prepare the people of God for His triumphant return on Judgment Day so that they may lift up their heads and cling to Him at His return.

Yes, there is a storm on the horizon. Its lightning flashes a warning across the heavens and its thunder shakes the very foundations of the earth. This storm will devour the heavens, stars will fall from the sky, the sun and the moon will no longer give their light. All things in heaven and on the earth will be swallowed up in an all-consuming fire. All things will pass away. But one thing will never pass away—the Words of JESUS—not one jot, not one tittle, will pass away.

Thus, the Word of Baptism, of Absolution, the Word of His Last Will and Testament in the Bread and Chalice of the Altar—these things shall never pass away. The Word that called you to life in the blessed waters of Holy Baptism, that gave you God's Name, will not pass away. By God's infinite grace and mercy, you will be His forever. JESUS' Body and Blood given and shed for you, these too, will not pass away. The Word of forgiveness that declares you righteous, this is not my word. Rather, the Word of forgiveness that I speak is the Word of your LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, whose authority has ordained, that is ordered me, to speak in His stead and by His command, and it too, shall never pass away.

You will be righteous forever. The Word that makes bread and wine into His Body and Blood, the Word that by faith unites you to our LORD in grace and love; that Word, too shall forever endure. You shall feast with JESUS forever in the new heaven and new earth, ever as one Body, one holy Bride.

So, my friends, “...*look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.*” Rejoice! Look up and pray! Look for your SAVIOR and hear Him say, “*I forgive you all your sins.*”

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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