

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Perhaps I should start with a confession today. In dealing with texts like our Gospel, my spirit sometimes feels like what Jesus describes. I feel like “*fainting with fear and with foreboding*,” not because I am frightened of the coming of that “*great and awesome day*,” but because (can I say this about the Bible?) I really don’t like these texts. Oh, I know they’re important and good for me—kind of like getting a flu shot—but I don’t like them.

And I certainly don’t get what the peddlers of the millennial views of end times think is so great about these texts that they spend weeks on end preaching about them, holding seminars, writing books and series of books about them. I’m not going to spend all that much time on this sermon, truthfully.

Of course, since these peddlers have constructed a complex end-times theology, it does take them some time to explain it. Jesus’ instruction in our Gospel is much shorter—and it’s not all that complex. And He concludes it with an encouragement to “*straighten up and raise your heads*.” When the day arrives, the prophet Malachi compares believers to calves released from their stalls leaping for joy. But until that day, perhaps the image of a deer grazing in a meadow is more apt. When deer hear an unexpected sound, they straighten up and tense up. Their heads are raised up; their eyes are watchful for what danger lurks nearby. That’s how we should be.

Now Jesus is talking about the approach of our final redemption in this text, when He will come again in glory. This one will not be like His first coming when He came in all humility to be born of the Virgin, to submit Himself to the law, to offer Himself up as a sacrifice for sin, to shed His blood unto death as the redemption price for the sins of the world. When Jesus comes in glory it will not be to suffer again, for “*Christ ... offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins*” (Heb. 10:12). Our “*redemption [is] through his blood*” accomplished once on the cross for “*the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*” (Eph. 1:7).

And yet, there is still to come a day that St. Paul calls “*the day of redemption*” (Eph. 4:30). For Jesus ascended back to the Father’s side, and was seated there in glory, “*waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet*” (Heb. 10:13), waiting for that day when He will return again on the clouds and bring to consummation what He accomplished in His first coming. And this second coming is not meant to be a day of fear or foreboding for those who have been sealed for this day, sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) in the waters of Holy Baptism. For there is hopeful language in our Gospel text. In the midst of the

warning signs: Jesus says to us, “*not a hair of your head will perish,*” and “*By your endurance you will gain your lives.*”

Now some of these warning signs have come to pass; others are ongoing. Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple, for example. “*The days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.*” And that prophecy has been fulfilled. It happened about 40 years later, in the year 70 AD as the Romans, fed up with Jewish revolts, destroyed this temple utterly such that all that remains is a piece of a retaining wall, called the Western Wall.

Similarly, Jerusalem was overrun by the Romans and destroyed. Although it has been rebuilt many times, still to this day, the temple mount is controlled by Gentiles. We should not expect another temple to be erected. Indeed, the true temple, you recall, was destroyed and rebuilt in 3 days.

But other signs are continuing signs: false christs saying, “*I am he*”; false doomsdayers ready to dupe the unsuspecting saying, “*The time is at hand!*” These people are troublers of the faithful. Indeed, a couple of these troublers—Jehovah’s Witnesses—rang our doorbell on Friday. I talked with them for a while, not so much challenging them on their unfulfilled predictions of the end, but challenging them on the false christ they preach. These are not Christians. Christ to them is not “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made” as Christians have always confessed (Nicene Creed). They do not believe in “the catholic faith,” “that we worship one God in trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance,” apart from which faith there is no salvation! “*Don’t go after them,*” Jesus says. “*Don’t be led astray!*” Remain steadfast in “*my words [which] will not pass away*” (Luke 21:33).

We are to expect these continuing warning signs, Jesus says: “*wars and tumults,*” “*great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences,*” persecutions and imprisonments, betrayal and death. “*You will be hated by all*” because of the name of Jesus, He says.

Does anyone not recognize these signs today—especially the latter? Churches bombed, Christian homes in the Middle East destroyed, Christian children in Nigeria captured, some put to death, some raped, a Christian pastor in Turkey imprisoned, a Christian woman in Pakistan sentenced to death for a false accusation, Christian men beheaded on a Libyan beach; and in this country, a Christian baker and a Christian florist and Christian artists persecuted by their state governments for not wanting to deny their confession that marriage is between a

man and a woman, Christian adoption agencies shutdown because they believe a child is best served by a mother and a father and will only place children in such homes. Etc. I could go on!

Yes, like a skittish deer, we need to be on high alert. “*Straighten up and raise your heads,*” Jesus says. But we need not be terrified, “*because [our] redemption is drawing near.*” We need not faint for fear or foreboding, for the “*LORD is [our] keeper; ... The LORD will keep [us] from all evil; he will keep [our] life,*” the Psalmist promises. We do need to be ready and watchful, lifting up our eyes to Him from who our help comes. We need to be ready to confess, for what comes upon us may give us an opportunity to bear witness. And here, too, Jesus says, don’t worry, “*for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.*”

So, be ready—not that you might flee, but that you may be ready to fight “*the good fight,*” to finish “*the race,*” to keep “*the faith,*” that “*there [may be] laid up for [you] the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to [you] on that day,*” the day of your redemption, “*and not only to [you] but also to all who have loved his appearing*” (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

The signs are clear. “*The kingdom of God is near*” (Luke 21:31). “*Your redemption is drawing near.*” Remember your baptism. Abide in Jesus’ word. Eat and drink for your salvation and strength. “[*Do your*] *work quietly*”; “*do not grow weary in doing good.*” “*Straighten up and raise your heads.*”

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.