

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Jesus knew what lay ahead of Him. Before He went up on the Mount of Transfiguration, He announced it to the disciples: *“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised”* (Luke 9:22). And when He came down He repeated it: *“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men”* (Luke 9:44).

Jesus also knew where this was going to take place. And so, Luke says, *“When the days drew near for him to be taken up,”* that is, lifted up on the cross, Jesus *“set his face to go to Jerusalem”* (Luke 9:51). Jesus did not run from His purpose; He did not run from battle, but met the challenges head on.

Jesus took the straighter, but more arduous path to Jerusalem, going through Samaritan lands. Making *“his way through towns and villages,”* He was busy casting out demons, healing, *“teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem”* (Luke 13:22). Jesus was teaching that not everyone who wants to be saved will be: *“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able”* (Luke 13:24). *“You may find ‘yourselves cast out. ... And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.’”*

That’s where our text picks up. That’s when some Pharisees came to Jesus and told Him to “get out of here and go away,” because Herod wanted to kill Him. Now that may or may not have been true, after all, Herod later had opportunity to make it happen and did not. Regardless, Jesus did not flee; He was defiant. Whether He was actually speaking to some treacherous Pharisees themselves or He thought that they would deliver the message, it matters not. Jesus was not deterred: *“Go and tell that fox ...,”* He told them. *“You see what I’ve been doing. I’m going to keep on doing it today and tomorrow, and what I came to do will be accomplished on the third day.”*

In the past several months, we have witnessed the violent take-over of one country and the inspiring resistance of an attempt to take over another. And we have seen how their leaders acted. The first was Afghanistan, and its leader abandoned it as the U.S. withdrew their forces. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled to save his own skin. The people were quickly overrun by the Taliban and placed again under their despotic rule.

The second is taking place in Ukraine as I speak, and its leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy is inspiring the people of his country and around the world with his courage. We’re told Russia has “hit squads” out to assassinate him. They want to “cut off the head,” so that the country will fold. He is undeterred; he is defiant. It’s

almost as if he said, “Go and tell Putin, that fox, that we are willing to fight and die for our country.” And he himself refuses to flee. “The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride,” he reportedly said when the U. S. offered to evacuate him from his country (The Associated Press, “Live updates: Zelenskyy declines US offer to evacuate Kyiv,” February 25, 2022).

One leader showed courage; he has inspired his people. The other leader showed cowardice, which took away the people’s will to fight. Reporters are describing the one leader as “Churchill-ian.” Perhaps he’s modeling himself on the British Prime Minister. Perhaps . . . , but perhaps both Churchill and Zelenskyy modeled themselves on Jesus, who did not turn His back on the task the Father had given Him, who would not shirk His duty today, or tomorrow, but who carried it out even unto the following day, and who was put to death in the holy city of Jerusalem, where prophets go to perish. Perhaps their model was courageous Jesus, who by His word and Spirit has inspired untold billions “*from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*” (Rev. 7:9) to deny themselves, take up their own cross, and follow Him.

But unlike Mr. Zelenskyy, certainly a modern day hero, for whom an untimely death is far from certain, unlike Mr. Zelenskyy fighting against an invading army, unlike Mr. Zelenskyy rallying his forces and the multitudes with patriotic cries of “Glory to Ukraine,” Jesus goes up to the holy city with a lament on His lips, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!*” Jesus goes to fight the world’s ultimate foes: sin, death, and Satan, and Jesus goes to a certain death, for although Jesus enters the city to shouts of “*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!*” (Luke 19:38), He will ultimately be rejected and met with maniacal screams of “*Crucify, crucify him!*”

And this is exactly why first the apostles, and then the church, and now we are inspired to follow Christ. Citizens of Ukraine, filled by their leader with patriotic fervor, are inspired to fight and even die for their country. Our leader and savior is Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, not simply for His own, but for the world. He sacrificed Himself, not for righteous people, but for sinners like those who falsely accused Him, like those who mocked and scourged Him and crowned Him with thorns, like those who called for His death, like those who sentenced Him, like those who drove the nails into His hands, like those whose sins like ours hung Him on that cross, which is exactly how God demonstrated His love for us: “*while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom. 5:8).

But God has done still more. He has made us citizens of heaven now by Word and Sacrament, so that we’re called now to duty, called to fight, ready “to suffer

all, even death, rather than fall away from” “this confession and Church” (LSB, Confirmation rite).

It often happens in war that some will betray the cause. So it is in the church militant; some will betray Christ and walk as His enemies with minds set on earthly things. God grant that we may not oppose Christ, but always look to Him as leader and follow His lead in our various callings, and as we wait for the consummation of all things, when He will come again in glory, when we shall inherit resurrection and life, when He will transform “*our lowly body to be like his glorious body.*” For though now, we in the Church militant are at war, we know that when Christ was brought to His goal on the third day, it was finished, the battle done. And by His resurrection three days later, the victory was granted to us.

Therefore, St. Paul encourages us: “*stand firm thus in the Lord,*” which is why we are here today: to be built up by Christ’s word and by His precious Body and Blood, that in the midst of a world that has taken up arms against Christ, we may go on today and tomorrow and the next day under the protection of His wings until we have finished our course in faith and rest from our labors. God grant us steadfastness in this faith and the inspiration to fight on in the kingdom.

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