

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Ever since All Saints Day, our thoughts have been directed toward the consummation of all things. We know that our loved ones who have died in the Lord have been accounted righteous through faith and have been carried by the angels to be with the Lord. They are blessed to be in Jesus' presence as they await His return on the clouds, the resurrection of their bodies and the life everlasting. This is our Christian hope, unseen but sure. Thus we pray in the funeral liturgy: "Comfort us with the *certain hope* of the resurrection to everlasting life and a joyful reunion with those we love who have died in the faith" (LSB Agenda, p. 123). With Jesus as the firstfruits, we follow Him through the gate of death to life immortal. And this hope calms our trembling breath as we pass its gloomy portal (LSB490:5).

This hope also affects believers regarding Jesus' return to "judge both the living and the dead" (Nicene Creed). The end ought not fill believers with foreboding. The ungodly, yes, but not believers, for the prophet Malachi foretells: "*all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.*" They will be set ablaze, and utterly consumed by the wrath of "*the LORD of hosts*" such that "*it will leave them neither root nor branch.*" Not so for the faithful, who "*fear [the] name*" of the LORD and trust in His promises.

Some of these promises surely have been fulfilled already; for others the fulfillment is still to come. The promise spoken by Malachi, for example, has been fulfilled: "*the sun of righteousness [has risen] with healing in its wings.*" John the Baptist's father Zechariah spoke a similar prophecy years later: "*because of the tender mercy of our God, ... the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace*" (Luke 1:78-79).

This sunrise is the first coming of God's own Son, Jesus our Lord, called by the prophet Jeremiah "*The LORD is our righteousness*" (Jer. 23:6), and by the apostle Paul as Him who "*became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption*" (1 Cor. 1:30). By His perfect obedience to the Law, and by His perfect obedience to the Father's will, "*pierced for our transgressions ... crushed for our iniquities,*" "*we [have been] healed*" (Isa. 53:5). His wounds did it, and His righteousness has been credited to us. Isaiah said, "*upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace*" (Is. 53:5), and Paul says He "*was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Therefore, ... we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom. 4:25–5:1).

And so, unlike those still mired in their sin because of unbelief, we who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, forgiven of our sins, sanctified through faith,

*“we [can] rejoice in hope of the glory of God”* (Rom. 5:2) at the thought of Jesus impending return for judgment. When He returns we will leap for joy like calves *“leaping ... from the stall.”*

Still, we know that our merciful God brings us “through suffering and death with our Lord Jesus Christ to enter with Him into glory” (Collect, “Comforting the Bereaved,” LSB Agenda, p. 113). We Christians are not immune to this sinful world’s hardships. We expect them; they are promised us also. Jesus said, *“In the world you will have tribulation”* (John 16:33). Again, He told us, *“You will be sorrowful”* (John 16:20).

Of course, these promises were spoken in the first place to the apostles, and they’re the ones that have borne the brunt of what Jesus foretold would come to pass.

At the disciples’ inquiry, Jesus spoke of the destruction of the temple *“adorned with noble stones and offerings.”* This temple would be utterly destroyed, Jesus said; *“there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”* We know that happened some forty years later. Rome laid siege to Jerusalem, defeated the Jewish rebels, and destroyed the city, leveling the temple.

The first century saw its share of self-acclaimed messiahs — all false, of course — for only the One who defeated death and the grave could be the true Messiah. And of those who laid claim to knowing the time of the Messiah’s return, Jesus said, *“do not believe it,”* for *“concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only”* (Matt. 24:36). The same is true for modern preachers who claim to have figured out the clues in the Bible for Jesus’ return. Don’t believe them; they don’t know.

Expect persecution, Jesus told His disciples, and they received it in spades. They were arrested and beaten and most of them lost their lives as they bore witness to Jesus *“before kings and governors.”* They are called martyrs for that reason — they died bearing μαρτυρία—witness to the Lord Jesus, and we give thanks for their continued witness to us. Indeed, by their witness, we are encouraged in our own witness as we Christians today face opposition, persecution, and in some places martyrdom.

All of this that Jesus foretold — *“wars and tumults ... [n]ation [rising up] against nation, and kingdom against kingdom ... earthquakes ... famines and pestilences,”* persecutions, imprisonment, family strife, being *“hated by all for [Jesus’] name’s sake”* — all this was just the beginning of the end. Luke records Jesus saying, *“the end will not be at once”*; Matthew records Jesus saying, *“these are but the beginning of the birth pains”* (Matt. 24:8). What that means, brothers and sisters in Christ, is that we have been living in the end times since the first

century, since the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles and the destruction of Herod's temple in A.D. 70.

But there is also an ultimate end, and before that we can expect things to get worse — not a lot of details ... *“signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken,”* but enough details to keep us awake, watchful, and ready for what comes next.

For then we *“will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”* *“[E]very eye will see him,”* St. John says, *“even those who pierced him”* (Rev. 1:7). But His coming will not be welcomed by many. *“[A]ll tribes of the earth will wail on account of him”* (Rev. 1:7), that is, the unbelievers who will not be welcomed into the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. *“Outside,”* St. John says, *“are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood”* (Rev. 21:15).

But those who belong to Christ, washed in pure water, clothed with His righteousness, eyes fixed on their Savior, they will neither wail nor duck in that day. They will *“straighten up and raise [their] heads, because [their] redemption is drawing near.”* Jesus is coming for them to give them resurrection and life. *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates”* (Rev. 21:14).

May that be us, God preserving us in the true faith by keeping us steadfast in His Word and Sacraments, that we may endure in Christ the Crucified, Christ risen from the dead, Christ high ascended but coming again. Lord, keep us in this faith to the end that we may *“gain [our] lives.”* Then, at Christ's return we will raise our heads to see His dazzling coming, His body adorned still with the “dear tokens of His passion,” His “glorious scars”; we will raise our heads, not filled with fear, but in “endless exultation” and with rapturous joy. Christ will have come to give us our blessed inheritance.

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