

**Pentecost 25/Last Sunday – (11/22/09 – P29B – *Watchful Waiting for Christ's Coming*)**

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

This Sunday in the life of the Church has been given various names – *Last Sunday of the Church Year, Christ the King Sunday, Last Sunday of End Time, Sunday of the Fulfillment*. With each name the Church desires to express and emphasize a certain, important reality. They all apply. I suppose we could compress them all into one thought: On this Last Sunday of the Church Year, our focus is on End Time events – the final Fulfillment of all God's promises ... the coming of Christ the King in great glory and might. It's all there in our Holy Scripture lessons – especially if we include the alternate readings for this day.

As we live out our liturgical life in the Church – an attempt by the Church to yearly take us through the key events in the Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection, and continued gracious work of our Lord Jesus Christ in and through His Church – we have once again come full circle. Today is the *Last Sunday of the Church Year* – so ... End Time stuff. Next Sunday starts *Advent* – the beginning preparations for remembering and celebrating with great joy the Advent or Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ at *Christmas*. Ultimately, all of our faith and life is about our Savior. He is our Beginning. He is our End. And He is everything in between. Today we focus on Christ as the End and Ultimate Goal of our faith and life. Today we focus on *Watchful Waiting for Christ's Coming*.

Last week we began hearing about some of the events in history that point to the end-of-time coming of our Lord Jesus Christ – the destruction of the Temple, wars, strife, earthquakes, famines ... oh, and betrayal by family, friends, society, and religious leaders. Today the Savior points to some additional signs of His coming on the Last Day – a great tribulation, a darkened sun and lightless moon, the shaking and falling of heavenly objects. We should learn the lesson of the fig tree – the time is right ... it has been for quite some time. Our Lord and Savior could return any day now. At any moment we might *see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory* [MK 13.26]. And the first question we need to ask ourselves is: *Are we ready? Are we ready for Christ the King to return? Are we ready to stand before Him on Judgment Day? Are we ready for the books to be*

opened [DAN 7.10]? We don't know *that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven* [MK 13.32]. But all things that point to the end have occurred – it can come at any time. And if it doesn't come during our lifetime, well ... then there's our own personal judgment when we die – as compared to the public judgment scene that our Lord describes in MT 25.

At any rate, the bottom line is, we **need** to be ready. But ... open books!?! Who wants their whole life to be displayed before the world? We all know our sins ... our own faults ... the way our own flesh has stained us – blackened the robes of righteousness we ought to be wearing as believers in Christ. Unlike the exhortation in an alternate reading from JUDE – which says: *have mercy on those who doubt, save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh* [22-23] – we all too readily put on the sin-stained garments of shame ... and too easily neglect to show mercy ... instead ridiculing those who doubt. We're even reluctant to be God's instruments in snatching others out of the fires of hell. God opens the door for us to speak of Him – to warn about the Judgment and point to the Judge Who now intercedes on our behalf by His Blood – and we remain silent. Don't we believe these words and warnings of Christ? Don't we care?

Or at least, shouldn't we heed the word of our Lord? *“Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know then the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore say awake – for you do not know when the Master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – lest He come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”* [MK 13.33-37] We need to be about *Watchful Waiting for Christ's Coming*. That means staying awake ... being vigilant ... being about the things of God ... receiving His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation through Word and Sacrament Sunday after Sunday ... day after day ... and daily showing His mercy and forgiveness and love to others so that they also might joyfully watch and wait with us.

You know already, of course, where this must go. I hinted at it earlier. Christ is our Beginning. Christ is our End. And Christ is our everything in

between. Today – as always – we focus on Christ as the End and Ultimate Goal of our faith and life. Or to put it another way – based on the alternate *Gospel* reading for the day – Christ was, is, and ever must be and remain our Truth. In JN 18 – as our Savior stood ... tired and already partially abused ... before the governor – ***Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?”*** and our Lord responded, ***“You say that I am a king. For this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice.”*** [JN 18.37] In the next verse, Pilate asks Jesus a question that many ask today ... as does our own sinful flesh: ***“What is truth?”*** – as if Christ’s truth were relative ... or changeable. And the answer to the question is this: We cannot know truth apart from Christ. We cannot know truth apart from Christ and His Cross. And we cannot **do** truth apart from Christ and His Cross. There – once-for-all time ... in most vivid relief – is the truth. There as Christ our Lord hangs upon the Cross we see the fullness of truth in Him Who **is** Truth. There our sins condemn us and make us truly worthy of the most fierce wrath of God. There our God loves us so very much that He pours out that wrath upon Himself – the Father pours it out upon His beloved Son – so that we need not feel its sting and its fire.

And it is precisely in this way that He Who is Truth takes up His crown and reigns as King in His eternal, other-worldly, heavenly Kingdom. That’s why God came into this world in human flesh – to bear witness to the truth of sin and grace ... everlasting death and eternal salvation and life. That’s why the Son became the God-Man Jesus Christ – so that He might win us for Himself and make us for Himself ***a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.*** For Christ ***loves us and has freed us from our sins by His Blood ... to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.*** [REV 1.5b-6]

Christ is the ***Justice*** of God set ... ***for a light to the peoples*** as ISAIAH says [51.4]. He is the ***Righteousness*** that has drawn near to us – the ***Righteousness*** Who is **for us**. He is the ***Salvation*** that ***has gone out***. And on His arms the Lord has judged the peoples ... and declared you: ***Forgiven ... saved ... innocent ... justified ... by virtue of the work of the Son of Man presented before the Ancient of Days on your behalf.***

In Medieval times, the return of Christ as King and Judge was depicted as something to be feared. Christ’s return was depicted in market-place dramas

... and great dread would come upon the people. And our Lords return **is** a cause for fear in **this** sense: when one has failed to give attention to God ... or is counted among *those who pierced Him* – either directly or by *crucifying Him anew* ... and *putting Him to open shame* through lack of repentance and faith ... as the author of HEBREWS puts it [6.4-6].

But for us who have been freed from our sins by His Blood ... for us who are the recipients of His love and grace ... His forgiveness, life and salvation already now – **for us** the Day of our Lord's Second Advent is something to look forward to with great anticipation and joy! For when Christ our Savior returns, then we and the whole world shall see the truth of what the Prophet Daniel *saw in the night visions*: namely, that Christ's *dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed* [DAN 7.14]. Although our present life is perishing ... and *the heavens shall vanish like smoke* and *the earth will wear out like a garment*, such that even *they who dwell in it will die in like manner* – God's *salvation will be forever, and His righteousness will never be dismayed* [ISA 51.6]. Which is to say that all who are saved and declared righteous by God's grace through faith in Christ our Lord and King shall live forever ... our faith and certain hope in Jesus will never be dismayed ... our God-given and God-sustained faith shall not fail.

For since *Jesus Christ IS the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of kings on earth* [REV 1.5a], we who belong to Christ through Baptism and Faith can be assured that **we also** shall be raised from death to *live under Him in His Kingdom and serve Him with everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness* [SC II.2]. You see, there is another lesson to learn from the fig tree. For the fig in Israel produces two crops each year. After it sheds its leaves in the fall and seems to be lifeless, it puts out its tender leaves, and then bears fruit ... and then a second time. Likewise our Lord was lifeless, but rose as the Firstborn of the dead, putting out the tender leaves of His righteousness and salvation to give forgiveness and life to all believers. And even as He lives, He keeps us in faith and life until His return. On that Day He will bear His second crop ... He shall raise all His believers from their graves and bring us into His eternal Kingdom.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]