

Pentecost 26C – Last Sunday (11/21/10 – *With Christ Our King in Paradise*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

Do you ever look around and think: *What's going on here!?* *This can't be right!* *This isn't the way things are supposed to be, is it!?* That seems to be what our *Old Testament Lesson* from MALACHI is addressing. And it wasn't just some generic or abstract wondering that the people were doing. They were actually accusing **God** of wrongdoing and injustice. ***"Your words have been hard against Me," says the LORD ... You have said, "It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping His charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?"*** [MAL 3.13-14] The people of God were giving up. They had been mourning the sins going on around them ... and their own sins. They were downcast because they thought they had been serving God faithfully. It seemed to them that their faithfulness had served no purpose. The wicked and the unrighteous were prospering ... while they suffered. That is what our text means when it says: ***And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.*** [MAL 3.15] People sin before God's face. Nothing happens. God does nothing! They thrive. We suffer.

We understand their discouragement. For we often fall into the same way of thinking. Sometimes when we look around at how evil and unbeliever prosper in the world, the weak flesh is tempted to become disappointed ... disheartened ... irritated ... and at times even downright angry with God. And this is all sin on our part ... from beginning to end. Since the Fall, the sinful flesh – our flesh – constantly seeks a theology of glory, saying: *IF I am just ... and refrain from the gross evils of the world ... and follow and serve God ... THEN I deserve and certainly should get all sorts of goods and prosperity in this life.* But when it is the evil who seem to prosper ... and we ourselves suffer – or even when we do fairly well but evildoers come out better still – then we murmur ... complain ... speak hard words against God ... doubt whether it is worth ***keeping His charge*** and ***walking as in mourning***. Again, this is all sin on our part – sin against God.

The same thinking can happen when we look upon the Lord and see His great suffering – as the women of Jerusalem ***who were mourning and***

lamenting for Him. We wonder again: *Is it really worth it? I mean, if Jesus Christ – Who is Lord, God, and King – suffered so, what can I expect? What is the point of doing good?* These are the questions our sinful flesh asks. That good is rewarded with evil by this sinful world and her temporary rulers is, in fact, what Jesus refers to when He responds to those who lamented His suffering and death: ***Daughters of Jerusalem – believers – do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?*** [LK 23:28, 31] If the unbelieving world treats the Kingdom of God – and its Sovereign – this way when Christ the King stands visibly in their midst, what will they do to the citizens of the Kingdom when Christ has removed His visible presence? How will it go then with His disciples?

We know how it will go. We heard it last week. Christ's subjects – His followers – will be persecuted ... ***hated by all ... delivered up ... put to death ... betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends*** [LK 21.12-17]. The evil will do all this – and prosper in the process. It will seem so very unfair – as if God were letting them get away with ... murder. But it will not be this way forever. The latter portion of our *Old Testament Lesson* shows us how things will be in the end. ***Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a Book of Remembrance was written before Him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed His Name. “They shall be Mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up My treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.*** [MAL 3:16-18] In the end – on the Last Day – when Christ comes to judge the living and the dead – He shall make all things clear ... and good ... and right. On the Last Day Christ the King shall sit as Judge and will place on His right hand those who were made to be partakers of His Kingdom already in this life – those whose names are written in the Book of Remembrance ... those who feared, loved, and trusted in God above all things ... those who were declared and made righteous through faith in the Son of God ... those who (even imperfectly) served God in this life in faith.

Did you hear the words the Lord spoke and promised? They are for you! *They shall be Mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the Day when I make up My treasured possession.* You are the Lord's! By Baptism and faith your name has been recorded in the Book of Remembrance. You – dear Christian – are His *treasured possession!* And in the end a **proper** distinction will be made: *Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.* No more will you be treated as a thief and murderer. In this sinful, upside-down world you will be treated as Christ your King was treated – shamefully ... with sinful mockings, jeerings, disbelief ... numbered with transgressors. But because He allowed Himself to be so treated, **you** will **not** be numbered with transgressors and the wicked before God the Father. You are, rather, as the one who hung beside Christ in repentance and faith. You are as the one to whom the Savior said: *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise* [LK 23:43]. Consider yourself as that unnamed criminal. See and own your sin. Repent ... and believe in the One Who was crucified unjustly for your transgressions and the sin of the whole world. Whenever you find yourself arrogant in your sins – unswerving ... proud ... unrepentant – speak the words of the one thief to your own heart: *Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.* Then in the fullness of faith, turn to Christ your King and say: *Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom! Forgive my sins! Cause my name to be written in Your Book of Remembrance! Bring me at last into Your eternal, heavenly Kingdom.* And know, dear Christian, that Christ's Word from the Cross is also **for you:** *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.*

Today is the *Last Sunday in the Church Year.* The Church Year has once again ended. The world thinks that this is simply one more proof that the Church is out of step. But it is, indeed, the world that is offbeat. The Church Militant – even when she is looking to her triumph and glory in the Lord – walks in the Lord's time. Next Sunday – with the season the Church calls *Advent* – we begin to remember all over again the coming of our Lord Christ in human flesh so that He might go to the Cross for us and on the Last

Day raise us with immortal bodies to be ***With Christ Our King in Paradise.*** This Sunday goes by other names as well: *Christ the King* ... and *Sunday of the Fulfillment*. All that our Lord Christ came to do has been fulfilled. Already from the Royal Throne of His Cross, Christ reigns as King over sin, death, devil, and hell on your behalf. We heard it in the *Holy Gospel* appointed for this day. The sign placed over Christ's head – both to irritate the jealous Jewish leaders and to mock Christ – says it all: ***This is the King of the Jews.*** Christ is our King – now and forever. And the last Word in our text tells us that all things have been once-for-all accomplished for our ***redemption*** and ***the forgiveness of sins*** [COL 1.14]. ***Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.*** The Lord fulfilled this promise to the penitent thief at His side. That believing thief is in heaven – in Paradise – awaiting the final consummation of Christ's work of reconciliation. He – with all the saints who have gone before us ... as well as us who are still on earth – has only to wait for that Last and most glorious Day of the Lord. For when our Lord comes at last in His glory, He will make all His believers as jewels ... to adorn that once thorn-crowned brow of Christ Our King. And we shall be raised in glorious bodies – that where the Head is, there the Body (His saints) might be also for all eternity.

Even now in this place, you are already ***With Christ Our King in Paradise*** – at least a little corner of it ... where heaven touches earth. For Christ your King comes to you today in His Word to fulfill for you all righteousness and pronounce your iniquities washed away. Christ your King speaks to you today declaring that He Who is ***the Firstborn of all creation*** and ***the Firstborn from the dead*** [COL 1.15, 18] will also raise you as a new creation from death and the grave. Because Christ has fulfilled all righteousness, ***making peace by the blood of His Cross***, the Father ***has delivered you from the domain of darkness and transferred you to the kingdom of His beloved Son*** [COL 1.20, 13]. Christ your King comes to you today in His Body and Blood to forgive you all your sins. ***And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."***

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