

# Jubilate

Lam. 3:22-33; 1 Pt. 2:11-20; Jn 16:16-22

May 3, 2020

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

**“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,”** we heard in the first reading this morning. Yet those words come from a book called Lamentations. It’s a song of despair for a Jerusalem in ruins. **“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases”?** How can you say that to someone who has lost their baby? How can you say that to someone who is out of work? How can you say that when the churches are closed, and the fear of death creeps unseen throughout the land?

It is precisely in such times that we need the reminder, **“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases.”** You are baptized. This means that your afflictions stem not from God’s hatred of you, but the means by which you grow. St. John Chrysostom called them “contests and exercises of the justified.”

Everything that comes from God is good. Even your adversities are ultimately for good. Did not St. Paul say that all things work for good for those who love God (Rom. 8:28)? All things. Psalm 119(:71) says, **“It is good for us that the Lord rebukes us.”**

Now is a time of waiting. Use it to direct your waiting toward God. That’s the use of afflictions, as we heard in the surprisingly hopeful message from Lamentations: **“The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.”**

In our imperfect, impatient waiting, we see the perfect and patient one, the Lord Jesus: **“Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults.”** He who said to turn the other cheek gave His own cheek to be battered, His back to be whipped. All the while He confessed

that **“The steadfast love the LORD never ceases,”** and in His resurrection we see it is true.

Today’s Epistle reminds us that the life of a disciple of Jesus is oriented towards a goal. That goal is **“the day of visitation.”** **“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”** The *visitation* is the day the king comes to set things right. Scripture also calls this the last day, or the day of resurrection. The Nicene Creed summarizes our hope: *“I look for the resurrection of the dead.”* That’s what I’m looking for.

We live in two realms, or two kingdoms, one is secular and the other is spiritual. We show respect to the worldly authorities, but our fear and love is for God and His Church. St. Peter uses simple, direct terms for these relationships: **“Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”**

We live in the age of outrage. It’s easy to get angry at the government for how they’re handling things. Then we become irritable with family members, or blame others for our own weaknesses. Those things, too, are the passions of the flesh that God’s Word warns us against: **“Abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”** Passion is today regarded as an ideal; and it’s certainly good to be excited and dedicated. But in the Bible, the passions are the desires within us that lead us away from wisdom. Lust, rage, revenge, envy, drunkenness – the pursuit of these things damages us, turns us away from who God made us to be.

Many people are really frustrated with our current situation. It’s tempting to give yourself over to those passions of the flesh to deal with your frustrations. You might drink too much, argue with your family, act in self-destructive ways. But think about our economic, political, and health problems in light of today’s words of Jesus. Our particular situation may be new to us, but the broader issues are really nothing new.

Jesus tells us today that there is both sorrow and joy in store for us. That's not what we want to hear. We want the joy without the sorrow.

But Jesus isn't telling us that life will have its ups and downs, so just learn to take the rough with the smooth. To follow Jesus is to share in His sufferings. **"If anyone wishes to follow Me,"** Jesus says, **"let him take up his cross and follow Me"** (Mt. 16:24). St. Paul even says that every true Christian will be persecuted: **"All who wish to live piously in Christ shall endure persecution"** (2 Tim. 3:12). The Holy Scriptures contain so many words of comfort precisely because we can expect trouble and difficulty as disciples of Jesus. Now your Coronavirus challenges aren't a cross in the sense of persecution. But the way they put you to the test, the way they urge you to sin and despair - that is a cross.

Jesus describes the suffering of a Christian as like a woman in labor. (One of our families had a baby this week; congratulations, Jason and Rebekah!) **"A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world."** Following the anguish of death will come the joy of the presence of God, and then the greater joy of the resurrection.

There's something else going on here. Did you notice the strange language of "human being"? Nobody talks like that about their baby. We say, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" or "Look at that beautiful baby!" Can you imagine after the baptism greeting the parents, saying, "Congratulations on your human being"? Weird.

But St. John records Jesus as saying just that in today's Gospel. In Greek it's *anthropos*, like the word *anthropology*. It's the word used in Genesis for the human race, and for Adam as the first man. And then it's used again for Jesus shortly before His crucifixion. Pilate brings Jesus out, bloodied and humiliated, and says, "Behold, the *anthropos*!" "Behold, the Man!"

The center of the world's history, the meaning of the world's future, is all in Jesus. He is the Man born into the world to rescue fallen man. He is the new Adam, the One who recapitulates and repairs the death of Adam. His cross is the purification of your conscience. His death is the remedy for your corruption. His resurrection is the healing of our nature. His resurrection is the sign and foreshadowing of our resurrection.

Let these words of Jesus be your hope now to the end of your life in this world: **"You now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."**

*In the Name of + Jesus*

*The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*