

## THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

*Jubilate Deo, omnis terra – shout with joy unto God all the earth, alleluia; sing ye a psalm to His name, alleluia.*

Beloved,

today our Easter joy is given a new color: in each of His earlier resurrection appearances to His disciples, Our Savior had brought them new and abiding gifts: “Pax vobis: my peace I give unto you”; “Because you have seen me, Thomas, you have believed; blessed are they who have not seen and have believed;” and again, “I am the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep.”

But today He directs our hearts towards the closing mystery in the great Paschal cycle: “Vado ad Patrem: I am going to the Father.” And, in the exchange recorded in today’s Gospel reading, we sense an urgent curiosity among the apostles regarding these remarks of the Lord. In St. John’s inimitable style we hear Jesus and His disciples discussing this question: “a little while and now you shall not see me, and again in a little while you shall see me.” The questioning entourage “what is this ‘little while’ business?” and the

Lord's enigmatic response: "Amen I say to you that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice – but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you!"

In reference to all this, there is little wonder that the texts of today's Mass are so filled with Alleluias! The curiosity of the Apostles concerning this "little while" has riveted the attention of all believers ever since; though the Gospel text is located in proximity to the crucifixion and resurrection, it has a deeper, mystical sense in its reference to the earthly consummation of the Lord's Incarnation and His return to glory.

At the Ascension, we will commemorate the Lord's being lifted from this world and carried physically into the presence of God the Father; at that time those men of Galilee will hear the angels asking them why they are standing there gazing into the heavens, for "this same Lord Jesus will come again in glory as you have seen Him go." Beloved for the past twenty centuries the "little while" between this departure at Christ's Ascension and our eternal and inseparable union with Him has been the cause of the Church's vigilant expectation of His final triumphant glory: a glory He now possesses, a glory towards which we, in

this world, are still longing but have foretaste in our participation in the eucharistic banquet, itself a type and foretaste of the heavenly banquet at which the Lord is already seated.

*Say unto God “how terrible are Thy works, O Lord! In the multitude of Thy strength Thy enemies shall lie to Thee.”* This is not some curious text; we know how fear can inspire lies and flattery from those unwilling to submit to rightful authority. For the children of grace, the Easter triumph finds its reflection in the final exaltation of Christ’s Ascension to the glory of His Father. And the eternal hope of heaven opened by the Redeemer to the children of His kingdom fills us with unspeakable joy. For the enemies of God it – the truth of Christ in glory – fills them with dread: if not now, assuredly so at the moment of their judgment.

Today’s collect takes up the theme: *may those in error return to the way of righteousness*; that is, to the true path of the Catholic Church and her teachings, by professing the name *Christian* by doing only what is consonant with Christian faith and morals.

In today’s epistle reading, St. Peter spells out, in all simplicity, the manner of our fidelity to this name we bear: it is not in using our freedom as a

cloak for doing malice, but that through our free choices we may show ourselves as servants of God. The “little while” of which our Lord speaks is this present life, that length of time during which we sojourn here below before entering into the beatitude of God in heaven: that joy which no man will take away. This “little while” is the sojourn of our mortal lives as “strangers and pilgrims” in the present world so mixed with sorrow and joy. In it we have the ability to choose or reject that good to which God calls us. The Prince of the Apostles urges us to purity: an uncompromised integrity of body and soul wherein, by obedience to revelation, we will be found justified and vindicated by God at our life’s end. For the “joy no man can take away” is won by a sincere submission *now* to Him in whose image we have been created and by Whose Divine Son our redemption is made possible.

Christ’s coming again – that cataclysmic event for which genuine Christian faith ardently longs – is understood under two headings. The first is His gentle return to us in grace; the second will be Christ’s return at the end of the created order when He will come again, robed in the terrible splendor of the God that He is, and then judge this world with an exactitude of Divine Justice

that will brook no compromise. This definitive coming will cut through the errors and delusions of an obstinate humanity and cast into the abyss any and all who have spurned His love. There will be no appealing to the ‘rights of man’ on that dread day, the Day of the Lord, for then the rights of God will be asserted without appeal.

That is why the liturgy prays in today’s prayer over the gifts that we may have the grace to “subdue earthly desires and learn to love the things of heaven.” We do not always perceive that this earthly pilgrimage is just a “little while”: we must learn to know what Our Lord means when He says, “you will grieve, but your grief will be changed into joy.” For even as we wait, even as we live the daily existence of children of God, we see that sorrow itself has a glint of heavenly joy: for when we see that fleshly desires reveal the bitterness of no lasting satisfaction it is then that our souls come to understand that the shortness of this life is made so because Jesus has gone to His Father. According to St. Augustine even the second coming is not far off: “It seems long now because time is still passing by; but when the wait is over, we shall see how short it was.”

Beloved in Christ, do not let your hearts be troubled by the apparent triumph of evil with

which we seem to be surrounded. God has triumphed and will triumph forever even while His enemies now mock and scorn. We are taken for fools while the world rejoices, pursuing its road to perdition: “A woman, when she is in labor hath sorrow because her hour is come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembers no more the anguish for the joy that a man is born into the world.” We labor as wayfarers in a world that is far removed from God. Yet time is short: have faith in the promises of Our Redeemer. We who share in the delight of His mystic banquet in this life are promised that by humility and grace we will come to an eternal felicity with God in a glory beyond all imagining. Be therefore faithful to God certain that He who died to redeem us from our sins, is standing ready, in the fullness of His own time, to receive our souls into that eternal glory which He has reopened to us by the fruit of His passion and glorious resurrection.