

“Will we see Him today?” Luke 21:25-36

“And there will be 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. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

How rich are traditions of the Church! How wonderfully arranged so that we can be reminded about all the most important realities in our lives. Let's take the Divine Service, for example.

Every Divine Service is like experiencing the Last Day. The Triune God gathers us in His presence and then He declares: “I forgive you all your sins!” Then He tells how much He loves us and has done for us, even as we don't deserve it and then invites us to His eternal holy feast where He Himself serves us.

Or let's take Sundays. Every Sunday for us Christians is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, and more than that. Every Sunday is a reminder for us that like Jesus was raised from the dead so will be we in the power of the same Spirit who raised Jesus and who has also been sent to dwell in us.

Every day for us is about living out our baptismal identity. Every morning we wake up, mark ourselves with the sign of cross, and remind who we are, – beloved children of our Heavenly Father. Then we go ahead every day drawing our old sinful self and allowing the Word and the Spirit to renew our lives.

And as we struggle with all our old sins and with our daily temptations, we also wait for the second coming on Jesus. Every day. And, of course, in this season of Advent we devote extra attention reflecting on the return of Jesus.

I would guess that we all at some point in our lives have been eagerly waiting for something to happen, or for someone to come. Maybe for a baby to be born, or a loved one to return after a long time of separation. When we were counting days that were left till that joyful moment. Waking up in the morning and wondering – “is it today, will it happen today, will I see them today?”

This is how we as Christians are privileged to wait for Jesus, watching the signs and longing to see our Lord – “is it today, will He come today, will I see Him today?” And the Advent season is given to us exactly for this purpose, so that we could rekindle our desire to see our Lord as soon as possible.

In our today’s Gospel reading Jesus speaks about the signs that will accompany the last days. It is a frightening picture. The whole order of creation will be crumbling and falling apart.

In the beginning God made order out of chaos by speaking His powerful Word, and even today the same Word, or we could say the Second Person of the Trinity, holds everything together and keeps the world going.

However, our rejection of and rebellion against the true God and the evil that we daily inflict on His creation and on one another is driving His patience to its limits. And the day comes when the Creator will decide “it is enough”.

Jesus foretells the signs that will precede the end and will signal that our time is about to be over. **“There will be 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.”**

Has that time already come? Is it already here? Is the end close? People have always asked these questions. And, of course, today we are closer to the coming of Jesus than ever. And, sure, we could try to see at least some of the signs that may have not been seen even a little while ago.

For example, I don’t know whether ever in the history of mankind this has been the case that so many people, especially the younger generations, and especially those who don’t know God as their Father, were so worried about the future of our planet as many are today.

There is a real distress, people fear even about foreseen future. Even if it seems that no one can pin down and explain what exactly threatens our future the most. Is it global warming, or is it global cooling? Is it over-population or is it over-pollution? Or something else... But one can definitely sense the anxiety and fear about the order of things. Chaos and unrest seem to be creeping in.

External signs have always been around in one way or another and it doesn’t seem that they can tell us exactly how much longer we still need to wait until Christ returns in His glory. But the very fact that Jesus revealed all these signs to His disciples, tell us something else as well. It tells something about our God. About what kind of God He is. “Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”

Jesus has made these signs known to everybody. He warns us. He wants to warn everyone. He desires that everyone would come to the knowledge of the truth, would repent and be restored in the live-giving relationships with their Creator.

But for us Christians reflecting on these signs is a particularly joyful exercise. We are not just waiting for something to happen, or for just someone to come... we are waiting for the Bridegroom of the Church, for the Lord of the Church to come and to take us to Him.

We are waiting for the day when we will see Him, when we will be able to gaze at His beauty and marvel at His divine glory and holiness. We are waiting for the day when we will see Him as He is. More, when we will be transformed to be like Him, in new resurrected, perfect, wonderful bodies.

We can't even picture the richness and goodness of the life to come. If only we could taste it, to get a glimpse of it, as some of the apostles were blessed to do. What a joy it will be! And we will see our God as ... the Son of Man.

That's right. We will see Him as one of us. This is such a mystery and miracle. That the Triune God, the eternal Creator, the infinite One, that He actually has become as one of us and has decided to remain as one of us eternally.

What does it tell about His love towards us, what does it tell about how important we are in His eyes?! We won't see God as some sort of eternal spirit, or energy or some bodiless super-mind. We will see Him as the Son of Man, as Jesus from Nazareth. What an amazing love God has showed us!

Thus for us all these signs of the end times, they are the source of encouragement and joy. It means that our waiting and longing is coming to the end, that our redemption is drawing near. That we will see our God sooner rather than later.

But how soon? It's been quite a while since Jesus spoke these words to His disciples. Almost 2000 years. For us this is a very long time. Sometimes time, especially such big numbers scare us. Two thousand years...

Can we still trust what Jesus said? God sees things differently. For Him thousand years are like one day and one day like thousand year. Besides, He knows that this world will pass away. It is not here permanently.

What is permanent, what is unshakable, what will endure forever – is God's Word. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus' words will not pass away." Can we still trust them today? Yes, more than anything in this creation.

What an encouragement it is for us, for God's chosen people. Living in this confused and disoriented world, where people seem to be losing the last remains of common sense. Where people don't know anymore who they are, they don't know good from evil, truth from lies, claiming to be smart they live in illusions.

In the midst of this great confusion we have the Word of God that "is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path." (Ps 119:105) We have the Word that is "perfect, reviving the soul... making wise the simple... rejoicing the heart... enlightening the eyes ... [the Word that is to be desired more than] gold ... sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb." (Ps 19:7-10)

Wow! Thanks be to God we still have the Word of God! But it doesn't mean that we can become lazy Christians, or apathetic Christians or ignorant Christians. Heavenly Father, spare us from such terrible fate! For everything in this world fights against the saving faith.

This is why Jesus warns us. We need to hear these warning. For the world today is so deceptive. It is so much about leisure and entertainment, about having fun and being happy, so much about doing anything that would make me feel good. Think about this, access to every imaginable expression of sexual promiscuity is given to us on our fingertips in our phones and computers. It has never been so bad before. And how many fall for it, how many Christians fall for it!

Not to forget about our daily cares and worries. It is interesting and concerning. So many believe that the more stuff we have the more we are in control of our lives and futures, the more freedom we will have.

In reality it is the very opposite. The more we possess the more our possessions require from us. The more they actually enslave us. Step by step, like swamp they suck us deeper and deeper and our hearts are weighted down. Not to mention all the problems with relationships and health... and so on.

We can't afford to be lazy Christians. We need to be disciplined Christians. Disciples of our Master Jesus. We need to be focused on following Jesus as professional sportsmen are focused on their training, or soldiers on their preparation for the battle. Because the Day of the Lord is coming.

It will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. And for many it will happen suddenly, like a trap. Therefore Jesus urges us to stay awake, praying that God would give us His own strength so that we can escape these earthly temptations and distractions, and to stand always with good conscience, always waiting for and ready to welcome our Lord Jesus whenever He comes.

And this discipline, this focus, this readiness that we all need – actually it is not that hard for those who love God. Remember, who are we waiting for? We are waiting for Jesus. Waiting to see the most wonderful person in the whole Universe. Waiting eagerly.

We are waiting to see the One who lied down His life, because He wanted to have you in His Kingdom. We are waiting to see what the New Heavens and the New Earth are like. Our eternal home. We are waiting to see our loved ones who have gone before us and countless multitudes of God's saints.

We will know them, and they will know us. We are waiting for eternal, never ending joy and blessedness. And when you wait for something that great, that precious, that wonderful, then every morning impatiently whispers the question: "Is it today? Will He come today? Will we see Him today?"

And one day our waiting will be over, and the the answer will be "yes, today is the Day!" Come, Lord Jesus, come! Amen.