

Advent 2

It was only four weeks ago that we considered St. Matthew's account of this speech. Jesus is speaking to His disciples during Holy Week--just days before Judas will betray Him into the hands of the chief priests and scribes.

In fact, arrangements are underway, it seems, even as He is speaking.

And just as the temple of Jesus' body is about to be destroyed...

Jesus is speaking of the destruction of the temple of stone which stood before them.

In fact, this event is so important, that Jesus' teaching about it is recorded in detail be all three Gospel writers--Matthew, Mark and Luke.

This is important for a whole host of reasons:

1-For one, as a practical matter, Jesus is instructing the believers at Jerusalem, how to escape from getting caught up in the war.

"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. 21 Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto."

2-For another reason, now that the true temple is here, building which God gave as His fore-runner must be destroyed so that the focus might switch to Jesus.

Just as John the Baptist had to decrease and Jesus increase, the temple can be seen in the same way.

3-A third reason for Jesus' teaching is this: Even though, as a practical matter, we do not have to concern ourselves with fleeing from the armies of Titus.

Nevertheless, Jesus words are relevant because they set a pattern for how we are to live in the midst of a world which will be judged on the last day.

For this reason, this passage is sometimes called "The little apocalypse."

Unfortunately, since we customarily talk only of this third aspect of Jesus' teaching, the first aspect--it's real-life setting has been all but forgotten.

And this, in turn, has left a vacuum of ignorance which has been filled-in by all sorts of millennial nonsense that denies Christ completely.

Many today consider both the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the crucifixion of Christ to be problems that need to be fixed.

They think the temple needs to be rebuilt and sacrifice re-instituted.

And they think that Jesus needs to come back in order to get it right next time.

But let us set the record straight by saying: The Jerusalem temple was destroyed according to prophecy -- and that same prophecy forbids it ever to be rebuilt.

And Jesus' body was destroyed according to prophecy -- and that same prophecy taught that His destruction was for the sins of the world and that He would rise again on the third day.

Jesus' coming to save the world was a coming in humility, weakness and suffering.

This was not some aberration which He will correct later.

Rather, it is only through His coming in weakness, suffering and humility that He does reign as our Savior-God!

His cross is not a set-back. His betrayal did not thwart the coming of His reign.

Rather, His betrayal, suffering and death ushered in His reign!

"He reigns and triumphs from the tree" 455.3

All of this is what we spoke about last week as Jesus rode on a donkey.

"Behold, your king comes to you lowly..." said Zachariah.

And it is only in knowing and believing this, that we are in a proper posture to consider the "Little Apocalypse."

For today's reading, on the face of it, is not all that comforting.

"there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; 26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. 27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

When Jesus comes in power and glory--no longer clothed by humility and cross--it is frightful to all men, even to all of creation!

And this is not only true of the last day of the world's existence.

In fact, these words are not directly about the last day of the world's existence.

They are about the power and glory of Christ manifested through Roman armies..

They are about eclipses and falling stars, earthquakes and tsunamis.

They are about storms and fire and all the things that nature can dish out.

God's coming in power is not a pleasant thing to behold. It is rather frightening.

When that day comes, it offers no appearance of help or comfort.

There is only one way to be helped and comforted on that day, and that is to take refuge in the riven side of Jesus' body.

For God's grace does not come to you in the fire or the wind or the earthquake.

God's grace comes to you in the still, small voice of the preached Gospel.

Often-times, when people are defending their absence from Church, they tell me that they can commune with God out in nature.

That in the majestic mountains amidst of the bugling of elk, they are worshipping God.

When such things are said, I do not deny them to be true.

But I do point out to them and to you, that Christ's coming in power and glory is not for forgiveness but for judgement.

We gather today not to marvel at the power and majesty of God.

But we gather to marvel at the saving and forgiving grace of God.

We hear His words and by His grace are given to believe and be saved.

In fact, it is only by this Gospel that you are able to stand in the day of judgement.

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

And because Christ has come to you in humility and mercy, forgiving your sins, giving you faith and preparing you for His coming in glory...

Now His coming in glory--as frightful as it is outwardly--becomes a deliverance for you from this world of evil.

"Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

So when next He comes in glory
and the world is wrapped in fear
He will shield us with His mercy
and with words of love draw near."
AMEN.