

### THIRD SUNDAY OF END TIME: SAINTS TRIUMPHANT

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:1-13

*For you are all children of light, children of the day.*

Last week, as we considered our Lord's coming, Jeremiah in our sermon text warned us to be careful not to react improperly to our sin, as the goats in the Holy Gospel, not to double down on our sin, not to fail to examine ourselves in the mirror of God's law, not to take for granted a tomorrow that might never come. Now, in Thessalonians, St. Paul urges us to be ready for Christ's coming by remaining vigilant, sober, and faithful. How can we know when we are failing to be vigilant, sober, and faithful? Once again, I'd like to propose three ways from our second lesson.

First, St. Paul writes, "*So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.*" Do you find yourself trying not to think about a behavior? That is probably a sign that that behavior is out of line with God's will. When we get uncomfortable considering our thoughts, words, or deeds, it is our conscience's way of telling us that we've been less than consistent with our Christian faith in the way we've lived. And so we are tempted to slumber. Just as a person struggling with the horrible grip of depression, we find ourselves nodding off rather than facing the problem. If it gets awkward considering your Christian life, putting your Christian life out of your mind will not fix things. No, only repentance and the new life that springs from our Baptism every time we return to it through confession and absolution can unburden our conscience and set us again on the narrow path to heaven.

Second, St. Paul writes, "*For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.*" Do you find yourself in the night, afraid that others might find out about a hidden behavior that has taken hold of you, hurrying to hide something, or quickly clicking shut a webpage, or making excuses to sneak out, or making up stories about where you've been? Do you get a sinking feeling in your gut when you think you might not have covered all your tracks the night before, worried that everyone will be disappointed if they knew what you've been up to? Are you afraid to even mention whatever secret sin you've been dancing with in prayer out of embarrassment or for fear that it might hurt your relationship with God, as if God, who knows all, would otherwise remain unaware of it? St. Paul says that we are "*children of light*" and "*children of the day.*" God's children ought not be actively storing up skeletons in the closet, and they definitely ought not fear them, because skeletons are but dry bones while our Savior is flesh and blood, and He is able to breathe life into those withering away under the burden of guilt and sin. Stacking up bones, shoving away secret sins, won't do anything to get us on with our life in a spiritually healthy way. No, only sending those sins away will help, sweeping them out of our lives, and our Lord Jesus promises to help us to that end.

Third, St. Paul writes, "*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.*" Are you a conditional Christian, behaving differently in different situations? Are you one person with certain people and another person with others? This is certainly a temptation for pastors. We can put on the holy act and take on the pulpit voice with parishioners and then sin like anyone else when with friends or at home. What about you? Would you be comfortable doing and saying what you've done and said outside of these walls here within them, having concocted some cockamamie double standard for how you act based on who you're with or where you're at? We are not to merely *act* like Christians in certain places or at certain times. That is a charade. We are to *be* Christians, to "*put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation*" and not to take them off. God is everywhere, and wherever we are we are to be His.

There were ten virgins in our Holy Gospel. Five were wise. Five were foolish. Five kept their flasks of oil full. Wherever they were, they were ready, their light able to shine. And when the bridegroom came, they made their way into the feast. The other five, however, gambled on time they weren't promised, took their oil for granted, and let their lights grow dim and smolder out, and when the bridegroom came, they were locked out and missed the feast.

Which will we be? The oil is the gospel, the good news of new life through the death of our Lord Jesus. And God provides that oil at no cost. No one will go without because he or she could not afford it. So are our flasks full? Are we ready for our Bridegroom's arrival? Is our light shining, or is it growing

dim and smoldering? And if it is flickering out, what are we doing about it while there still is time? Are we putting off concern about the feast until the doors are shut and locked? How many loved ones haven't joined our Lord already, eager for the glad reunion of the family of God? Will we disappoint? Will we so abuse the freedom of the gospel and so little appreciate the invitation to eternal glory that we sleep in and miss it, wander in the darkness, revel away and stumble into the ditches the devil has so carefully dug along our path?

What a heaven awaits us! Isaiah writes, *"The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain."* The tragic results of the fall into sin will be undone, and a new creation will arise, and the death and the sickness and the sorrow that so infects this cursed world will be forgotten, will be no more. There we will be as God originally created mankind to be: one with Him. There we will be made whole, and nothing will ever be able to sabotage our bliss. Bernard of Cluny, singing amidst the dust and ashes and trials and misery of his time in the Middle Ages described it well in his majestic hymn, *Jerusalem the Golden*:

Jerusalem the golden,  
With milk and honey blest—  
The sight of it refreshes  
The weary and oppressed.  
I know no, oh, I know not  
What joys await us there,  
What radiance of glory,  
What bliss beyond compare.  
They stand, those halls of Zion,  
All jubilant with song  
And bright with many an angel  
And all the martyr throng.  
The Prince is ever in them;  
The daylight is serene;  
The pastures of the blessed  
Are ever rich and green.  
There is the throne of David,  
And there, from care released,  
The shout of them that triumph,  
The song of them that feast;  
And they who with their Leader  
Have conquered in the fight  
Forever and forever  
Are clad in robes of white.  
Oh, sweet and blessed country,  
The home of God's elect!  
Oh, sweet and blessed country  
That eager hearts expect!  
Jesus, in mercy bring us  
To that dear land of rest;  
You are with God the Father  
And Spirit ever blest.

Take St. Paul's words to heart, fellow children of the light, of the day. Listen to your conscience and let the Word guide your life. Don't recoil from self-examination, and don't hide in the darkness, and don't lead double lives as part-time Christians. No, Christ has died for us. And when we recognize the dying works of the flesh and the ancient serpent in our lives, there is only one wise reaction: give your Jesus your sins and put on His righteousness again, *"for God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."* Amen.

