

Sunday after Ascension

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 May 2021

Preacher: Fr. Paul Beutell

[0 : 00] But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, you may remember. The words of this morning is holy gospel in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen. There's a disturbing trend growing within Western society, which is also increasingly affecting the Church. That trend is an inordinate fear of death.

This isn't the natural fear one may have when confronted by death. For example, if I go to my doctor and she tells me I have terminal cancer, I will feel fear in that moment and at times through that process.

Or if I'm walking in my car and someone points a gun at me and says, give me your wallet or I'll shoot you, I will feel fear in that moment and may be reminded of that fear when I go to my car alone in the future.

In these two instances, the fear of death is natural. It is part of our human condition. Only a true nihilist doesn't feel this kind of fear.

[1 : 12] The disturbing trend is different. The fear of death is beyond what is natural. Many today live in fear of death.

They live as if there is no life after death and therefore grasp for life at all cost. Moreover, while many fear the death of the flesh, few fear the death of the soul.

The life of the flesh is protected at almost any cost. While the life of the soul is left to chance. And being good enough is if that were possible.

This trend is understandable for non-Christians. But it should not exist for us as Christians. I recently read this excellent quote from St. Athanasius.

Everyone is by nature afraid of death and bodily dissolution. The marvel of marvels is that he who is enfolded in the faith of the cross disregards this natural fear.

[2 : 16] And for the sake of the cross is no longer cowardly in the face of it. As Christians, you and I are enfolded. We are enveloped. We are veiled in the faith of the cross.

We know that by Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, there is life after this life. There is eternal life in heaven. We know that while this earthly life is very valuable, it is not so valuable that we are to clutch it at the expense of fully living the life we are called to live in Jesus Christ.

If I hold my hand out and you pour water into it, so long as I keep my hand open and cradle the water, it will stay in my palm until it naturally evaporates.

But if I close my hand upon it, if I clutch the water, what will happen? The water will be squeezed out and lost.

This is what many are doing with life. They are clutching to it so tightly that they cease to really live. In St. Matthew 10, verse 39, Jesus warns, He who finds his life will lose it.

[3 : 31] And he who loses his life for my sake will find it. There is a very clear reason why we as Christians should not live in fear of death.

We should not fear because we have already died in holy baptism. In Romans chapter 6, verses 3 and 4, St. Paul states, Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Therefore, we are buried with him through baptism into death. That just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk, meaning we should live in newness of life.

By baptism, we enter into the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 through 3 states, If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

[4 : 52] In baptism, the life we inherited from Adam in our first birth, is crucified and buried with Christ. So that we now, today, live in the resurrected and ascended eternal life of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians chapter 2, verses 3 through 5 boldly states, But God, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

This is not a mere positional seating with Christ. It is metaphysical. By baptism, we are made one with Christ, so that where He is, we are too.

Yes, our bodies and souls remain here on earth for a time to strive and be threatened by physical death. But by baptism, we are one with Christ now.

And being faithful, we will remain with Him as an eternal kingdom unto ages of ages. This knowledge should liberate us from all fear of death.

[6 : 09] When we recognize we have already died and now live in Christ, how then can anything in this world cause us to live in fear of death? Jesus tells us this very thing in St. Matthew chapter 10, verses 28 and 29.

He says, And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear whom is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin?

Not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. Jesus is calling us to set aside all fear of death and live our lives in hope.

He would not have taught this if we were not able to live by it. Our baptismal death, resurrection, and ascension is so real because Jesus first died, arose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. St. Athanasius again comments, Before the divine sojourn of the Savior, even holy men were afraid of death and mourned the dead as those who perish.

[7 : 27] But now that the Savior has raised his body, death is no longer terrible. But all who believe in Christ tread it underfoot as nothing, knowing full well that when they die, they do not perish, but live indeed to become incorruptible through the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15 is Scripture's most succinct teaching on the efficacy of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Whenever the fear of death creeps into our lives, we should quickly turn to these words and have those fears relieved.

Verses 20-23 states, But now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man, meaning Adam, came death, by man, Christ, also came the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, afterwards those who are Christ's at his coming.

The resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is our assurance that on the last day, we too will rise from the dead and ascend to be with him.

[8 : 51] 1 Thessalonians 4, 16 and 17 states, For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

We are assured by our Lord through his holy apostles that we will one day rise from the dead and ascend to be with Christ forever. Knowing this, knowing that eternal life is awaiting us, we should not live in fear of death.

My brothers and sisters, if you sense you are being captured by the disturbing trend of those who live in fear and death, I adjure you to break away from it. As those baptized into the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, as those who now live by faith in him and are fed by his very body and blood, we should not live in fear of death.

Instead, we should live as those who know that one day we too will rise from the dead, we will ascend and we'll forever live with our Lord.

[10 : 18] In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.