

Easter V, Rogation Sunday

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[0 : 00] These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer.

I have overcome the world. The world right now is being gripped by fear.

All around us we see people living in it. Fear of hyperinflation or an economic crash. Fear of food shortages.

Fear of nuclear war. Fear of the next pandemic. Fear of political and social unrest. Fear of changes in the climate and its results.

Many Christians are buying into these fear narratives. They too are living in fear. Honestly, I don't understand why.

[1 : 05] Even if any or all the above things happen, why are so many Christians today living in fear? In the gospel, we heard the words of Jesus from St. John chapter 16, verse 33.

He said, In the world you will have tribulation. We recall Jesus' words in St. Matthew 24, 6 and 7.

And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled. That word troubled in Greek means frightened. See that you are not frightened.

For all these things must come to pass. But the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.

Jesus has told us, his church, in advance, that all of these type of things will occur. We will face tribulation.

[2 : 12] But he also told us in the gospel lesson, St. John 16, 33. But be of good cheer. For I, Jesus Christ, have overcome the world.

Unbelievers have nothing else but what they see and may gain in this world. So they live in fear of tribulation. They cling to this temporal life because they do not believe in or are afraid of the life eternal to come.

But for Christians, for you and I, this is different. This world is not our home. We are strangers and aliens here.

Our affections are set above, not on this earth. We live for heaven, for the Jerusalem above that is free. Why then, if our Lord Jesus has told us we will face tribulations.

He's told us what types of tribulations we will face. And then he tells us not to live in fear of them because he has overcome them all. Why then, do many Christians increasingly live in fear?

[3 : 31] Now be assured, I am not saying we will not or should not feel fear. Fear is a natural emotion. Only a sociopath doesn't feel it.

It is useful to protect us from running carelessly into danger. For example, if we're standing on the edge of a cliff, a healthy fear of falling prevents us from getting too close, losing our balance, and falling off that cliff.

But living in fear is different. Very different. Living in fear is an obstacle to faith. It robs the soul of hope, joy, and peace.

Living in fear demands control of circumstances. It obscures our judgment. It seeks self-preservation, engenders anger, and builds resentment.

Do these not describe many people today? In contrast to these, Jesus teaches, if anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

[4 : 42] For whoever desires to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?

Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? So yes, we will feel fear as the tribulations in this era of the church's ministry increase.

But we are not to live in fear. For Jesus has overcome the world, and our lives are now in him. The antidote to living in fear is prayer. The more we immerse ourselves into a life of prayer, the stronger our faith will grow, and the less likely we will surrender to fear. The gospel lesson begins, Most assuredly I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. Do we trust this? Now we must be careful.

[5 : 54] The Father is not a vending machine, and Jesus' name is not a magic incantation. The proper understanding of that verse is given in 1 John 5, verses 14 and 15.

John writes, Now this is the confidence that we have in Christ. That if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of him.

If what we pray for is in accord with the will of God, we can trust the Father will provide it when we ask in Jesus' name. But like Jesus in Gethsemane, we must be able to pray, O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. When we are willing to submit what we want to the perfect will of God, then we can pray confidently that what we ask for will be given.

But if we want our will, our way, then we surrender that expectation. What then does a prayer to not live in fear look like?

[7 : 15] An excellent example is Psalm 56. It's 13 verses to declare the confidence we have in God. I hope you will read it and then begin to pray it if you feel the need to when you get home today.

Because God is our refuge and strength, we have no need to live in fear. Verses 3 and 4 of the Psalm declare, Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you.

In God, I will praise His word. In God, I have put my trust. I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? No matter what the nations do, no matter what the earth does, no matter what politicians do, no matter what the economy does, God is the one in control.

He alone is sovereign. Do we believe this? If so, then let's live it. It is likely that we are just at the beginning of the tribulations the church throughout the West will face in this era of her ministry.

[8 : 27] We should not expect things to return to business as usual. Therefore, whenever we feel fear rising within us, we need to immerse ourselves in prayer.

Pray Psalm 56 or pray your own words in the spirit of the Psalm. The Colic for Trustfulness on page 596 of the prayer book reflects that spirit.

Let us always remember St. Paul's Declaration of Deliverance in Romans chapter 8, verses 31 through 37. St. Paul writes, What then shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

[9 : 31] As it is written, For your sake we are killed all the day long. We are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

As we remember what the scriptures teach us, and as we pray, willing to accept the tribulations we must for God to be glorified in and through our lives, we will never find cause to live in fear.

And when we feel fear, we'll be able to overcome it in Christ. Brethren, the world is gripped by fear, but you and I don't have to be, for Jesus has overcome the world, and we are in him.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen.