“Joy in the Face of Mourning”

Matthew 5:1-12

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Sorrow. It’s one of those feelings and emotions that is completely universal. Everywhere you look around you, you can find someone who is hurting, suffering with the dregs of dealing with the realities of this sinful world. Whether they are battling the woes of a sudden or lingering illness, the pain and emptiness of the loss of a loved one, or battling the pressures of a job they despise but have to keep going to provide for the ones they love, you can go almost anywhere and see the struggles of your fellow man. Even here, among the saints of the Lord, there is sorrow and mourning. All are subject to the effects of sin in the world, but sometimes it seems that the Christian suffers even more. And that is what your dear Lord and Savior addresses for you this morning in our text. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt. 5:4).” You are not alone in this world and suffering on your own. There is joy in the face of mourning, because of the comfort you receive from Jesus.

But it’s confusing a bit, don’t you think? In mourning, you are blessed. Those two things just don’t seem to go together at all. Because mourning brings pain in both body and soul many times. To be blessed because you are in pain and hurting to your very depths is something that your sinful flesh simply cannot allow. By the nature of the Old Adam, you want nothing more than to recede into yourself, feeling as though you are guarding yourself against more sorrow by mourning in silence and solitude. The problem with that is more than a single issue, but the problem lies in that sin is the cause of mourning, and so retreating into the place where sin dwells—that is, your sinful flesh—isn’t going to help solve your grief and sorrow. And yet, the evil one is constantly pulling you inward, trying to force you into solving the problem on your own, because only you have the power to change such a strong feeling or emotion.

Mourning and grief are some of the strongest weapons of the adversary. That’s one of the reasons that Jesus brings up such a powerful statement in our text this morning, that those who mourn are blessed and will be comforted. Because the attacks from the devil will make you feel like you are all alone, fighting a battle within yourself that you feel like you have no hope of winning. And, frankly, on your own, you don’t have any hope of winning that battle. Even if in your mourning, you are looking to another who in their sinful flesh believes they have the power to solve your problem, you are still barking up the wrong tree. You are still seeking the consolation of the world

instead of the consolation of the soul. And there is only one place where that consolation can be found.

The Psalmist gives testimony to where the hope and consolation of the Christian lies. Psalm 119:50, "This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your promise gives me life." On this All Saints' Day, we are called to remember those who have already seen that promise fulfilled, for they have received life in Christ. Though, they are not the only ones who have received the promise of everlasting life. You have already taken hold of that promise by faith in the water of Baptism, where the promise of everlasting salvation has been placed upon you. You wear Christ's white robe of righteousness, the same righteousness that the Saints in heaven already bear in its fullness, but you await its full consummation. And that is the weapon you have against the evil one. That is the point the Psalmist makes in that verse I just read. In his affliction, his grief and mourning, the devil cannot overtake him, because he has been chosen by God as His elect child.

Very often, when the Christian, just like any one who bears the sinful nature of the Old Adam, is mourning, they feel alone and helpless. Which is exactly where Satan wants you to be. He wants you as vulnerable as possible so that he can use your sorrow in your sinful flesh against you to turn you against God and away from His promise of salvation. He did the same thing to Jesus in His grief and sorrow. He tempted Him with the flaws of the flesh, but Jesus being without sin, He did not give in. When Lazarus died, the Lord was greatly grieved and mourned the loss of His dear friend. But when the devil came knocking with his temptations to resign him to the grave, the Lord of all things raised his friend from the dead. He did not do that act for Himself. It was not a self-gratifying resurrection, but one that foreshadowed His own death and resurrection.

We are taught to read the Psalms as if Jesus Himself is speaking them. In the verse I gave you, think about it in context of the cross. Christ, as he hangs there in anguish, shedding His blood for the salvation of the world, is comforted in His affliction. In the face of death, the promise of His Father gives Him life. Because following His death, He will lie in the grave for three days, and rise to life again on that glorious Easter Morning. Since it is Christ who dwells in you, and you have been baptized into that same affliction of death and resurrection in which your Savior finds comfort, therein lies the answer to your grief, sorrow. and mourning. The Beatitudes are not just guides for how to operate in a world full of sin. They are all about Christ, and the work that He has done to redeem His people, to bring them the hope and joy of life everlasting.

"Blessed are the poor in Spirit…" Only Jesus can humble Himself to that level, and He does so in going to the cross to die the death that you deserve. "Blessed are those

who mourn…" Only Jesus knows what it truly means to mourn, as He mourns the loss of every sheep that goes astray or does not heed His call. "Blessed are the meek…" Only Jesus was incarnated of low estate, in the meekest of manners in order to bring salvation to His people. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness…" Only Jesus can be righteous without self-righteousness creeping in. "Blessed are the merciful…" Only Jesus can show true mercy, and He has done so in the grace that He has given to all who believe in His name. "Blessed are the pure in heart…" Only Jesus can have a pure heart because it is not corrupted by the sinful flesh that we all bear. "Blessed are the peacemakers…" The only peace we can find in this life comes from Jesus and His forgiveness won for us at Calvary. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake…" Only Jesus can be truly righteous, and so only He can know true persecution for it, and He did as He went to the cross, was beaten, scourged, and crucified all for you.

Today, we focus on what it means to mourn the loss of those you love. There is no filling the hole that is left in your heart when you lose someone if you rely on the sinful flesh to fill it for you. That hole must be filled with the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing else can assuage your sorrow and grief except for the only one who can truly know what it means to mourn. And He gives you the assurance of His comfort in His very body and blood which has brought you peace and comfort for His sake. He tells those gathered to mourn for Jairus' dead daughter in Luke 8:52, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." Your comfort is found in the words of Jesus. Do not weep, for they are not dead, but sleeping. As Paul says, "that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep." Joy is found in the truth of what Job proclaims, a truth that we will proclaim together with all the saints as we gather at the Lord's table in a few short moments, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth (Job 19:25)!"

The Christian life is fraught with sadness, sorrow, and mourning. It is something each and every one of you will have to deal with on a daily basis. But I will repeat the words of your Savior, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." You are blessed not because you mourn, but because you have been comforted by Christ Jesus in the forgiveness of sins that He has freely given to you by His blood. There is great joy in the face of mourning, because as one who is in the true faith, you know that mourning is temporary and fleeting. St. Paul says in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." On this day when we celebrate all the Saints that have gone before—

those in recent days, recent memory, or distant time past—the truth of what awaits you is what they experience even now.

What awaits all of the Saints is nothing more than the glory of heaven. They have departed this world of tears and unrighteousness, and entered into the place where Christ promises, "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:4)." The joy of every one of you as baptized sons of God is that the same promise of everlasting bliss awaits you when you depart this world of sin, or when Christ returns again in glory. But when He returns, the joyous song of all the Saints before the throne will be upon all of our lips, as we worship the Lamb upon His throne with shouts of what we sang moments ago:

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain,

Whose blood set us free to be people of God.

Power and riches and wisdom and strength

And honor and blessing and glory are His…

Blessing and honor and glory and might

Be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen.

This is the Feast of victory for our God! Alleluia!

That is the comfort of those who mourn, and the blessing of all who have entered and will enter the heavenly glory of the Lamb upon His throne. Amen.