

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

July 19, 2020

Psalm 119:57–64

- 57** The LORD is my portion;
I promise to keep your words.
- 58** I entreat your favor with all my heart;
be gracious to me according to your promise.
- 59** When I think on my ways,
I turn my feet to your testimonies;
- 60** I hasten and do not delay
to keep your commandments.
- 61** Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me,
I do not forget your law.
- 62** At midnight I rise to praise you,
because of your righteous rules.
- 63** I am a companion of all who fear you,
of those who keep your precepts.
- 64** The earth, O LORD, is full of your steadfast love;
teach me your statutes!

OLD Testament Reading: Isaiah 44:6–8

Besides Me There Is No God

- 6** Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:
“I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.
- 7** Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.
Let him declare and set it before me,
since I appointed an ancient people.
Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.
- 8** Fear not, nor be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?
And you are my witnesses!
Is there a God besides me?
There is no Rock; I know not any.”

EPISTLE: Romans 8:18–27

Future Glory

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. **19** For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. **20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. **27** And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

THE HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 13:24–30

The Parable of the Weeds

24 He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, **25** but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. **26** So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. **27** And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ **28** He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ **29** But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. **30** Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers,

“Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ’ ”

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

“Decay”

Romans 8:18-27

Dear friends in Christ,

This Sunday's readings have a theme of sorts, reflecting one of the parts of our faith. If I had to narrow it down to one word, it would be waiting. Waiting is a big part of being Christian. You would think that this would be easier, given how much of our lives we waste waiting as human beings. Traffic lights alone should've trained us adequately for this, or the Secretary of State's office, the DMV, computers, despite the fact that computers were supposed to make things easier, it seems like we still have to wait for the darn things. We're used to waiting, but somehow we never get better at doing it right.

The Epistle and Gospel lessons both talk about waiting, but what are we waiting for? Let's see what Paul says: **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”** Two phrases stick out here to me: futility and decay, and they're closely tied. Paul says the creation, that is, everything God created, was subjected to futility. What does that mean? It means, that, for all creation, there is no point. There's just no reason for anything. There's nothing that matters. Why would Paul be saying such a depressing thing? He gives his reason. Decay. I caught on to this when I was running through Ecclesiastes with the folks at St. John. That word, decay, really struck me, Paul is smart in using it. In this world as we know it, in our world, everything eventually falls apart. There is one constant in this world, and that is decay, entropy. Metal rusts, land

erodes, even mountains are worn down by a combination of gravity, snowmelt, and wind, if enough time passes. Nothing lasts in this earth. Nothing. It all crumbles to dust. A bird makes a nest, and then the wind blows it away. An animal digs a hole in the ground, and eventually that hole collapses. Paul is highlighting one of the most devastating consequences of living in a sinful world; given enough time, nothing will last. Even this world itself, planet Earth, we depend on a lot of things being exactly right in order to maintain our life-friendly nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere, and comfortable gravity. Change the planet's metallic core, and our magnetosphere can't repel the solar radiation, and every living thing on earth dies. Change the orbit of the moon, and the tidal flux could break the planet. Move us a few thousand kilometers closer to the sun and we're all done for. Move us a few thousand kilometers away from the sun and the planet freezes. Will earth last a million years? A billion? I doubt it. Too much could go wrong.

Paul says this goes for us too. **“And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”** We're subjected to this futility too. This planet has seen God-knows-how-many years of human civilization, and what we do we have left over from humanity's ancient days? A few buildings, a few scrolls, and that's it. That's what decay does to us. It renders everything we build, everything we plant, everything we do impermanent. That's futility right there. Nothing lasts. Even in our lives we see this, we spend the day working like dogs and what do we have? We gotta wake up the next day and do it all over again.

It's one of the ugliest consequences of the Garden of Eden. Before sin, there was no death, there was no decay, there was no futility. Now, that's all we have to look forward to on this earth. We need to be saved from this futility. We need a way out of this, and that's one of the things that Jesus gives us. Remember, Jesus took care of sin on the cross, and in taking care of sin He rescued us from all of sin's consequences, including this one. That dark reality is no longer true for us, because we belong to Jesus, and He doesn't give us futility, He gives us hope. Look at what St. Paul says. We have the firstfruits of the Spirit. We groan, because this life is tough, but we wait for the redemption of our bodies. **“For in this hope**

we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Back to waiting. We have a promise given to us by Christ, a promise sealed in His blood. We were given that promise at Baptism. At that moment, God promised us: “Everything I've done belongs to you. It's yours. You have it now, but you'll get it at the end.” And that is the strange reality of being Christian. Are we God's children? You bet your rear end we are. Has God adopted us? He did, in the waters of Baptism, nailing the sinful flesh into the grave. We have all of that, but we're still waiting to see it. That's what Paul says. We hope for what we do not see, and in that hope we are saved.

So what are we hoping for? What are waiting for? We're waiting for all this to end. We're waiting for what Christ has promised us that we will see with our own eyes. We're waiting for Him to come back, to bring an end to all this. The futility. The groaning. The grieving. An end to death, an end to all those things that keep human beings pacing the floor at night, an end to worry, an end to pain, an end to all of it. That's what we're waiting for. Jump over to the Gospel lesson and look what Jesus says about this in verse 41.

“The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” That's what we're waiting for, and that's what Jesus has promised us. He's paid for our sin by shedding His blood on that cross, and that means that on that wonderful day when this bloody world burns, we will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father. May that day come soon.

Sounds great, but until then, we're stuck here, in decaying planet Earth. Only the Father knows when Jesus will return, so what do we do until then? We hope. We wait. We work. We laugh, groan, love, suffer, and eventually die. We serve the neighbor and receive God's gifts from the altar. We fight with our

sin, we lose that fight, we ask God for forgiveness. But God is so good, He offers more. Not only does He offer us freedom from the decay and futility of our sin, but He offers us a conduit, a line of communication, support even as we struggle with sin on this earth. Look what Paul says in verse 26 of the Epistle lesson. **“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”** Wow. We've been given not just a guarantee of the glory to come, not just forgiveness, but the Holy Spirit, which helps us in our weakness. The Holy Spirit, God Himself, working with us, praying for us, giving us a voice when our voice fails. God doesn't just die for us, doesn't just live for us, doesn't just save us, He stays by our side even through our sins, even through the futility and the failures and all of the assorted crap that comes with living in a world like this.

And He keeps doing it, even 'till the end of the age.

Amen.