

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

It begins with Christ. It ends with Christ. He is before all things. So He is Alpha, the First, for there was not when He was not. Before the first man Adam He was, from eternity. The first man Adam became a living being, but he received His life by the breath of God. God Incarnate, the Image of the Invisible God, God who tabernacled with men, became a life-giving Spirit, Firstborn from the dead, Christ the Firstfruits. Before Abraham was, He is I AM. He is Alpha, the First.

And He is Omega, the Last. When He comes He brings with Him the Last Day, the end of this creation. He is the Last Adam. He brings the final judgment. Christ is the Omega, whose Kingdom is eternal. At His final coming, all things will be made new, for He makes all things new. It begins with Christ. It ends with Christ, Christ who has no end.

And He is the Head of the Body, the Church, who is the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead who calls forth on the Last Day all those who sleep in Christ. And He is the Bridegroom, the faithful and just Perfect Man who creates for Himself a Bride by the Water and Blood that issued forth from His riven side. He purifies unto Himself a chaste and pure, holy and universal Church. In Him she was created. He is with Her now. And soon He comes to take His Bride home.

So now she waits. She is the betrothed, awaiting the return of her Bridgroom. So the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the Bridegroom. That's what the Church does. She makes ready for her Bridegroom, her Head, her Savior, her Lord. She waits joyfully, she waits expectantly, she waits trusting in Him. She believes in His coming.

The Holy Church fixes Her eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of her faith. She centers her life on the Christ who gives her life. She places her life in His unseen hands. She waits, year after year, century after century, millennium after millennium. She waits, her hope ever undimmed, her faith strong, her lamp full.

But along with the wise virgins, dressed as they are, sleeping with them, lamps in hand, are imposters. The Lord calls them foolish. They had the Promise, but never believed it. They pretended to be the Bride, but never were, feigning faith, but never having it.

So they have lamps, but their lamps are empty. So it is in this world. Like goats among the sheep, like tares among the wheat, like diverse fish in a net, there are unbelievers among the faithful. And in this earthly life, they appear the same. But truth be told, when that glorious shout comes, when the Bridegroom returns in glory, their lamps will avail them nothing. Simply a garnish in this earthly life, when truly needed their lamps are useless. They are unrepentant sinners, crass unbelievers, who feigned Christian faith for worldly gain.

The Lord's condemnation of them is strong, and eternal: "Assuredly I say to you, I do not know you." Sin cannot stand in the presence of God. Sinners can't stand in the presence of God. And

Totenfest, The Commemoration of the Parish Faithful Departed
The Last Sunday in the Church Year, 2017 A.✠ D.

every sin you have committed places you not with the wise, but with the foolish, with those of empty lamp, with those rightly excluded from the wedding feast.

And yet, in His mercy, in His great love for you, God has filled your lamp. He has given you faith, faith that trusts in the Promise, faith that trusts in the Promised One, the One who came, the One who died for your sins, the One who defeated death, the One who reigns in heaven, preparing to return for you. The Bridegroom loves you. He gave His life for you. He freely gives you faith, faith worked by His Holy Spirit, faith that trusts in Christ.

His Gospel Promise creates life in you, life in the Bride, the Holy Church. She believes the Promise, which creates the very faith it demands. She lives by the Promise. And it is that Promise, the Gospel Promise, that fills her lamp. With Him is the fountain of life, by His Light she sees light.

By His Light you see Light. And that Light, His Word, is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path as you tread the road of earthly life in this dark world. His Light brings light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. It guides your feet into the Way of Peace, the Way of Life, the Way of Salvation, the Way of the Bridegroom.

And that Way is, in this life, the Way of faith, the Way of hope. The Prophet Isaiah calls it the Highway of Holiness, upon which one walks and even though a fool, shall not go astray. It is the ancient Way, the Way of the Promise, the Way of life, and the Way - of waiting. That waiting, your waiting in faith, transcends earthly life. It overcomes the tribulations of this world.

While the Bridegroom was delayed, the five wise virgins slumbered and slept. They sleep with those who we name this day, with Karl, with Roger, and with Danny, with those you have loved that you miss so dearly at this time of year, and every day. But you do not sorrow as others who have no hope. You know that they sleep with all the faithful departed of our parish who have gone before us with the sign of faith.

They sleep now with all those who sleep in Christ, those whose souls live with Him now, those whose bodies sleep in the dust as their souls know only heavenly bliss. Lamps filled with the oil of faith, they laid down. They laid down believing that the Bridegroom comes. They laid down believing, even in the face of death, the Words of Isaiah: "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come... He will come and save you."

The day has been long. So the holy martyrs pray from beneath the divine protection of that celestial altar "How long, O Lord?" And we too wonder, not doubting, but earnestly desiring to be united to our Lord, we wonder in joyful anticipation the hour of His coming. As He Himself has taught us, no one knows the day and the hour. And yet, this day is long. But as with any day, midnight comes. Midnight brings to a close the old day, and at the same instant the new day is born.

Soon you will hear that long-promised cry: "Behold, the Bridegroom is coming! Go out to meet Him!" Those words bring joy to the heart of the Bride, to your heart, dear Christian, for in them your faith is fulfilled. In those Words His promise is kept. It is for Him that your lamp is

Totenfest, The Commemoration of the Parish Faithful Departed
The Last Sunday in the Church Year, 2017 A.✠ D.

trimmed, it is for Him that you are vested in gleaming white, for Him that you keep yourself pure and undefiled, for Him that you wait. But of this you can be sure: your Bridegroom comes.

And soon, that Christ, the risen, ascended Christ, will come again. Soon He comes to call forth all those who sleep, all those whose lamps He has filled, all those He has made wise through faith in Him, all those who lay down believing that He will come again. That you be ready for that Day, that your lamp be full, He fills you now with Himself.

He fills you with His Holy Gospel, with the washing of regeneration, with the forgiveness of your sins, and with the Word that gives life. He fills you with Himself, as He gives you His Body to eat and His Blood to drink. He fills you with Christ, your Bridegroom, that your lamp be full of the oil of salvation. He fills you with Himself, that you be shown to be His True Bride on the day of His return.

The day has been long. But midnight comes. So take heart, dear Christian. Soon you will hear the cry “Awake!”, for the darkness of this time soon gives way to the light of everlasting life. Awake, for night is flying! Rejoice! The Bridegroom comes. He comes as He has promised. He comes soon.

He is Alpha and Omega. It begins with Christ, it ends with Christ, Christ who has no end.

Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.