

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

Malachi says the day is coming, and that it will burn like an oven. He also prophesied the coming of John the Baptizer, and that happened just as he foretold. The Forerunner came. The Prophet is proven true. Now Malachi foretells the consuming fire of the Last Day. Just as John came, so will the Last Day come.

The wicked, he prophesies, will be burned like stubble. It is a horrible prophecy, a vivid description that seems to bring hell-fire upon the earth. Not only the wicked will be consumed by that fire. So too the proud. Pride is a form of wickedness. Pride is a sin. Faith is never proud. Faith is thankful. Faith is grateful. Faith boasts in the Lord, not in self.

But pride is different. Pride boasts in self. The Lord Himself teaches that pride is like unto lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, and foolishness - the things that come from within and defile a man. Pride puffs a man up, which the Prophet Habakkuk equates with his soul not being upright. St. John the Divine places pride with the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. Solomon, in his Divinely-given wisdom, teaches “everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.”

St. Paul writes that “...whatever things were written before were written for our learning.” He means for you to hearken to the Prophetic Word, and to believe what the Prophets of old foretold. “The Day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.” So put away pride and haughtiness. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Repent of the high opinions that fallen man has of himself. Repent of arrogance and conceit. Repent of your sins. Prepare for that day now, for it comes as promised upon all men.

And do not say “If I were sinless I would look forward to it.” For no man born of human father is without sin. Rather trust in the promises of the Lord through whom all things were made. For as the Blessed Reformer teaches, “There is no one so well prepared for the judgment day as he who longs to be without sin.” Repentance has two parts: contrition and faith. And where there is faith, there is salvation. Where there is saving faith, there is deliverance.

What was promised of old is nearer today – the Day of Judgment, the Last Day, and the ruinous fire that comes with it. That fire will purify, by reducing all creation to ashes. And lust and jealousy and pride will be devoured by those wrathful flames. So amend your ways and your doings, turn from the fallen things of this world, this world prepared as tinder for the fire, and seek that which does not perish or fade.

For when that Day comes, the Lord doesn't direct you lay low, to seek shelter, to run, to crouch down, or to hide. Adam tried to hide, to cover Himself. It didn't work then, it won't work now. You cannot flee from God. There is nowhere to hide. So God provided a covering for Him. And so to you, you who long to be without sin, you who long for His coming, the Lord speaks not words of terror, but Words of comfort. And for you He provides a covering: the righteousness of Christ, poured out upon you with His shed Blood.

Rightly understood, the coming of the Last Day brings the Christian joy and hope. It is the Day when the Holy Church will be revealed. It is the Day that suffering ends, that peace reigns, the

Day of fulfilment of all the promises of God. It is the Day of your deliverance, the Day of salvation, the Day the Church will finally be one in heaven.

So on that Day, the Day the Lord comes, the Day of His final Advent, the Coming Lord bids you: “look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draws nigh.” The same Lord has taught you to pray “Thy Kingdom come.” The Kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it come among us also. As the sign of His coming, the Lord points not to a withered, dead branch waiting to be burned. He points to a new branch, a branch full of life, a branch ready to produce fruit, a living, budding branch.

For the Kingdom of God comes when God gives you His Holy Spirit. So you who are baptized, you who are washed in the washing of regeneration, you who are washed in a better washing than John could give, you have the Holy Spirit, you have new life, and you have the fruit of the Spirit. The Kingdom of God is among you now. And by that Spirit, in baptismal faith, when you pray “Thy Kingdom come”, you pray for the Last Day, the Coming of your Lord Jesus Christ.

And so too you pray “Deliver us from evil.” And there you make the sign of the cross, for to pray “Deliver us from evil” is to pray for a Christian death. It is to pray that God would strengthen your faith, that He would sustain your hope, that He would keep you steadfast until it pleases Him to take your soul to His nearer presence. For the faith in which you lie down is the faith in which you rise when your Lord comes at the Last.

To pray “Thy Kingdom come” and “Deliver us from evil” is to pray that the Last Day would come. It is to pray that your Lord would come. It is to earnestly desire His deliverance. It is to long to be sundered from this fallen world, to desire to dwell in the heavenly mansion that He has prepared for you, in the sincere conviction that God will do for you exactly what He has promised. To pray those Divine Words back to the God who spoke them is to pray according to His will. It is to long for His coming, to live for His Final Appearing.

Advent is the time of preparation for His coming, although that you be sustained in this life He daily comes to you now. Now He does not come in glory, He does not come in judgment. He comes in Bread and Wine, in the Word rightly preached and taught, and in water comprehended with His Word of Promise. He comes now as the forgiveness of sins He won for you on the cross is made yours by proclamation. He comes now as His righteousness is made yours by His glorious resurrection. He comes that you be ready for His coming. In this you know His great love for you.

So lift up your head, dear Christian. Kneel at this rail, lift up your head, for your redemption draws nigh – as Christ is placed in your mouth and poured across your lips, as your Lord comes to you for your salvation. And in thanksgiving you, you who are made One with Christ in His Holy Communion, you who are made One with His Holy Church, you who are made One with the Prophets and Evangelists and Apostles, with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke 21:25-33

*Populus Zion*, the Second Sunday in Advent, 2017 A. ✠ D.

The Bridegroom soon will call us. Then the unending Feast will begin. Until that Day, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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