

Last Sunday of the Church Year / November 26, 2023

1 Corinthians 15:24

“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.”

The Last Sunday of the Church completes the cycle that began last December with Advent and the Church's celebration of Christ's first coming into the world, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. Through the course of the past twelve months the weekly lectionary readings have led us through the life of Jesus, His ministry, the sacrifice of His body on the cross for our forgiveness and His resurrection for our justification before God the Father. In the weekly readings the Holy Spirit has informed our understanding of the Holy Scriptures, which make us wise unto eternal life. Through the witness of the word and His inner working in our hearts, the Holy Spirit has sought to establish our faith in Christ, so that it strengthens, grows and achieves fulfilment in our share of His resurrection when He returns and delivers the kingdom to His God and Father. There is nothing more important than knowing Jesus as Saviour and having God as our Father.

The cycle of the church year like the cycle of the seasons constantly repeats itself, so we are constantly reminded of the story of salvation and our need-to-know Jesus as Saviour and have God as our Father. But because this is repeated year after year, it's easy to become complacent and forget there will be a fulfillment to our faith. Our lessons at the end of the Church Year remind us the end will come. The cycle will cease. The clock will reach midnight and stop ticking. Christ will return. The dead will rise. Judgement will follow. Those who have rejected the Saviour, fallen asleep in faith and separated themselves from His word, will depart from His presence into eternal sorrow. Those who have held fast to Christ in faith and faithfulness will enter with Him into the Father's presence to live, laugh and love forever. The scriptures at the end of the Church Year teach us to always be mindful of the return of Christ and of our return to Him, should we die before that day. There is nothing more important than knowing Jesus as Saviour, for in Him we have God as our Father in time and eternity.

The fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is devoted to teaching the resurrection of Jesus and of all who have believed and been baptized into His death and resurrection. There were some in Corinth who doubted the resurrection, possibly because it seemed impossible or pointless. They forgot that nothing is impossible for God and that God displays His power in doing what is impossible for humans. They failed to appreciate that God created humans body and soul and that we are only truly alive when body and soul are united. More than that they failed to appreciate the spiritual significance of the resurrection as the greatest sign that God accepted Christ's sacrifice for the world's sin. The resurrection shows us we are truly forgiven. We will be fully alive to God in the resurrection.

Three things are of first importance: that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day. Without these Christ is nothing more than a human teacher. If Christ is nothing more than a human teacher our faith is in vain, we are still in our sins and remain under the condemnation of death. But Christ is more than a human teacher, He is the Son of God. Christ is more than a teacher of good behaviour. He is our substitute, who lived a perfect life in our place. He is our Saviour, who sacrificed His sinless self for our sins and rose for our justification. Christ died, was buried and rose again. Because of these we know Christ is our Saviour. Because of these we know that when we die, we will rest in peace. Because of these we know when He returns, we will rise with Him to share in His glory. There is nothing more important than knowing Jesus as Saviour and having God as our heavenly Father through Him.

It is important to remember that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose the third day for our justification, because this is the essence of the Christian faith. It is equally important to remember that Christ will return, put an end to time and call those who belong to Him to rise to a new and eternal life. This also is of the essence of the Christian faith. Everything we value in life passes away with time. Some day time will pass away. In time we will pass away. The most valuable thing in time and eternity is the life we have with God through faith in Christ; the life which we will receive in its fullness when Christ returns. On that day the only thing that will matter will be our relationship with Christ. He brings us to the Father in peace.

Whether we were rich or poor in life will not matter. It will not matter whether we were oppressed, stressed, repressed, elated or depressed in life. The only thing that will matter will be our relationship with Christ. It won't matter whether we were male or female, slave or free, a Jew or a Gentile. It won't matter what we wanted to be or wished we had done. The things of this life, the world and its desires, will have passed away. The only thing that will matter will be our relationship with Christ. Christ brings us to the Father in peace. He is the way and the

truth and the life. All who believe come to the Father through Him. On the day of His return Christ will call those who belong to Him to rise from the sleep of death and the dust of the grave and enter into His Father's presence to live with Him eternally. There is nothing more important than knowing Jesus as Saviour for through Him we have God as our heavenly Father.

God calls us into relationship with Himself through faith in Christ by the gospel of repentance and forgiveness. The law shows us our sins and sinfulness. The gospel shows us Christ our Saviour and offers us forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Him. By the working of the Holy Spirit in the word and the washing of Holy Baptism, God opens our hearts to receive Christ as Saviour and begins to establish His kingdom, His righteous reign, within us. Day by day throughout the course of our lives, through the cycle of the seasons and the repetition of the Church Year, He nourishes our faith with the nutrition of His holy word. We live not by bread alone. We live by the words that proceed from the mouth of God. Jesus is the bread and water of life. Whoever comes to Him will not hunger or thirst, but will be filled and refreshed in time and eternity.

God refreshes our spirits by continually returning us to the living water of our baptism, by which He washes away our sins and fills us with His Holy Spirit. He feeds our faith with Christ's righteousness in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, through which we receive His true body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. He walks with us along the path of life through the body of believers, which is His kingdom and treasured possession. He shares in our joys and consoles us in our sorrows through the body of believers. In life and in death He is with us for the sake of Christ Jesus. Because He is with us, death for believers is always referred to in scripture as a rest and gentle sleep. Whether in the body or out of the body, we rest in His peace for the sake of Christ our Saviour.

The last Sundays of the Church year remind us that when the time comes, time will pass away and Christ will call us to rise in His resurrection. As Paul says in our text, He will deliver us body and soul to His heavenly Father, so we may dwell in His presence forevermore. He will destroy death. He will wipe every tear from our eyes. He will create new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness. Like the Church Year everything will come full circle. The creation will be made new. Believers will be made new. We will be with God as in the beginning, in perfect righteousness and in eternal security. God will be in us and we will be in God. There is nothing more important than knowing Jesus as Saviour and having God as our heavenly Father through Him.

God in His mercy, establish us in faith and keep us in His grace. In Jesus' name. Amen