

Pentecost 4 7/3/22
Luke 10:1-20 9C

“REJOICE THAT YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN”.

In what do you rejoice? Your health? Your wealth? Your children or grandchildren? How far you can hit the golf ball? We rejoice in many things. But, above all the gifts of God that bring us joy, Jesus says today, “Rejoice that your names are written in heaven”.

Our Gospel reading is the account of Jesus sending out of the 72 to the regions of Perea and Judea, where Jesus Himself was about to go. They were sent to preach the peace of the Gospel. They would be as defenseless as “lambs in the midst of wolves”. They were to trust in the Lord for their daily bread. They were not to worry if people would not listen to them.

They return with great joy, joy that even the demons were subject to the power of the Gospel. Jesus greets their joy in a seemingly strange way. He directs them away from the here and now, to the true joy of heaven. “Rejoice that your names are written in heaven,” He says.

In that we are to rejoice, and yet, that is hard. It is difficult. It is more than a challenge because “your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour,” St. Peter writes (1 Pe 5). The fall into sin brought sin, death, and slavery to Satan upon all men and it is the devil who leads us away from God to fear, love, and trust in the things of the here and now.

Luther reminds us that it is no joke to take sides against the devil and be saddled with such a mighty, lifelong enemy. The devil is Jesus’ enemy and he is your enemy. The devil robs us of joy by plaguing our lives with

sin, sin that brings discord, discontentment, despair, envy, jealousy, hatred, anger, and loneliness.

True rejoicing is based on what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Jesus sums up all that God has done for us, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven".

Immediately after Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, God gave the first promise of a Savior. To the father of all lies, God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Ge 3:15).

The offspring of a woman who crushed the devil's head was Jesus. The book of Hebrews teaches us, "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He himself [Jesus] likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (He 2).

When Jesus was crucified, the ruler of this world, Satan was thrown out, defeated, crushed. The victory over sin, death, and the devil has been won.

Our joy is that Jesus gives us His victory to be our very own. In the order of Holy Baptism, the candidate who comes to be baptized is asked, "How are you named?" Do not overlook this part of the service -- it is very important. By name, the victory of the Jesus over sin, death, and the devil becomes your very own victory! Rejoice and be glad: Jesus died for you. Jesus crushed the head of the devil for you. Jesus rose from the grave to defeat death for you. Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father to prepare a place in heaven for you. "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine," God says to you through the

Prophet Isaiah (43:1). Rejoice and be glad, Jesus has written your name in heaven.

But, as we live awaiting our exodus from this vale of tears, the devil does not leave us alone; He continually seeks to devour us. The great lie of the Father of all lies is that being a Christian means freedom from troubles, tribulation, and tears; being a Christian means that you will have money and worldly goods, that your marriage will always be joyous, and your children are above average and incapable of doing any wrong. No, Dear Saints of God, being a Christian does not mean immunity from suffering but rather eternal deliverance from it.

Like Job, we might lose our health, our wealth, our fame, our friends, and even our spouse may abandon us. We rejoice in words of Battle Hymn of the Reformation, "Take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, our vict'ry has been won; the Kingdom ours remaineth". The devil may scowl fierce as he will to devour us, as he did Job, as he did Jesus, but he cannot take Jesus' victory from us, for our name is written in heaven. Under the cross and in the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death, we can say with Paul, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tm 4:18).

For today, Jesus says, "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and even over all the power of the enemy (the devil), and therefore nothing shall injure you". Let us not misunderstand these words of Jesus. He is not telling us to handle snakes and scorpions to impress people. Throughout Scripture, serpents and scorpions are symbols of evil; remember that it was in the form of a snake that Satan came to Eve. Jesus is telling us that Satan is judged, he cannot harm us. What was the effect of the mission of the 72? Literally, Jesus

says, “I will continually watch Satan fall like lightning...” Wherever His Word of peace is proclaimed and His Sacraments administered, Satan is defeated. That is the cause of our rejoicing.

Even in the hour of his deepest grief, Job was able to rejoice, “I know that our Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after our skin has been thus destroyed, yet in our flesh I shall see God” (Job 19).

We rejoice that we shall see God. And yet, we remember the multitudes who still believe the lies of the devil, who still look for joy in that which moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. So, Jesus sends you. Jesus does His work in you, so that He can do His work through you.

No, at least not today, God has not sent you to Africa or China, He has sent you here in your daily vocations -- parent, grandparent, child, student, citizen, employee, employer – that you may “Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim”.

Our Gradual for today proclaims, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news, who publish peace and bring good news of salvation...” How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news because we can give what this world cannot: the peace of the Gospel of Jesus and the joy of knowing that their name is written in heaven.

Your kitchen table is the greatest mission field you will ever have. When you are visiting with your neighbor who is mourning the death of a loved one or if your neighbor is terminally ill, share with them the hope of the resurrection of Jesus. If your neighbor is lonely, comfort that with the good news that Jesus is with us always, never will he leave us nor forsake us. If the woes of life have overtaken your neighbor, if the darkness of the

valley of the shadow of death is indeed dark and frightening, cheer them with the peace that Jesus gives, that his world cannot give. Invite them to the worship services of God's House that they may hear and learn the Word of God, that Word that gives and strengthens faith.

“Let none hear you idly saying, ‘There is nothing I can do,’ while the multitudes are dying and the Master calls for you. Take the task He gives you gladly, let His work your pleasure be; Answer quickly when He calleth, ‘Here am I, send me, send me!’” (*LSB* 826:4). Like Paul, may we only boast of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.