

7th Sunday of Easter
Revelation 22:1-6, 12-20

5/29/22
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HE WHO TESTIFIES TO THESE THINGS SAYS, "SURELY I AM COMING SOON." AMEN. COME, LORD JESUS!

Well, the time came when it comes to all men – I had to have my ice cream! And, the only ice cream shop of any kind I could find was a McDonald's. But, I could attest from prior experience, that McDonald's does sell McFlurries, so off I went. The only pothole in my yellow brick road was that we had just finished touring the Airborne Museum in Sainte-Mere-Eglise, Normandy, France. So, there I stood, a desperate man, trying to make the young workers at a McDonald's in France understand "McFlurry," and they were responding, in French, in words that meant – I'll paraphrase here – "stupid American tourist."

I was a stranger in a strange land. Not all that different from you, Dear Child of God. You find yourself a stranger here, on this side of heaven. Your citizenship is in heaven (cf. Ph 3:20). And today, you find yourself like an American tourist trying to order a McFlurry in a McDonald's in France. It just doesn't work. You find yourself frustrated, shaking in fear like a little rabbit. Your Lord Christ has ascended into heaven. And He ascended to prepare a place in heaven for you. And the GOOD NEWS is He is coming back to take you to be with Him, that you would be forever with Him in heaven (cf. Jn 14:3). Today, we hear this comfort in our reading from Revelation, "Surely I am coming soon!"

In our reading, John says that outside of heaven "are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (v. 15).

These are the unrepentant, those who are not sorry for their sins and

do not believe in Christ. The dogs are outside the kingdom of heaven. No, these are not our four-legged, beloved household pets. This is an Old Testament expression for male prostitute; obviously, one who did not honor God's blessed estate of marriage. Those who practice magic arts, which often involve the use of drugs, are outside of heaven's gate. Murderers, those who disobey the 5th Commandment to inflict violence and suffering upon other people, are outside as well. People who continue to practice and love falsehood, lies, and deception are not in heaven, either. In other words, those who showed by the fruits of their lives that were not part of Christ will not live in heaven.

Wow, you hear those words, and shudder a little bit, don't you! You know why? You've sinned. We all have. We've doubted God's Word, we've allowed the sun to set on our anger, we've lied, harmed other people by our words and deeds, we have things in our lives that we have put first instead of God. We may have dabbled in sexual sin or the occult. Will we be outside the gates of heaven?

No, no, you won't. The gates of heaven are open to us, because we have Jesus, "the root and descendant of David, the bright morning star" (v. 16). Jesus is the One who came as the shoot of the stump of Jesse, both David's son and David's Lord (cf. Is 11:1, Ps 110:1). In the book of Revelation, the stars are associated with angels; but the most brilliant star in heaven -- the bright morning star -- represents the brilliant glory of Christ.

It's all about Jesus, because He has opened the gates of heaven to us. So that we would not have live outside the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem with the unrepentant, the Son of God Himself left heaven and came to this fallen world to go outside the city in our place. Jesus was the Scapegoat upon whom the sin of all the world was laid and was sent into

the wilderness of Golgotha, the Place of the Skull. There, they pierced His hands and feet and His side so that His sacred blood flowed – it flowed to wash and cleanse us of all our sins. Yes, we are washed in that blood “so that [we] may be the right to the tree of life and that [we] may enter the city by the gates” (v. 14).

Forty days after He rose on Easter morning, Jesus ascended into heaven to open the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem to us. This morning, we sing why the ascension of Jesus is so comforting to us, “By our mighty Lord’s ascension we by faith behold our own” (*LSB* 494:5). Ascension assures us, comforts us, that we may enter the heavenly Jerusalem to dwell before the throne of God and the Lamb, where we will reign forever and ever.

The words of our reading from Revelation are oh, so comforting for us. Our citizenship is in heaven. Those who harm us, endanger us by their sins are outside the gates of heaven. And, we by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, are inside those heavenly gates. Which means, they can harm us no more. They are not a danger to us anymore. We simply have the joy of being with Jesus, forever, and ever, without end.

But, today, we find ourselves living as strangers on this side of heaven, living among and with the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. And, it’s dangerous and it is scary.

The perversity of this world is on full display. Jesus said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female,” but we live among those who reject Jesus to say that boys can be girls, and girls can be boys, and everything in between. Murderers harm us in our bodies, even shooting and hurting young school children.

Idolaters would have us believe that our worth is based on what brand of blue jeans we wear. The darkness of this valley of the shadow of death overwhelms us.

On this Sunday after the ascension, we pray, “O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation, but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father.” Jesus answers our prayer. On Pentecost, He sent the 3rd Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify us to Himself, His Body, His Church, on this earth. Our lesson says it this way, “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (v. 17).

Do you recall what happened when the Lord God saw that the wickedness of mankind was great upon the earth? He shut Noah and his family into the ark and they were safe from the flood waters. In that same way, God has shut us into the Body of Christ, His Church, and here, we are safe.

Here, in the ark of Christ’s church, you receive the gift of forgiveness again and again and again. Here, the forgiveness Jesus earned on the cross is made your forgiveness, by your baptism into Christ, when you hear the absolution spoken over you, as you feed on the good food of Christ’s body and blood.

Graduates, today is the BIG day. The world is yours. Your parents, your families have high hopes and dreams for you. But, your parents, your families, your family of Concordia, and especially your Father in heaven have no greater plans for you than you walk in the truth of God’s Word, as

you learned it in the *Small Catechism* in Confirmation. Walking in that truth, you will be kept safe from every lie of the devil, every evil intent of this fallen world, and even every lust and unholy desire of your sinful flesh, HERE, in the ark of the Church, until you reach that safe harbor of heaven.

I know, I know, inquiring minds want to know – did Pastor ever get his ice cream? Yes, even though I was a stranger in a strange land, I got my ice cream. And, you Dear Child of God, have the certainty of knowing that you will ascend through the gates of heaven to dwell in safety there. You have that certainty and joy because your Lord Christ promises, “Surely I am coming soon.”

To which the church cries, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”