

26 S. after Pentecost 11/17/24
 Mark 13:1-13 28B

“THESE ARE BUT THE BEGINNING OF THE BIRTH PAINS”

Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him (Ge 4:8).

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Ge 6:5).

They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams” (Ge 37:19-20).

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us” ... And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt! (Ex 32:1, 4).

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at [Stephen] ... Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him (Ac 7:54, 58).

Which brings up a very important question: What exactly is Jesus referring to when He spoke of these signs in our text for today? Is He talking specifically about the Last Day, the day of the great Judgment? *“These are the beginning of the birth pains,”* Jesus says (v. 8). No, Jesus is **not** speaking about the Last Day and the Judgment. He’s talking here about the terrible, sinful things that will happen in the years, and months, and days leading up to Judgment Day. He’s talking here about “everyday life” as a Christian living in a fallen and sinful world. And you and I are all too aware of that, because we live it every day.

Riots, thefts, vandalism, murders, rapes, ugly confrontations, shouting matches. Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Cancer, Covid, Chemotherapy, IV's, another trip to the dr's office for yet another appointment. Injustice, sadness, loneliness, worry, fear, regret. Heresy and lies of the devil, you know those all-too-well because you hear them every day: Marriage is curse, not a blessing from God; Holy Communion is just bread and wine, nothing more; you can't eat meat on Friday; all religions worship the same god and all religions lead to the same heaven.

So, My Dear Friends in Christ, let me ask you a question: Do you sincerely think that we're the first generation to have to deal with these things? These birth pains have been going on since sin entered into the world; since our first parents were cast from the Garden; since the time Cain murdered his brother Abel in cold blood; Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and lied to their father; the Israelites worshiped the Golden Golf; and Stephen was martyred for the faith.

Look at the context in which our Lord Christ is speaking these words. He's talking to the disciples as they look at the wonder and magnificence and the **stability** of the temple buildings. Jesus tells them to not look to these earthly things, made with human hands, for confidence or security or hope. He tells them about troubles, tribulations, the turmoil of earthly life. Then, He goes in, in our reading for next Sunday, to tell them that not one single stone of that huge, beautiful temple will be left standing upon another, something which came to fulfillment in the year 70 A.D. when the Roman army completely sacked and destroyed Jerusalem.

The real question for us to consider is: Why? Why did Jesus tell His disciples such terrifying things? He was telling them these things so they wouldn't lose their faith when the going got tough. He was teaching

faithfulness! He is giving them, and us, a good healthy dose of reality. *“The one who endures to the end will be saved (v. 13).”* Stay faithful. We press on toward the goal from the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, in the face of all the calamity and terror we’ve witnessed in the world, and in our lives (cf. Ph 3:14).

Our Epistle reading admonishes us, *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (He 10:23).* OUR HOPE IS JESUS, FOR THE ONE WHO SPOKE THESE WORDS ABOUT LIVING LIFE IN THE MIDST OF BIRTH PAINS, IS THE SAME JESUS WHO DELIVERED US FROM ALL OF IT.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took on human flesh and blood and dwelt among us on this earth. He lived a perfect life of obedience to all of God’s Commandments for you. He took from you all your wrongdoing, all your worries about your daily bread, and all your fears about tomorrow -- **all of your sin** -- and carried it all to Calvary’s cross, where He offered the single, all-sufficient offering for sin. He died. He was buried, but the 3rd day, He rose again and His resurrection is proof positive that your sins are forgiven. Forgiveness, life, and salvation are yours because you have been baptized and live in Christ Jesus. You live in that blessed hope that Jesus will come again and deliver you from false preachers, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines. This is your hope. You walk by faith in that hope. And, this is what you hold fast to, even in the midst of things you cannot understand, especially not with your human reason and senses.

The truth is this: Earthly life is lived under the cross, and the cross is an instrument of death. Our Lord Christ said it this way, *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).*

Nothing has ever overtaken you except that which is common to all man. You have not been singled out. Look upon your brothers and sisters with sympathy. They are all hurting, *the same as you*. If it seems to you that they have it easy, you are wrong. No one has it easy. And please understand me, I don't mean that in a negative way; what I mean is that you might just **not** be aware of the crosses your neighbor bears. In the midst of all these birth pains, each of us is called to stay faithful, remember the coming Day of the Lord, and live in His grace. Comfort one another. Encourage one another. Love one another, just as you have been loved. Forgive one another, just as you have been so graciously and lovingly forgiven. Our Epistle reading today says it this way,

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (He 10:24-25).

Jesus is with you and He is doing His work in you. In the midst of the lies of the devil, war, natural disasters, divorce, illness, and sorrow, burdened by guilt, shame, and regret, your Lord Christ Lord continues to come to you as He has promised. You, Dear Child of God, are not alone. You have not only your fellow, suffering brothers and sisters in Christ; you have Jesus. He speaks His Words of forgiveness and peace and comfort into your ears. He feeds you with His life-giving Body and Blood so that you will be strengthened for the times and trials to come; so that you will have joy and peace that surpasses all understanding while you wait **and** even while you suffer. For He is not simply your Lord in the future, when all sorrows shall cease, but He is also your loving and gracious and almighty Lord right now, even as you live life today in the midst of birth pains.