

Faithful Sign-Seeing

In our Gospel lesson for today our Lord makes clear that just as we can see the signs of coming summer in the fig tree, so also can we, through the eyes of faith, see the coming of Christ in all glory and judgment. In fact, He commands us to straighten up and raise our heads and look to Him when we see all the signs and symptoms of this fallen and sinful world coming apart at the seams. ***But that's not all our Lord tells us to look at, is it? "Watch yourselves...."*** Understand: Our focus is to ALWAYS be on Christ, in good times and in bad times, better/worse, sickness/heath, rich/poorer... **ALWAYS!** You can NEVER focus "too much" on Jesus or have "too much" faith. But there is the problem. We can (and do) take our focus off of Jesus. We can (and do) focus on the wrong things. Our Lord prayed that we be "*in the world, but not of the world*" (John 17). However, we can very easily become "of the world" when we take our focus off of Christ, and it's this "of the world" problem that ***blinds*** us to all the signs all around us. It's this "of the world" problem that weighs our heads and hearts down so that we don't look up and look to Christ.

"Watch yourselves so that you don't get weighed down/blinded by dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this world, and then that day will come upon you like a trap." ***What does all this mean?*** Well... the drunkenness and cares of this world are pretty self-evident. We can get/be "drunk" on the things of this world, intoxicated with the things that this world cares most about; ***e.g., health, wealth, popularity, and prosperity.*** The feelings of euphoria and joy and power these things give us—"ten-foot tall and bulletproof"—it's easy to see why sinful man is such an ***addict*** for these things. ***We're junkies.*** We can't get enough, and the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh are more than happy to supply us. It happens all the time. It happens to us. We get what Jesus means with these words. *"Watch out. Watch yourselves."*

What about "dissipation" though? That's not a word that comes up often in conversation. Simply put, to be dissipated—*kraipalai* (Greek)—is to be ***crippled/hung over*** because you've been intoxicated with material, worldly, non-redemptive things. You're sick on all the wrong things; sick to the point of being crippled; sick like a bad hangover with a terrible headache. You don't want to move. You don't want to open your eyes or hear a thing. It hurts too much. Can we, as "good Christians," really be dissipated to the things of Christ? Absolutely. We can get so sick on the things of this world that it hurts to lift our heads to Christ. It hurts to hear Christ. ***His Truth hurts when it confronts us in our sin.*** It's easier (or at least less painful) to just lay there in the darkness of our sin, eyes closed and trying to keep that painful Word of Truth from penetrating our aching heads. *"Watch out. Watch yourselves."*

I'm reminded of St. Peter's second epistle, where he speaks of "nearsightedness" to the free and unmerited gift of baptismal grace and salvation in Christ (2 Pet 1:5-9). A "Christian faith" that is without virtue/valor, without knowledge of Christ (i.e., a Christian who knows nothing of the faith they claim as their own), without self-control (i.e., the ability/desire to resist temptation), without patience/endurance, without piety/holiness, without brotherly love is a faith that is blind to the love of Christ. *"Whoever lacks these qualities [virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, piety, brotherly love and Godly love] is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed/washed from his former sins."*

To be nearsighted means that you can only see things up close. ***We, as Christians, can be sinfully nearsighted to the point of blindness.*** It happens all the time, and it happens to all of us. Life gets tough, and that's **all** we see. We don't see Christ. We don't lift our heads and look. Life doesn't even have to get tough for sinful nearsightedness to blind us. We can get too busy focusing on ourselves; i.e., our desires, our cares, our comforts, our feelings and worries, that we become blind to the needs of our neighbor (and Christ). *"When you did not do these things to the least of these, you did not do them to Me."* We can be so ***nearsighted and curved in on ourselves*** that we can be blind to the unconditional love of God that is Christ Jesus.

Look no further than this baptismal font. How often we don't recognize our own sinner/saint reality. We forget. We're so nearsighted that we are blind. While you were still dead in your sin, your Lord chose you, called you, and cleansed you. You didn't ***earn*** His forgiveness. You didn't ***earn*** God's grace and mercy. **He gave it to you as a free and unmerited gift, in spite of you.** He washed you and cleansed you, all out of His great love for you in Christ and because of Christ. ***Shouldn't that change you? Shouldn't that Good News have an effect on you, or have you forgotten? Do you not see?***

And before you answer that, look to the altar/communion rail. Here is Jesus—***God's unconditional love in the flesh***—holding out to you His blood-bought gifts of Body and Blood; of forgiveness, life, and peace. *"As often as you do this, remember what I have said."* Each and every time we gather together for this feast, **here is Christ... just like He has promised.** *"I am with you to the very end of the age."* Here He is! And yet... we can be so blinded and weighed down by our own cares and worries and desires that we fail to recognize Christ right in our midst.

And none of this even addresses our nearsighted blindness as it pertains to the End, ***whether it be our own end of life or the end of time and Judgment Day.*** We may say that we *"look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come,"* but the fruits we bear make it clear that we can't even imagine that

Christ could pull the trigger and sound the trumpet and bring all this to an end in the twinkling of an eye. ***We're too busy navel-gazing to raise our heads and look to Christ.*** "I'll go to church next Sunday." What if next Sunday doesn't come? What if the next time you're in church is for your own funeral? What if Judgment Day comes before you can work God into your schedule? It's too late then. Your end/judgment will have come upon you like a trap. "Watch out. Watch yourselves."

Like I said last week, this is why we take this little bit of time before Christmas to focus on ***repentance***. We're all guilty of such spiritually blind inebriation and avoidance, aren't we? But here's the thing: ***Harping on it doesn't change it.*** What changes such sinful behavior isn't brow-beating and shaming, but the ***Holy Gospel reality of Christ*** for you, for me, and for the whole world.

I'll steal the line made famous by John the Baptist: Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! Put down the phone. Put down the sales ads and the shopping lists and whatever else is "more important" than Christ. Lift up your heads. Here is your Savior! Here is the One who took your place and paid for each and every one of your sins. ***Put away all malice, all deceit, all hypocrisy, all envy, and all slander.*** Jesus died for the sins of the person you can't stand... just like He died for you. Jesus loved them enough to die for them, no different than He loves you. Here He is, and He's not here in terror and wrath. He's here in love. He's here to give you His blood-bought victory and peace. Look to His holy tree of Life. It is finished, and it's all for you. ***Can't you see the signs and proofs staring you in the face [the font/altar]?***

Folks: I know the world you live in. I live in it too. It's scary. It's depressing, and it doesn't look to be getting any better. Lift up your heads. Lift up your eyes. Behold! The Christ, the almighty Son of God, is in your midst and is with you always, even to the very end of the ages. By virtue of your baptism into Him; into His death and resurrection, ***you belong to Him, and nothing and no one can ever steal this away from you.*** Not even the gates of hell can prevail against this blessed Truth and comfort. May you never lose sight of this. May you never let this get out of focus. May this beautiful Gospel Truth be what you look to and hold fast to, now and into all eternity.

In Christ's most holy name...**AMEN.**