

## Seventh Sunday of Easter, Exaudi, May 21, 2023

**Readings:** Ezekiel 36: 22-28, 1 Peter 4: 7-14, John 15:26–16:4

### ***The Spirit of Truth Bears Witness to Jesus***

The Spirit of Truth bears witness to Jesus, who is the truth. But the world does not receive the truth. It loves its own and hates those who are of the truth. Just as Jesus was scorned, so is His Church. *“The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God”* (John 16:2). Yet it is by Jesus’ suffering and death that we are saved. Therefore we rejoice to share in His sufferings, that we may also share in His resurrection glory (1 Pet. 4:7–14). Through the ministry of the Spirit of Truth, we are cleansed from the deceit of our idols and given a new heart and a new spirit, the heart and Spirit of Christ (Ezek. 36:22–28). He now works in us fervent, self-giving love for one another, love which covers a multitude of sins, *“that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen”* (1 Pet. 4:11).

### **Sermon Transcript**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Okay, we have another reading from Ezekiel. Ezekiel is telling us what the Lord is going to do. It's not very flattering for us or for the Israelites of the day. Basically God is saying, I'm going to glorify you and I'm going to make My name holy amongst the people, but not because of you, because you have profaned My name in front of the nations. You have failed to live up to the Word of God. Now, admittedly, Ezekiel is talking to the Israelites and we all know that the Israelites' favorite pastime was grumbling and complaining and chasing after other gods. That was just what they did.

Unfortunately, we are not that much different. We like to grumble and complain. Whenever anything bad happens to us, what is our first response? "Why me, God?" We seem surprised that we have trials and tribulations in our life, which seems rather odd given the fact that Jesus said very clearly that it was going to come, that we would be persecuted, that the Christians would be kicked out of the synagogues. There would come a time where people would kill you and think that they were doing a good thing.

Now, we here in America haven't come to that point yet, but we do feel some trials and tribulations, fiery trials that come upon us as 1 Peter says, but it's not that something strange is happening. Whenever we share the Word of Christ, we can expect that persecution and suffering and mockery are going to come, from some. Some will hear and believe and rejoice, but many will not. After all, they crucified Jesus. They did not accept Him. And so if they persecuted Jesus, you and I ought not to be surprised that they persecute us. But Ezekiel says, in spite of all of this, in spite of the fact that we have failed to live up to God's standard, in spite of the fact that we have profaned His name and that Israelites have done the same, He will vindicate Himself. And how is He going to do that? He's going to do it in a way that does benefit us, that gives us a hope and a promise. And for that we are extremely thankful. He says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you and I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness, and I will remove you from all your idols, and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit. I will remove your heart of stone and put a heart of flesh. I will give you My Spirit and cause you to walk in My statutes."

Now, if that does not sound like baptism to you, you're not really listening very well. "I will sprinkle you with water and cleanse you from all your uncleanness." What does baptism do? Through the power of the Spirit, we receive the Spirit of God, we receive a new heart, a heart of Christ, and we receive salvation. We receive forgiveness of sins. We are cleansed of all of our unrighteousness. When we are sprinkled with water, God adopts us as His children and He connects us to His death. So that in our baptism we are connected with Christ in His death and moreover we are connected with Him in His resurrection.

And so as we are on this side of the ascension, as we remember the ascension of Jesus, we remember that we are connected with Christ. If Christ rose from the dead and ascended to be with His Father, that is what we have to look forward to as well, and sooner than we may think. Because Peter and Jesus make it very clear that the end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded. Peter, all the way back in the first century AD was saying that the end of all things is near. What did he know that we don't? Christ always is coming soon. He always says, "He's coming soon." Now, we have seen 2000 years of history come since when He rose from the dead and He has not come yet, and so it seems like maybe He's far off.

But the reality of the matter is, our day, our end is sooner than we might think. Each and every one of us are going to die. We don't know when. We cannot determine the day or the hour. For all I know it could be today for some of us. So for all of us, the reality is that the end of all things is near for us. And so how do we then live? Well, we live like we've always lived. We live as Christians. We love one another. We are generous with one another. We pray for one another. We share the good things that we have with one another. In other words, they will know we are Christians by our love.

Now, just because we are loving does not mean that we cannot speak the truth. And that is what is going to get us ridiculed and persecuted. Because in today's society, we can see very clearly where sin is celebrated and righteousness is considered evil. We are called bigots. We are called all sorts of names because we speak the truth and say, "This is sin." We need to recognize that, but we need to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. In other words, we need to love everybody, all people. We need to be generous and caring. We need to live as if this were our last day on earth. And as such, we want to make sure that everybody that we know knows our hope. As a child of God, our hope is in Christ, and we want everybody to know that. So we live each day as if it were our last, knowing that sometimes we are going to be persecuted for what we say. We can still love and speak the truth.

And when we are persecuted, we know that this is just God working within us. We see this as an opportunity for God to help us to let go of the false ideas, the false idols and the false securities that we have.

In the hymn that we sang just before this, "Firm Foundation", it talks about the trials, the fiery trials that come our way, that we ought not to fear them, but just see them as God clearing the dross from our lives. Just like we desire a pure precious metal, we desire pure silver. It's beautiful and it is wonderful, but it gets that way by being heated up and the impurities that are within it, being burned out of it, until nothing is left but the pure silver where you can look and see your reflection in it. If there are impurities, you cannot. And God wants the same thing in our lives. He wants to look at us and see Himself. And we ourselves want to look in the mirror and see God in us. Part of the way that is done is by facing the fiery trials that come our way, of dealing with the hardships in our life. And how do we do that? By turning to the Word of God, by allowing the Word of God to dwell in us richly, by being so consumed by God's Word that that informs all of our ideas and all of our hopes and all of our joys, because we will face hard times. Jesus warned us about it. Peter warns us about it.

We should rejoice in these opportunities to share in Christ, to share His suffering. Because in the suffering, we are purified. We are made more like Christ each and every day. And that ought to be our desire because the end is near. It could happen at any time.

But instead of being afraid and hiding in our own home and trying to shelter ourselves so that nothing bad will ever happen, God calls us to go out and to be ready in season and out to give witness to the hope that we have in Christ Jesus, our Lord, and not to be afraid for anything that may come. Because He promises, because we are His children, we have been sprinkled with the waters of baptism and we have His Spirit within us. Because of that, He says He will never leave us nor forsake us, that He will be with us to the very end of the age, or more accurately the end of our age.

So hold fast to God's Word. That is the only thing that will bring comfort. Money will disappear, goods will rust, houses will fall apart, jobs will end, governments will change. But the only thing that does not change is the Word of God. And that is where our security always is found.

May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.