

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠

All men are weary of this world. We are not the least of these and perhaps we are the worst. For we are the most weary due to our hope. We know that God has taken up our cause, become one of us in order to die for us, and that he has risen from the dead in order to lead us away. Away from our own malicious hearts and away from this dark world.

And so, for us to be apart from the body, that is to die, is better, is good, is the desired outcome for it is to be with the Lord. But it is not our lot to decide when the time is right, when we've had enough, when our work is done. We do not know how much we can handle. However unfulfilling or painful it might seem to us, life is a gift from God. It is meant for good. Death is a passage, but it is still the enemy. If we die, so be it. It's an enemy we are willing to face because we know what's on the other side. We are weary and we are ready to go. We are confident of the end.

For while there is fruit for our labor here, we desire the reward of Christ. Whether we live or we die, we are his. And so it is that we recognize now is the day of salvation. Now is the day to hear the word of the Lord and repent. For if the Lord requires us to remain here for a time, then he himself must provide. And if we are to remain for a time, then it is our duty to tell the truth. To see this world for what it really is and to see ourselves for what we really are.

Sinners loved and redeemed by God who are caught up in a cosmic battle where evil seems to win. This is why we pray so fervently for the end. This is why the vision is given to St. John on Patmos. Because it always seems as though wickedness is reigning and prospering and these horrible things are happening. And if we did not have faith, if we did not trust that what God says is real and we only went by what we see and what we experience and our reason, then we would believe that all was lost.

But we do not believe that. We believe that Jesus lives. And that is why we pray so fervently for the end. We know that this world is not all that there is, that this is not our home, cannot be our home, that our hearts have already flown to that better city. We do not belong here. We cannot be fully satisfied here. No matter how good it gets here, no matter who is elected president and what new wave of prosperity and health and well-being flow, we cannot be satisfied here. We do not want to fight this war. We don't even want to win what we are fighting for. We want to go because we hate our sins, our own complicity,

And we hate the unfairness of this world. We hate the lies, the manipulation, and the pain. We belong to and with Jesus, and we will never be at home here. But soon, he will bring us there.

And so it is that the Holy Spirit comforts us through the prophet Isaiah. It is only a little while, he says, until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field and the fruitful field esteemed as more as a forest. In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the Bible. They will recognize it as the word of God.

They will listen, they will hear, they will believe. That doesn't apply only to the deaf mute in the region of Decapolis, with Jesus spit on his tongue and fingers in the ears. It applies also to us. We were once deaf, but the waters of holy baptism have commanded our ears to open so that we would hear. In a similar way, Isaiah explains that the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness. They will behold true beauty and goodness.

And of course, this also describes us, that the word of God reveals to us what is real and true and how our eyes have so often been fooled. Finally, he says that the humble, that is the unimportant, the insignificant, the disenfranchised, those who have no voice in the media, you. Those who are out of place in this world and its constant bids of power, you shall increase in your joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel, that is King Messiah, Jesus, born of Mary, crucified and raised. The deaf, the blind, the humble poor, this is our lot on this side of glory and we would have it no other way because those are the people who belong to Jesus and that's where we want to be. So it is that this is a promise. Your joy shall increase. You shall continue to rejoice in Christ and grow in it evermore.

And finally, the prophet tells us that in the end, the terrible one, the deceiver of Eve, along with his many minions, human and otherwise, will be brought to nothing. The scornful one is consumed. And then Isaiah gets to the particular burden of the church in our age. He says that the human agents of Satan who watch for iniquity, who plot for power, who seek to control and oppress and steal, they will be cut off. He's talking about those agents who seek to make a man an offender by a word. That's his phrase. They make a man an offender by a word. That is, they simply make accusations. They deny the actual character and actions of individuals. They see nothing but a group which they have defined and created generally by some accident of birth or origin. And every member of this arbitrary group, which they have created out of their own minds, is then held accountable for all that anyone in that group has ever done.

And there's no escaping it, no matter how good you are, no matter how smart you do, or how able you are. Your character, your actions don't matter because you have no individual personality or reality. You are only defined by the group that other people have placed you in, zero escape. They make a man an offender by a word. This is demonic. It is absolute madness. It makes the regime of Stalin look something like justice and due process. And no one is safe in this environment.

But Isaiah tells us that it's coming to an end, that the madness will not endure. That this lack of justice, this refusal of mercy, this judgment without cause, the denial of individual reality, of liberty, of character, of the entirety of the vision of man in Holy Scripture, that this will cease. Because God became a man, the Holy One of Israel, did not just become a member of a group. He became a human being, one of us, and there is hope in him. He does not slander us, nor does he come to

accuse. He comes to bless. The Lord who redeemed Abraham redeems us. The Lord who opened the ears of the man in the region of the Decapolis opens our ears in order to speak and bestow faith.

These fickle human judges and their demonic overlords will not endure. They will go to the fiery place that was prepared for them. In the meantime, God says of you, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, nor shall his face now grow pale. But when he sees his children, the work of my hands in his midst, they will hallow my name and hallow the Holy One of Jacob and fear the God of Israel. Ephatha, be opened. Do not mistake the character of this age in which we live or the hostility of this world toward the people of God. You do not belong here. You cannot appease them. There is no way to make a utopia here on earth. You cannot fit in. God's people have never fit in. Do not make deals with the devil. It is not worth another thousand years on this earth in this living hell under his terms.

And it won't matter anyway because he is a liar and he hates you. You cannot appease him. So do not be fooled. Repent of your sins, confess Christ, do good to all men, even to those who hate and persecute you. Show the compassion and the goodness of Christ and confess, even as you pray for the end. Hallow the Holy One of Israel and wait upon him. The present earth is occupied by wicked forces. It has been from time immemorial. This is not a new problem. It is filled with the instruments of war and torture as men strive for power under demonic influence. But Isaiah says that in a little while, It shall be turned into a fruitful field, and it will be given to you as an inheritance. This is the overarching reality that undoes all other things. Jesus lives.

✠ In Jesus' name. ✠