

Sermon for the Third Sunday after All Saints' Day November 16, 2025 jj
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✠ sdg ✠

What comforting signs God has in mind for you who are living in these end-times! But they look pretty scary at the same time. Judgment Day is near, as Jesus promises, and along with it come the signs He talks about to His disciples: armies laying siege, people fleeing Jerusalem, great distress on the earth, wrath against this people, signs in sun and moon and stars, distress of nations from the sea and the waves, people fainting in fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. Sounds like an apocalyptic thriller movie, or a news release out of the Middle East! And these are the signs with which Jesus wants to encourage you?! Listen again to what He says: "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

But why is it so important for today, to know so much about what will happen in the future? What use can you make of these "highway signs" while you are so intent on the present-day road that you and yours are traveling in life? It would seem to be enough these days to juggle school, home and work schedules, run to endless meetings and get-togethers, handle the occasional crises that come up, keep up on your e-mails and phone calls. Then, if all that weren't enough, you add a few big holidays coming up, with shopping, cooking, traveling and cleaning that'll make you crazy. Anyway, the point is clear: it's so easy to get engulfed in cares and concerns of the present, that you lose sight of the goal of our precious Christian faith, that is, our eternal salvation.

That's why these signs are so scary-looking. That's probably why the Bible says only a few things about what the full glory of heaven, and ultimately the new creation will be like. It's all designed, quite intentionally, to shake you out of the present-day worries and needs and fleeting pleasures. You have fallen for the strangle-hold of the here-and-now. The people were amazed at those massive temple stones. In the very same way, you are enthralled by anything that steals your attention from Jesus and His glorious coming. The passing, temporary things of this life remain the most important to you, even though you're objecting even now, thinking: I've got my priorities straight, I'm doing my part. And although you can give one testimonial after another about how God has blessed you in your life, showing everyone else how thankful you are to Him, your Lord still knows your heart. He sees when you begrudge the difficult times that you're facing. You cave in to your secret weaknesses because that's so much easier than to remain strong. He has created in you a clean heart, and you don't waste a moment getting it dirty again with sinful thoughts, words and deeds.

Of course, it is easier for a Christian to think of the heavenly things when there is very little to hope for on this earth. That explains the stories of death-bed conversions or renewals of faith. It brings to life what Jesus says—that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. The more faith that you have invested in the things of this world and the here-and-now, the less faith you have to put in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

If your earthly life were in danger every day, like it is right now for many believers around the world (I'm thinking especially about those Christians who face persecution at the hands of Muslim governments and armies); if you were in their situation, then you would be bowed down, crushed to the ground in despair since you cannot count on any blessings that you can see. And yet that moment, when you give up on everything you hope for in this life, that's an opportunity for the Lord to raise your head in true hope of your redemption, that is, your heavenly rescue that is just around the corner.

So you who live in the comfortable, freedom-loving United States of America, although you may just be getting by in this economy, yet you still have food and shelter and a few of what you call the "necessary comforts," you who may even have some of the nice things that money or plastic can buy: what hope is there for you? You are not persecuted, you are not homeless, or suffering a complete lack of adequate medical care (at least not yet!). Sorry if I'm making it sound like a bad thing, but you may not have anything going on in your life so utterly drastic that it's automatically built-in to force you to appreciate the true, heavenly joy that is already hidden in the forgiving word of God, the everyday water in the baptismal font, the common bread and wine that is seen upon this table. It can be bad because many other desires of your heart can get in the way. And even though you are often tempted to look for that heavenly joy in emotionally touching and entertaining worldly things, the gift remains yours without anything you have to do for it. This free gift also means that you are completely transformed by the grace of God that was given to you in your Baptism. He

sets you at war against your own sinful human nature, but it is a war that He will win for you.

Because the decisive victory in that battle wasn't your decision to follow Jesus. It wasn't when you stood up in public and confessed the Christian faith, as exhilarating as that may have felt. If you only had to rely on the strength of your faith or those emotional mountain-top experiences, then you'll be left with nothing when those things fade during difficult times. No, the decisive victory in the war you face every day was already won for you when Jesus suffered for your sins and died on the cross to give you eternal life. That remains the only hope you have, whether you are barely getting by, or living on Easy Street. And in the end, especially at the end of this temporary world, that is all that matters to you. For that humble Savior who died unjustly under the Divine curse, is the same Son of Man who is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity, and will return soon in a cloud with power and great glory.

So, when terrifying events take place, when suffering and hardship come along for no good reason, even if you are treated shamefully because of the Lord in whom you believe, straighten up, Jesus says, and raise your heads. Listen attentively to the precious, powerful words of eternal life that are entering your ears. Thank the Lord for washing you clean in Baptism. Kneel with all the others at this table who have publicly confessed total agreement with each other, and with the saints whom we cannot see but who are safe in the Lord's care, then open your mouth to eat and drink the holy Body and Blood of Christ given and shed for you.

These gifts are all the preparation you need for those scary-looking end-times. In fact, your Baptism and Holy Communion bring you the good parts of the end of the world that you are looking forward to as your inheritance. You just get the gift in a hidden form for now. Though chaos and violence against the Christian faith boils all around you, the Lord still brings you through. These sacramental signs in which your Jesus hides Himself are not as fearful as the other signs of the end of the world, but they are definitely more important, because they connect you to Jesus, the true source of comfort that your soul needs. Since you the Church have the Father's promise that your name is written in His book, be sure to encourage one another as you see the great Day approaching, and as you are filled with the Lord's heavenly gifts, you too shall stand firm to the end and be saved.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.