

“Come and buy without money!” Isaiah 55:1-5

Today for our meditation we have these words from prophet Isaiah, chapter 55. In Hebrew they are written in beautiful poetry, in high and elevated language. Let's read them once more.

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.”

Beautiful invitation, beautiful encouragement, we could say. Yes, but why would we read them and why would we bother meditating upon these words today? This is 21st century, isn't it? More than two and half millennia after prophet Isaiah. What have we to do with him? In fact, a lot, a lot, and we'll see it in a minute.

First, a bit of historical context for these verses. Isaiah lived and prophesized seven centuries before Christ. His book contains many prophecies which refer to different times and places. Chapters 40 to 55 from book of Isaiah are very special.

They are considered by many of Biblical scholars the most important chapters in the Old Testament, or even in entire Bible. They are the most often quoted chapters in the New Testament. Obviously, authors of the New Testament knew and valued Isaiah's message.

In these chapters 40 to 55 Isaiah addressed his brothers and sisters who were brought as captives to Babylon by their enemies. They were overcome by hostile power, brought into exile, without hope for return. It looked like gods of Babylon had prevailed.

But Babylon carries also symbolic meaning in the Bible. It is a place where false gods reign, place of oppression, of slavery, where you toil but do not receive what you truly need.

Babylon is the very opposite of Zion. Zion in God's holy mountain. It is a place where God comes to bless us, and where we can have access to Him. In Zion we are free to live a life for which we are created, rejoicing in God's abounding gifts.

We can say that Babylon and Zion are two parallel realities also in our days. Babylon in this world around us, where we all are captives of sin, with its false idols, temptations, deceit, abuse, empty promises, and never ending toil.

Zion is the Kingdom of God. It is the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is God's chosen people, His new Israel, gathered from all nations, and languages and tribes into His presence, protected, guided and blessed by the Lord of the Kingdom Himself.

To those still in Babylon Isaiah prophesied about God's intentions. He proclaimed the good news, the Gospel that the Lord, the Creator of the Universe, Almighty and incomprehensible God comes to rescue us from Babylon.

“Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” (Isa 40:10-11)

Do you see these two picture combined in this one message? God coming with His might, but He also... as a shepherd, He Himself gathers the lambs in His arms, carries them in His bosom, and gently leads them.

Amazing combination of supreme authority and power, and humble, loving service. This is how our Lord comes to us. Both, as the Almighty Creator and a humble servant at once.

Then Isaiah explains more – what this humble service in going to look like. He introduces the Servant of the Lord. Initially Israel as the nation was called the servant of the Lord, but they failed miserably. As Isaiah put it, they were blind and deaf, like stubborn, stiff necked cattle.

But this Servant, this servant will listen to the Lord. He won't be rebellious, He will trust the Lord. He will accomplish His mission. And then Isaiah goes on describing the work of the Suffering Servant with these famous verses.

“He was despised and rejected by men [...] Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows [...] he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; [...] and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isa 53:3-6) Does this sound familiar? It should... these verses speak about Jesus Christ.

Verses which we read today are aftermath of the Servant's ministry. They are addressed to those to whom this Suffering Servant brought peace, to those who are

healed by His wounds, to those who are invited to leave the Babylon and to find their true home in Zion. And it includes also us. Each of you.

Let me ask you something? Take a time, think about it. Which things are the most important for you? What are you looking for in your lives? What are you waiting for? What are you hoping for? What does your heart long for? Aren't we all looking for the same things? For good things...

Aren't we all looking for love and acceptance? Don't we all want to be somebody, have respect, dignity? Aren't we all looking for joyful and fulfilled lives? Aren't we all looking for security and peace, for good conscience?

The Bible call all these things together 'shalom', peace. Peace in the sense of total wellbeing, physical, spiritual, emotional, social wellbeing, when things are as they are supposed to be.

But we all live in this world, in this Babylon, and inevitable we learn what principles rule this world. If you want to get something, you fight for it, you work for it, you make sacrifices. We try to get this shalom by accumulating riches, achieving certain status, or connections, or trying to fulfil every desire that sprung up from our hearts.

We put in our best efforts, our energy, thoughts, sometimes we sacrifice even people in our lives, relationships, so that only we can obtain this shalom. But it doesn't matter how hard we toil, we never really get what we long for.

We toil in this Babylon, and we don't receive what we long for. Our lives go on, and on... and sooner or later we need to realize that the most important things, - love, dignity, joy, peace we simply can't buy.

In the midst of this never-ceasing striving the Lord God speaks to us through prophet Isaiah. **"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.**

To translate the Hebrew text literary, God says something like this: "Hey, attention, attention!" Here, here... Come, come, buy without money and without price. Come and buy what truly satisfies you. Listen diligently to me, delight in rich food. Hear me that your soul may live! That you may have a true life.

This is God calling us, calling you... Come to me, and I'll give you what you truly need. I'll give you true life, I'll give you shalom. I'll give it to you as a gift. No

merits required. Buy it without money. You can't find it in Babylon, you can receive it only in Zion, in God's presence, in His Kingdom.

And we don't believe it. It can't be true! Why would someone give something good away for free. Why? It doesn't make sense. Probably it is not that good at all. Why would we believe that the deepest longings of our hearts can be satisfied without paying the price? It is not how things work in Babylon.

But this is exactly how it works in Zion, in God's Kingdom where true God reigns. The most important things are given as gifts. This is exactly how God the Father treats us. Think about it, - begin with your life, it is given to you as a gift. You don't possess it. It's given to us every minute, and we haven't merited it.

We work so hard to protect this life, trying to secure our futures, but we can't control this world; what seems safe today, can be gone by tomorrow. You know it. In midst of this uncertainty Our Father speaks to us 'my beloved child, trust me, I'll open my hand and will give you food, your daily bread, at the proper time.'

We want to be loved. Unconditionally. Of course. For when we hear these words 'I love you', it changes everything. It brings on new beautiful reality. But... we also know our hearts, our secret passions, our shameful thoughts, envy, jealousy, anger.

We know that so often we don't deserve to be loved. There is so much ugliness within us. But God the Father knows your heart, all that is hidden, and knowing you even better than you do, He says to you...

... 'you are my beloved child, I have chosen you from before the creation of the world, nothing and no one is going to separate you from my love, you are mine, I love you, I love you.'

The most important things are given to us without price. For free. As gifts. *But wait!* They are given without price to us, but only because we simply cannot buy them. They are not for free. Someone has already paid the price.

We cannot even leave this Babylon and come to Zion, to the Kingdom of God, into His presence on our own. We are captives of Babylon, we are enslaved by our sins, and can't free ourselves until someone redeems us, until someone actually pulls us out of this captivity and brings us into God's Kingdom.

You know that everything is as valuable as someone is ready to pay for it. Do you know how valuable you are? Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant gave up all that He had, He gave up His life, so that we can be free to live in Zion, in God's Kingdom, enjoying His gifts.

The Son of God paid the price to get us out of Babylon, He bore our transgressions, He was pierced because of us, so that you can receive all God's

gifts for free. God Himself is inviting you to enjoy His goodness. Sure, we don't deserve it, sure, we can't buy it, we can only accept it as a gift, and thank for it.

But this is not all, yet. This there is more. And this also applies to you. **“And I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David [...] because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.”**

God made His covenant with the king David, and He promised that His Son will inherit eternal Kingdom. This promise refer to Jesus Christ. In Him God fulfilled His promise.

But then, you are joined with Jesus in your Baptism. “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:4)

You are made heirs of the same Kingdom. God's eternal promises apply also to you. Yes, to each of you. You see, this is how words of prophet Isaiah apply to us. Directly. To each of you.

These are the best news that are proclaimed to us. What was said through the prophet Isaiah was said also to us. We are called by the same God, we are those, invited to receive His gifts.

Come to Christ, receive His blessings, His forgiveness, His love, His peace, His shalom. Receive it abundantly, receive it as a gift, as the most precious gift, and receive if for free, for the price has already been paid.

Rejoice and be thankful! Amen.