

“Worry about this!” Luke 21:5-19

And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, “As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, “I am he!” and, “The time is at hand!” Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.” Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, what are you worried about? Future? Health? Security? Your children? Your parents? Your job, or your business? Your congregation? Our church? Our society?

There are plenty of reasons to be worried about all these, that's for sure. But, how often do you worry about your salvation? How often do you worry that someone can lead you astray and you can lose your saving faith?

But this is the one thing that truly matters, for it has eternal consequences.

Today's Gospel reading gives us opportunity to reflect on what we should be worrying about. It also tells us, what we don't have to worry about. Let's look at what Jesus taught His disciples and what it means for us today.

Jesus disciples wanted to know the signs of the end times. Do you want to know when Jesus is coming back? Would you be interested to know the date? People have always been interested to figure out the date. They have searched the Bible, the words of the prophets, the saying of Jesus, the book of Revelation.

They have proposed different dates and even places where Jesus would come. During the last century many indeed have identified themselves with Jesus. Exactly as Jesus Himself foretold. “For many will come in my name, saying, “I am he!” and, “The time is at hand!””

What would it change if we knew the time of Jesus second coming? I have heard people saying that they don't need this Jesus and His forgiveness right now. Not yet.

For now they want to live according to the desires of their hearts, that is, according to those desires which are contrary to the blessed and joyful lives that our Father in heaven has in mind for us.

But then, when their last hour comes, then they will repent and ask for God's forgiveness. There are many sad stories where people have lived with this idea and have died suddenly and without Jesus as their Saviour.

Remember, our faith in Jesus is not something we choose. You can't choose to trust Him as your Lord and Saviour. Your faith is the gift of God and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And what a wonderful gift it is. Be grateful!

It is the Holy Spirit who creates true faith, when you read and listen to the Gospel message and when you receive the Holy Sacrament. True faith is God Himself embracing you with His Holy Spirit.

Rescuing you from the power of sin and devil and death, bringing you from darkness into His wonderful light, it is God the Creator Himself breathing new life, eternal life into you, and making you His beloved child.

It is your Saviour Jesus hugging you so strongly that all your broken pieces grow together again. It is God's love being poured over you, abundantly.

You can't tell the Holy Spirit 'not now, later, now I am busy with my life and I have no time for you, but come back later, then I may need you'. It doesn't work this way. Yes, our God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love, but... it is our time on earth that can run out. Sometimes unexpectedly.

I believe that God hasn't given us the time of His return caring for us. To protect us from temptations of this world and from our indifference to the saving message of God's forgiveness.

When Jesus' disciples repeatedly asked Him 'when', 'when will this happen', Jesus turned their thoughts from 'when' to 'how should we wait for that day'. You shouldn't be worried about 'when', leave it to God the Father, instead, be worried about your readiness to meet your Creator and Saviour.

This is what we need to be worrying about – how to be ready to see our Lord again. And this is where Jesus warnings from today's Gospel reading are so important.

Don't be deceived, don't be lead astray! Many scary and unpleasant things will happen. Wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes and famines. Terrors and great signs from heaven.

On top of that there will be persecutions, Christians will be thrown into prisons and brought before kings and governors for Jesus' names sake.

More, and this is particularly painful for us, there will be betrayal and rejection by our own families. The name of Jesus brings division. It divides all people in two groups, those who love God and those who hate Him and want to be like gods themselves.

Once we trust that Jesus is the only way to the Father, it brings divisions – even among the closest. “You will be hated for my name's sake.”

All of this have been already happening and is happening also today in different places across the world. Don't make a mistake, we live in end times, we have been living in the end times for quite a while.

I assume that at least some of you would have experienced rejection even from your loved ones because you want to remain faithful to Jesus. Many probably have seen your loved ones turning away from Jesus. It hurts, it hurts a lot.

Many of these things Satan uses to lead us astray. Our fears. Our pain. He lies trying to persuade us that rebellion against our loving Creator will make us happier. He uses our weaknesses and our busyness to drive us away from Jesus and His healing and saving presence in His Church. He never stops.

He may try to lead you away by snatching away the Gospel message, or at least trying to twist it. And most of Western churches suffer from this. For example, take away Biblical teaching about sin and our accountability before the Creator.

What happens? If you do so, if sin is understood only as bad things that your neighbour does, and not the deep corruption of our hearts, then Jesus is not needed as our Saviour anymore.

He becomes just an example how to lead a good, moral life. And once you have learned how to do it, you don't need this Jesus anymore. How many today have been misled this way?!

Or, take away Biblical teaching about the second coming of Jesus Christ, about the day when all nations, all people will be gathered before His throne to give Him account of our lives. Not according our standards, by the way.

Not comparing us with others, for there is always someone who is worse than me. No, but judging us according the will of holy God, which is revealed to us, so that we have no excuses.

God doesn't see only our actions. He sees our hearts, He sees our lives, everything we have ever done at the same time. It is not a nice picture. But if we forget this teaching, then the Church becomes only a social club, one more organization that brings together like minded people.

Then the powerful message, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has taken your place in God's judgment, that He has taken full responsibility for everything that you have done wrong, that He have died the death that you deserve, and now offers in exchange His forgiveness, good conscience and eternal life, this message then is lost.

Then the Church becomes only a shade of what it truly is, namely, God's powerful, saving, life-changing presence among His chosen people. Then the saving truth about Jesus doesn't matter, what matters is only being nice, not offending anyone, and avoiding any threatening conversations about this Jesus.

We could go on with this list almost endlessly. We live in challenging times for Christians, when many are deceived and lead astray. This is what we need to be worrying about. For if we are deceived and lead astray there are consequences in the life to come.

Our second topic. What are the things we don't need to worry about? Once Jesus has told what we need to worry about, He also gives us very comforting promises. He always does.

What we can often see as challenging, confrontational and unpleasant situations in our lives, God uses as opportunities to save more people, as opportunities to bear witness about Jesus through us, through our words and actions.

"Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict."

This is what the Word of God and the Holy Spirit gives us. True wisdom. Wisdom to know God, wisdom to understand who we are. Wisdom to see what is wrong with this world. Wisdom to know the truth from falsehood.

Blessed you are, for this wisdom is available to you. It is given to you as the message from our God, it is preached every Sunday, it is taught every week in Bible studies, and there are so many ways to access it these days.

The Lord is gracious. He lavishes us with His wisdom. And the more you grow in His wisdom, the clearer you can see the foolishness of this world. And the more you can appreciate grace and mercy of our God Jesus Christ.

But this is not all. Whatever comes, Jesus promises to be together with you. "But not a hair of your head will perish." It doesn't mean that we'll be protected from all the troubles and tribulations, not at all.

It means that you can be assured, that whatever happens, Jesus is with you. And we'll be with Him. "By your endurance you will gain your lives." For you, for children of God, the end of this life is not the end at all. It is a beginning of your true life.

God never stopped telling us what He has prepared for His beloved children. What a wonderful life, exceeding all our hopes and our imagination. You just heard these words from the prophet Isaiah:

“Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.” (Isa 65:17-19)

This is the life that you will gain with your endurance. Life in God’s presence. Life without sin and death. Life without pain, suffering and tears or loss. Life of joy and gladness. Life where everything is as it is designed to be – very, very good.

With this God’s promise in mind we can go on with our lives. With joyful assurance and trust in our Lord Jesus. Now we know what we need to be concerned about, holding fast to Jesus and His promises. Guarding our faith in Jesus as the greatest treasure.

Knowing that He Himself is present with us, that He continually strengthens us with His Holy Spirit, and longing to see the day, when we’ll feast in His presence.

It is exciting to be chosen by God to live with Him, isn’t it? It is exciting to wait to see what He has prepared for you. It is what gives us true joy already here. We are so blessed to be God’s people. This is who you are.

Peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep your minds and hearts in Jesus Christ.