

“You need to see this” Col 1:11-20

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

How do you see the Church? What is she like? What is your impression? Or maybe you can try to imagine how people, who are not Christians, see the Church? What is their impression?

If you rely on your senses only, and if you look only at a small part of the Church universal, maybe at your local congregations, then you may get not too high and too optimistic a picture.

A little bunch of people, in many cases mostly elderly people, gathering together in some old, even if quite well maintained buildings, and enacting some unusual rituals, which don't make much sense to outsiders.

If this is how Christians begin to see the Church, then it is not surprising at all that we may try to do different things so that only we could look better, meaning, more like the world around us and to be more appealing to the outsiders.

Then we may despise our Christian heritage, instead, trying to appease people by asking – what would they want? When, in fact, what they truly need is – to think less about what they want. Thus, we risk to become just like the world.

And If we become like the world, then we have lost our unique identity as God's own people, then we have become unfaithful to our Lord and there is not much we can offer to those outside. Such a church dies. We can see it today all over the place in the West.

Therefore, we need to have a proper view on the Church, we need to understand what the Church truly is, and what she does. And we can understand it only if we understand properly who the Lord of this Church is.

This is what we'll reflect on today. On who is this Jesus Christ, and what is the Church? Who is Jesus and what is the Church? And we'll do it with the help of what Paul the apostle wrote in his letter to Colossians.

Remember, you will need to use all the power of your imagination to see things how they truly are. For they are far too great for us to perceive. God's wisdom and ways are too high for us to comprehend. But we can try it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

So, who is this Jesus? Let's listen once more to what Paul wrote. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Take a time to think about these words. In fact, they are far too great for our minds. But they can help us to see things the way God sees them. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

The image; in Jesus we can see what the true God is like, what His attitude towards His little human creatures is and what He is willing to suffer for our sake. If you want to know what God is willing to do for you, look at Jesus.

By Him all things were created. All things, meaning everything that exists, things visible and invisible. All that exists was created through the Son of God, the Word of God. And not only through Him, but also for Him.

The creation is here for the Son of God. He is before all things, and even today, at this very moment, in Him all things hold together. In Him! This vast Universe, billions of galaxies, and here around us – millions and millions of different life forms fill the earth, the sea and the sky.

All of this is held together, and receives life from the Creator, from the Son of God, whom we know as Jesus Christ. We often tend to separate God's work of creation from God's work of salvation.

Today reflecting on these words of the Holy Spirit given to us through Paul, we can see that it is impossible to separate God's creative work from His work of salvation. The same God who created the Universe and still holds it together, the same One came to save us from sin and death.

"And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

He is the beginning. The beginning of God's new creation. The firstborn from the dead. The first One who was raised for new life, eternal life. We can see how in Jesus both creation and new creation are inseparably united.

He, the Creator of everything came to restore His fallen creation and to bring forth new creation. In Jesus' resurrected body we witness this new creation emerging, free from sin, from death, destined for everlasting joy and gladness.

Through us, human beings, the sin and death came into this world, therefore Jesus became one of us, and took full responsibility of all our wrongdoings. Then He destroyed all our sins through His death.

By the blood of His cross He has reconciled to Himself all things in heaven and on earth. As the Holy Spirit wrote it elsewhere: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Cor 5:17)

Or remember, what Paul wrote about your baptism, that in your baptism you were buried with Jesus, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead ... you too might walk in newness of life. For if you have been united with Him in a death like His, you shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like His. (Rom 6:4-5)

Jesus is the firstborn of God's creation, and He is also the firstborn of God's new creation, in Him God's new creation begins. And you, each of you, because you are united with Jesus in your baptism, you are a part of God's new creation. And you shall certainly be united with Jesus in a resurrection like His.

Forgive me, but I don't have better words how to describe this marvelous reality. Use your imagination, pray for the help of the Spirit! You are united with Jesus! He has gone through the death and have come out alive, as new creation, with new resurrected body, eternal body.

And because you are united with Jesus, this is what will happen with you. Our old sinful bodies will die, and we will be raised in new bodies like Jesus to live with Him in everlasting blessedness and righteousness.

I encourage you, never stop marveling at this wonderful and powerful mystery of God, for it is a source of our joy!

Now we get to our second question, – what is the Church and why we are here? The identity of Jesus, the Lord of this Church also defines what the Church is and why we are here.

Again, the words of the Holy Spirit through Paul are most helpful. The Church is Christ's body. That is, each one of you are united with the Lord of the Church with the bond of the Holy Spirit.

You have received the same Holy Spirit which accompanied Jesus during His earthly ministry. You have received and continue to receive the same Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead. And for you this Spirit is a guarantee of your inheritance in God's Kingdom.

Let's see how Paul puts it. In Jesus we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. This is how it works. Jesus saves us by means of forgiveness of our sins. You are saved, you are made a member of Jesus body, and a part of God's new creation by means of forgiveness that you have received.

This is how God does His work. Sin is the problem. His forgiveness is the solution. Sin leads to separation from God and to death. Forgiveness leads to reconciled relationships with God and to eternal life.

So simple and so profound. This is what the Church is about. This is, why we are here. Forgiveness of sins. This is the main reason and purpose for the Church to exist. Forgiveness. For by means of forgiveness God brings forth His new creation.

Once we realize it, we can see that any other means of attracting people or trying to be likable, are futile. Meaningless. Whatever appealing they may appear for us. Nothing else brings new life. Therefore, this is what we need to focus on – forgiveness in Jesus' name.

But who needs this forgiveness? Try to tell people that there is God's forgiveness available for them and they will respond by ... looking at you as if there was something totally wrong with you. What forgiveness?

Only someone who knows he is sick and going to die is able of rejoicing in a life-saving medicine. The same is true about God's forgiveness. Only someone who recognizes our sinfulness can be thirsty to hear the words of forgiveness.

Therefore, the Church always are to speak two messages. First, the message of repentance, where we reveal God's will for our lives, as it is summarized for us in the Commandments, so that people could see their sin and rebellion and repent.

Then we speak the message for forgiveness, where God's gift of eternal life is given to all as God's free and unmerited gift. "I forgive you all your sins, come and inherit the Kingdom, prepared for you from before the creation of the world."

This is what we are here to do. But we also need to see the grandeur of this proclamation. "God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son."

We often picture the Church as a loving community of God's people, and it is true. But that is not all. With these words the Holy Spirit reveals what happens when we proclaim repentance and forgiveness. This message is not simply informative.

It has the power of God in it. With this message people are brought from the domain of darkness to the Kingdom of God's beloved Son. Every Christian, every bearer of the Holy Spirit is an enemy of Satan and his minions.

What we do here, – we battle for salvation and eternal life of God’s chosen people. Equipped with the Holy Spirit and the Gospel of forgiveness you are deadly weapons against the lies of Satan. Each one of you.

This is, why there is always unrest in the Church. As long as any church does faithfully what Jesus has commanded, there will be resistance. Satan will try to put obstacles, often deceiving God’s own people and using them to obscure and hinder the powerful message of Jesus.

That’s our reality. Be mindful of it, and pray for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to know the truth from lies. But, as we remain faithful and look for guidelines in God’s Word and not the world around us, we can rejoice in God’s wonderful promises.

The Father ... has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Through His forgiveness, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Father has qualified you to share the inheritance of the saints. This is our reason for joy, this is our reason for gratitude.

This is what the Church is about. New creation, Christ’s body, acting in His power by means of proclaiming the message of repentance and forgiveness. You are the future. You are the new creation. You are the heirs of God the Father together with His Son Jesus. Remember this forever.

Now, how do you see your church? What is your impression? Stop looking at it with human eyes, instead, see it as God Himself sees it, and as His Word reveals it to us, as His new creation, and His powerful presence in this world, as His Kingdom and you as His beloved children, coworkers and heirs. For this is who you are.

See it yourself and be bold to share this truth with those who don’t see it yet.

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

Amen.