

“How great is our hope?” Rev 21:1-6

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.”

As we lead our daily lives and as we struggle our daily struggles, it is easy to get bogged down by the problems and challenges that we face on every step. Be it health, bad test results, unexpected pain, be it financial burdens, unpaid bills, expensiveness of everything, or family issues, loses, conflicts, and so on.

There is no shortage of issues that we need to battle through every day. And as we do it, it is easy to lose the sight from our ultimate hope, to forget how marvellous, how majestic God’s plan is for all His beloved children. For us.

If we forget about it, and we all do, hopelessness and helplessness lays as a heavy burden on our shoulders, taking away our peace, taking away our joy, obscuring all the many things that we need be grateful for even now.

We are so blessed to be members of God’s own family, members of His own Church, for even if we need to encounter all the same difficulties as everyone else, we at least have Sundays, we have the Divine Service, we have the Word of God, the Gospel message that reminds us about who we are, who our God is, and what our future holds for us.

We, Christians, have more reasons to be hopeful and therefore joyful than anyone else. Because the world in which we live is not just a meaningless and purposeless matter, or just a material prison for our souls.

We live in this world, in this Universe created and cared for by our benevolent Creator, who is the Author and Designer of everything that exists, things visible and invisible. He is the One who still holds everything together.

What is more important, He has created everything for us, for His favourite creatures, for our enjoyment, so that we would continue His work, and would take care of His creation.

We know that He has created us in His image and likeness, meaning, as infinitely precious in His eyes, to serve and love like He Himself would do. We also know why things are so messed up in our world.

Because we have turned our backs to our Creator and have lost His wisdom, we don't know Him anymore, what is worse, we often don't even want to know Him. We don't want to listen to Him, we want to do things our way, even if that means that we and others get hurt.

But... we also know that our God wouldn't leave us in such a miserable state, where the spread of our sins and evil has to be restricted by the line that none of human beings can cross, by our death.

We have this God, who uses even our disobedience to reveal the depth of His love and commitment to us. Already in the beginning, right after the actions of our first parents brought death into this world, He gave this promise.

That one day, He Himself would restore what they had broken, more, that He Himself would take full responsibility for all the faults and failures, mistakes and evils that we as His fallen creatures have incurred.

He fulfilled His promise, as He always does. In the most unusual of ways. Our God, He came into this world as one of us, in human flesh, to suffer, to die, to rise again, and to reveal the depth of His love towards us.

He did all of this while we were still His enemies. He did it, so that convinced by His self-sacrificial love we would turn back to Him and would be restored in these wonderful loving relationships with our God, for which we were designed.

But that all is already past... and sometimes we are guilty of dwelling too much on the past, forgetting what lies ahead of us. And for us, Christians, our future is the greatest source of our joy and hope.

It is so, so good, that we can know that, yes, our sins are forgiven, that we are forgiven, that we are restored in relationships with our God, that our Father in heaven looks at us with favour, and that there is nothing we would need to fear as our last hour approaches. That is great.

But that is not the main thing. Our God did all of this – creation and redemption of His creation by Jesus, His Son - with a certain goal in His mind. With the goal that was His from the very beginning.

With the goal towards which the whole history of humanity, and of this world has been leading. With the goal for which He had chosen His beloved already from before the creation of the world to be with Him in Christ Jesus.

And today we were again reminded about this goal, as we read the message from our God from the Book of Revelation. Let's reflect on it, so that we are reminded about our ultimate destination and about the incomprehensible greatness of God's plan for us, and about this majestic hope that we all have and

that powers our lives. Abraham longed to see that day. Job was dreaming about it in the midst of his suffering. Isaiah, seeing it in the Spirit, prophesied about it in such beautiful a poetry. To Daniel in distant Babylon it was told what it will be like. To Paul the apostle glimpses of this coming reality were revealed.

He couldn't even put it in words, he could only say with an ease that all the suffering and hardship of this life are not even worth comparing with the glory that is prepared for us, for those who respond to God's love.

Then John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, the author of the Book of Revelation, wrote these words in his first letter. "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

[...] Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is."

And let's hear once more the words from the Book of Revelation. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth." How do these words make you feel? This is God's message to you. He is revealing, He is giving us a glimpse of what our home, our eternal home will be like. This is where we all are heading.

Don't you long to find out, what it will be like? Already this heaven and earth are beautiful, sometimes so beautiful that it takes our breath away. But these will pass away, as the whole old order of things. To give place to something new, something so much better and so much more enjoyable.

Then we, perhaps, won't feel the separation from the creation, then we will be able to bath, to merge, to embrace all the richness of that beauty of this new creation, where now we can only look at it as we remain separated and distant.

"The sea was no more." The sea, the ocean is one of the most beautiful and majestic elements of creation that we can enjoy. Will that be gone? Most of theologians tend to understand these words as refereeing to something else.

Both in the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation sea often describes the chaos, the underworld, the abyss created by our sin and evil, that separates humanity from God. From this sea came out the beasts that waged wars against God's saints, and now this sea will be no more.

There will be nothing that would separate us from God. There will be nothing that would rebel and rage against God and His saints, no powers of darkness and chaos left to threaten our lives. Nothing and no one to worry us.

"I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." This is not just a restored historical Jerusalem. It is the city where God Himself dwells together with His

people. This city symbolizes all God's people, the Church, the Bride of Christ, us. We were separated, we were running after other gods and committing adultery with them, that is still our reality, when we trust created things more than our Creator, but in this future vision, John sees the Church inseparably together with Jesus, adorned and beautiful, radiating God's glory and holiness.

The goal of God's activity will come to its fulfilment. What we are now only dreaming about, in our imperfect and limited ways, will become our reality. "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

I wish we could understand these words with our hearts, with our very being. Because this is the heart of our Christian hope, this is what we are waiting for. We could call it our return to the garden of Eden, except, that this is something much more. This incredible promise that one day God will again dwell with His people, and that He will be our God and that we will know Him as our God permeates the Scripture. We can read it again and again.

He desires to be with us. Right now, in the interim, He comes to us here, through His word and Sacrament, and already this place in our haven of peace and joy and hope, but then the dark mystery that separates us, our sinfulness, will be gone, there will be no room for anything that taints our joy.

For as John wrote in his letter: "When He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is." If only these words sunk in, if only we could understand what it means for us... and we can't ... but this is the description of where we are heading and what our life will be like.

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

We can see that John perhaps is running out of words and images to describe what our new life will be like. For there are no analogies in our reality for the abundance of blessings that awaits us. He couldn't describe them and we can't comprehend them. Therefore, John lists the things that grieve us the most.

No more crying, especially when death takes our loved one. For death itself shall be no more. Therefore, there shall be no mourning, nor crying, or pain, or anything else that robs us of joy, and peace and enjoyment of God's blessings.

All the wrongs and evils of this life will be gone. Everything that hurts and harms us, that worries and concerns us, all of that will be gone and will never ever come back. Imagine, and it is not just for moment.

We have good moments in this life as well. But in this age, we always need to look over the shoulder wondering how far is the next trouble, what is the next

hit that we will need to take, what is the next thing that will go wrong. All of that will be left in past. Never to come back. This is how great our hope is, this is where we are heading, this is what our new life will be like.

“He who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Remember Genesis 1? God said: “Let there be...” And then there was everything He created with His all-powerful creative word.

Now we witness Him speaking again: “I am making all things new.” And as always creation gladly obeys the voice of its Creator. Everything will be exactly as God says. “Also, He said,

“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.”

Write it down, so that all my chosen and beloved can receive this message. Write it down, for these words are trustworthy and true. It is done! This is our God speaking to us, reminding about the very foundation of our majestic hope.

He speaks to John and commissions him to bring these good, these great, these marvellous news to us. So that you know and are assured beyond doubt, so that you can be fully convinced that this is your future. This is your hope.

Sure, certain, unchangeable, irrevocable. Prepared for you by your Father in heaven and by your Redeemer Jesus Christ. About this hope we need to be reminded, on this hope we need to meditate days and nights.

For the glory of this hope is such that anything that bothers us in this life, is not even worth to be compared with it. The old order of things will be gone, and the life seeing God as He is, will be our present forever. Amen.