

“Bring back first love!” Revelation 2:1-7.

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.””

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

The season of Lent is associated with repentance. And the repentance with turning away from our sin and idols towards the Triune God. In this Lent season we will meditate on the Book of Revelation.

More specifically on the letters that Risen and Glorified Lord Jesus sends to seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

As the Church has understood it, on the one hand, sure, these letters were addressed to specific churches at that time, but on the other hand, Jesus’ message is addressed to His entire Church, to every Christian congregation, to every Christian. The Risen Lord Jesus speaks to you; He wants you to hear His message and meditate upon it.

So, why such a choice for this Lent Season? Why those letters? Because we are in danger. Yes, we are! And because in these letters the Risen Lord Jesus not only calls us to repentance, more than that, He helps us to see various dangers for our faith and salvation which we may not be even aware of.

Hear it again and let this sink it! He calls to repentance Christian congregations, Christians. Yes, He has good things to say about them, but at the same time, and that is a scary though, He makes us aware that even when there are good things in our Christian lives, something may be missing that may endanger our very salvation, especially if we do not recognize it and do not attend to it.

Let's see what the first letter to Ephesians brings to our attention. What I hope we would all do, what I encourage us to do - that we would listen carefully to what our Lord says to the Church and to us.

That we would ask the Holy Spirit to show us where we fail and fall short, especially those areas of our Christian lives where we may not be aware of our shortcomings, that He would graciously reveal to us what we, each one of us need to repent of and amend our ways so that our faith and salvation is not endangered.

But first, let's be reminded, who is this speaking to us, for that is significant: **"The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands."** This brings us back to what John saw in his vision:

"I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters." [Rev 1:12-15]

This Being, holy and terrifying in His majesty and power, is now speaking to you. And He does it because He cares for you and wishes you well: **"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary."**

This is quite beautiful and encouraging. Jesus speaks to Christians who are committed and endure hardships of Christian life, who are spiritually discerning and cannot bear with those who are evil and bring in false teachings, He speaks to Christians who suffer for Christ's name's sake and don't give up but persevere. Good things. Praiseworthy fellow saints! And the Risen Lord does praise them.

But... then He continues. **"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."**

Our Lord speaks about the faithful, committed, patiently enduring Christians, but something is missing in their lives. **"You have abandoned the love you had at first."** The love that you had at first... What is He referring to? To that very special experience of Christ's love which turns our lives upside down. You may remember it too.

You may recall that experience of encountering the incredible grace of the Triune God. It burns in us. It changes our hearts. Make them melt. It places the Triune God at the

center of our life. God's love washes over us so that we feel like and indeed are born again. It fills us with such joy and happiness that we want to offer our very lives to this amazing Lord. You too may remember those moments in your life.

As Jesus gives us this divine gift He also instructs us: **“Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”** [John 13:34-35] Just as Jesus loves you, so we need to love one another. For that is how people will know that we are truly Jesus' disciples. But you know what happens.

Time goes on. Our passion for Jesus wears out, our hearts kindled by His grace begin to cool down. We begin to reflect more rationally on how to be Christians, we articulate reasonable excuses why not to be that passionate, our self-interest takes over. Our love grows cold. Jesus sees it. It worries Him. He is concerned. For you.

So, He warns us. If we do not repent and let the works of His divine love manifest through us, the Holy Lord will come and remove our lampstand from its place. But remember why He warns us - because He does care about what happens to you.

He also knows that on our own we can't just pull ourselves together, we can't rekindle that love in our hearts. Only He can do it. As He speaks to us. As He sends His Spirit to dwell in us. Because His words change us. They wake us up. They enable us to act.

When we hear of His love, we feel loved, we want to respond. We want to live as little Christs for others. We do. By the way, this is a helpful way to reflect – how should we love all the people in our lives very practically so that looking at us they would see Jesus, so that they would recognize that we are indeed His disciple?

For we are and we want to do better.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

The whole message of Jesus is nothing but encouragement to us.

He already has completed our salvation. The job is done, finished. He has conquered sin; He has conquered the devil and death. He has already called us and welcomed us to His family. We are His own, and He won't let anything separate us from His love.

Now listen to Him! Let His words rekindle that first love in you again. So that one day soon you can hear the voice of this majestic Beings saying to us: “You are my joy, you have been faithful, you have endured, and you also have loved and blessed so many, come, the tree of life is prepare for you, come and enjoy the paradise of God!”

Amen.