

“Judged with the sword.” Revelation 2:12-17

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also, you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

“Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.” We continue our midweek Lenten meditations on the Book of Revelation, and more specifically on the letters that the Risen Lord Jesus sends to several congregations.

Remember that those letters were not addressed to those fellow saints two millennia ago only, they are addressed to the Church Universal and to each one of us. The Risen and Ascended Lord to whom all authority is given in heaven and on earth is speaking to us, He wants us to hear His warnings and encouragement.

This time He speaks as the One “**who has the sharp two-edged sword**”. From His mouth came a “two-edged sword”. The author of the letter of Hebrews also speaks about such a “two-edged sword”. “**For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**” [Heb 4:12]

This time Jesus addresses us as the divine Judge, where His Word pierces our very hearts and discerns the very thoughts and intentions of our hearts. And this time again Jesus begins with the acknowledgment of good things in the Pergamum congregation.

“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”

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Whatever was happening in Pergamum, and we don't know all the details, one is clear that Satan had focused his offence on those Christians. Jesus speaks about their situation as "where Satan's throne is". The Enemy had been fiercely attacking that Christian community, up to the point where one of them, a faithful witness Antipas, was killed by the enemies of the Gospel.

Imagine someone from our Christian community being murdered because of their faith. Because they were Christians. Because they believed and confessed that Jesus is the Lord. What impact would it have on us? Perhaps, the Holy Spirit would stir up our courage and commitment, our passion for the salvation of others. Perhaps!

Or perhaps, our old nature would make us fearful and scatter us. We should certainly hope for the former... But we know about Christians in Pergamum, they stood firm in their confession of faith. They didn't waiver. We could say: "Wow, so impressive!"

Sure, it is. The Spirit was at work among them. Thanks be to God! But at the same time, as Jesus continues: **"But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also, you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.**

While they remained firm in their Christian faith, they tolerated false teaching and practices among them. What Jesus says could be rephrased along those lines: "You have among you some who want to serve two masters, God and Mammon and who want to listen to two masters, God and sexual temptations of the world. And you keep tolerating them as if that was of little importance?!"

Greed, earthly wealth and sexual temptations are always present. It was so back then. And it is the same today. It was so in Pergamum, and it is so in Oshawa. That is not surprising. Temptation will come. False teaching will come. Till the end of this age.

But... we can and should examine ourselves. Who is my God, really? God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit or Mammon? Which of those do I fear to lose more – true faith or my possessions? Which of those make me feel secure and at peace, God's presence or the presence of wealth? Do I see my possessions as God's gifts entrusted to me for the sake of my family and the Gospel, or as my possessions for my own pleasures?

So also, we should ask about sexual temptations and our lives. Do we look up to the Lord to guide us in our relationships and in everything we do, do we daily strive to live according to His Commandments, or do we believe that since we are forgiven, we can relax about our new life in Christ and be lazy Christians. "Don't worry, you are forgiven anyway!"

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But Jesus speaks in the strictest terms about any congregation allowing such things, tolerating such attitudes, neglecting our new life in Christ. **“Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.”**

Otherwise put, unless we recognize our sinfulness in the light of the Word of God, unless we turn away from our sins, unless we repent of trusting in created things more than the Creator, unless we strive to lead a holy life as Christ has made us holy, the Lord Jesus to whom all judgement is given, will come and war against us.

We will be judged by the Word that is **“sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”**

Therefore, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.”**

Thank you, Lord Jesus! Thank you for speaking to us! Thank you for sending your Word and your Spirit to wake us, to pierce us, to cleanse our hearts and to turn us back to yourself, thank you for not giving up on us, unworthy, when we fail daily, thanks for caring for us and not allowing our continuous sin to rob us of our salvation!

Thank you for comforting us with your promises! Hidden manna, a new name... These a bit obscure expressions have been understood as pointing to the great gifts that the Triune God so graciously provides for us.

Namely, to our new identity bestowed on us in our Baptism. A new name. A child of God. Gifted to you already now, with the fullness of what it means to be revealed when the Reigning Lord Jesus returns in His glory.

And the manna is likely referring to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper. The ongoing heavenly feast where we are privileged to participate. Where we are privileged to be fed by the medicine of eternal life, by the very holy Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus.

Thanks be to God, that you have an ear and can hear what the Spirit says, otherwise you wouldn't be here! Thanks be to God that He has welcomed you as His beloved child! And thanks be to God that He keeps strengthening you with His Holy Meal, so that in His power, not in ours, and under His protection, we are assured of our victory.

Thanks be to Him who with His Word, sharper than a two-edged sword, comes and judges us. And what a judgment it is: “You are forgiven. You have conquered! Come and receive what I have prepared for you!”

Amen.