

**Alleluia! Christ is risen and ascended! He is risen and ascended, indeed! Alleluia!**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Jesus said: ***"I have given them Your Word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world"*** (John 17:14).

*"The world needs to change."* How many times have you uttered those words? That is not a statement that would incur much argument. You merely have to read the paper, watch the news, or scroll social media to agree that the world does need to change. But how realistic is that? How is the world going to change?

For many people, they believe that we have reached the point of no return. They see the sexual revolution taking over public schools starting in pre-school, as these children receive a "head start" in questioning how God created them. They see the increase in crime. They see the increase in people disobeying authority. It appears to be too late.

To this, Jesus says: ***"I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one"*** (John 17:15). Here, Jesus gives us a big clue about the fallen world and about change in this fallen world. The world can certainly change, but this fallen world will never change if Christians just sit back, do nothing, and watch as the world continues changing for the worse. So, the Holy Spirit leads us to bring about positive change in this fallen world.

This portion of today's Gospel lesson records a prayer that Jesus prayed to God the Father right before His arrest in the garden. In this prayer, Jesus is specifically praying for His apostles then – and His disciples now, you and me.

The world back then needed to change, too. The Gospel message needed to infiltrate the lives of the people. So, the Holy Spirit was called to lead the apostles and disciples to carry on the work that Jesus had begun. In His prayer, Jesus knew His time was short – and that after His atoning death and bodily resurrection, He would bodily ascend into heaven. To this, Jesus prayed: *"Father, help them be the kind of people that we need them to be. Help them be strong witnesses of the Gospel. Help them change the world."*

This vocation to change the world is not easy. They – *and us* – are in the world, but we are not to be of the world, that is, to be one with the world. This is a hard balance to maintain. Remember, those apostles and disciples then, were just like us. They were ambitious. They argued on who was the greatest. They fought with one another.

Like us, they too, were politically minded. They wanted rewards for their hard work. They wanted to be approved of and liked by the world around them. For that, they were often lured by the trappings of the fallen world. But unlike the fallen world, they had spiritual weapons. They had the Word of God, prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit. It was never easy – *and Christ said the same* – but they did change the world by the Word of God and how they lived their lives in love and service for one another. Slowly, day by day, with the work of the Holy Spirit, they attracted others to Jesus' love.

You too are in the world but are not of the world. For us, this is a hard balance to maintain. The fallen world hates you. This is the title we wear as Christians. As disciples of Christ, we should never be ashamed to be hated, but we ought to be prepared to face the hate of the fallen world.

The world will slander you miserably and afflict you on every side. And yet, they will have no accusation or charge to lay against you or any vice to charge you, but only that you possess, preach, and confess Christ's true Word. You will hear that you are a bigot. You will hear that you are evil and judgmental. You will hear them say, "*You are the greatest abomination on earth.*" You see, this fallen world cannot tolerate and endure true Christianity.

So, the fallen world has nothing else to do with its hatred but to rage against Christians. This fallen world cannot tolerate Jesus, John, Peter, and Paul. This fallen world cannot tolerate you, and especially me.

And what have Christians done to the fallen world? We have not robbed or stolen from them. We have not injured them in the slightest. So, what have we done so that the fallen world hates us? We have freely served everyone with great effort and labor, offering and imparting the grace of God, eternal salvation, and every good thing. But what do we get in return? We receive nothing but fierce, bitter anger and hatred.

This is the thanks and reward this fallen world gives Christ and all who abide in Him and His Word. And even if we would give in to some of the fallen world's demands, it would never be enough. What the fallen world and its fallen prince desire is that Christianity cease to exist. Satan wants us all to follow him and his lies and delusions.

Wrong can so easily become normalized that it ceases to be wrong. Just look at how Satan's lies are being promoted on television and movies today. See how much the fallen world has moved the culture into falsely believing that wrong is right. Sexual immorality and theft are encouraged these days. "*You be you,*" they say, which really means, you be your own god. Fellow Christians, may we never negotiate with evil, for if we do, evil always wins out. In fact, we do like to rationalize the evil we do in our lives. "*At least I'm not that other guy.*"

Jesus knows that living in this fallen world is difficult. Jesus knows our sins and our failures. This is why He suffered the shame and endured the cross, so that He could earn us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, which gives us the strength and encouragement to keep us going strong in the one true Christian faith.

In Jesus' prayer, He prayed that we are not taken out of this fallen world, because there is work to be done and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are the ones to do it. Indeed, the world needs to be changed. And this fallen world can be changed one corner at a time. The world needs to see the difference the triune God can make in the world through His people in our daily vocations as parent, child, friend, student, and co-worker.

In this tension that we have as being in the world and not of the world, how do we not act of the world? How do we live in this fallen world, use it for good, yet not bow down to it or be swept away by it? Well, this is surely an everyday, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute battle in our lives. So, how do your actions and decisions affect your life as a Christian? Will your actions and decisions affect how others see you as a Christian? How do you use your God-given vocations to further the Gospel in this fallen world?

The only sure way to not be carried away by Satan and his fallen world is to have regular attendance in the Divine Service where we are fed and nourished with God's Word and His Sacraments. As you are fed and nourished, the Holy Spirit strengthens your faith and leads you to Bible study and devotions to further strengthen your faith.

It's all a matter of catechesis. We are all being catechized. So, how are you being catechized? By Satan and his fallen world, which only leads to eternal death and eternal separation from God? Or by the Holy Spirit, which through His Means of Grace, we are given forgiveness of sins, which begets eternal life and salvation.

Being a Christian is tough. It's hard. It's difficult. Jesus was hated by the world, rejected by the world, killed by the world, so that someday, we, who abide in Him, would be taken out of this fallen world to enter eternal bliss.

In the meantime, we live in this fallen world, but, in our Baptism, we are also in Christ, so that everything He won for us through His suffering and death would be ours. So, knowing what is before us, we have the privilege to gladly tell those of the fallen world what Christ has done for them, and thus through the Holy Spirit, we change the world for the better one person at a time. *Alleluia! Christ is risen and ascended! He is risen and ascended, indeed! Alleluia!* Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**