

Pentecost 24 – Proper 28B (11/15/09 – *Enduring in Him Who Endured*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Imagine the dismay of the disciples at Jesus' words: ***Do you see these great building? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down*** [MK 13.2]. What was the point of the treasury we heard about last week – and why bother holding before our eyes the faith of the widow in giving her very last penny – if the Temple is going to be completely leveled? But more than that. Where will God's gracious and merciful presence be if there is no Temple? Where will the sacrifices be performed? What about the atonement of sins? And without God's gracious and merciful presence, where will **WE** be? Those must have been some of the very troubling questions that ran through the minds of the disciples.

We have to understand just how important the Temple was in Jewish life and religion. And further, we must understand just how unimaginable the destruction of this Temple would have been. It was built on one of the highest hills of Jerusalem – Mount Moriah ... just east of Mount Zion – and could be seen for miles, glistening in the sun, on a clear day. Its stones were massive – and I mean massive beyond anything you have ever seen or probably even thought of – some as large as 37 feet long by 18 feet deep by 12 feet high. These would not be easily toppled – unlike the narrow walls of most structures. And not only were they a gleaming white ... many were decorated with gold. How fitting for the structure where the Almighty God was present with the eternal, heavenly riches of His grace.

And that is most important – as I already alluded. The Temple was the place of God's gracious and merciful presence ... a place of atonement by blood. If the Temple is gone ... so is God's grace ... God's mercy ... and God's forgiveness. That's how a devout, faithful Jew would have thought. And even for a less-devout – merely nationalistic ... or self-righteous – Jew, the Temple would have represented the pride and glory of Israel. It was unthinkable that it should be utterly destroyed. Old Testament prophets were stoned – or at least very nearly stoned – for saying such things.

This prophecy of our Lord – which was fulfilled to the letter when Rome sieged and destroyed Jerusalem in AD70 – points to something even greater.

It points to the Last Day ... when the heavens and the earth shall be burned up. But it also points to every day in between in a general sense – every day when all that we think is strong and sturdy and glistening in **us** is cast down by God the Holy Spirit through the condemnation of the Law.

For you see, before God – and in eternity – no mere human, manmade glory shall endure. Our supposed human wisdom – it is nothing but foolishness. We stupidly fall for the snares of the devil on a regular basis. Our strength – it is nothing but frailty. In great weakness we succumb to sin daily. Sturdy? How readily our sinful flesh topples. How quickly our resolve is bowed. How easily our spirits are blown over by every wind of doctrine. And glistening? Only if we consider the foul, filthiness of our infractions against God's Commandments something in which to glory.

When it comes to standing before God on the Last Day, nothing that we have said and done – by means of our own willpower – will remain. We must be scraped clean – every stone ... and all the wood, hay, and stubble with which **we** try to build our miserable lives **by ourselves** ... must be cast down and removed. For there is nothing in us naturally – nothing in our hearts or minds – that is worthy of standing before God on that Last Day. From our sinful hearts and minds proceed sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. If we are to stand, God must first bring us low ... to the dust of the earth ... even to the dust of the grave.

When the Temple was thrown down as Jesus had prophesied, much of the Temple Mount itself was allowed to remain standing. The Western Wall contains part of the foundation upon which the Second Temple had been built. Or, to put it another way, though the Temple built with human hands was cast down – for Christ is the eternal, living Temple ... and He entered the heavenly Holy of Holies by through the curtain of His Flesh to sprinkle the Blood of His sacrifice and atone for the sins of the whole world once-for-all – God allowed the foundation to remain. This may serve as a reminder that the Church ... and our faith – we ourselves – are built upon a lasting foundation. St. Paul says it this way in his letter to the Ephesians: ***So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the***

foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone, in Whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord [EPH 2.19-21].

You, dear children of God, are built upon Jesus Christ – Himself the Rock and Cornerstone of all that we are and have that is good. By means of the foundation laid by God through the apostolic and prophetic Word of Holy Scripture, you are being built up by God into a holy temple of the Lord. As St. Peter puts it: *As you come to Him, a living Stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* [1PT 2.4-5] You have your *hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and your bodies washed with the pure water* of Holy Baptism [HEB 10.22].

Through the preaching and teaching of the Word, the Holy Spirit has *put* His *laws on your hearts, and* written *them on your minds*. Though this is good, it is not always comforting. For with the Law of God on our hearts and minds, we see how we have fallen – how we have failed to *hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering* [HEB 10.23] ... how we have *neglected to meet together, as is the habit of some* ... how we have botched encouraging one another [10.24] **both** to refrain from sin **and** to gather with us around the gifts of God's Means of Grace (the Word and the Sacraments) offered in this place to receive the forgiveness of sin. And **yet**, you may *have confidence to enter the holy places by the Blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened* by His life and death, and His resurrection and ascension. For on account of the ministry and intercession of Jesus Christ your Great High Priest, the Holy Spirit says to you again today: *I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more* [10.17]. By His *single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified* [10.14] – which is to say that Jesus by His Cross has forgiven all your sins and made you perfect and holy in the eyes of the Father. Christ's work of your salvation is complete and perfect. There is nothing lacking ... nothing that you need do ... *no longer any offering for sin* [10.18].

But be on your guard, dear saints. As our Lord Himself warns us: *See*

that no one leads you astray. Many will come in Christ's Name, saying, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place – and has since our Lord's ascension – but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. [MK 13.5-8]

The Jewish leaders would mock and despise Jesus – crucify Him. “Where is Your wisdom now?” they thought. “Where is Your strength? Your power? Your glory?” The Son of God was delivered up to the death of the Cross by those He had made His brothers when He took human flesh into Himself. The Jewish leaders would claim to sit in the seat of Moses and the Patriarchs and deliver the long-promised Son into the hands of sinful foreigners. *Aha! You Who would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself and come down from the cross!* [MK 15.29-30] The rulers of the nation rose up against the Savior of the nations. The kingdom of men rose up against the Kingdom of God. And as Christ our Lord hung upon the Cross, dying in our stead, the earth quaked. And when the Teacher was laid in the grave His disciples hungered to taste His good Word. And ever since Christ our Lord arose from the grave and then ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father, we and the whole earth have been in birth pains – until He shall return to deliver His creation and His saints into eternal glory.

You can expect the world – even family – to be against you. *Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for Christ's Name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.* [MK 13.12-13] Built on the Rock, which is Christ, the Church – and you – shall stand. Built into Christ by a living, God-given faith – strengthened and nourished by Word and Sacrament – you shall *endure in Him Who endured* all things for your sake. For Christ has fought and won the war for you ... and He shall keep you safe in Himself until the Day of His glorious return ... when you shall enter His eternal Kingdom.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]