

From the Holy Gospel: A little while, and ye shall not see Me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father. [John 16.16]

I.

In today’s text from the Holy Gospel, the disciples puzzle over this phrase used by Jesus: “a little while.” “A little while, and ye shall not see Me; and again, a little while, and you shall see Me, because I go to the Father.” They whisper among themselves: “What does He mean?” “What is He telling us?”

Jesus then asks them – “What are you whispering to one another? Are you puzzling over what I just promised you? Your asking what I mean by ‘a little while,’” and what I mean about “seeing Me,” aren’t you?

As usual, Christ has this way of using words in several senses, because they are true in several ways, and these several ways fit together so as to give us a visions of things that, as Scripture records, angels desire to look into and to understand. It is the nature of the way in which our heavenly Father reveals His will to us that it comes as a paradox with multiple applications.

Today, this proclamation of our Lord first explains what the disciples experience between Good Friday and Easter, when they cease to see Him alive, and then they see Him again, live. This sequence of “not seeing” to “seeing again” has the effect of driving them to despair only to raise them to ecstasy again. If they only understood this upper room discourse, they could have been consistently neither in despair or in ecstasy, but simply in the state of faith. In that upper room, Jesus further explains what He means, but to no avail – they still don’t get it.

But the Good Friday to Easter trail from despair to ecstasy is not the only aspect of this promise of Jesus to them. It also relates to His ascension, where in a more long range sense, they will not see Him, but then, they will see Him in His blessings given to His Church through their apostolic ministry.

And through the ages of the Church Era, this same mysterious promise from Christ is taught and applied to the puzzled faithful. For us, we start out not seeing Jesus, only then to see Him as He reveals Himself to us according to His promise.

And then, in the grandest final sense of the truth that Jesus speaks, after His resurrection and ascension, all Christendom will not see Him, physically, body, hands, feet, wounds, and all, until again we do see Him at His glorious return on the Last Day for this segment of human existence. And for Christians who have died before the Last Day, this same Jesus brings to truthful reality what He promises when they are, upon their deaths, immediately “with Christ,” according to their soul – mind, will, and emotions – while, according to their body, it is at the 2nd Coming that they see Him again, and they will rejoice – you will rejoice, I will rejoice – and, then, no one, for all of everlasting time, will take that joy from us.

II.

But, there remains the question: “Outside of a forecast, does this paradoxical promise of our Lord have any meaning and impact upon daily life, for every day leading up that final day for us?” Does it mean anything more certain that a father’s cryptic comment to a child’s pleading for something: “We’ll see!” Is this “little while” discourse saying more to you than a heavenly, “We’ll see”? Yes, it does! And the peace and joy and confidence of life in Christ is found in the meaning of “a little while.”

First of all, the first- you-don’t-see-Jesus-and-then-you-do promise teaches you the nature of faith. We are told that, as Christians, we live by faith. Well, actually, it is only when we take the Bible’s promises and declarations to be the truth, that we live by faith. Otherwise, we live by doubt, we live, practically speaking, by unbelief, along with Thomas in his miserable first seven days from

Easter until he is presented with “facts” that he demanded to see.

But, unbelief is changed to faith when the Holy Spirit breathes anew His breath of spirit-life into troubled human hearts and minds. And so it is, in your life and mine, that we continually go in this life from unbelief to belief, from doubt to faith, from fear to confidence, and from not seeing Jesus in our in our frustrations to seeing Him in the peace that His promises bring us, seeing Him in the human things to which He has attached His promises – seeing Him in the waters of Holy Baptism, seeing Him in the preaching of the Gospel, seeing Him in the peace of Holy Absolution, seeing Him in His very body and His true blood in the vessels of Holy Communion, and through all these, His gifts, seeing Him in the gathering of saints, seeing Him in the needs of the world – for, as Dr. Luther teaches, “we serve God in our neighbor’s needs” -- and in blessings from His hands in our daily lives.

This is the pattern of daily living as Christians. It is up and down, not because the promise is up and down, but because we, in our sins, are up and down. But the promises of Christ to you remain constant. You see Him, day by day, when He opens the eyes of faith for you to see Him in those promises, and to see Him in those neighbor needs, that are not only spoken by Luther, but also by Jesus Himself in His discourse on the Last Day, when the sheep and goats are separated, and the elect are shown Jesus in every little act of caring that comes from them, no matter how many other times they failed to care, while the condemned are judged for every little act of caring that they failed to do, no matter how many other times they managed to care.

So, as you revisit the upper room, Easter has its point: to point you to Jesus, with you and for you! Seeing Him now by faith, and soon, forever in all His fulness!