

## Revelation 21:1-7

“When a woman is giving birth,” says Jesus in our Gospel reading, “*she has sorrow.*” And so her doctor, her nurse, and her husband will encourage her by saying things like, “It will soon be over...hang in there.” And, as Jesus puts it, “A baby will soon be born.” Soon, her joy will replace her sorrow because a girl or a boy is coming.

It’s not only expectant mothers who need such encouragement. All Christians do. In a certain sense, we all suffer labor pains as we wait expectantly for the Son of God to appear. And so the last book of the Bible, the Revelation to St. John, was written as kind of a Lamaze manual for Christians. Its theme is one of hope and victory; victory over the very struggles and sorrows we deal with right now.

In today’s Epistle, we are reminded that when it’s all over, God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more. Crying, and pain, and mourning will not be a part of our life in heaven. So hang in there. Yes, it’s a real struggle at times. The labor pains and sorrows can be overwhelming. But the end is in sight. The “baby” is coming. Soon, Christ will appear and gather His church into heaven with Him.

There is a word that keeps popping up in our text in Revelation. That word is “new.” Three times we see it in these seven verses. When the Last Day comes, everything will be new. A new heaven and a new earth will be awaiting us. This present world, everything we see--the heavens above us and the earth we live on, will pass away. It will all be destroyed by fire. How sad, therefore, it will be for those who cling to the things of this world; whose god is not the Lord Jesus, but money, fame, and power. Now we make use of this world. Now we go to work and earn a living. We go to school and gain an education. Now we enjoy a Cardinal’s baseball game. We take in a movie. We gather with friends at a restaurant. We enjoy a beer together or a bottle of wine. But the day is coming when this world and everything in it will pass away. And so we look to the new heaven and new earth even as we make use of, and enjoy, this present heaven and earth.

Yet, our enjoyment is tempered with pain and suffering. We can hardly make it through a day without hearing news of a tragic nature. Bombings in Boston, explosions in Texas, oil spills, earthquakes, shootings, credit card fraud at a local grocery store, friends and loved ones dealing with grief and heartache. But it must be this way because this world is dying. It is filling up with wickedness. God created our world perfect in the beginning, but sin, which entered the world through Adam, has spread like a cancer. And because sin results in death, even this earth is marked for destruction.

How can we know for certain that we will be a part of the new heaven and earth?...that these words of victory and hope in Revelation are truly meant for us? How can we know that we will not be a part of the destruction of this dying world, but will enter into all things new?

This concerning question is raised to an even higher level when we take a peek at the verse following our text in Revelation 21 verse 8: “*But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.*” This verse is frightening, even to us who are Christians, because who among us can brush off these words saying, “I am not such things! My life is exemplary. Others should live as I do.”

The cowardly in this verse refers to all Christians who have given up, who have quit fighting the fight of faith. The faithless are those who, even though they have head-knowledge of Jesus, have not

remained true to His Word and Sacraments. Murderers, sexually immoral, idolaters, liars refers to those who despise the word and commandment of God; who live as though what God says does not matter, or matters very little.

Fellow Christians and fellow sinners, these words condemn us all. None of us can say that we are innocent of wrongdoing. Even we, who know the Lord Jesus as our Good Shepherd, daily fall away from Him into all manner of sin and wickedness. When you see evil in others, do not gloat and boast that you are so much better. The same evil dwells in your heart. When you condemn others and judge others, you condemn yourself, for no one is righteous. The same sin infects us all.

Still there is hope, hope for you in Christ Jesus. This present world is dying and will pass away with all who cling to it. But you who trust, not in yourself, nor in your works done for God and your neighbor, but who trust in the Lord Jesus will be a part of the new heaven and new earth. How can I say this with such certainty? Because according to your baptism into Christ Jesus, you are already a new creation in Him. Those who belong to Jesus are even now citizens, not of this dying earth, but of the new heavens and earth that are awaiting us.

When you were washed in the waters of Holy Baptism, you became one who is like Noah. As he entered the ark and the floodwaters came, he and his family were carried by those waters away from the world that was passing away, into a new world awaiting them. And when they stepped out of the ark, after the floodwaters had subsided, they entered that new world. Those waters washed away the old, wicked world, and brought them safely into all things new.

The same is true for you. Here in the ark of the church, (and you were brought in through the water and word of baptism), you are being carried into all things new. Every time you enter this ark you confess that you are a sinner, a sinner with all the rest in the world, and you confess that you are dying day by day, and that you deserve to be destroyed in the lake of fire in the end. But your God turns toward you, and through the mouth of your pastor, declares that your sins are forgiven, that you are a new creation in Christ Jesus, that you will live even as your body is dying.

Whenever you come up to God's altar in this ark of the church, you leave behind your old, sinful ways and receive God's promise of all things new. Jesus gives you His blood of the New Testament. It is His last will and testament and is based solely on grace. God does not look at your sins because Jesus already paid the price by His dying on the cross for every wrong you have done. God, instead, covers you with all things new. He clothes you with Jesus' innocence. He declares you innocent, even though you are a sinner, innocent for Jesus' sake. He forgives you completely. Leaving God's altar, refreshed with Jesus' true flesh and blood, you become like Noah leaving the ark and entering into a new world. This is your life now in Christ. You do not cling to the old, sinful world that is passing away; you are a new creation in Jesus. You do not hang on to your old, sinful ways; you have been given a new heart and life in Christ.

Even now, therefore, even as you live out your days in this present, temporal world, you can be certain that you will, in the end--the end which is coming soon--enter into the new heaven and earth which awaits you. You can be certain, not because of how you have lived your life, but because your life is lived in Christ Jesus, who is your forgiving Savior--in Him, you already are God's new creation. Amen.