

Grace and peace to you . . .

Are you ready for the end of the world? This question is treated often in the realm of fiction, in books and movies and on the internet. Survivalist websites spout the belief that modern society will soon collapse and urge you to prepare for the coming chaos. There are lists published of the things you will need in order to survive the dark ages to come: things like an electric generator, medical supplies, food and water stores, high-caliber weapons, ammunition, and so on. If you are old enough, you may notice that such lists simply reproduce common supply lists for the bomb shelters of the 1950's and '60's. If you are not fully equipped, they say, the coming collapse will usher in a time of great suffering for you. This extreme view, so widely hyped in the media, has many people waiting for the end with fear and trepidation.

There is another extremism which paints a foreboding picture of the end of the world. Many Christians, lured into the lies of millennialism, face the end with a certain amount of fear. They believe Jesus will at that time take up into heaven all those Christians who are truly ready; the rest will be left behind to suffer severe persecution at the hands of the unbelievers. To these misguided Christians, being ready for the end of the world has a whole different meaning. If you are not fully equipped spiritually, the end will usher in a time of great suffering for you. This false and heretical view, also widely hyped in the media, has many people waiting for the end with fear and trepidation, wondering if they are fully equipped.

I am your Pastor, sent by God to preach to you Good News. You have nothing to fear from the end. Neither this year nor the elections this November are likely to cause the collapse of society. And even if they did, you have nothing to fear, for you know that your heavenly Father richly and daily provides you with all that you need to support this body and life. As for the return of Christ: He may or may not return this year; no man knows the day of His coming. You certainly have nothing to fear about being left behind after some rapture. The whole idea of a rapture of some Christians and a following great tribulation suffered by those left behind is a complete falsehood, a lie of the devil. You have nothing to fear about the end of the world.

But what about the return of Christ, whenever that may be? Do you have reason to fearfully wait for His return? After all, you confess in the Creed that, "He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead." It is true that those who are not fully equipped spiritually DO have reason to fear the coming of Christ, the righteous Judge. On the other hand, those fully equipped have nothing to fear. So, are you fully equipped, or do you come up short?

If it were up to you to equip yourself, you would fall far, far short. In order to be pronounced “innocent” on Judgment Day, you must be blameless, righteous, and holy. God says, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.” [Gen 17:1] “The righteous shall go into eternal life.” [Mt 25:46] “Be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” [1Pe 1:15-16] Are you holy? Are you righteous? Are you blameless? Are you ready for the Judgment?

God’s Law says, “No!” “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.’” [Rom 3:23,10-12] God’s Law has pronounced you guilty — not holy, not righteous, and certainly not blameless. So, are you fully equipped for Judgment Day? According to God’s Law, you come up far, far short and have every reason to be fearfully waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thankfully, God’s Law is not the final Word. He has sent me to preach another Word, the Word of the Gospel. For what does St. Paul say in today’s lesson? “You come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” [7] He does not say that you fearfully wait for the Lord’s revelation; rather, you eagerly wait for the coming of the Lord. You are eager for the Lord’s return, because you come short in no gift. God has blessed you with every spiritual blessing in Christ [Eph 1:3] and you have nothing to fear on Judgment Day.

“You come short in no gift.” Notice that the blessings which you have received are pure gifts; you have done nothing to deserve or to earn them for yourself. God was moved by His own “grace which was given to you in Christ Jesus.” [4] The grace of God is His undeserved love for you due to the work of Christ. Out of this pure grace, God has given you all the gifts you need to stand unafraid before His judgment throne. In fact, God has given you so many gifts in Christ that you eagerly wait for the revelation of your Lord. Indeed, “you come short in no gift.”

Remember what you need in order to stand without fear before your righteous Judge: you need to be righteous, holy, and blameless. These are the very gifts which God has given you by His grace in Christ. You have heard God’s Law; now hear His precious Gospel: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.” “To him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.” [Rom 3:21-22, 4:5] God considers you righteous through faith in Christ. The righteousness which you have is the righteousness of Christ, whom you wear like a cloak over your sin, a cloak given to you by God in holy Baptism. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” [Gal 3:27] And so the very righteousness

of God clothes you, the righteousness which you have received as a gift through faith. You are righteous, and have nothing to fear at the coming of Christ.

“You come short in no gift.” In addition to being declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, you are also holy, even as your Father in heaven is holy. Moreover, you are also blameless. Hear once again the glorious Gospel promises: “Now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. . . . The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord..” [Rom 6:22-23] “. . . that He may establish your hearts blameless and in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.” [1Th 3:13] “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.” [Col 1:21-22] Christ has made His whole Church holy and blameless, washing Her in the water and Word of Baptism, as St. Paul testifies in Ephesians 5: “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” [25-27]

All these gifts have been given to you by God through the preaching of His Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments and have been received by you through the gift of faith. You are holy. You are blameless. You are righteous. The coming Judgment holds no fear for you. “You come short in no gift.”

“You have been made rich in everything by [God] in all speech and all knowledge as the witness of Christ was confirmed in you.” [5-6] How was this witness of Christ confirmed in you? By His holy Word, which you hear as it is preached and read as it was written by the apostles and prophets. God the Holy Ghost, who proceeds from the Word, confirms the witness of Christ in you. And you may eagerly wait for the revelation of your Lord Jesus, even until He comes, because He continues to “confirm you to the end.” [8] He does this as He comes to you again and again in His Word and in His Supper, bringing to you forgiveness, life, and salvation. The Lord has given His promise: He will “confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” [8]

God has even given to you the reason that you may believe this promise: “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” [9] Even when you are faithless, “He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” [2Ti 2:13] He will continue to confirm you to the end. He will continue to come to you with His Word of forgiveness, even as I absolve you from sin Sunday after Sunday. He will continue to come to you with His Body and Blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of

your sins. He has called you into the fellowship of His Son. He will also confirm you to the end. God is faithful. He will do it. He cannot deny Himself.

“You come short in no gift.” By His grace in Christ, God has given you everything you need to greet His coming with eager expectation and hope. He has given you His own righteousness, His own holiness, His own blamelessness. You have received these gifts through the faith which He placed in you by the Holy Ghost. He will confirm you to the end, as He comes to you in His Word, in holy Baptism, in holy Absolution, and in His holy Supper to forgive your sins and strengthen you in the faith. He will keep you blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. And when that day comes, and Jesus returns with all His angels to judge both the living and the dead, He will find you righteous. He will consider you holy. He will declare you blameless. For that is what you are in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes . . .