

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Today the Paschal Candle, which has graced our Sanctuary since the great Vigil of Easter, the candle which has shed its light at every Mass and every Divine Office, the candle that shined as the Light of the risen Christ in the world, today that candle is gone. It has been removed.

It was extinguished at the reading of the account of the Ascension of our Lord. The *Lumen Christi*, the Light of Christ, which was returned into the dark Nave at the first Celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord, is no longer seen. Christ has ascended. He has gone to the Father as He promised. For a little while we do not see His Light.

He is ascended. But He is not gone. Still our lives are full of Christ. The Divine Service is full of Christ. Our faith is full of Christ. As His Holy Church, we live because of Christ, and we live for Christ. Perhaps we do not see His Light with earthly eyes. But the brightness of that marvelous Light still brightens our hearts and souls and minds. We still see Him by faith. We bask in the Light of Christ, even though the world around us is very dark.

The Prophet Isaiah described it 700 years before the Birth of the Messiah. The palaces forsaken, the city deserted, wild beasts filled the forts and towers, strongholds a pasture for the flocks. It is a horrible picture. But it is not a physical world he foretells. It is a spiritual world. The Prophet describes a desolate, ruined world, a place ruined by the absence of preaching and the Word. For although the wilderness and ruins remain, still justice dwells in the wilderness, and righteousness in the field. It is a picture of the Church in the world.

The coming of the Promised Spirit into the wilderness of this sinful world brings righteousness, righteous works, peace, quietness and assurance. And all these blessings are visited upon the Kingdom of God in the midst of this fallen world.

That Kingdom is the Holy Christian Church. Even though the forest be destroyed by hail, even if the city is brought low in humiliation, the people of God dwell in peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, in quiet resting places. You, His Holy Church, abide in faith by the work of the Spirit, sustained by the Word and Mysteries of God.

It is the time in which you live, an invisible Kingdom of Peace and righteousness hidden inside of a visible kingdom of chaos and death. Outside there is sin and transgression, debauchery and perversion. Inside there is righteousness and hope. And the Prophet tells you why – because the Spirit is poured out from on high. And yet the Light of Christ is hidden for a time, as the Holy Church prepares for Pentecost.

While the Paschal Candle is not seen, still the Light of Christ illumines His people. The Holy Church is sustained by that Light, and She reflects that Light. The Church is a Light in the dark place of this fallen world. It is the Spirit that brings the Light of Christ to you.

And so does St. Peter, thrice restored, describe the Church Militant, the Church that dwells in the wilderness of this world: serious, and watchful in prayer. The Church is serious because She knows that She deals with the difference between eternal life and eternal death. And the Church is watchful in prayer because the quickening power She has is not Hers – it belongs to God

alone. It is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe, the power of the Gospel, the power of Divine Words that give life, the power through which the Spirit works to convert sinful men, to give fallen men life all the while they are surrounded by a dying world.

That you be able to identify the Church, the Apostle describes it: fervent in love for one another, hospitable, employing God's Gifts in daily service one to another, good stewards of the manifold grace of God. All this is possible only through the ability which God supplies, that He be glorified through our Lord Jesus Christ; Christ, the Light of the World.

How can something not seen, like yeast hidden in dough, work so powerfully? The Beloved Disciple, the adopted brother of the Lord, captures for all time and eternity the Words of Christ, and His Promise before He went to the cross: "When the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness..."

That is the justice that dwells in the wilderness that Isaiah promises. That is the righteousness the Prophet describes. That is the source of peace, of quietness, of assurances, and of your hope. Christ ascended into heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the Living God brings the Light of Christ into His Church. And the Church dwells in that Light, reflecting that Light to one another, and into a dark world.

The Church knows Christ. That is the work of the Spirit. But the world does not know Him. So He taught His disciples that they would be in danger of stumbling. They would be put out of the churches of their day, for there was no room for Christ there. And those who do not know Christ would count putting them to death a work pleasing to God.

The world around you does the same. The Truth of Holy Scripture is ridiculed and mocked. So too are those who believe it. In some places men suffer physically for their faith, some are added to the holy martyrs protected under the heavenly throne, the martyrs that pray "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

As the martyrs pray there, here there is pressure on you to go along with the world, to reject the clear Word of God, to be embarrassed or ashamed to speak the Truth. Our fallen society makes it uncomfortable to be a Christian, and that not by accident. The devil works through sinful men to try to make it uncomfortable, to make it impossible to be a Christian.

And truth be told, you must confess that you have succumbed to the temptations of the fallen world. But your Lord has warned you beforehand: "These things", the Lord said, "they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me."

So hearken to the Words of your Lord: "... whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword."

That you be saved, that you be preserved in these evil last days, the Lord who sends the Spirit, the Sent-One of the Father, teaches plainly what His Spirit does – He testifies of Christ. Through

the Word of God He makes known to you, and to all men, the Truth of the Savior, the only Savior, the only Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that Word, the Gospel Word, is the Word that saves.

You hear and believe, by the work of the same Spirit. You believe, and all your sins are forgiven. By faith you receive that life-giving testimony, that saving witness, that Gospel Word. And it is that same Word that you confess, the Word of Christ that the Holy Church speaks openly and faithfully and boldly in this dying world, that the Spirit work to bring the full harvest in. So the Apostle exhorts “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.”

The Paschal Candle is gone. But Christ is not. The Light that gives Light to the world is not gone. He is here. He is the center and substance of your faith and worship. He is unseen and yet All Seeing. He is unseen and yet All Powerful, enthroned and reigning from the Right Hand of God the Father. He is unseen and yet All Knowing. He is here, with you, when you are baptized, as your sins are forgiven, as the Spirit testifies to you through the Word of God. Christ is here, placing His Body and Blood with earthly elements to be your Heavenly Meal.

He is here, where justice dwells in the wilderness, in His Holy Church, hidden in the world. He is here for your salvation, your protection, your deliverance. He is here to give you hope, the sure hope that He who ascended into heaven will soon come again to lead you into heaven. May it be now as it will be then: That in all things God be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

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