

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

1 Peter 4:7-11

The end of all things is at hand, writes the Apostle; that is the motivation he gives for commanding Christians to live together in His Church as he commands us to live, *self-controlled and sober-minded*, in *fervent love for one another*, sharing whatever gifts we each have in service to one another, and in particular sharing the Word of God, *in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*. We should live that way because *the end of all things is at hand*. At the end of this world the Son of God shall come in glory to judge the living and the dead. And, as our Lord Jesus has said it, *you know neither the day nor the hour*. Nor do we know the day, nor the hour, of the end of our own life in this world.

The end of all things is at hand. This world will not always be our home; either His heavenly Kingdom shall be, or the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Nothing less is at stake.

The end of all things is at hand. All the things of this world shall perish. Therefore is it that our Lord Jesus has also said: *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; rather, lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven*.

The end of all things is at hand, writes the Apostle; *therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers*. In other words, we should not allow the things of this world to distract us from our life with God, in His Church. Not only should we not be too preoccupied with storing up treasures in this world so as to forget to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in the Word and worship of His salvation; we should not allow ourselves to be distracted, either, by what happens in the world around us, and how to make things good and right in this world. We should not allow our indignation at the evils of this world, or our own opinions as to how to make things right, to overshadow that which is first and foremost our calling, which is to live in the love of God, in His Word and worship, and live out His love in our life with others, in and outside of Church, including those who think differently than ourselves about how to make things right in this world. In particular we should not be caught up in the evils of the world so as to lose our *sobriety* of mind by indulging ungodly attitudes, nor should we lose our *self-control* so as to engage in evil and unlawful and thus ungodly activities.

The end of all things is at hand, writes the Apostle; well, actually, what he wrote, in the original Greek, is that the *fulfilment* of all things is at hand, or more precisely, perhaps, the *fulfilment of the purpose* for all things. The word the Apostle uses is that which our Lord Jesus also used when He declared that *It is finished!*, that is: that the purpose for His sufferings had been fulfilled, the price and penalty paid for the sin of all sinners, full forgiveness for all sin won for all sinners, and rescue from eternal death and damnation, and eternal life with Him in the fullness of His goodness and His glory.

That which is at hand is that which was always the purpose of God in all things, that which He had in mind for His most beloved creatures even before He actually created us in order for us to live in His love and have all things good given to us out of His goodness.

It is that of which He has had His holy Apostle John write that he heard the voice from Heaven declare: *Behold, the dwelling place of God is with Man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.* It is of that the Apostle writes in what we hear today; not so much the *end* of all things, but rather the *fulfilment* of all things, which will actually be a new beginning, once *the former things have passed away*. The Son of God shall come in glory to usher in an altogether new eternal reality filled with His own fullness of life, of goodness and glory. And as little as we know about the new reality that is at hand, we do know that it is a such reality that all glories of this present age are not worth comparing to it, nor its grief, all its grief, or any of its griefs. And since we know this, and if we believe it, why would we lose ourselves to the glories of this world, or to any of its griefs?

The Kingdom of God is at hand. Not only is it *near*, it has already *come*; it has already begun. The King has already come to us, our Lord Jesus, who is the Son of God, and in whom is the Kingdom of God. He has come to us with salvation. *It is finished!* The price and penalty has been paid for the sin of all sinners, with His sufferings and death, and full forgiveness for all sin won for all sinners, and rescue from eternal death and damnation, and eternal life with Him in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. And He who died for the sin of the world is risen from death and lives and reigns again in His glory as God, for our salvation.

God the Father has raised Him from the dead, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and has put all things under His feet, and given Him as Head over all things to the Church, which is His body and His fullness, who fills all in all.

He lives and reigns in His glory as God; and He lives in His Church as her Head, which in the language of Holy Scripture means that He gives His own life to His Church, and fills her with His own fullness of life. With His Word of life He breathes His own life into those who hear His Word, so that we come alive to His love and believe His promise of full forgiveness for all our sins and shortcomings, of rescue from eternal death and damnation, of eternal life with Him in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. With His word of love, His love lives in us, so that we begin to love Him, and seek His love, and seek to live in His love, and to live out His love in our life with others.

The end of all things is at hand, writes the Apostle, or rather, the fulfilment of all things; our heavenly life has already begun. Therefore is it that the Apostle admonishes Christians to be self-controlled and sober-minded, and to be both, as we also hear it, for the sake of your prayers. Yes, for to be self-controlled and sober-minded is to be always aware of the reality that in our life with God, which is the life of His Church, our heavenly life has already begun. We have full forgiveness for all our sins and shortcomings. We are right with God and righteous before His judgement. We are children of God, and heirs to His heavenly Kingdom and His eternal life. This reality is our real reality already in our life as His Christians, and His Church, under His love, in the Word and worship of His salvation.

When we are aware of this: that the fulfilment of all things is at hand, how can we not continue to seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, in His Word and worship? And on the other hand: when we seek the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, in His Word and worship, so that we do not merely sit and serve our time, but actually pay attention to His Word, and take it to heart, or *gladly hear and learn it*, as our Catechism reminds us that He commands it, that is exactly how we are reminded, and remember, not to lose sight of this: that the fulfilment of all things is at hand. When the reality of His salvation is held before us, in His Word and worship, and His love alive in us, we will not despair at the troubles of this world, in our own life, or in the world around us.

We will not lose our *self-control* so as to engage in evil and unlawful and ungodly activities, as long as we do not lose that *sobriety* of mind which is the faith, so that we think that we have to engage in evil, because we have indulged ungodly and evil attitudes in ourselves.

Therefore, again, is it that the Apostle directs us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; which is what he does, when he reminds us that the fulfilment of all things is at hand, and when he admonishes us therefore to be self-controlled and sober-minded and focus on our life with God, in His Church, together with those with whom we share our love for His love. As we hear it: *have fervent love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins*. How can we hold on to our petty grudges against those with whom we share His love, living together under His Word, by which His love is given to us, really given, and lives in us? We who love the love of God, which forgives us our own great wrongdoings against Him, greater than any wrong ever done to us, or any wrong we *think* that somebody did to us, how can we refuse to allow His love to affect our attitude toward others? We who live in the Truth of God, how can we not care about truth, and acknowledge that we might not know the whole truth about what others did, and why they did it? We who know about our own sins and shortcomings, how can not be understanding of the weaknesses of others? We whom so much has been forgiven, how can we insist that all wrongdoing, real or imagined, must be duly punished? We who love the love of God, by which our own sins and shortcomings are covered by the righteousness of Christ, all evil and ungodliness and impurity in our lives, and in our hearts and minds, how can we not allow His love to cover the shortcomings of others, as we rejoice in how His love covers our own multitude of sins? How can we not be *self-controlled and sober-minded*, knowing that *the fulfilment of all things is at hand*, and that all the glories of this world, and all its griefs, are not worth comparing to the glory that awaits us, and is being given to us already, out of the goodness and grace of God, and for no other reason whatsoever, and at the most awful cost to Himself? How can it not be our goal *that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*; as the Apostle writes it? After all, *to Him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever*, does it not? Well, it does. And He is well worth it, as is His salvation.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. *Amen*.