

“He Who Is, Who Was, and Who is to Come”

It’s amazing how quickly things change for the Lord’s disciples. In our Gospel reading, it was just one week prior that Jesus entered into Jerusalem to the shouts of “hosanna” – and then later in the week He was arrested, condemned, crucified, died and was buried. Now He has risen from the dead and appears in the midst of the room with locked doors – revealing His resurrected body to His disciples.

Nothing has changed with respect to how quickly things change. Old people see the pace of life just flying by – but those who are young, like our Confirmands, are used to it. But regardless of age – we all long for stability.

Listen to the words of St. John the Apostle, who not only has written our Gospel Reading, but also the reading from Revelation 1. “Grace to you and peace from Him who IS and who WAS and who IS TO COME, and from the seven spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.”

Now that’s stability! No matter what happens in Ukraine, or with the climate, or with Twitter or the housing market, or with you and your friends – the one true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is eternal, stable, unchanging. “He who IS and who WAS and who IS TO COME” – is God “for you.”

From both John’s Gospel and Revelation, there are some key points that are very comforting for all of us – indeed, as Jesus says, “Peace be with you.”

Jesus is “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth” – and He has shed His blood “for you.” He loves you and has freed you from your sins by His blood. And as we confess – “where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation” – for you.

This Jesus – the One who was pierced for our transgressions – who still bears the marks of the nails in His hands, and the spear in His side – comes into the midst of His disciples gathered here today – and gives you His peace.

Over and over again the Confirmands have heard the Scripture that says – “the wages of sin is death.” Sin = death. Jesus, the Son of God, died – because He has taken to Himself the sin of the whole world. But He’s not dead! He is risen! What does this mean? What does this mean for you? His resurrection means that death has been defeated. His life means that your sins are forgiven – and you are free!

Do you hear what He says to you today? “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living One. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

We tend to fear the death that comes by pandemics, or war, or natural disasters – but Jesus holds the keys – He is not only the ruler of kings on earth – He rules over eternal death and the gates of hell.

In St. John’s Gospel – He shows us how He rules over death and hell even now, in this life. To His Apostles He gives this charge, and this promise. “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”

This is stability for us who are constantly shaken by life in this world. This is His certain and sure PEACE for all sinners.

The Lord revealed to St. John that the Risen Christ continues to be present and active in the midst of His Church. After all, He is Immanuel – which means, “God with us.” He who has ascended into heaven to rule and reign over all things – at the same time, continues to “be with you always, even unto the end of the age.”

“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me,” St. John writes, “and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands One like a son of man ...”

Jesus, the Son of Man, is revealed to us, walking in the midst of His Church (represented by the seven golden lampstands) – and, “In His right hand He held seven stars” – which we are told at the end of the chapter, are “the angels (or messengers, the pastors” of the seven churches.”

So that you may not fear – so that you may have stability – so that you may live with the peace of the Resurrected Christ – Jesus is with you, here in His Church. Here is where you will find Him ruling and reigning over your sin and its death with His very own Body and Blood – given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of all your sin.

Here, by His Holy Word – that “sharp two-edged sword” coming from His mouth – He breaks and hinders the three great enemies who seek to deceive you and mislead you into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

Here – for you who confess not only that “I WAS baptized,” but “I AM baptized” – He unites Himself to you – and you are united to Him and His resurrection. Here you are washed in His blood – released from the guilt and shame that your rebellion against God produces.

Here, He who loves you and gave His life for you – gives you His very own life – a life without end. That’s stability. That’s certain and sure – that you, His beloved children, who live by faith in Jesus Christ – will live with Him for all eternity. This is most certainly true. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.