

The Peace that comes from God

The church has always been the gathering of believers. Scripture refers to that gathering as “Jerusalem” and “Zion.” In our First Reading today, from Isaiah 66, the Lord addressed His believers and encouraged them to rejoice. They were to rejoice at the birth and transformation of Jerusalem. The Lord promised that the church would re-emerge and the New Testament era would dawn with glorious and gracious light.

“*All you who are in mourning over her, rejoice greatly with her*” (Is. 66:10). How can those who mourn over Jerusalem rejoice? In what sense do they mourn? Through the ages, believers have encountered sorrow as they witnessed the troubles of the church. Those in Isaiah’s day saw the hypocrisy, unbelief, and idolatry among their own people. Such realities troubled them deeply. When they saw the Assyrians destroy the Northern Kingdom and invade Judah, they mourned. Later on, their hearts melted as the Babylonians carried believers and unbelievers away as captives. They mourned because they knew that the sins of God’s people had brought about the exile. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because of its unbelief (Luke 19:41). The church has been persecuted over the centuries, and we believers still suffer for our faith in Jesus today. We note the erosion of morality and the abandonment of the gospel of Jesus Christ by so many in our own age. We too mourn over the condition of the visible church. The church on earth remains a faithful little flock battered and ridiculed by the world and even by some who claim to be Christian. Yet even the very gates of hell will not triumph over the church of Christ (Matthew 16:18). So, instead of mourning, we ought to rejoice! Why?

Isaiah says, *All you who are in mourning over her, rejoice greatly with her, 11 so that you may suckle and drink your fill from her consoling breast, so that you may drink deeply and refresh yourselves from her full nipples!* (66:10-11). The gathering of believers will find nourishment, comfort, and abundance for their souls. The gospel will give believers all the comfort they need. Peter wrote, “*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,*” (1 Peter 2:2). Luther wrote: “The church’s glory is the cross which remains despised and wicked in the eyes of the world. Yet through the Holy Spirit the breasts of the church comfort many hearts with peace and the security of faith,” (LW, Volume 17, page 408). As believers have gathered together, they have found strength through the gospel in Word and Sacrament. God has richly nourished the Church through the means of grace and will continue to satisfy His saints during the difficulties and tears of their earthly pilgrimage.

The Lord underscores the blessings he provides for believers with a reminder of the source of this promise: “*For this is what the LORD has said,*” (66:12). We find another reason to rejoice in the peace that flows to God’s people. Jesus assured His followers: “*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid,*” (John 14:27). The peace of forgiveness flows to the church and through the church. That peace comes from God.