

### **Christ's Church will Endure Forever**

The church is imperishable which means it will endure forever. Here on earth and as long as the earth lasts, the church is called the *church militant*. That is, it is a church at war. The warfare is not a warfare like that between visible kingdoms. It is a spiritual warfare. St. Paul tells us that it is a battle against the devil (Ephesians 6:10, 11; cf. also 1 Peter 5:8-9). St. John says that our battle is with the allure of the world and the gods of wealth and pleasure; these lie to us with false offers of peace and pleasure in this life. To see their lie, we need only look at the times in life when we have fallen for the lie and brought ourselves to sin by which we did damage to both ourselves and others. Thus, ultimately, the warfare is a battle against our own sinful self (Romans 7:14-16; Galatians 5:17-21).

Jesus assures us that that battle, the battle of the church militant, our battle with the world, will often become violent on the part of the world. For the devil and the world will strive to exterminate the Gospel and those who proclaim it (John 15:18-21; Revelation 6:9-11). That violence began shortly after the creation of the world, when Cain murdered Abel (Genesis 4), and has continued to this day. But all of the daunting power of the foes arrayed against us, against the rule of Christ in us, against faith in Him and His redeeming work, do not drive us to despair and cannot destroy the church. The weapons at hand for opposing and defeating the powerful alliance of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh are greater than the weapons arrayed against us. St. John says that we overcome by faith (1 John 5:4); that is, our triumph, the triumph of the church, is in the continual trust that comes from the Word and Sacraments, the trust in Jesus as Saviour. The faith thus armed struggles, not alone but with Jesus Himself and His Holy Spirit at our side (John 16:33; Romans 8:12-39).

Eventually the battle is over and done with for the individual Christian. Eventually the individual believer in the church militant becomes a member of the *church triumphant*.

The church triumphant is the church in heaven, where there are no more battles to be fought but rather an unending enjoyment of the victory won for us by Christ in His resurrection from the dead. Jesus spoke of that ultimate and ever-lasting victory for each believer often in the parables about the kingdom of heaven. Always the picture in those parables is one of victory after struggle. The struggle is a life and death struggle; it is what life is all about for the believer while in this world. At the same time the victory is always and purely a gift of God that is received by all in the church triumphant as a gracious gift which no one could ever deserve, no matter how severe or difficult the struggle on earth (cf. especially each of the parables in Matthew 25 and the song of the saints in heaven in Revelation 19:1-19).

So we have the great paradox: Our salvation is altogether a gift of God, but those who refuse the struggle of faith in the church militant eventually cast aside that gift of salvation and lose the goal of eternal life in the church triumphant. However, for those engaged in the struggle, there is the assurance that on Jesus' side there is always the desire and the power to save us and bring us to that blessed and eternal goal (Luke 12:32; John 6:37-40).

The confidence of the believer is a confidence in Christ who has already given us eternal life - that life is not a life yet to be won or earned by us but a life assured by Christ's victory for us.

May we never find ourselves among the number of those who abuse Christ and disgrace His bid, the church, by thinking or teaching anything other than Christ and Him crucified! Instead, may our love for Christ and our devotion to the church, His mystical body on earth and His bride, ever grow as we through Word and Sacraments come to know Him ever better and cherish His church and kingdom in us ever more faithfully!