

*A Homily for Closing Worship for the General Retreat of the Society of the Holy Trinity*

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When St Peter was sentenced to death—to which he went willingly, having chosen not to flee Rome following a vision of the Christ—he made the bizarre request that he be crucified upside-down. And when asked why he would choose to exit this world in such peculiar fashion, he replied:

“Your whole world is upside-down. The Cross sets it right.”

It is the Cross, brothers and sisters, that allows us to see the world as it truly is, to see the deep reality beneath the appearance of things. Such is the primary concern, to my reading, of the Book of Revelation, which describes both events contemporary to John, and the timeless majesty of the Divine Liturgy, not as we see them but as God sees them—with the heavens torn asunder and the Almighty Lord descending to earth upon the Altar, beneath which the bones of the martyrs cry out.

It is from Revelation that we are given the image of Christ as Conquest, the White Rider, who in place of a weapon strapped to His thigh has instead the inscription, “King of Kings and Lord of Lords!” while the true sword proceeds from His mouth, striking down the nations. Rome is conquered, we see, not through fire and steel, but by the Word of God on the lips of the Church. To our eyes, humble men are preaching and dying in her streets: beheaded, as Paul; crucified, as Peter. But through the Cross—through the eyes of God—we see the reality that it is Christ, through the blood of these martyrs, who lays the nations low. Even as we are murdered, we conquer.

It is through the Cross we see the terrible irony of the legionaries at the Crucifixion, crowning Him with thorns, draping Him in purple, paying homage to Christ as King. They thought it was all in mockery. But we see the truth. This is His glory. This is His coronation. Even as we strike Him, spit in His face.

These are trying times for clergy, my brothers and sisters. As the Church in the East drowns in an ecumenism of blood, we find ourselves drowning in a sea of ennui. Faith in the West has become antiquated, passé. Who has time, after all, to ponder the deep and abiding questions of God, the world, and the destiny of Man, when there’s so much neat stuff to buy on Amazon?

We find our flocks distracted, hypnotized, by ephemeral diversions selected from a menu of infinite choice, chasing exhaustive solutions to manufactured desires. For indeed, a consumerist society is by nature an atheist society, as transcendent goods are crowded out of the soul by all the shiny new proximate goods all around us.

And so entire generations have arisen with no anchor, no bulwark, no story or narrative, no connection at all to the past—and so no desire for a future. Our civilization cannot be bothered to raise children, let alone raise them in the faith.

And all the while this is going on, there is this constant pressure, from within and without, for the Church to conform, to get with the times, to abandon tradition and dogma and come enjoy the narcotic bliss of the slow death of the Western world.

“Your whole world is upside-down. The Cross sets it right.”

How do you suppose Christ sees our situation? What do you suppose is the reality beneath all these crooked manifestations?

All across the world, brothers and sisters, the Church is on the march, thriving in all the places we barely dared to hope she could thrive: in China, in Iran, in the former Soviet Union; even in mass conversions amongst those Muslim refugees of whom everyone seems so terrified. Christianity, and indeed the Lutheran Confessions, are going gangbusters in Africa, Madagascar, even old imperial Russia. Everywhere, it seems, but here. Everywhere but the West.

And so let me tell you what I see. I see the congregation of a Society of 300 faithful men and women (the same as Gideon had! the same as Leonidas!), gathered out of every nation, tribe, and tongue—Canadians, English and Scots, Vikings and Slavs and Americans of every stripe, some of whom were here long before Columbus—all of us, drowned in Christ’s own death already died for us, and raised up in Christ’s own eternal life, already begun; gathered here for fellowship and formation, raptured up in the Divine Liturgy together with all the saints of everywhere and every when; nourished from eternity by the Bread of Heaven and Cup of Salvation that bind us as one into the Body of Christ!

I see immortals! Men and women implanted with the undying flame of the Holy Spirit coursing as fire through our veins! We are few, but we are chosen, selected and empowered by the King of Kings to go, and to proclaim His liberation to a world enslaved by acedia, desperate for something, anything, that is Good and True and Beautiful, a world ravenously hungry for the only food which can satisfy the infinite longings of the sundered human heart: Jesus Christ our Lord!

What a time to be a Christian! What a time to be a priest! Saints of old would have sawn off their legs to have the mission, the opportunity, entrusted here and now to you and to me! Save the world! Save the West! Be the faithful in a faithless time! Rise, rise to the battle we have been called to fight! For the victory is already won for us in Christ Jesus and Him Crucified!

Oh, my Society! We find ourselves surrounded by opposition and inundated with need—which means that we have the enemy exactly where we want him. Hell hasn’t got a prayer. And as the White Rider prepares to lead our charge in glorious array, He calls

upon this army of faith:

“Pick up your cross, and follow Me.”

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.