

Exaudi (The Seventh Sunday of Easter)
1 June 2025
John 15:26—16:4 (Ezekiel 36:22-28; 1 Peter 4:7-11)

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

The text for this morning's sermon is the Holy Gospel appointed for today from the Holy Gospel according to St. John, the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

Jesus warns His disciples that bearing witness about Him, that is, believing that Jesus is the Christ, and saying so, will cause others to hate you. They will “put you out of the synagogues,” He says. In other words, they will excommunicate you and cut you off from your friends, your family, and from normal life. They will shun you and treat you as if you don't exist. Today, we might call that being “ghosted.” We might call it being “cancelled.” And Jesus says, “indeed the hour is coming” when it will get even worse. For “whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.”

We know that the church went through terrible times of persecutions by both the Jews and the Romans. We know that Christians still fear for their lives in many places in the world, especially in nations ruled by Communists and Muslims. Christians are mistreated and harassed by their own government, even in countries like Canada and the United States.

Our Lord not only warns us that this will happen, He tells us why: “They have not known the Father, nor Me.” These people harass Christians because they don't know God. They think they do. But they worship other gods. It might be the Jewish god who rejects Jesus. It might be the Muslim god who rejects the Trinity. It might be the materialist god who rejects the

supernatural. It might be the militant progressive god who rejects the difference between men and women. It might be the Communist god who rejects anything which someone might worship other than the state. But whatever our persecutors worship, it isn't the true God. They don't know the Father. They don't know the Son. And they don't know the Helper, whom Jesus promised to send: the Holy Spirit, who came to the church at Pentecost.

And when we are ruled by people who do not know the true God, they get angry when we won't worship their false gods.

At the time when St. Peter also warned the church: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you," the Christians were being thrown out of the synagogues for rejecting the one, false, Christless God of Israel, as well as becoming a target of the imperial government for rejecting the many false gods of Rome—including the emperor. Peter would himself be put to death on a Roman cross.

Today just happens to be the day the church remembers one of her most famous martyrs, Justin. He was a pagan student of philosophy who converted to the Christian faith and became a teacher in Ephesus and Rome. After his conversion, He became a most illustrious opponent of the pagan philosophers and addressed two Apologies to the Emperor Antonius and the Roman Senate. In A.D. 165, after refusing to make pagan sacrifices, he was arrested, tried and executed, along with six other believers.

We learn from Jesus, Peter, and Justin that we Christians simply can't play along with everyone else's man-made false religion. We are not the same. We don't worship the same God. We don't recognize the same scripture. We don't want the same things as our neighbors. Sure, we want peace. We want to raise our children in a nice place. We want to have a roof over our heads and food on the table. All people want that. But we believe something radically different

than everyone else. We believe that we are all poor, miserable sinners and are without hope apart from Christ.

We believe that the one, true God—the Holy Trinity—created all things, that there is order, that there is right and wrong, that there is male and female, that there is true and false. We believe other people are wrong, and in the world in which we live, believing that will get you cancelled: fired from your job, kicked out of your school, cut off from family and friends, and treated like a criminal. And if you say it too loudly around the wrong people, something worse might happen.

Indeed, the unbelieving world paints a picture of us Christians that we are irrational, that we are unreasonable, that we believe in fairy tales.

But they are the irrational ones, dear friends. They don't believe in what their own eyes tell them. They will watch a man playing dress-up leave the women's restroom which their daughter just entered, and they will convince themselves that the big guy with a beard and a dress is actually a woman. They will fight tooth and nail to allow men and boys playing dress-up to compete against women and girls in sports. They will even insist that men can, in fact, get pregnant and bear babies.

And our bosses at work believe such fairy tales. Our politicians pass laws based on this madness. Our judges and university professors are like mental patients who have escaped their cells and are running around like rabid dogs. These are the madmen who sit in judgment of Christ's church.

In fact, if a Christian church with a valid permit issued by a large west-coast city holds a festival in a city park where the city officials told them to be and that festival includes worship and family fun carnival-type activities, and those festival-goers are physically attacked by

violent, anti-Christian extremists, the mayor of that city just might blame the church, the victims of the attack, for inciting the violence.

If you lived in a time before things were like this, you are going to be surprised by it. But St. Peter says, “Do not be surprised... as though something strange were happening to you.” Jesus says, “I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.”

There is a temptation to “fall away,” as Jesus says, simply to quit the church, stop believing the faith, adopt the religion of our oppressors and of those who hate us, so that we won’t be put out of the synagogues, so that we won’t be killed in the service of their false gods, so that we won’t be subjected to a “fiery trial.” Yes, indeed, if we just give up the Christian faith, people will love us. We will get admitted to the best colleges and move up in the company. If we just say that two plus two equals five and repeat and obey whatever the government poster on the wall says, if we just hate our ancestors, hate the church, hate Jesus, and hate God—we will be treated well by our leaders and friends.

And you don’t even really need actually to believe that you can be saved by eating kosher, or by reciting the Koran, or by burning incense to Caesar, or by repeating a slogan by Lenin or Stalin, by flying the rainbow flag, by being a good “ally” to this “community” or that, or by supporting your local politician who thinks killing babies and old people is an act of love. You can just fake it, and deny Jesus, deny the Trinity, stop going to church, and stop calling yourself a Christian. You can stop hearing the Word of God, stop remembering your baptism, and stop receiving the Lord’s Supper. And before you know it, dear friends, you will fall away. You will slowly begin to worship their gods. And one day, you will yourself be mocking and persecuting Christians and despising the name of Jesus.

God grant that this never be so! Jesus has given us His Word so that this won't happen, dear friends, so that we don't give into the temptation and "fall away" when the "fiery trial" comes upon us.

As the prophet Ezekiel (whose name means "strength of God") reminds us, God will vindicate the holiness of His great name, "which has been profaned among the nations, and which [we] have profaned among them." Yes, indeed, we too profane God's name when we are afraid to confess Him, and when we commit sins against Him.

And this is why we confess Jesus, dear friends. For He is our Savior. Moses doesn't save us. Muhammed isn't God. Marx and Lenin do not speak the Word of God. Our politicians do not die for us. Our celebrities and influencers do not rise from the dead. Our professors and judges cannot give us the gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Our friends and people we want to like us do not know the Father, the Son, nor the Holy Spirit, and they have not defeated the devil. In fact, they ultimately serve him.

Well, we don't, dear brothers and sisters. We confess Jesus. We have a more excellent way. We are sane. We know what a woman is (one gave birth to our Savior). We know what a man is (God became one for our salvation). We know what truth is, and we won't live a lie. We know who the devil is, and we will not serve him. We know what love is, and we even love our deluded enemies, and we want them to join us in confessing Christ.

Through Christ, God sprinkles clean water on us and cleanses us. He removes the heart of stone within us, and replaces it with real flesh. And He sends the Helper to us, putting the Spirit within us. In Christ alone do we have this promise from the Father: "You shall be My people, and I will be your God."

So don't be surprised by the world. And don't be fooled by it either. Let us remember, when our own hour comes, that Jesus has told these things to us. He has warned us, but more importantly, He has redeemed us. He has given us the Helper so that we may faithfully bear witness, even in difficult circumstances. And, as St. Peter says in God's Word: "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." And we join Peter, Justin, and the saints of every age, "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" in confessing before anyone and everyone: may God be "glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever."

To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever because through Jesus Christ, you are forgiven for all your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—Amen

Much of this sermon relies on by the Rev. Larry Beane