

Maranatha! Come, O Lord Jesus!

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

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In today's Gospel reading and in last week's Gospel reading, we are introduced to two very needy men. Last week it was the poor Lazarus and this week it was a man possessed by a legion of demons.

In both of these cases we see a desire for a better way of life. Lazarus desired to eat from the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table, and the demon-possessed man desired to be freed from his possession. In both of these cases the desire that was expressed was nothing other than that deep yearning within all of us to have life as it was originally given – to have life as it was experienced in the Garden of Eden free from sickness, sorrow, and sighing – free from the corruption which set in through sin.

If we remember, in the book of Genesis, after God created the world, He looked at it and said that it was good. And then when He created man, He said that it was very good. It was this goodness that Adam and Eve experienced when they walked with God in the coolness of the Garden.

Yet as the story goes, Adam and Eve, in disobedience to the one commandment given them, chose to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And once they did this everything changed. Into the world which God had created good, and into mankind which God had created very good, entered the knowledge of evil. Things became as they are today.

Through choosing to disobey God, Adam and Eve, and each one of us in our own lives, have personally chosen to know not only the goodness in which we were created but also evil in a world subject to corruption. One cannot pass a single day without experiencing the evil of this world. And we all know how this evil oppresses us, whether it be through the our passions and addictions, or through sickness and poverty, or through forest fires and floods, or through war and violence, or through the struggles which face our church, or through death and the loss of loved ones. Truly, we should not have chosen to taste of the knowledge of good and evil.

Yet deep in the spirit of man lies an awareness of that time before the Fall, before we knew evil, before sin and death reigned. Even though none of us here actually walked with God in the coolness of the Garden, because of the humanity we share with our ancestors, deep down within us is a faded but not forgotten memory of how life was intended to be. We all know deep down that the evil we experience in this world was not in the original plan of God. The Lord wanted us to know only goodness, hence the one and only command not to mix this knowledge with that of evil.

Now this collective memory of life in the Garden does more than simply remind us of what we have lost. It also gives us an insatiable desire to once again walk with God in a

world free from evil. The memory of the Garden gives us hope and encouragement that God has a plan to get us out of this mess.

It is this hope that kept Lazarus alive all those years when he hungered at the rich man's gate. And it was this same hope which kept the man possessed by the demons in today's Gospel reading from total despair. Each of these men knew that God had created them for goodness, and that the evil they experienced in their lives ultimately would not last. They each knew that a day of restoration and vindication would come.

Yet this knowledge that the day of the Lord would come was not known only to men. St. Paul says that even creation itself groans and travails until the coming liberty of the children of God. Likewise, even the demons know that the day of the Lord is coming. St. Matthew writes in his Gospel that when the demons saw the Lord they cried out, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" In other words, have You come to torment us before that great and terrible day at the end of this age?

And so, the knowledge of God's goodness and the His day of redemption is found in the depths of everything which has come from non-existence into being. All of mankind, the created world, and even the devil and his fallen angels know that the evil of this world which torments us so much will not last forever. This is why every time we recite the Creed we affirm that we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. And it is this anticipation of the life of the world to come that makes life in this world bearable.

We know that through the obedience of the Cross, the Lord has overturned not only the disobedience of Adam and Eve but also our own disobedience. He has destroyed death by death, and He has made for us a passageway to life - though not the life we experience here, but the life that we carry within us as a deep but faded memory - the life of the Garden, the life where we know only the goodness of God.

This is what the Lord has assured us of by His coming to earth. Those who were hungry were fed, those who were sick were healed, those who were blind and deaf received their sight and hearing, those who were possessed by demons were freed, and even those who had died were raised back to life. In the Lord's Incarnation, when He walked among us for a second time, He gave us a foretaste of that Age to come when all would be made new - when the world, together with each and every one of us, would be restored to that primal goodness.

The early Christians had a special greeting they exchanged with one another. It is a greeting which expressed both their deepest desire and the most profound assurance of their faith - that desire for and that assurance of eternal life with God. We find this greeting in the writings of the Apostles. St. Paul used it, and we also find it at the very end of the Bible in the very last words of the Book of Revelation written by St. John the Theologian.

The greeting was “Maranatha!” This was an ancient Aramaic word which meant two things: it meant that “the Lord has come” and it also expressed the truth that the Lord will come again. Yet this word, “Maranatha” was much more than simply a doctrinal statement, it was a prayer. And like the unutterable prayer offered on our behalf by the Holy Spirit who cries out from within us, “Abba Father!”, the prayer, “Maranatha – Come, O Lord!” represents the deepest craving of the Christian.

For this reason, it is the custom of some Christians to this day, that at the most solemn moment of the Divine Liturgy, when the bread and wine are consecrated and changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, they quietly but powerfully utter the words, “Maranatha! Come, O Lord Jesus! Do Thou come!” In these words so much is expressed. The expectation of the Age to come when the Lord will set all things in order and we will enjoy His presence forever, certainly, but also the desire for the Lord to come and be present with us in the here and now, to come and help us, to heal and comfort us, to strengthen and reassure us, to cleanse and enlighten us, to come and do all things necessary for us so that with Him we might overcome the world.

And so, brothers and sisters, as we face the challenges of our lives in a world where the knowledge of evil is ever with us, let us hold fast to the memory of the Garden of Eden, where our ancestors once walked peacefully and blissfully with God. Let us remember that through His Incarnation, the Lord has come to renew that memory within us and to encourage us to stand strong in these evil times. And let us remember that the final Day of the Lord is coming when all things will be set straight, when sickness, sorrow, and sighing will be no more, when we will once again walk with God in the coolness of the Garden and when the evil which struggles against us so oppressively will itself become just a faded memory of the past.

And as we expectantly wait for that Day let us continually have as our prayer and our comfort those words which the first Christians held so dear, those words which all of creation silently groans, “Maranatha! Come, O Lord Jesus Christ! Do Thou come!”

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