

Our victory in the midst of an evil world.*Isaiah 49:22–26*

Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. ²³ And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me. ²⁴ Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? ²⁵ But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. ²⁶ And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.

Dear Christian Friends,

The cry of every Christian is found in the words of our Introit this Sunday, “Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net. Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted” (Ps. 25:15–16). Those words express anguish and hope at the same time, for while we are desolate and afflicted, yet do we lift up our eyes toward the Lord, for we have the assurance that he shall deliver us. This we call hope, because we believe contrary to the evidence of our senses. If we cast our eyes to the earth, and concern ourselves only with what happens around us, then we must conclude that evil always has the upper hand in the world. The Church is oppressed as the wicked rejoice. Christ is crucified as His enemies boast and brag. And if we did not lift up our eyes to the Lord, we would never have a reason to believe otherwise.

Therefore lift up your eyes unto the Lord and hear His promise, that in the end evil shall not prevail. Every enemy of God’s people will be overthrown, and even the kings of the earth will bow down before Christ and His Church in submission. Indeed, the kings and queens shall become the nurturers of the people of God.

What a time of peace these words promise! An end to all war and suffering, all poverty and trouble. Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Has the Church ever known such peace? At times it seemed that this promised future was almost in our grasp. During the reign of Constantine, the kings of the earth literally were brought under subjection in the name of Christ. Do not be deceived. The fruit of *that* kingdom was to be found centuries later in the apostasy of the Roman Pope, the Antichrist. After the Roman Church took over the reigns of Europe, the blessed peace of Christ was robbed from God’s people. The one time when the kingdoms of the world and of the Church were united, the result was disastrous. Therefore,

the promise given through Isaiah has not been fulfilled by any earthly reign of the Church over men.

Where is this peace to be found? Jesus has given us clear words concerning what we must face in the world. From Jesus own words, we must conclude that any time of peace between the Church and the nations of the earth is an exception, not the rule. One would almost think there is a contradiction between this promise of God in Isaiah, and the prophecies which Jesus gave before His passion. Then He told His disciples, “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). He says “in the world” without putting limits upon it. As long as we are in the world, this is what we should expect. Jesus confirms this when He declares, “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened. ... Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” (Matt. 24:21–30). Therefore we expect the tribulation to continue and grow bad enough that were Jesus to delay His coming, the Church would indeed be wiped from the face of the earth.

Hear again the prophecy of Isaiah, and see that there is no contradiction. God’s people ask about this very seeming contradiction: “Shall the prey indeed be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive (the righteous captives) delivered?” In other words, “Can what you promise Lord, ever really happen?” This is the lament of the Church at all times, for in the world it always appears that the promise of God’s deliverance, and the golden peace of Christ cannot possibly come. Evil’s power seems to be absolute. Ever do we lament, “Oh dearest Jesus, why doest Thou tarry?”

It has always been so. Israel, in Egypt, cried out for deliverance, and could see nothing in their future but a life of slavery. Once in Israel, they found one enemy after another. There seemed no end to the wars which would come. In Assyria, and in Babylon, they knew captivity once more, with no help in site to save them from foreign oppression. Though God chastened Israel for her sins, the righteous suffered along with the wicked. But the greatest desire of God’s people was for the one promised Deliverer, God’s Christ. How could He come when there seemed to be no possible way for God’s promise to be kept. And now we, after Christ has come, are in the world, surrounded again by many evils, and the same doubts oppress us from without. We are glad that we do not suffer bodily persecution for the sake of Christ, but what we have here is much much worse. The evils that surround us in

our land are especially spiritual in nature, and that makes them much more dangerous. We see a natural progression of unbelief and unrighteousness in our world, and it entices us with every sinful morsel, it wears down our faith and draws us toward unbelief. We understand perfectly Jesus' question, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" God promises us a victory, but talk of victory seems empty when the war, by any human standard of measurement, seems all but lost.

Yet whenever God's people lament, God is with them. He sent Moses to deliver them from Egypt. With the leadership of faithful men, such as Caleb and Joshua, and by many wondrous divine works, God overcame all of Israel's enemies. When oppressed by the Philistines, God sent Samson. When in captivity in Assyria and Babylon, God caused His people to be brought back. But the greatest victory of all came in the fullness of time, when God sent His Son into the world, born of a woman, to redeem all men from the curse of the Law. In every age where the Church laments, God is with them, and helps them. What greater proof of this can we possibly find than that which is before our eyes in Lent? Christ Jesus gave Himself unto the death of the cross, a death when all the powers of evil were on display and *everything* seemed utterly lost beyond anything that the Church had ever known or ever will know. Yet He by His death, He gained the victory over death, and by His resurrection, He pronounced absolution, the forgiveness of sins, upon the whole world.

Likewise will the Lord overcome evil in this our day. Our text in Isaiah provides its own response, for this prophecy itself promises a two-fold fulfillment. The first we see in the promise itself: God will lift up his hand, beckoning to the Gentiles to come. He will set up a standard, sending out His call to every land. His Word will be preached in every nation, calling all men to repentance. Not only Israel, but every nation will become the womb of the Church. The sons and daughters of Israel shall come from afar, carried in their arms and born on their shoulders. It will be in that day that many more children will come from the nations than from the land of Israel.

This is a wondrous promise, for it means that we do not wait for some future triumph over evil. It has already been accomplished through the death of Christ, and every day we see the fruit of it. Where are God's children to be found today? Since Christ has delivered us on the cross, they come from every nation of the earth. Yes, it is true, the kings of many nations set themselves against the Lord. In spite of this, the people under their protection are made children of God. Even those rulers who set themselves against the Lord have become the unwitting protectors of His Church, carrying in their arms and on their shoulders the sons and daughters of God's kingdom.

The second way in which this prophecy is fulfilled may

be found in the words which God answers the lament of His people, "Shall the prey be taken from the might, or the righteous captives delivered?" The Lord responds, "Yes indeed. Even they shall be delivered, for I will contend with those who contend with thee, and I will save thy children. I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob."

As the servants of Christ, we are guaranteed that the kings of the earth will contend with us, that is, they will set themselves against us and seek our overthrow, even as they set themselves against Christ. Even here, God shall deliver us. He gives us a promise: He will personally come down and contend with these men. They will learn what it means to set themselves against the Lord, and against His anointed, Jesus Christ. He will hold them in derision and laugh at their plotting. For His Son is already their judge. He already rules over all things in heaven and in earth, and the day will quickly come when they will see it with their own eyes. Even as we lift up our eyes onto the Lord in hope, they will lift theirs up in dread, for on that day they shall know for certain, that Christ Jesus is Lord, and will receive the fruits of their hatred against Him. So it shall be for all who set themselves against the Lord's Christ.

Therefore, dear Christian, as you see around you all the signs of evil in this world, know this: the nature of the devil is to deceive and seduce. He wants you to believe that God is false, and that Christ has failed. He entices you to give up hope, and to drive out the Holy Spirit with unbelief, for he would gladly take up his abode in your spiritual house. Yet this foe too has been conquered. He has no power over you who are in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus has become your Savior and your Redeemer. He is the Mighty One of Jacob, whom God promised to all your fathers. Since you are His and He is yours, what power on earth can possibly harm your soul? Not even death is a threat to you any longer.

Therefore let Christ be your Champion, your Mighty One, and know that He who has overthrown death itself cannot possibly fail to deliver and save you from the evil of this world. God grant unto you this hope. Amen.