

Sermon for the First Vespers of Lent

'For the day of the Lord is coming; and it is near. A day of darkness and gloom.'

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Let us now fix our eyes on Jesus, the creator and perfecter of our faith, for his day is coming, and it is near, a day of thick darkness.

This is what we wait for. We who wander, we wait for the this day of darkness, when the Lord of Glory shall be crucified upon a cross; when the sun shall be blinded in night and the earth shaken.

We do not wait for this day in happiness, nor in joy, but if nothing else, in hope.

'For there is a time to laugh, and a time to weep.'

And we approach a day where no one laughs, where every man should weep, for the King is dead.

We are Israel, dear Christians; we are those who wander, for forty days in the wilderness, for forty years in Sinai, for forty generations in this broken world, and perhaps for forty millennia more. We have no home here; we wander.

Yet we pitch our tents in this land. We buy a house, we rent or own land, we acquire possessions; some even acquire wealth. We make the best of it, as they say, creating what comfort we can before the time to move on, like nomads, returns, a clock that is set at a specific time for everyone, a clock set on the minute and hour of your death. When that hour and minute comes, you will leave behind all your possessions, pick up your tent, and move on.

I do not say this to sound dreadful. We know this is not our home, nor should we regard it as such. For look around; *the peoples are in anguish, all faces grow pale. Warriors charge, and soldiers scale the wall. They burst through with weapons,*

and they are not halted. All the inhabitants of the land tremble, and fire devours before us. Who would call this life a home?

Lent calls us to join our Jesus in the wilderness, to be tempted with him for His forty days. It calls us to join Him in His homelessness, to dwell with Him in His desertion, *for birds have their nests, and foxes have their holes, but the son of man has no place to lay his head.*

Neither do you have a place to lay your head, for you were baptized into His homelessness, into His desolation. Do you not know that this is why St. Paul wrote that *in baptism we died with him?* As the good soldier says, 'you are already dead.'

But we do not weep for this reason, for our death we deserve. We weep for the death that we see in the distance, the death of the Lord of Glory crucified upon a cross; when the sun shall be blinded in night and the earth shaken.

We weep for Him who deserved no death, but took on death for us, that He might descend into our hell, and there abolish our death.

We weep for the only innocent man to have ever lived; Him whom creation hails as its maker and man bows before as our God; Him whom the sun and stars turn away from in mourning at His crucifixion, and even pagan soldiers look down in shame at His murder.

For Him we weep. It is not a time for happiness, nor of joy. But I tell you, it is a time of hope.

For He dies to abolish death. He descends into hell to conquer hell. He faces Satan to defeat Satan, as a great hero of old, our King, who though He dies, yet shall live. For He must rise from the dead, that we too, who are *baptized into His death*, might rise with

Him. For He has loved us, and shall never leave us behind in this wilderness, but bring us to *a mansion prepared for us*. For he *goes before us to prepare a place for us*. A home; even as it is written '*behind is a desolate wilderness, but the like the garden of Eden lies before them.*' In the darkness is made our light; in the quake of the earth

is made our peace. To Eden He draws us. And for this reason, we look to the cross, not in happiness or joy, but in hope, for we hope for that final rest. For our home.

Therefore *rend your hearts and not your garments*. And *return to the Lord with all your heart*, for He has returned to you.

Return to Him in your penitence. Return to Him in your life. Return to Him in your death. And in this, *rend your hearts*. For *there is a time to weep*.

But not all weeping is cast for the sake of sadness.

To those who have been given much, even they weep, tears of gratitude. For those who wander, who have nothing, when they are given a land, a home, a life; for these they give thanks, and weep, for such is proper. *There is a time*.

As you close your eyes for the last time, let then a tear of gratitude fall upon your cheek, as you walk into the Holy Land of the Sapphire Seas of heaven, where:

'You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied.' *'And your old men shall dream dreams.'*

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*Preached by Pastor
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*Sermon Texts: Psalm
13; Joel 2.*