

Jubilate, A✠D 2009

John 16:16-22 A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." ¹⁷ So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" ¹⁸ So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." ¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'?" ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 A popular hypothetical question is, "If you knew your days were few, what would you do differently?" If you knew your days were many, what would you do differently? More religion? Less? More sin? Less? Whatever the number of your days, the words from Jesus in today's Gospel reading make this much certain: your time is short. The days until the Lord's return amount to this refrain repeated seven times in the seven verses of the Gospel reading: a little while.

2 "In a little while," Jesus promised His disciples, "and you will see me no longer; and again a little while and you will see me." From the immediate perspective of the disciples hearing Jesus' words, He seems to indicate His death and resurrection, which would take place mere hours from the time of this conversation. A little while until their Lord would be dead and sealed in a tomb and they would not see Him for the longest Sabbath of their lives. And then a little while and they would see Him as He rose victorious from the tomb. From the perspective of the audience of John's Gospel, however, both then and now, the first little while was the time until the Lord's ascension, until He disappeared from their sight. The second little while until they would see Him again is the era of the Church, awaiting the Return of the Lord. That little while is now.

3 Be patient. It's only a little while until the Day of the Lord's return, He promises. The Christian life is one of weeping and lamentation while the world rejoices. You will have sorrow, Jesus guarantees, but be patient; your sorrow will turn into joy. This only lasts a little while. That call to patience might seem somewhat akin to telling a woman in labor to be patient. Her pain is intense; it feels like death; and, when she's in the greatest anguish as the child is about to be delivered, it feels more like an eternity than the little while of minutes or hours. But the Lord's call to patience amid the little while of labor pains is not meant to diminish the pains or pretend they're insignificant. His call to patience acknowledges your pain and suffering, your weeping and lamenting, and yet calls you to hope for what is to come after the little while of suffering. After the woman has given birth to a man, she no longer remembers her anguish, no longer focuses on the pain, which is past.

4 When the pain is right now, patience—focus on what is to come—is difficult, even unpopular. The world wants relief from suffering now and gratification instantly. Pleasure, says the world, is not meant to be delayed, nor is pain meant to be endured. If it feels good, do it; if it hurts, avoid it. So why wait until you're married to have sex when the pleasure can be enjoyed now? Why put off buying what you want when credit cards make that pleasure available instantly? But in a world broken by sin, pain and dissatisfaction are the way of things. To deal with the brief labor pains of creation groaning until the Return of her Lord, the rebirth of all creation, the world seeks pain killers. Perhaps—the thinking goes—the pain of life can be numbed if you just had that one little something. More money, a nicer house, a better job.

5 To be delivered from pain, the world will stop at nothing. To be delivered from the pain of childbirth—both during labor and through the years of child-rearing to follow—she'll sacrifice her babies to the false god of choice. To be relieved of the pain of aging and the pain of watching her parents grow old, she'll encourage her elders to lay their lives on the wicked altar called the "quality of life." To be delivered from all the pains between birth and death, she'll

inject the epidurals of toys, sex, alcohol, work, hobbies, distractions. Whatever the drug, as long as it claims to numb the pain of the now, the world is buying.

6 In fact, because the pain of hearing His words was too great to bear, the world killed the Lord of the Church, nailing Him to the cross to ease her discomfort. Will she not also attempt to do the same to the members of His Church? Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice—at the crucifixion, at the ascension, and until the Lord's return. The world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. You cannot numb the pain of life. Trying to do so will only numb you to the joy that is rightfully yours. Repent.

7 The world rejoices; the Church laments. Nevertheless, joy belongs not to the world but to the Church. Even in the midst of pain, she has joy. She watched her Lord crucified, and yet she had joy, knowing He died for her. The world rejoiced that Jesus died, and the Church has joy that His death forgives her sins. She groaned in labor while her Lord was in the womb of the grave. The world rejoiced, but the Church had the joy of His promise that He would see her again. She groans even now as in birth pangs, awaiting the return of the Resurrected Lord. The world rejoices, but she has true joy. How? The birth she awaits is not the first. The Firstborn from the Dead will return, and death will give way to life. You who have been reborn through the womb of the Baptismal Font will be born from the womb of the grave. Sorrow will give way to joy. And no one will take your joy from you.

8 In only a little while. For now, nothing is as it seems. Jesus was taken from His disciples, and Yet He promised to be with them. Jesus has been taken from your sight, and yet He promises to be here. Nothing is as it seems. The world rejoices and seems to be winning. The Church has sorrow and seems to be losing. But only for a little while.

9 In a little while, you will behold your Lord. The hours of labor pains eventually give way to days and years of joy. The days of pain—physical pain, emotional pain, spiritual pain—will

yield to endless days of paradise—dwelling with your Creator. The night of sorrow will at last surrender to the eternal morning of joy—at the return of the Risen Son.

10 In a little while—but only if shorter than the little while until your Lord's Return—while you will not see your Lord, you will receive Him. All throughout this little while until His return, you are not forsaken. Your Lord who died and rose for you continues to care for you. He sustains you for the entire little while through His Word and Sacrament. Even now your sorrow is being turned into joy. The Lord answers the prayer you will sing in a little while: "Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation. So He does; the joy of your salvation is restored to you, strengthened and preserved, in the Lord's feast of forgiveness.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Pastor Jeff Hemmer
Hope, Jerseyville, IL