

We bow our hearts in prayer: Dear Father in heaven, who richly provides us with all that we need for this body and life and who has sent Your Son, Jesus Christ to purchase and win us from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death. We praise You that You send Your Holy Spirit to call, gather, enlighten, sanctify us, and keep us in the one true faith. Daily and richly forgive us all our sins so that on the last day, You will raise us up and grant us eternal life. Amen.

Dear fellow Redeemed,

In the Nicene Creed, you confess:

*And I look for the Resurrection of the dead and the Life of the world to come. Amen.*

In that confession, you are not just saying that you believe the resurrection is going to come.

You are actually confessing that you “watch” for it, to use the word from the Gospel lesson.

You are also confessing that you look forward to it with eager anticipation, longing for it, over and against this life of corruption and death.

Or text for meditation for this Last Sunday of the Church year would prompt us to not lose sight of these, as yet, unseen realities, and so jeopardize our comfort and joy in Christ’s final appearing.

... *We read as follows in Jesus’ name:*

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I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen* <sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

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This text is one of many that pastors often use to comfort survivors after the death of a loved one.

It’s a great text for this because it informs the faith of the survivor of two things:

1. that the death of the loved one is not permanent,  
but just a putting off of the perishable and mortal nature of this life caused by sin, and
2. that through Christ, they too, together with their loved one, will put on an imperishable & immortal nature when Jesus appears.

The victory is already certain, since Jesus already rose from the dead

**as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

So certain, in fact, that we taunt Death:

**“Where, O Death, your victory? Where, O Death, your sting?”**

Death is no longer a threat for the Christian because its sting, sin, has been dealt with.

Jesus' death as the Bearer of the world's sins, removes your guilt before God's judgment throne.

Jesus' perfection in accordance to the righteous law of God is given to you in Baptism.

The antidote for the venom of Death's poisonous sting is to look to the Son of God who was lifted up on the cross as your Savior.

This victory that St. Paul writes about is not such a victory as we see here on earth.

After our wars, the reconstruction of what was destroyed is just as taxing,  
if not more so, as the actual fighting itself.

Living in the aftermath is not glorious, as your physical and mental wounds heal... or don't.

Total peace is not guaranteed when a treaty is signed, as combatants' hatred incites violent acts.

But this victory of Christ's is so complete that what was lost is not only regained,

It is even improved, and not just temporarily, but for eternity.

**Our perishable... flesh and blood... will all be changed... the dead will be raised imperishable,  
for this perishable body must put on the imperishable  
so that it can inherit the kingdom of God.**

In the resurrection there will be only glory. Only joy. Only comfort. Only peace. Only love.

And this victory is guaranteed certain because God alone is responsible for it.

God the Father predestined you.

God the Son took on your natural flesh and blood to suffer and die for you  
and to rise for your justification with a glorified body.

God the Holy Spirit has called you out of darkness and will raise you up on the last day.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, for these spiritual as well as natural gifts!

**Therefore**, St. Paul continues, **be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.**

We already pointed out that in the Nicene Creed,

you confess that you *look for the Resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.*

When you consider what this means, that you are watching for, eagerly awaiting for Christ's return,  
does that describe you well?

Are you so focused on heavenly things that the earthly blessings and difficulties you encounter are  
couched in terms of their spiritual and eternal benefits or threats?

Putting it in terms of the Gospel lesson, are you preparing for the bridegroom wisely or foolishly?

The wise virgins prepare for a long night of waiting.

These Christians do not suppose that they will be able to last the darkness of this world  
on what they already have learned and acquired, as do the foolish ones.

So they continue to gladly hear and study the Word of God and take heed of it,  
so that it may inform their consciences, being constantly vigilant.

They do not allow sins to harden them against the Law of God as they confess their sins,  
nor permit a guilty conscience to overwhelm them with doubt as they receive absolution.

But such a life of steadfastness and immovability is not easy, nor is it always convenient,  
nor does it always seem wise to us in this corrupted world.

What is easy is to lose sight of God's wonderful, unseen certainties in the day-to-day grind of life.

What seems wise is to concern yourself with how you will "bring home the bacon"

rather than living in anticipation of the eternal marriage feast of the Lamb.  
What seems convenient is considering only what you will wear for the day's activities,  
rather than putting off the sinful nature in confession  
and donning Jesus' righteousness for the day ahead.  
And as rich as the promised inheritance of the kingdom of God is, it doesn't pay the rent/mortgage.  
The cares of family and children, work and education, social pressures/needs, health and wellness...  
these all, and many more cares and needs of this life, consume our focus and attention.  
So often, we take on the mentality of the foolish virgins, lazy and short-sighted  
when considering the weightier and more enduring truths of life.  
And for this, we must repent and seek the salvation of God through Christ alone,  
who wisely said, **Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you as well;**  
and asked **what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?**

It is not that God thinks little of "**all these things**" that He would add to you.  
Instead, He desires that you see what is truly vital, what is truly important for life.  
But the sin and corruption that lives in our flesh and blood darkens our spiritual awareness  
so that what we see with our physical eyes takes on the appearance of the only reality.

For such spiritual clarity then, you need God's Word daily, to hear divine wisdom  
and to receive constant comfort, strength, joy, peace, and love so that you may enjoy eternal glory.  
And what is the sum and substance of Scripture?  
It is Jesus! As your righteousness and redemption.  
It's Jesus who came down from the glories of heaven to endure the earth's corruption in flesh & blood.  
Who took on all your infirmities, cares, and distresses, yet continued to trust His Father.  
It is Jesus the Steadfast, who did not lose sight of your salvation,  
but endured the scorn of men as He spoke the truth of God's justice and mercy for sinners.  
It is Jesus the Immovable, who, while you struggle to watch and pray, watched for you,  
always mindful of His Father's will, even when that will was for Him to suffer all  
God's righteous wrath for the sins of you, mortal.  
It is Jesus who perfectly performed the work of the Lord, and though it looked to be in vain  
as He hung there on the cross and gave Himself into death,  
and was completely victorious, swallowing up Death forever, as He was rewarded  
with the resurrection of His body into eternal glory, and not only His, but yours as well.

It is good, right, and salutary then, for you to regularly confess in the Nicene Creed  
that you *look for the Resurrection of the dead and the Life of the world to come,*  
even when you drastically fall short of it every week, for you confess it after you confess that  
the Son of God, *who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven...  
to redeem you a lost and condemned creature... in order that you might be His own,  
live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness;  
even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.*  
This confession puts your life back in focus, helps you to see the spiritual realities,  
and gives you the proper perspective when cares, frustrations, and blessings come to you  
so that they do not jeopardize your comfort and joy in Christ's final appearing.  
*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen*      –      *Soli Deo Gloria*