

Dear God and Father ... show us the day of the coming of Your Son's glory, ... *when the Antichrist, the very man of lawlessness ... will be destroyed and brought to nothing and an end will be made of the monstrous errors of the devil, by which ... he seeks to preserve intact the tyranny of the abominable and apostate throne of Rome; hindering Your Word where he can so that it is not heard or believed. Keep us always in true faith and a Christian life, that in them we may grow, increase daily, persevere steadfast until our end, and be eternally saved; through Jesus Christ ... Amen.* (Lutheran Prayer Companion, CPH Trans. Matthew Carver, 2018 p. 146, adapted also from pp. 141 & 145)

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to Him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. **Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.** Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In Christ Jesus, who alone fills us with that which we hunger and thirst, namely His righteousness, dear fellow redeemed:

Scriptures warn us about many false teachers, but there is one about whom we are especially warned. St. John writes: "you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour." Paul calls this one particular antichrist in our text – "the man of lawlessness".

On this last Sunday of the Church Year when we consider the last things, we will take special note of this man who has been revealed and about whom we need to be warned. Christ remains superior in everyway over against this antichrist. So as we examine the words of the Lord's Apostle we shall be comforted and warned at the same time by observing how it is that **Christ Fills to the Full, with What the Antichrist Seeks to Deplete.**

I

Our Gospel lesson for this day puts before us Jesus' parable of the Ten Virgins. It is a parable of preparation for the last day, when Jesus returns for judgment. We heard how five of the bridesmaids

had flasks filled with oil and five who had no reserved oil. The lamps of the first were easily filled ready to go and meet the bridegroom. But there was no flame from the depleted lamps. These missed the opportunity to attend the bridegroom to the wedding feast. From this we learn that our Lamps of faith in Christ must be ready to meet Christ our heavenly Bridegroom. The oil is the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, which fuels such faith. Keep in mind the five foolish were also awaiting the bridegroom, but neglected having the necessary oil.

It is this oil, which our Lord desires we have to its full. It is the word that gives life. It is the Word of Christ, which is to dwell in us richly. As you and I hear the glorious news that all our sins are forgiven by the person and work of Christ Jesus and as we receive the same in the gracious waters of life and in the holy meal of Jesus' body given and blood shed, we are filled and ready for Jesus' return. We will know Him and He will know us. He will greet us with these words: "Come you who are blessed by the Father."

II

But sadly, with what our Lord Jesus desires to fill us, the antichrist, man of lawlessness, desires to deplete. Paul identifies very clearly who this is. We are told "he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" and will seek to deplete the Gospel oil "by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved".

In the first century the power that was keeping the antichrist restrained was the Roman Emperor, but the bishop of Rome slowly assumed more power over the outward Church of Christ. Finally after a few centuries the power of the sword was transferred from the Roman Emperor to the Bishop of Rome, the power of the lawless one, the antichrist was clearly there seated in the throne of the Church.

While it was a gradual power grab in the outward Church, the papacy to this day still retains for itself the power as the enemy of Christ, while at the same time, appears to speak in place of Christ. He literally makes his pronouncements from his temple throne wearing a hat with "The Vicar of the Son of God" written across the brow. Vicar means "in place of" and so he claims to speak as the Son of God. To this day the man who sits in that throne upholds and continues to invent doctrines conflicting with the Gospel and refuses to relinquish his supposed divine authority.

The lawless one claims the right to change the established doctrine in the Church; to act as judge over souls even after death

and is unwilling to be subject to the judgment of the Church at large through legitimately assembled councils of other bishops.

III

It may seem better to ignore making such an identification of the antichrist, but it is necessary to resist him. His errors are clear, and they are not small. Through his great pomp and ceremony, he is deceiving many who are perishing. Now do not misunderstand, not all who are under his subjection are lost, but their faith in Christ Jesus alone as Savior is being threatened by this lawless one's many lies. The biggest lie is that faith in Christ is not sufficient alone to save, but that one must add his/her own works, works prescribed by this lying lawless one. He seeks to have many "believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness".

Over much of the history of the papacy, it has operated in secret with limited exposure to the world. Much of its devilish mischief was hidden from the people. In these last days, he has greater exposure. So such things as charisma and popular unbiblical teachings and practices work to deceive even more throughout the world. All Christians need to be concerned in these last days. What he teaches and promotes depletes the oil of the Gospel leaving the unsuspecting unprepared to meet their heavenly Bridegroom aright. The strong delusion is still at work all around us. Do not dismiss the lies, which oppose the Gospel.

You are well prepared to detect these errors as your lamp is filled, the oil that fuels your faith in Jesus as your Savior alone. This truth stands out in complete contrast. Neglecting to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, leaves you vulnerable to the lawless one's lies of self-righteousness in its various forms and practices.

Many survive their time spent under the tyranny of the antichrist. By God's grace Martin Luther did. There are still many who are Christians who are ensnared under this tyrannical rule. While the teachings and practices of the abominable sacrifice of the mass, purgatory, Mariolatry, mandatory confession with its required acts of penance deceive many. Some will claim that they believe in the true presence of the body and blood of our Lord in the supper. But understand they believe and teach that every time they take communion Christ is being re-sacrificed for the sins that are being confessed. The one sacrifice upon the Christ was not sufficient, so we must do this work to find forgiveness. Nevertheless, the Word is still heard, baptism is applied properly, crucifixes declare Christ and Him crucified. These salutary things are at work still bringing salvation to

many. But do not dismiss and trifle with these his gross errors, they deplete, they do not fill up.

We are living in the last days of the great rebellion against Christ and it is especially coming from that very throne in the outward Church. Dismiss and ignore it to your own peril. If you have dabbled in any of these dangerous practices, or excused or minimized them, there is forgiveness. But knowing better now - in the future, avoid them. Have nothing to do with such contradictions of the one saving truth in Christ alone. The lawless one still condemns to hell anyone who believes that the sinner is justified through in Christ alone.

Do not be overwhelmed by the deceptions of Satan, nor all his allies, like the antichrist. In the end, the Lord of Church will break down the gates of hell forever. You are safe in Him, in His work of suffering, death and resurrection. In Christ you no longer live under condemnation for your sin. He was condemned in your place and His righteousness covers you completely now and forevermore, no matter what the most prominent person in the outward Church says and does from his exalted throne – through faith in Christ you are eternally safe filled to the brim with salvation and life. Amen.