

“Come, Lord Jesus”

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” (Revelation 22:17).

As a husband and father and son, I don't always pick up on the subtle hints made by the women in my life. As a grown man, now living in a house with two teenage daughters, I often feel like I'm on the outside of an inside joke. My lack of understanding has been the source of great frustration for my wife and kids frequently causing them to walk out of the room in disgust while I stand there oblivious to what just happened. As I think back to my childhood on this Mother's Day weekend it gives me an even greater appreciation for the plight of my own mom who lived in a house with four men, raised three boys and must have wondered daily whether we would ever “get it.”

As I grow older, I realize more than ever the incredible patience my mom had with us and I've also begun to recognize the importance of the things she taught us. One particular lesson that stands out in my mind has to do with dating etiquette. Even before I was old enough to care, my mom taught me that when you pick up a girl for a date, it's important for the boy to go up to the door and greet the girl (and her family) personally. It would be unthinkable for the boy to simply pull up in the driveway, honk the horn and expect his date to come out.

As a father, I am now keenly aware of this important protocol and, regardless of the deviations from tradition in today's society, boys should listen to their mother's advice on this point and the girl should wait for the boy to come and get her. In a sense, that's exactly what we see in today's reading from the book of Revelation. Today, we hear God's final revealed word from Holy Scripture and in this apocalyptic vision from the Apostle John, we see a Bride eagerly waiting for her Groom and, my friends, we are that Bride.

Throughout the New Testament, the relationship between Christ and the Church is compared to the relationship between a Groom and His Bride. In Ephesians 5, Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives...” (Ephesians 5:25-28). And these words are more than a simple set of instructions for how husbands ought to act. These words from Paul define the relationship that Jesus has to His Bride, the Church. They tell us what He's done for us in His death and resurrection, they tell us how we have been made holy through our Baptism into Christ and, in these powerful words, Jesus also describes that final day when He will come for His Bride and that scene is exactly what see in our text from Revelation.

In Scripture's ultimate chapter, God gives us a vision of heaven and the picture is spectacular. Listen again to John's description: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:1-5).

And then, in the brilliant light of this vision, Jesus himself speaks to John – and to us – with words of promise, “Behold, I am coming soon” (Revelation 22:12). This is the vow of the Groom! This is the language of love spoken to the Bride and even the words of warning that we see sprinkled throughout this reading carry a sense of protection and communicate the pledge that the world will not win. That no matter what kind of evil may threaten and no matter how many enemies may terrorize; no matter how twisted and corrupt things get in our society and in our own lives, the Bride whose garments are made white in the blood of the Lamb will eat from the tree of life and drink from the water of life without price and without end...and to this vision of life the Bride says, “Come” (Revelation 22:17).

The Church awaits Her Groom and the Groom has promised that He is coming soon...and yet we don't live like we believe this! We live for the moment. We put all our trust in the things we can see and do and control. And unless you are very elderly, or ill, or desperately struggling with some part of your life...most of us would rather put off Christ's return. The truth is we have other places we would rather be and other things we want to do. A young person wants to fall in love and get married. A married couple wants to have children. An older person wants to see grandchildren or realize a promotion or travel the world and the list could go on and on and, as special as these things may be, they pale in comparison to what is coming *and they can deceive us and distract us away from the promises of God.*

One novel that's still taught in many high schools today is the classic "Great Expectations" written by Charles Dickens and a great character in the book is an old woman named Miss Havisham. If you remember the story, Miss Havisham was a wealthy heiress and, as a young woman, she had been deceived by a man who vowed his love for her and asked for her hand in marriage, only to swindle her out of her fortune and leave Miss Havisham abandoned at the altar on her wedding day. Her response to this cruel deception was live out her life as a recluse, waiting by the uncut wedding cake and never taking off her wedding dress as her estate decayed around her.

Miss Havisham is a fictional character and yet, in this tragic figure, we see exactly what waiting for the wrong groom can do. In Luke 16, Jesus said we cannot serve both God and the world (Luke 16:13). This is another way of saying that our hearts cannot be in both places and when we stake everything on the hopes of this empty life, we quickly lose sight of the fact that Jesus came into this fallen world *to redeem us from it*; that our home is not here; that in Christ our citizenship is in a far better place. And today, Jesus tells us that this promised future is coming soon.

Time is a curse. It is a result of the fall of humanity into sin and waiting can drive us crazy...but the promise of Christ's coming was given almost two thousand years ago *and it is still true today!* He is coming soon and yet, even as we wait, He is with us now. Through His Word and His Sacraments He is never far away. "Soon" is not strictly a matter of chronological time, but it is a word that communicates nearness.

In human time, it must have seemed like God was never going to keep His promise to Adam and Eve to send the Savior. But from God's point of view – and in the fullness of time – it was the blink of an eye until Jesus came as a baby in Bethlehem. And that's where we are right now! He is coming again and He is coming soon! There is the beginning and there is the end, and there is the time in which we live and our time is in God's hands. Any moment could be our last on this earth. If there's anything we've learned in recent days from the bombing in Boston to the factory collapse in Bangladesh or even to the weekly prayer list in our own congregation, this existence is quickly passing away. Everything from the great institutions of the world to the relationships that we depend on each day are temporary and this life is transient and so Jesus assures John that he is coming quickly. And what is John's response? "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). And this is our response as well!

If you were raised Lutheran then you know that when it's time to eat, the prayer usually begins with these words: "Come, Lord Jesus..." In this simple phrase we pray for Jesus to join us and bless the food we will eat. In the Early Christian Church, an ancient writing called the *Didache*, or "Teaching," included a prayer during the celebration of the Lord's Supper and it contained the cry "*Maranatha!*" meaning "Come, O Lord." Here the Church looked to Jesus' coming first with his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and then in glory as He returns to claim His Bride. *And this should be our prayer every day* – that this is the day that Jesus will keep his promise: "Surely I am coming soon." The Church lives and loves and dies and waits for this promise to be kept. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

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