

## Exaudi

*“They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.”*

With these words, Jesus warns His apostles of what lay ahead of them.

Peter and John were among the first to realize their fulfillment when the Sanhedron punished them and commanded them to stop speaking in Jesus' name.

But it grew worse. Stephen was stoned to death. James, thrown from the temple.

Thomas run through with a spear. Peter crucified upside-down. Andrew on an X-shaped cross. Bartholemew skinned alive. And on the stories go.

But these words are more than just a warning to the disciples. They are speaking of the way Christ's Church and His Christians will fare in the world always.

Not only will you be persecuted by the world at large, but the persecution will also come from within the religious establishment itself!

Those who call themselves “the Church” will ever be rising up against the Gospel and those who believe, teach and confess it.

This makes the difficulty of enduring the persecution even harder.

For no longer do you even have the appearance of right. But that is robbed from you and you must suffer in shame and ignominy.

Far from being considered a hero in your persecution, you will be seen as a fanatic and a fool.

They will say, “Why do you sacrifice your goods, fame, child and wife for such a dubious cause?”

“What harm could it possibly do you to knuckle under for now? You can always repent of it later and then you'll still have your life.

“Besides, who can know for sure if you are even right? Look how many Christians throughout the world don't even believe the thing that you are willing to die for. How can you be so sure that you're right?”

“Why don't you save yourself for something that everyone agrees on?”

When you defend your actions and say, “but this *is* the Christian faith!”

That is when you receive revilings from the Church itself saying, “How dare you call so many people unchristian! How dare you think that you have such a corner on the truth as to condemn as unchristian all those who are not as sure about it as you are! Show a little tolerance!”

In the face of such persecution from both synagogue and world, who is able to stand up to bear witness of Christ?

I am not talking about standing up for some ivory tower idea.

I speak of merely standing up to confess with your life and your conversation (words and deeds) that Christ is Lord.

*“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”* That is, by going to Church according to Christ's plain command, confess to all the world that Jesus here distributes a treasure that is beyond everything else that the world can offer.

On the other hand, when you stay away from the Divine Service you proclaim both to the world around you and to the other members of the Church that Jesus is not Lord of the Lord's Day.

Likewise, to bear witness to Christ is to *“Take and eat the Body of Christ and to drink His blood.”* for in this way you *“show forth the Lord's death until He comes.”*

To refuse to do this and to teach others to do the same is to deny the Lord Christ and His death for the sins of the world.

These things are also true for the second table of the law.

*“Thou shalt not commit adultery”* is plain and clear.

By loving and honoring your spouse and living a chaste and decent life in word and deed, you bear witness to Christ's faithful and steadfast love for His bride the Church.

But here the devil comes and plants all kinds of doubts in your mind.

Surely you don't want to alienate your friend or relative by telling them this in their own marriage troubles.

Surely you don't want to lose a boy-friend or girl-friend by telling them that they shouldn't commit adultery or by denying their advances.

Maybe it's not always wrong. Maybe Jesus' day was different than our own.

Or maybe, even though it's a sin it's OK because we're forgiven anyway.

With these examples you can see how much more difficult it is to confess Christ when the pressure is on.

All the logic and head-knowledge in the world will not hold in the face of such devilish assaults. You need conviction of faith—not only thought.

That's why you need help—*“The Helper, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father. He will testify of Me.”*

This is the only One who can keep you from stumbling in times of persecution when devil, world and flesh seek to confuse your confession.

Last week, you were taught to pray.

This week, you are shown the promise of how that prayer will be answered.

The Holy Spirit comes to you to testify of Christ and confirm you in the true faith so that you are willing to sacrifice all to stand upon His Word.

Even should the whole world be opposed to His Word, with the faith given by the Holy Spirit you can stand up to death, hell and the devil with the strength that God supplies.

And where does this Helper, the Holy Spirit come to you?

He comes through the preaching of Christ Jesus.

The voice of Christ is the giver of the Spirit and you hear that voice where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name.

He is the treasure which is distributed to you here this morning.

Today you receive anew the promise of the Father who emboldens your heart to believe in Christ to the end.

And thus believing — thus holding fast to the true faith, you receive the righteousness won on Calvary.

This means new life now. And the promise of heaven in eternity.

Here you have fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, *“The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.”*

*“These things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.”* Amen.