

The Most Secure Place (John 14:1-14 ; Acts 6:1-9; 7:a; 51-60)

* Dear Friends, on behalf of the generation after us, who may read this sermon, I want to specify the time we are living in now. According to the Gregorian Calendar, today is the 22nd of May, 2011 – that is to be believed by some people is the second day of the End of this world, and October 21, 2011 should sum up everything. Fortunately, despite the fact that the beginning of the End took place much earlier, just almost 2000 years ago, the millions didn't die on this night as was believed. Indeed, it is much harder to calculate the Last Day of the world than the last day of someone in the past, as for example, the last day of Constantine, the first Christian emperor. With help of Eusebius - a church biographer and bishop, we figured out that day of the emperor. Our calculation shows that Constantine fell asleep 1674 years ago, on May 22. Significant or not, if we leap over the years, then May 22 can be seen as the last day, but for Constantine. In this instance, we can say that the evangelist Harold Camping is right so far as Constantine accedes to this point.

* As the popularity of the false prophets and the intensity of the weather disturbances increase, it causes fear in hearts as well as the conviction that the King is at the very gate, (Mat 24:21-24). Meanwhile, the knowledge of the sacred times remains to be the great mystery so that none on earth and in heaven can know and prevent the course of events, (Mat 24:36). However, God gave us the picture of the last days, and it is breathtaking. For *the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken*, (Mat 24:29; Isa 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:10, 11). As much as we have been given the picture and the signs of the last days, it shouldn't surprise us that so-called natural phenomena will reach its climax as well as a common fear.

* Friends, are you troubled as you anticipate of the upcoming disturbances? Anyway, the gospel message assigned for today (John 14:1-14) can help everybody fear less, if they believe. Today the Spirit strengthens our faith on hearing Jesus' consolation. The passage begins with the three imperatives: do not let your hearts be troubled; trust in God ; trust also in me, (v.1). It is essential for our salvation to trust and believe in Christ our Master who wants us to fear less under all circumstances, but always trust in Him (Mar 5:36). However, if we follow after the course of events, Peter's bravery turned into distress and the disciples were scattered as sheep (Mat 26:56) in view of the Master's cross.

* Fortunately, it was not the end of the road but only its beginning because Jesus had returned to our physical world by rising from the dead. The Scripture says that Peter and his companions feared significantly less and proclaimed the risen Jesus boldly, despite the strong opposition. So, many people believed their message and rejoiced. We also have believed and have become the confessors of Jesus' resurrection. Dear Friends, let's praise God for His merciful act in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Master of the resurrection is proclaimed and believed among nations as the Giver of all goodness and of life eternal. Because of this, we also fear less and trust God who promised to raise us from the dead as He raised Jesus. After the death of our physical bodies, we believe that Jesus will take our souls in heaven as he promised, *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also,* (v.3). But at the Last Day, the Giver of all goodness, the Father Almighty will grant us new bodies and we will never die again. Therefore, let not your hearts be troubled but trust and rejoice.

* Now believing and experiencing the risen Christ, we rejoice with double reason. First, we have joy because Christ's resurrection proves his dominion over death and the devil, our chief adversaries. The second reason makes us cheerful as we see how God treats our minor adversaries. He makes them and their weapons good for nothing. It proves that Israel and we are one, in purpose and results. If the listeners doubt our testimony is fine, but they shouldn't doubt the Scripture. Today it comes with the reading from the book of Acts, chapter 7. It narrates the last day of the faithful servant Stephen, deacon and martyr whose day of commemoration occurs on December 26th. But today we recall his name in connection with our witness that the rebellions couldn't succeed with their purpose to wage war against Stephen, the witness of Jesus' glory.

* Luke mentioned that Stephen was executed by the Jews who also betrayed and murdered the Messiah, (v.52). Stephen's executioners had found a reason to do it because this man boldly and effectively proclaimed Jesus' death and his glorious resurrection. In accord with the apostles, Stephen stated that Jesus is *The Righteous One*, but the officials and those who followed them were guilty of his crucifixion,(Act 2:23,24; 5:29). God's people can be recognized by their acts. Thus Stephen didn't seek revenge but loved his enemies, (v.60). At the same time, Stephen was not afraid to say that the sinners were murderers. In view of the deadly weapons in their hands, Stephen's heart was not troubled but it was filled with unspeakable joy upon seeing Jesus in heaven. *Look!* he exclaimed, *I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand,*(v.56). Unfortunately, his listeners were not as Peter's on the Day of Pentecost; they didn't believe and repent, instead they stoned Stephen to death,(v.59). According to the tradition, Stephen was stoned on one of the days of the Passover festival, in the spring that followed Jesus' resurrection. And who knows, it might happen on Sunday May 22.

* Significantly, Stephen's joy was not terminated with his execution. Luke says that Stephen did not die but fell asleep (v.60). No doubt, Jesus took Stephen's spiritual body to heaven according to his solemn promise. ... *I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also,* (v.3). Friends, let our hearts not be troubled when we face natural disasters, or persecutions, or anything else; but let's our hearts rejoice because Jesus is the absolute truth and he is everlasting life, (v.6).

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life, (Joh 5:24).

* Because we are not as strong as Jesus is, he urges us to pray in his name, (v.13). Friends, just ask Jesus according to his will and in the Spirit, and you will receive; for all things are possible who believe, (Mr 9:23). If your hearts are still troubled, don't wait until tomorrow; ask God today. You may have the inward wish to pray to him now. Please join me as I pray. Dear Jesus, my Lord and God! I pray, take away my fear of the evil; enrich my hope in Your promise, and grant me Your peace. When I pass through the valley of death, let your rod and your staff protect my soul; grant me the joy of drinking the cup of your salvation in the presence of my enemies; and turn my last breath into the everlasting. Amen

* When we think about Jesus' resurrection, it is impossible to say nothing about his death. Why did our gracious Father allow the foes to execute him? Well, the Scripture teaches that it was necessary. By sending the Son to die for us, the Father had shown his justice condemning sin in the flesh. Now the Father demonstrates His great mercy granting salvation to anyone who will believe in His Son. When we follow Jesus, we actually follow the way of life, (Joh 14:6). Walking by this way, we'll approach the Golgotha on certain day, the most secure place on earth. Here we'll find the resting-place; under his cross there are no anxiety and fear of the evil anymore, (Mat 11:28). On the Last Day He will raise our mortal bodies according His solemn promise; and we'll turn into His likeness, - the perfect Man-God, Lord Jesus. *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!* (Rev 22:20).

Beloved, Let not our hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Jesus.

Amen.