

* In Ecclesiasts chapter 3 we find a prominent insight that identifies the scheduled time for everything that happens in a man's life. The author, probably Solomon, sets forth the idea of a timeless circle of existence that begins from "a time to be born and time to die." Between these times he points to several others. All of them are "meaningless" or it can be translated as "frustration," according to the Septuagint. After all, death brings everything to an end. By the way, keep in mind that we are also at the end; in this case we are at the end of Lent, but none of us knows about end of individual life. With this in mind "Tremble and Joy."

* After reading Jeremiah and John's Gospel for this Sunday I had a feeling of the high expectation of something important as a result of dynamical repetition of the word NOW alerted my feeling. The texts say, "The time is coming, declares the Lord;" Now "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified;" "Now is my soul troubled;" "Now is the judgment of this world;" After all, upon hearing these words people might have the sense of excitement or frustration. How about you? Certainly the children will cry if their mother is weeping and they will trouble if she is mourning. The anticipation of future calamities might cause all souls to be troubled but it all depends.

* When Jesus' ministry came to the end he understood that the final battle with death, devil and flesh would come soon. He also understood that human salvation would demand an incredible effort. Jesus remembered the "Cross in the Wilderness," -- 40 days of starving; cold nights and hot afternoons, wild beasts and poison snakes, weaken flesh and the strong devil. But NOW he faces the Golgotha -- the overwhelming pain, humiliation, abandonment, death on the cross. Soon he would face excessive temptations staying alone against all the devil's forces as well as the people's anger, frustrations and hate. Can you imagine that? All these painful things would fall on him very soon. So, what exactly did Jesus feel? He said, "Now My soul is troubled and distressed." Many times we heard and read the words of Christ suffering on the cross. Don't you get tired? Ask yourselves that. Do you remain indifferent by hearing such a message or does it make you tremble? Friends, I tell you the truth, if one's heart doesn't tremble anymore upon hearing the message "Christ crucified," soon such a heart will lose the sense of awesomeness and the fear of God.' And where there is no awesomeness and the fear of God' in a man's heart there is fear of annihilation, fear of the future, fear of many things; and that indicates the critical condition of the lost.

* Today's anticipations of global catastrophes seem very vivid. "Tragedies intensify, as the birth pains of a woman, starting from September 11, the bombing of Bagdad, Katrina, Gasoline prices, Fires, Tornados, Flooding, Housing market Crash and now financial crisis; then, what's next? The fear of losing jobs, money, homes in anticipation of natural calamities; all these are reality of the present time, NOW. Ask yourselves. Do I care? Or does my heart tremble, tremble, tremble?

* Friends, unlike the universal fear that originates from sin and death, our fear and concern should originate from experiences of God's nature in the lives of the beloved children of the Father. If we are really His children than we cannot escape the painful corrections from the Father. "For the LORD disciplines those He loves; just

as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights”. (Pro 3:12, Heb.12:6). And it is good to be disciplined by God if there is deficiency in knowledge and obedience. The Scripture witnesses about the wonders of God, His holiness and justice. God hates sin and wickedness as well. He calls us to be holy.

* God executed his awesomeness upon his Son in the cross. “... He was wounded for our transgressions; the Son was crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53). At this particular moment the Father revealed His awesomeness and justice. Don’t be deceived, the Son endured tremendous amounts of acts of violence which caused him the tremendous pain that is not comparable with any other painful executions ever experienced by someone condemned to death. Now let our hearts tremble, tremble, and tremble. The Almighty God is the only One whom “we, in the first place, should fear and love,” (M. Luther). On the other hand, we are the beloved children of God and not the sons of fear and despair!

* The passage from Jeremiah 31: 31-34, our Sunday reading, introduces us to the surprising action that turned the course of human history upside down. Don’t be afraid! It is not a calamity or a judgment! It is Good News! The Lord says, “The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with Israel and Judah”. Unlike the Old Covenant written on tablets of stone, God will put the new one in people’s minds and He will write it in their hearts. The Christian era began with the fulfillment of this prophecy in us to whom it is given to believe in Christ Jesus. The changes that took place in our minds and hearts are very much like a new birth, with God taking the initiative. Turning our lives over to God, He, by his Holy Spirit, builds into us the desire to obey Him. It is the timely process that will be fully accomplished with our resurrection from the dead. Then “...no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." The last forgiveness we will receive in the Day of Judgment. By virtue of our faith in Christ, God will forgive our iniquities and He will not remember our sin ever again. In addition to that, our new born nature will experience sins no more. Can you imagine that! This is awesome!

* Thinking back to John’s Gospel let us see the next surprising action. It says, “The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life,” (v. 25). Friends, saying this, Jesus had at least two things in mind. First, he calls us to be ready and if it is necessary, to die rather than deny it. And second, he calls us to demonstrate our readiness to die by denying ourselves, taking up our personal cross and following Him, (Luk 9:23). The reward for such a sacrifice is eternal life because it is grounded on one’s faith. Jesus continues by saying, “My Father will honor the one who serves me.” Instantly the voice came from the Father. “I have glorified it (my name) and will glorify it again.” Some people thought that it had thundered. Others said that an angel had spoken to them.

* Today, just as it was in Jesus’ time, some people hear the Voice... but some say that it is just thunder. The thunder is a symbol of judgment (Exodus 19:20), and there are those today who only hear the earthbound thunder but have missed the Voice. Their fantasy goes beyond the truth; they deny God’s judgment saying, “there are natural consequences to sin and just plain foolishness!” After all, hearing the news and experiencing

“natural” challenges makes them tremble, tremble, and tremble.

* Soon God will separate those who hear ‘thunder’ from those who hear the ‘Voice.’ If our hearts tremble upon hearing Jesus suffering on the cross then it witnesses that our judgment has already happened, 2000 years ago, on Golgotha. There Jesus suffered the cross for our transgressions. Surely the ‘fear of God’ has exhausted the fear of coming Judgment from our hearts. Surely the love of God has filled our hearts with great joy. For he says, " Behold, NOW is the favorable time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation," (2Co 6:2). “But those who don’t believe, they are judged NOW.” That is why their hearts don’t have great joy but upon hearing the thunder, they tremble, tremble, tremble.

“... to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time,
NOW, and for all ETERNITY.”
Amen.