

Wednesday of Gaudete
Revelation 22:6-21

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

μαράνα θά!

So cried out St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:22) It's the Aramaic equivalent, written in Greek, of the prayer of the bride of Christ. It is the prayer that John wrote as you heard in the text this evening: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.'"

μαράνα θά! "Come quickly, Lord Jesus!" Or, perhaps more appropriately, "Come now, O Lord!"

What you heard from the Apocalypse this evening is the epilogue of the book. After granting the Apostle the beatific vision of the end of creation, with the signs in the sun and moon and stars and trees, the creatures with multiple eyes and heads and wings and horns—enough to drive any man mad—the angel tells him, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

Then Jesus tells him, "And behold, I am coming soon." μαράνα θά!

What John was privileged to see and relate to the church was enough to drive men mad. To see creation being burned up, the sun and moon destroyed, the various beasts and creatures, and to hear the martyrs under the throne would be quite frightening. But not so for one such as John; not so for those who bear the image of Christ as John did.

Even today, to see what goes on beyond these walls, out in this world where the devil is allowed to reign for a time, it can be a frighteningly maddening sight—even more so when that which is perpetrated is directed squarely at the Bride of Christ or the individual Christian. Mockery and hatred and persecution and death—these are your lot in this Vale of Tears for bearing the image of Christ. What does the angel say about this? "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy..."

This can be your mantra, too, dear hearers. While you face evil and hardship from all sides outside of this refuge (and perhaps even in it, as this place is still a location in this fallen world), you, too, can say, "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy." Dear Dr. Luther wrote as much in his quintessential Reformation hymn: "And take they our life, / Goods, fame, child and wife, / Let these all be gone, / They yet have nothing won; / The Kingdom our remaineth." Let the evildoers do their worst, they cannot rob you of your salvation!

Scripture is full of such exhortation for you. Jesus said, "[D]o not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." (Matthew 10:28a) Both Peter and Jude warn of the coming scoffers in the last day, but that they are nothing to fear. Even Paul lets his listeners know that there will be evildoers to watch out for. Watch and be warned, they all say, because they are out to get you. But, do not fear them for what they can do to your body, but do not let them steal you of your salvation—do not let them drag out of the Church, do not let them cause you to doubt the faith that you have been given in Christ. Let them do their worst, but watch out for their schemes and games.

Knowing that they're out there, knowing that they mean to cause you harm, spiritual harm, at the devil's guidance, you should all the more desire the imminent return of Christ. After all, when He returns, those who do this evil will meet their end, and you will no longer have to concern yourself with them. So, the prayer becomes urgent as a result of the terror and evil all around. Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Come now, O Lord! μαράνα θά!

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and the murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” There it is! Those who have washed their robes have a right to the tree of life. The evildoers and filthy are on the outside; they do not have that access that those who are clean do. You know it from another passage from Revelation. Upon seeing a great, white host, an elder asked John, “Who are these?” “Sir, you know,” he replied. “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:14) It’s nothing other than the blood of Jesus which makes them pure, which grants them access to the tree of life. Those who are not purified by Christ are on the outside. The difference? Well, Jesus shed his blood on the cross for all; those on the outside refused the offer. In other words, if you’re saved, it’s all Jesus’ doing, but if your damned, it’s all your doing.

So, Jesus said, “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.” As Dr. Louis Brighton wrote,

Christ calls it my reward, not their reward; it is the reward which Christ himself earned, and which he freely gives to all believers by grace. The “reward” itself is the gift of eternal life in God’s holy presence, earned for God’s people by the death and resurrection of the Lamb of God. This “reward” is represented by the tree of life.

The reward is Christ’s, not yours. He’s the one who earned it. He’s the one who merited it. He’s the one who has done all the work in order to be rewarded—in order to be given a recompense. It is His! And what does He do with it? He gives it freely to you. To you, whom He has purified by His blood, given faith to believe and trust in Him for salvation, who take Him at His Word, He gives His reward: eternal life with Him in paradise, a place at His victory banquet, to be one among that great, white host who have come out of the tribulation.

μαράνα θά! Jesus said, “And behold, I am coming soon.” He gives you a picture of what His coming again is going to look like. It’s a frightening picture, but the outcome is a glorious one for the one who bears the image of Christ. “Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book,” Jesus said. The one who keeps these words are the one who is kept in the Word, who bears the image of Christ. Therefore, the one who keeps the words of this prophecy is you, dear Baptized, one who is forgiven for all of your sins. Therefore, the one who keeps the words of this prophecy is the one who hears Jesus say, “Behold, I am coming soon,” and replies, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus,” “Come now, O Lord!

μαράνα θά!

In the name of Jesus. Amen.