

NOVEMBER 15 2024 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

In our first reading, John addresses the church, an unknown church, and we haven't deciphered where it is. He calls them "The elect lady and her children." It was quite common in those days to look at the Church as the bride of Christ, and therefore it was quite appropriate to address a church as the elder lady and her children. He praises them for keeping their faith and practicing their works of charity. But he says, very carefully, "Some of you do that." Therefore, there were some that did not walk in the path of truth.

In Psalm 1, we hear those words, "Happy the man who walks in the path-- who does not walk in the counsels of the wicked, who does not stand in the path of sinners, who does not sit with scorners." So there were some who were precisely doing this, with sinners, with the scorners. And who were these people that John was speaking about? There were some within the community that thought they were an elite group, they were above the others, because they had been enlightened on high. They had an inner knowledge, a secret society of sorts. The word for knowledge in Greek is "Gnosis," and they were called "Gnostics." They believed that Jesus was not a person in reality. Today they would say Jesus is a product of artificial intelligence, he was not really there. And therefore, what really mattered was now that they were enlightened, they would not only be saved, but they would allow, and bring others to salvation.

John tells them, "These are deceivers, they are not walking in the path of truth. Avoid them at all costs." In other words, they're not a group of people, and these were the people who said, yes, Jesus was there, Jesus started salvation. But now it's all up to us. I can make sacrifices, I can fast, I can pray, I can achieve my own salvation. Two centuries after John had written this letter, there was another monk, a monk from Britain, called Pelagius, and he developed this to such an extent. They said, really, Jesus was not necessary, all that matters now today is I can

do all the prayers I want, all the sacrifices I want, all the fastings, and I can save myself. And John was saying this is another group of people that should be avoided.

In our present day, one of my theology professors would say we are most of us semi-Pelagians; we do not think that our salvation can be achieved-- or was achieved by Jesus Christ. We have to make up something or the other. And Paul would say, I make up in my body what is lacking in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. What Paul was saying, that I am a part of the mystical body of Christ, and therefore the sufferings carry on into our day. But to say that I can achieve my own salvation, by my prayers, and sufferings, we are down the wrong path. Salvation is a pure gift from God. You cannot buy it on Amazon, online, Kijiji, or go down to Saint Lawrence Market and buy it. And I'm saying this in a facetious way, because we think that all these online things can give you anything you want on earth. They can, perhaps, but they can't give you a way to heaven. This was a free gift given to us by God.

One of the people who watch television says, "So, the thousand Masses that I've been attending, and the thousand Rosaries that I've said, are they totally useless? They will not work for my salvation?" And I said, in one sense, yeah. You cannot get it; it's a gift given to you by God. Keep it open, and then you will receive this gift. But all these prayers and fastings are important because they help us to keep our minds open, our hearts open, our eyes open, in order that when the gift comes, we are the most ready person to receive this gift by God.

As we come to the end of this liturgical year, at the end of November, we will be hearing all sorts of readings that deal with the four last things, especially death and judgement. And that is what we hear in the Gospel today. We speak about Paul and the evangelists were of the firm opinion that death and judgement were just around the corner. Jesus would come to judge and separate the good from the bad. And they were under the opinion that some of them would still be alive. And they mistook some

of the teachings of Jesus Christ, and perhaps you and I can also be led down the wrong path, when Jesus said, "There will be two in bed, and one will be taken away, one will be left. There will be two in the kitchen, one will be taken away, and one will be left."

We get an impression that some will die, and some will still be alive. What Jesus was trying to tell us at that given moment was we do not know, at all. We can never figure out. And therefore, he gives two historical events that took place: Noah and the flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah. They did not get any warning signs. And when disaster came, many people were not prepared. And that is exactly the message Jesus is giving us. Not that some will be alive, and some will be dead, but rather, you and I do not know the day or the hour.

But for the elect, as we heard in the first reading, some who are walking in the path of truth, we don't have to bother. When the day comes we will all be ready. Because there will be oil in our lamps, and ready when the bridegroom comes to welcome him. And we will hear those beautiful words of Jesus, "Well done, good and faithful servant, come into the kingdom prepared for you, from the beginning of creation." God bless you all.