

It is never easy to be separated from those we love. And I'm not just talking about permanent separation, although that's certainly very difficult. But just to be separated from them, to no longer see them. They have gone away, and we can't see them as often as we would like. Or they live somewhere else, and we don't have the same contact with them that we once had. We want to be with them in that case. We want to see them face to face, to hear their voice without anything in between, to be able to touch them with our own hands. Nothing really compares with that. Nothing else is ever quite the same. Yeah, we have lots of ways to still be in contact with them, especially these days. We can send them a letter. We can call them on the phone. We can even video chat with them through our screens either on the computer or on our smart phones. It enables us to stay in touch with them, and that is certainly a good thing. It's something that we may even look forward to. But it's not quite the same, is it? Being able to do these things are not quite the same as actually being with them. Nothing can ever replace being together with those we love. And when we are separated from them, we long to be with them again.

And Christians, the same is true of our love for Jesus. We have been separated from him right now, and we long to be with him. We long to see him, to be able to touch him with our hands, to hear his voice without anything in between. That's what we really want. Yeah, we have his promises that he will be with us, and that's a good thing. Yes, we know that he's with us now, walking among us, and that's also a good thing. Yes, we can talk to him through prayer. We can call on him in our troubles. And yes, we receive his very body and blood at this table today. These are all good things. But they're not quite the same as seeing him face to face. They're not quite the same as actually being with him, to see him with our own eyes. We have only seen him by faith. And while seeing by faith is good, it won't replace that day when we finally see his face.

It's like Paul says in 1 Corinthians: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part. Then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." Mirrors in those days were not usually made of glass. A mirror was usually made of a highly polished metal. And if you've ever seen your reflection in a piece of metal, you know what Paul is talking about here. Yeah, you can see yourself. You might even be able to tell what you look like. But unless that metal is very highly polished, it's not really exact. It's kind of fuzzy. It's kind of indistinct. You don't really get a clear picture of yourself. And the same is true of us towards Jesus right now. We know him by faith. We even see him by faith, but it's not very clearly. It's not like we've seen his face. All we have is hope, and hope of being with Jesus forever. Paul says again, Romans chapter 8: "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." But being patient is never easy, especially being patient for our Lord Jesus Christ. And it's even more difficult to be patient when faced with all the things that we suffer now. How will we be able to be patient, how will we be able to wait for Jesus when everything in this world seems to have gone wrong?

The disciples in our Gospel reading for today were just about to be separated from Jesus. Jesus was going to die on the cross. And it's hard for us to fully understand just how devastating that was going to be to the disciples, because we know what's going to happen next. We know that he will rise again on the third day. We know the rest of the story. But the disciples at this point don't. They barely understood what Jesus was trying to tell them here. And so for Jesus to be taken away from them was extremely distressing. It seemed as if all of their hopes and all of their dreams were coming crashing down around them. It felt like they were going to lose Jesus

forever, like he would never come back. They felt utterly hopeless in the face of what was about to happen. And even after Jesus rises from the dead, forty days later he ascends into heaven to go to be with the Father, just as he says in our reading for today. And that would also have been difficult for them, just as it is difficult for us. Because now that Jesus is in heaven, he seems to be gone, to be separated from us forever. And this is what makes us weep and lament. Where is Jesus? When will he come? When will we see his face? Why do we have to wait?

And what makes that all the more difficult, Christians, is this world that we live in. Because we live in a world that is full of trouble. We live in a world that is full of evil, a world where evil seems to win and good seems to lose. And how often has that led you, Christians, to want it all to just come to an end? To have an end to politics, an end to agendas, an end to evil? To just have it all stop? Every day we hear something in the news about some terrible thing that has happened here or there. Or we hear about some wicked thing that someone's trying to push through Washington. Or even the advertising campaigns of companies like Budweiser. What are we supposed to do with these things? Is it ever going to come to an end? It just makes us want to cry out: "Stop! Stop this! No more evil! No more suffering! No more of this." And that leads us to say, "Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly! Bring this evil world to an end. Give us justice! Give us peace! Deliver us from this world which laughs at you. Save us from this evil generation. Save us, Lord! Bring us to yourself! Come quickly, Lord Jesus." And yet we wait and wait and wait, and while we wait, the world seems to get worse and worse and worse. Where is Jesus? When will he come? When will we see his face? Why do we have to wait?

But even if we must wait for him, Christians, even if we have been separated from him, it is not hopeless. Because Jesus tells us today the same thing that he told his disciples: we will see him again. The disciples were certainly full of sorrow when Jesus died, but their sorrow turned into joy when he rose again from the grave. They saw him alive, face to face, raised from the grave, never to die again! And their joy seemed to have no bounds. It too never seemed to come to an end. And we will also rejoice, Christians, when our Lord comes to deliver us from this world. When Jesus comes to bring an end to all of the evil which we see around us, our joy on that day will never come to an end, because we'll be with him forever. We will be able to see him face to face as plainly as we see each other. We will be able to hear his voice without anything in between. We will be able to touch him with our own hands. And it will be the greatest reunion of all: the end of all of our sorrows and the beginning of an everlasting joy. And all of these things we see around us, Christians, all of these things that we suffer now will disappear. And they will never come back again. What a day that's going to be, when Jesus comes again! What joy we will have when we are with him forever!

But what we do while we wait for that day, Christians? How do we be patient? We hold on to the things that Jesus has given to us. Yeah, they're not the same as actually being with him. That's true. But that doesn't mean that they're useless. Just like talking to our loved ones on the phone may not be the same as actually being with them, but that doesn't mean that it's pointless either. It is still a good thing. And think of all the things that Jesus has given to us. He has given us the Holy Spirit, the proof that God is with us always. Jesus has given us the Word of God, his very voice that we can listen to at all times. Jesus has given us his very body and blood, the proofs that we are forgiven, the proof that we belong to him. And Jesus has given us prayer, so that we can call on him in all of our troubles, so that we can turn to him in the midst of all evil. These things are good, Christians. They give us hope. They show us that no matter how bad this world

gets, no matter how much evil is around us, we are not alone. They give us hope, because through them we see Jesus by faith. And that too is a joy which the world can never take away. And strengthened by this joy, we can face the world. We can even change it for good as we wait to welcome him on that day when he will come again.

So Christians, be patient. Wait for your Lord Jesus Christ, because he will come and he will deliver us from all this evil. But hold on to those things that he has given to you, because through them you will have hope. And through that hope, you will find a joy which the world can never take away.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, though we wait for you to return so that we may see you face to face, strengthen us now in our faith so that we may not waver, and help us to look forward to the joy that will be ours with you forever; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.