

If you were counting, you would have noticed that in just four verses of today's Gospel our Lord Jesus repeats this phrase, ***“a little while”*** seven times. Actually, it is one word in the Greek – **μικρὸν**, pronounced “mik-RON.” We would say “a micron,” and we know it as one millionth of a meter. A micron it is one of the smallest units of measure known to man. For a little perspective, there would be about 25,000 microns in one inch. That's small!

But Jesus says **μικρὸν**, “A little...” And He drives this word home and drums it into both the disciples' ears and our ears so that we simply cannot forget. One word in the Greek, “Mikron.” A micron. A little. What is it that lasts only a little? Based on the context of our Lord's word to His disciples, He is clearly referring both to the Christian's time of sorrow and the world's rejoicing.

“A little while, and you will see me no longer...” Today's Gospel reading, and the Gospel readings for the next four Sundays, are all recorded in chapters 14-16 of St. John's Gospel. All of these readings include Jesus' words to His disciples on that first Maundy Thursday evening after Judas had left the group to fulfill his plan to betray Jesus. Three years Jesus had been with these disciples – three years of teaching, preaching, performing miracles, and, toward the end, telling them of His ultimate death and

resurrection. Now the little while ends up being just a matter of hours before Judas catches up with them in the Garden of Gethsemane with the guard of armed soldiers to have Jesus arrested. Just a little while of having Jesus with them, and then He would be arrested, tortured, tried, crucified, and buried. And they would see him no longer. ***“A little while, and you will see me no longer...”***

“And again, a little while, and you will see me.” Just a little while. When Jesus said this, that “little while” ended up being just three days, just until the third day – or for Thomas, one week after that. But Jesus does not give those details here. He does not spell it out for his disciples or for us, nor does He give us a countdown, saying, “This many days or that many hours until you will see me again and rejoice.” He does not give a timeline like He gave to the Ninevites through Jonah, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” He just calls it “a little while.” And that is all we need to know.

But the disciples could not grasp that. They were too sad; they were too sorrowful; they were too wrapped up in their dashed hopes and dreams for earthly happiness. They were looking forward to Jesus sitting on His throne in Jerusalem and making everything OK on this earth. They had the

“sitting on His throne” part right, but they did not understand that it would not be here on earth. They had to wait a little while, and they did not want to.

So the disciples asked, “What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again, a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.”

Do you know what Jesus is talking about? Do you want to ask Him? It is OK if you do, because this is not just a private conversation between Jesus and the Eleven. This is inspired Holy Scripture recorded for our learning, too. Jesus’ words are meant for you, too.

St. Paul says in Romans 15:4, **“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”** All of Scripture is for our learning, even the words of Jesus that seem confusing to us. They are not confusing to Him, of course, but sometimes they are to us. We want to know what He means. And the best, and truly the only, way to know what Jesus means is to have Him tell us, rather than try to figure it out for ourselves and mess it up. Scripture interprets itself; God Himself explains His Word. And where He does not explain His Word neither do we. Jesus

always knows what we need to know; and He always knows what we are thinking, just like He knew what the disciples were thinking...

“Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, ‘Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’? Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.’”

The disciples did weep and lament when Jesus was taken from them for a little while. And the world most certainly rejoiced that Jesus was dead. But it was only for a little while, and then the disciples saw Him again, and they rejoiced.

Of course, the world still rejoices, because the world still thinks Jesus is dead, or at least wants Him dead. The unbelieving world cannot tolerate Jesus, because Jesus lumps all the works of the world together and calls them all wicked. He condemns the wickedness of man – all of it: the false religion, the hypocrisy, the gossip, the slander, the hatred, the staying home from church. He condemns the good works of men who offer their goodness to God in exchange for His favor and grace. Jesus insists on being the only way to God because He IS the only way. He is the only righteousness for mankind, the only goodness that counts before God.

So, the world rejoices now, for a little while, while Christ is hidden from view. And Christians mourn and weep and lament now, for a little while, when times of suffering and tribulation come. During those times it seems as if Christ moves away for a little while so that we do not feel His comfort or notice His presence. He seems more than hidden; He seems completely unavailable and uninterested in our concerns. And in those times He allows us to be sorrowful and to mourn—for a little while.

And why does He allow that? Well, as always, God allows us hardships, illness, troubles, and the like in order that we may learn from those situations to trust in Him more. And in so doing He also brings about the devastation of our free will that we wrongly imagine that we have, that sense of self-accomplishment and power that, in our sinful human pride, we wrongfully trust and cling to.

It is a good thing that God pulls the rug out from under our powers and good works and teaches us not to place any confidence in them. It may be uncomfortable, but when that rug gets pulled out from under us, it is our loving God bringing us to realize again that we are powerless to comfort ourselves, that we are powerless to face life in this godless world where the prince of demons is still the prince.

It is simply and divinely part of the Lord's discipline. And the point is not for us to ask, "What did I do wrong? How can I fix this sorrow and get it taken away?" No, it is not about us and our works or about fixing ourselves or our life. By nature we are hopelessly broken. That is the point. In and of our sinful nature we are hopeless victims against the devil and sin and the world. Without Christ we are nothing. So, God uses affliction to drive us again to Christ, to show that all is most certainly worthless and hopeless and lost without Him. Only with Him is there joy and comfort and safety and certainty, and most importantly, forgiveness for all sin.

This promise of Christ is that the sorrow caused by His seeming absence will only last for a **μικρὸν**, a little while. That is a promise you can cling to, for His Word is sure and certain. Dear friends, your sorrow does not mean He loves you less; it does not mean that He has somehow gone from being risen again to being dead again. His death on the cross paid for every one of your sins – even all the ones you have yet to commit.

Remember, Jesus rose from the dead whether you feel it or not. He defeated death for you whether you feel it or not. You need never fear death even though you feel as if you do. And Christ lives, whether you feel it or not. Even when you do not feel the tiniest bit of divine comfort; even when the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead does not *seem* to matter,

you have this word and promise of Jesus that whatever is eating at you and trying to bring you down will last only a little while.

So, dear fellow redeemed, wait patiently in faith for Christ. He will return with His true comfort and endless joy. And in the meantime, until that little while is accomplished, He will sustain you; He will hold you up. In fact, He does sustain you and hold you up and is doing it now through His Word regularly preached into your ears, with His Word of absolution, with His baptismal water, and with His body and blood given and shed for you here at this altar.

Do not lose hope. Do not run away from Christ's Word and Sacraments; rather, run to them as often as they are offered. They are the only things that will sustain you in times of sorrow, trouble, or grief.

And do not doubt him. He has even told you ahead of time how it's going to be. In our reading He said it is going to be just like a woman giving birth. ***“A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore, you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”***

We know that the pain has to come before the childbirth. And, hard as it can be, the sorrow has to come before the joy. And the cross has to come before the comfort. That is just the way it is. And we are very glad that it is that way and not the other way around! It is good for us Christians that the sorrow is only for a little while because the joy is eternal.

Jesus was talking about the here and now and He is talking about when He comes again in glory and we will see Him face to face. It is both. It is now and not yet. It should come as no surprise to any of us that the Christian life is full of sorrow that will not be completely erased until Christ is revealed at the end. But then, oh but then, there will be absolutely nothing to take your joy away from you.

Even now the risen Christ comes to you in His Word and promises to help you here and now, to help you even by allowing times of sorrow and mourning to come into your life. And this is so that He can come, after a little while, with His everlasting comfort and joy.

Then you will see Him face to face; then you will understand perfectly that Jesus is your faithful and loving Savior, and that His resurrection from the dead really is the truth that will get you through today and tomorrow and the next day, until He comes to take you Home with Him forever.

A little while, dear friends. A little while. With Jesus and His gifts for you through your Baptism, Absolution, and His very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins you can most certainly last that long. Amen.