

Saint Thomas on the Gospel for the 3rd Sunday after Easter.

A little while, and now you shall not see me; and again a little while, and you shall see me: because I go to the Father. Then some of the disciples said one to another: What is this that he saith to us: A little while, and you shall not see me; and again a little while, and you shall see me, and, because I go to the Father? They said therefore: What is this that he saith, A little while? we know not what he speaketh. And Jesus knew that they had a mind to ask him; and he said to them: Of this do you inquire among yourselves, because I said: A little while, and you shall not see me; and again a little while, and you shall see me? Amen, amen I say to you, that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice; and you shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. So also you now indeed have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you.

CHRYS. Our Lord after having relieved the spirits of the disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit, again depresses them: A little while, and you shall not see Me. He does this to accustom them to the mention of His departure, in order that they may bear it well, when it does come. For nothing so quiets the troubled mind, as the continued recurrence to the subject of its grief.

BEDE. He said, A little while, and you shall not see Me alluding to His going to be taken that night by the Jews, His crucifixion the next morning, and burial in the evening, which withdrew Him from all human sight.

CHRYS. But then, if one examines, these are words of consolation: Because I go to the Father. For they show that His death was only a translation; and more consolation follows: And again, a little while, and you shall see Me: an intimation this that He would return and, after a short separation, come and live with them for ever.

AUG. The meaning of these words however was obscure, before their fulfillment; Then said some of His disciples among themselves, What is this that He said to us, A little while, and you shall not see Me; and again, a little while, and you shall see Me; and, Because I go to the Father?

CHRYS. Either sorrow had confused their minds, or the obscurity of the words themselves prevented their understanding them, and made them appear contradictory. If we shall see Thee, they say, how do You go? If you go, how shall we see you? What is this that He said to us, A little while? We cannot tell what He said.

AUG. For above, because He did not say, A little while, but simply, I go to the Father, He seemed to speak plainly. But what to them was obscure at the time, but by and by manifested, is manifest to us. For in a little while He suffered, and they did not see Him; and again, in a little while He rose again, and they saw Him. He says, And you shall see Me no more; for the mortal Christ they saw no more.

ALCUIN. Or thus, It will be a little time during which you will not see Me, i.e. the three days that He rested in the grave; and again, it will be a little time during which you shall see Me, i.e. the forty days of His appearance amongst them, from His Passion to His ascension. And you shall see Me for that little time only, Because I go to the Father; for I am not going to stay always in the body here, but, by that humanity which I have assumed, to ascend to heaven.

It follows: Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said to them, Do you enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and you shall not see Me; and again, a little while, and you shall see Me? Verily, verily, I say to you, That you shall weep and lament. Their merciful Master, understanding their ignorance and doubts, replied so as to explain what He had said.

AUG. Which must be understood thus: viz. that the disciples sorrowed at their Lord's death, and then immediately rejoiced at His resurrection. The world (i.e. the enemies of Christ, who put Him to death)

rejoiced just when the disciples sorrowed, i.e. at His death: You shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and you shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

ALCUIN. But this speech of our Lord's is applicable to all believers who strive through present tears and afflictions to attain to the joys eternal. While the righteous weep, the world rejoices; for having no hope of the joys to come, all its delight is in the present.

CHRYS. Then He shows that sorrow brings forth joy, short sorrow infinite joy, by an example from nature: A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

AUG. This comparison does not seem difficult to understand. It was one which lay near at hand, and He Himself immediately shows its application. And you now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice. The bringing forth is compared to sorrow, the birth to joy, which is especially true in the birth of a boy. And your joy no man takes from you: their joy is Christ. This agrees with what the Apostle said, Christ being risen from the dead dies no more (Romans 6:9).

CHRYS. By this example He also intimates that He loosens the chains of death, and creates men anew. He does not say however that she should not have tribulation, but that she should not remember it; so great is the joy which follows. And so is it with the saints. He said not that a boy is born, but that a man, a tacit allusion to His own resurrection.

AUG. To this joy it is better to refer what was said above: A little while and you shall not see Me, and again, a little while and you shall see Me. For the whole space of time that this world continues is but a little while. Because I go to the Father, refers to the former clause, a little while and you shall not see Me, not to the latter, a little while and you shall see Me. His going to the Father was the reason why they would not see Him. So to them who then saw Him in the body He says, A little while and you shall not see Me; for He was about to go to the Father, and mortals would thenceforth never see Him again, as they saw Him now. The next words, A little while and you shall see Me, are a promise to the whole Church. For this little while appears long to us while it is passing, but when it is finished we shall then see how little a time it has been.

ALCUIN. The woman is the holy Church, who is fruitful in good works, and brings forth spiritual children to God. This woman, while she brings forth, i.e. while she is making her progress in the world, amidst temptations and afflictions, has sorrow because her hour is come; for no one ever hated his own flesh.

AUG. Nor yet in this bringing forth of joy, are we entirely without joy to lighten our sorrow, but, as the Apostle said, we rejoice in hope (Romans 12:12); for even the woman, to whom we are compared, rejoices more for her future offspring, than she sorrows for her present pain.

ALCUIN. But as soon as she is delivered, i.e. when her laborious struggle is over, and she has got the palm, she remembers no more her former anguish, for joy at reaping such a reward, for joy that a man is born into the world. For as a woman rejoices when a man is born into the world, so the Church is filled with exultation when the faithful are born into life eternal.

BEDE. Nor should it appear strange, if one who departs from this life is said to be born. For as a man is said to be born when he comes out of his mother's womb into the light of day, so may he be said to be born who from out of the prison of the body, is raised to the light eternal. Whence the festivals of the saints, which are the days on which they died, are called their birthdays.

ALCUIN. I will see you again, i.e. I will take you to Myself. Or, I will see you again, i.e. I shall appear again and be seen by you; and your heart shall rejoice.

AUG. This fruit indeed the Church now yearns for in travail, but then will enjoy in her delivery. And it is a male child, because all active duties are for the sake of devotion; for that only is free which is desired for its own sake, not for any thing else, and action is for this end. This is the end which satisfies and is eternal; for nothing can satisfy but what is itself the ultimate end. Wherefore of them it is well said, Your joy no man takes from you.