

Rev. Sakari Korpinen

Our Lord's holy apostle cries out, "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!"

Holy, eternal God is a King, at whose gestures the world trembles. He is a God of power and might, He is inscrutable, He is awesome, a destroyer and devourer in His wrath. But the fearful above all is also gracious above all. He is gracious only in His Son Jesus Christ and His completed work. This is the reason the church of Christ, ever since the holy apostles, has preached the most holy Gospel of God's grace. And this is the reason why, as we are here by the lifeless earthly tabernacle of pastor, doctor Anssi, the pastoral office grounded in God's command must preach: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Since earliest times, graves have been marked with the reminder: *Memento mori*, remember your death! But the main emphasis in the church of Christ is not here at all. The wonderful message of true altars and true pulpits is always in Christ's work of redemption and the grace of holy baptism. There can be nothing greater than that one may rest life and death boldly on the grace of Christ and to live by the holy Gospel.

"Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!" The Antichrist has been successfully breaking the church of Christ and he always does it by attacking first the apostolic pastoral office; thus he destroys the means of grace. He knows how to entice, wear out and falsely acclimatise the servants of Christ. He also knows better and better how to turn shepherds into those who are ashamed of God's word and the Gospel of grace. He turns them into men like Demas who "in love with this world" go their own way. In the religious institutions of cheap grace there is no room for the Jesus of the Bible. Nor is this all: true altars and pulpits where Christ works, are already under scrutiny, even though they are not yet prohibited. – Lord, raise up the people of Finland yet again from this trampling of your holy Word!

Father Anssi received 15 years of life after his heart operation like the Old Testament king Hezekiah. He is an example for us of how the charism, the gift of grace, of the office must be "kindled into flame" again and again, to use the words of the holy apostle. From his ordination until the finish line, pastor Anssi tended the pastoral office with profundity and determination. One must take pains so that today's seekers would find, that the church would be fed in the weekly Eucharist, that it would grow in the knowledge of God's word. Toil in the Lord, in His holy and eternal word, is not in vain! It is not in vain, even though the greatest treasure in the world, the forgiveness of sins and the certainty of eternal life, doesn't seem to interest many people.

But in this holy moment, the Word must be directed within everyone's reach with the cry, "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!" For there is prepared in Christ an eternal righteousness, grace and salvation. It exists in order to be possessed. The help and comfort of the Gospel comes to all who believe it. The evening hymn written by pastor Anssi, which he dedicated to our dearest friend Simo Kiviranta, instructs us all:

"The law every sinner does condemn
Yet with my sins I refuge seek
To Jesus' perfect work complete,
To my baptismal covenant."

We have a beautiful hope, based on the word of Christ and His holy apostles, that father Anssi "sought refuge" and gained the victory!