



Come and See!

November 5, 2017

The Word...

Brothers and sisters:

We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children.
With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you
not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well,
so dearly beloved had you become to us. ...
And for this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly,
that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us,
you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God,
which is now at work in you who believe.
(1 Thes 2:7b-9, 13)

Pondering the Word ...

This endearing little passage from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is wedged between some heavy-hitting words from the Old and New Testaments about the hypocrisy and self-centeredness of the priests and elders of the Jewish community. Paul reminds the converts of how gentle and caring he, Silvanus, and Timothy have been with them. One phrase in particular stands out: "We shared with you, not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well."

At first thought, it reminded me of how important it is to not preach or pontificate, but to allow the Spirit to shine forth through my actions and compassion, to share myself as well. It all sounds so warm and genuine, until...until I began to consider "my very self." My very self that can be hypocritical and self-centered. My very self that does not always practice what I preach. My very self that can derive self-serving satisfaction out of doing, while not allowing myself to be drawn into the reality of the other's lived existence.

But thankfully, the Spirit led me—and I hope leads you too—to the place where I need to be, the place Paul so readily acknowledged in many of his letters. My very self is not an "either/or:" good/bad, holy/sinful. I am both sinner and saint, human and divine, body and soul. To share my very self means that I share it all, my struggles and my joys, my sinfulness and the salvation I have found in Christ. It is through this kind of genuine human witness that we foster the Word of God at work in the hearts of others.

Living the Word...

How willing are you to share your very self? Most of us prefer to hide behind a façade. We like to pretend everything is A-OK; or worse, we project a mask of moral superiority, rather than becoming vulnerable by sharing our foibles, missteps, and suffering. I'm not talking here about parading our "dirty laundry" for all the world to see, but it is often in revealing our struggles that we can make the deepest, most healing connections with those around us.

Does your sinfulness make you feel unworthy to represent God? If so, get to know Peter and Paul. Take a lesson from their willingness to use their denials of Christ as a place of mercy and growth they willingly share with those they encounter. Take a step outside the walls you've built and give your very self to others.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Nov 6: *“Lord, in your great love, answer me.”* (Ps 69)

In his spiritual exercises, St. Ignatius tells us to ask for the specific grace we wish to receive. In fact, the Spanish word he uses is “demandar:” to demand, to insist. We hear that same kind of urgency in today’s psalm: “Answer me.” How comfortable are you “demanding” answers from God? This is NOT the way most of us were taught to pray. But it doesn’t imply haughtiness or arrogance. Of course, we approach God with reverence. It doesn’t mean the specific intentions we pray for will be granted. But such an attitude in prayer implies our dependence on God and graces we might not even know we need. Ignatius tells us to pray for the grace to become aware of the answers we are seeking, the graces we desire. Give this kind of passionate, heart-felt prayer a try and see how the Spirit will enlighten you and share the very thing you need.

Nov 7: *“We, though many, are one Body in Christ and individually parts of one another.”* (Rom 12:5-16)

“Wait a minute! I get that we are all one Body in Christ, but you are saying we are parts of one another too?” Yes, we are all in this together. This can be tough for me to accept, especially when I am so ready to judge those I deem as being unfaithful to Christ’s message of mercy. This doesn’t mean there are not false prophets among us--Christ warns us of that. But it does mean that those whose faith practice is different from mine are part of me as well. We humans have done a dismal job of keeping the Body of Christ intact. See what you can do this week to accept into yourself and your life someone whose beliefs and practice differ from yours.

Nov 8: *“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”* (Lk 14:25-33)

I remember my mom saying that if God fits the back for the burden, God must know we are pretty weak! Although my family has had sadness and trials to bear, in comparison to 99.999% of the world, our burdens have been small and lightened by a great support system and by our faith. I know people who worry his or her “own” cross is so comparatively light that they fear they have already received their reward (Lk 6:24-25). Let’s not overlook the importance of Jesus’ directive: “come after me.” ‘Come after me with whatever life, whatever blessings, whatever burdens my Father has given you. Yes, more is expected of you with your good education and upbringing, health, financial resources, etc., but to be my disciple is to learn that the burden is light when you place all you are and all you have in God’s hands.’

Nov 9: *“God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in distress. We fear not, though the earth be shaken and mountains plunge into the depths of the sea....There is a stream whose runlets gladden the city of God.”* (Ps 46)

The recent natural disasters come to mind with this passage. The earth and its creatures has been shaken, wide swaths of land and lives destroyed by flood and fire. For those of faith, God is indeed our refuge, but the runlets, the little streams of grace and compassion brought to those in distress can begin to ease the pain and restore hope. Imagine yourself as a little stream for God’s grace. Allow yourself to be filled with the fresh, cleansing waters of the Spirit and then provide refreshment and nourishment to those in need.

Nov 10: *“In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast in what pertains to God. For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.”* (Rom 15:14-21)

Let’s go back to Sunday’s reflection. Paul knows he persecuted Christ’s early followers. He knows he still does the evil he does not want to do (Rom 7:19). He knows he has become a great minister in bringing Christ to the Gentiles. But, most importantly, he knows it is all due to the grace of God. “But rather, let him who boasts, boast in this, that in his prudence he know me, knows that I, the Lord, bring about kindness, justice, and uprightness on the earth; for with such am I pleased,” says the Lord. (Jer 9:23)

Nov 11: *“Greet Prisca and Aquila...Greet Epaphroditus... Ampliatus... Urbanus... Stachys.”* (Rom 16: 3-9,16)

How many of these names do you know? Heck, I can’t pronounce most of them. Actually, if you read the whole passage (3-16), Paul lists at least 24 individuals that the Roman community should be willing to greet with a holy kiss. People behind the scenes. People who probably don’t have statues erected to them in town squares or churches named after them or special devotions prayed to them. All doing the Lord’s work, in quiet, everyday ways. People like you and me. ☺