

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The work of the Spirit is manifest in the saints as they do the work of the Church Militant, as they wage war against an enemy without and within, an enemy already defeated. By their battle their election is known – those God chose from the foundation of the world war against the fallen world until God’s Kingdom of Glory is ushered in on the last day. Then the saints at warfare will be the saints at rest.

The work of the Spirit is tangible and visible. The Holy Spirit is not seen, but His Work testifies to His presence. The work of the Spirit is seen in the work of the Church and of Her faithful. Where that work is done, there is the Spirit.

So it is that St. Paul recognizes the works of the Thessalonians as an outward manifestation of their faith. Their work is a powerful demonstration of the indwelling of the Spirit, the Seal of Salvation that God placed upon them. The Spirit of God can not be seen. But by their fruits did Paul know them.

The elect of God, as St. Paul writes, receive the word in much affliction. That is what God promises – that those who follow Christ will taste of His cross, and that those who taste of His cross will know the eternal comfort He alone can bring.

So do not be surprised at the sufferings the world visits upon you for your faith. The Christian faith, the only true faith, will separate you from friends and family, from neighbor and coworker, and even from others who call themselves Christian.

Consider the request of Jesus’ disciple – he desired to depart from the Christ to go and bury his father. Jesus’ answer is a rebuke of the fallen world. He tells His disciple “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” Those who have Christ have life. Those who reject Christ are already dead.

This is, of course, an affront to the world. And it is an affront to pietism, which is an effort to be nicer than God. But Jesus, while in this world, is not of it. And the Lord is no pietist. He tells the Truth. He alone is Life. Following the world is death. And the world and those who believe its doctrines prefer to deny the Truth that sin makes all men dead to God.

From their sin fallen men bring forth dead works, sinful works, sinful thoughts, and sinful cravings. So your sin, even the sins you have considered your smallest, even the sins you have considered insignificant, each of your sins has been sufficient to number you with the subjects of the kingdom of the fallen world - dead in sin, dead to God.

Now consider what St. Paul saw in the Thessalonians. They exhibited life. That life was manifest in their works of faith, their labors of love, their patience of hope in the Lord, and their knowledge of their election. They have eternal life even before physical death - life believing that He is the Christ, the Son of God, the Promised Savior. They have life following Him, and life imitating the Apostles.

They have life hearing God’s Saving Word. They have life receiving His forgiveness and salvation through the Means by which His Spirit works. And that new life, everlasting life, is yours as well in Christ. He won it for you. He gives it to you freely, as His Spirit works in you, as you believe in Him, as

you trust in Him, as you look to Him as God and Lord, as you confess Him as your Savior.

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As faith makes His cross and tomb your cross and tomb, your sin, and so your death, is removed. And as His resurrection is made yours, you are declared holy before God, and you receive life.

He offers you the life He took up – eternal life – by the Gospel that comes to you not in Word only, but also in power. For the Holy Spirit works through the Word of Christ to give you life.

While you live out your time awaiting the Lord's return, there will be affliction. There will be sickness of body and mind. And there will be physical death. It is part and parcel of life in the Church Militant. But that is where the Christian is shown to be different from the world.

The Christian meets affliction with the foreknowledge of your victory in Christ. Even great affliction, as the Thessalonians suffered, will not overcome you. For in that affliction you receive the Word, which brings you joy, joy even in affliction, joy of the Holy Spirit. You have the comfort that Christ alone can give, the peace that passes all understanding.

Christ comes to you not in Word only, but in Water and Word, in Bread and Wine made Body and Blood, and in the sure proclamation of the forgiveness of your sins. And so Christ's faithfulness, His labor of love, and His patience, strengthen you and give you hope, hope in Him in the sight of your God and father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.