

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

It is a strange vocation into which St. Paul is called by God. Consider the description the Apostle abnormally born provides: men condemned to death, a spectacle to the world, fools, weak, dishonored, reviled, persecuted, defamed, and the list goes on. It defies reason, fallen reason that is, that a good God, a merciful God, a God of peace and love would place a man in such an office. Really, who would sign up for that? And yet many of you have felt what the Apostle describes, and many of you have seen Pastors endure it.

But of course that is exactly the Apostle's point. He didn't sign up for it. No man is worthy of the Divine Call. He didn't seek it. It sought Him. He was called. He was called by God. And in his case it was a forceful calling, the student of Gamaliel, the Pharisee of Pharisees, the one zealous for the tradition of his fathers with the imprimatur of the high priest witness to a personal theophany, blinded for three days, without food or drink, and led about helpless.

And later he would meet Agabus, who would prophesy that in the discharge of his Divinely given duties, St. Paul would be imprisoned and die. He would, as the Apostle himself writes, be poured out like a drink offering.

Had the Apostle preached self-improvement or sports stories or financial success and tips for better living, he would not have suffered. He would have been embraced by the world. These are the things the fallen flesh wants to hear. He would have been accepted, even lauded. He would have drawn bigger crowds, crowds that weren't seeking to stone him. He would have enjoyed earthly success. He would have avoided suffering and disappointment and mistreatment. Men would have liked him.

You too have wanted to be liked. Your fallen flesh, and the sinful heart it conceals, has coveted the approval of other men. So at times you have been silent when a clear confession of faith was called for. It has been easier to look the other way than to correct, to ignore it rather than to confront it. Under the guise of graciousness, you have allowed others to continue in sin to their peril, fearing a negative reaction, fearing conflict, afraid to suffer what St. Paul describes.

And so too, seeking to be innovative, trendy, appealing to the un-churched and de-churched and the may-someday-be-churched, Pastors tickle their fallen hearers' ears with worldly wisdom. And fallen men love to hear it. They prefer it. And truth be told, if you're honest, your flesh has desired it too. But the one it pleases most is the devil.

What the devil wants is full churches - and vacuous preaching. Nothing pleases the devil more than large crowds of hearers being filled with false doctrine. Such preachers grow wealthy and are respected by the world. They are not counted as spectacles to the world, as fools, as weak, as dishonored. They are not reviled or persecuted or defamed. And hell is filled.

Our Lord did not come to bring peace, but a sword. His Word divides, as He has promised. The fallen world did not receive Him kindly. It is He that was made a spectacle of, both to angels and to men. It was He that was counted a fool, He that was weak, He that was dishonored, He that hungered and thirsted, He that was naked, He that was beaten and homeless. He was reviled and yet He blessed, He was persecuted, and endured, He that was condemned to death.

And His Apostles would go in the way that He went, for they preached the same Word. And so will it be for the one who is faithful to that Lord, faithful to the Apostolic Doctrine, faithful to God in the face of a perverse world. Today we commemorate two such Martyrs, Sts. Cyprian and Justina, whose death for their Christian confession the tradition of the Church records. And many before them, and many since, have suffered and died for the Faith.

But the God the world crucified is not dead. He lives. He lives to give forgiveness and life to all you who believe in Him. His forgiveness is sufficient for your sins, even the sin of yielding to your flesh and being attracted to the things of the world. His shed Blood bespeaks you righteous. In Him you are not condemned to die, for He died your death. In Him there is life.

In Him, by the indwelling of His Spirit, you have Christ, the wisdom of God, the Wisdom the Apostle spoke in a Mystery, the hidden Wisdom that God ordained before the ages for the glory of you who have faith in Him. He became for you Wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

These are made yours in the Washing of Regeneration, the new birth of Holy Baptism. So you are no longer weak, in Christ you are made strong to withstand the evil day. And although the world may revile you, in Christ you are not dishonored, but distinguished, set apart, chosen, elect. In Christ you are not poorly clothed, but vested in the brilliant righteousness of the Son of God. And you are not homeless, for He who has ascended has gone to prepare a place for you. And until that day, He is with you.

The world will have its tribulations, its embarrassments, its disdain for the Christian, and as we have seen recently these will grow worse. So the Apostle says “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children to warn you.” In Christ you have been begotten through the Gospel. You have been given faith, faith that clings to Christ. Faith does not seek to be liked by men, rather faith trusts that you are loved by God. Faith trusts in His Word. Faith seeks to do His will.

You do not hunger and thirst as the world does, you hunger and thirst for Christ. You long to hear the Word that shows hell to those who sin, and opens heaven to you who believe. And your hunger and thirst are satisfied as the Lord who died and rose for you Banquets you on Himself.

After suffering, even near death, Father Paul wrote to his son in the faith Timothy “be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” It is a strange vocation into which the Pastor is called by God. Perhaps that’s why our Catechism calls the Office of the Keys that “peculiar power.” It is strange to this world because it brings holiness to sinners, it brings God to the godless, it brings salvation to the perishing, it brings life to the dying, it brings Christ to you.

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