

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

St. Paul directs the Thessalonian Christians to stand fast and hold to the traditions which they were taught, whether by Apostolic word, or by the First Epistle he wrote to them. In this context tradition, the Apostolic Tradition, the preaching and inspired writings of the Holy Apostles, is the Holy Gospel, God-breathed, salvific, able to make men wise unto salvation.

But tradition is not always a good thing in Holy Scripture. The same Greek noun translated “tradition” also means to “hand over”, and in the participial form is the Bible’s nickname for Judas Iscariot, who handed over the Lord to be arrested and crucified.

What St. Paul calls the “traditions of my fathers” is shorthand for the Jewish practices of which Christ says “Why do you also transgress the Commandment of God because of your own traditions?” And again “...you have made the Commandment of God of no effect by your traditions... Hypocrites.”

So our Lord and His Apostle warn against traditions that are man-made. They admonish against traditions that are comfortable for sinners and make sense to fallen men. For such traditions treat of works-righteousness, of earning salvation by merit, traditions that strive to aid fallen man in saving himself.

And such traditions encourage men to fit in, to keep the traditions, to conform to fallen human desires, even at the cost of breaking the Word of God.

But it isn’t just the Jews. Your fallen flesh has striven to do the same. Local traditions can divide congregations, or divide congregations from Synods. And the sinner in you has been comfortable with traditions that separate you from God.

If that sounds harsh, consider: What is it in your tradition that is “handed down”? Egoctrism? Exaltation of self? Anger and dissension? Critical and hurtful comments? Chaos around dinner and bedtime that prevents family prayers? Gossip? Work schedules that prevent church attendance? Social events that prevent the study of Holy Scripture? Poor stewardship of finances that leaves nothing with which to support the Church? Hear the Word of our Lord: “Why do you also transgress the Commandment of God because of your own tradition?”

But St. Paul writes of another kind of tradition – a good, helpful, salutary tradition, a tradition that begins with God, not with men. He tells you to stand fast in the traditions that you were taught. He speaks of a tradition taught in Word and Epistle, the Apostolic Tradition.

And he explains “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.” That is the tradition in which the Apostle exhorts you to stand fast.

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself was handed over, betrayed, handed down from Annas to Caiphas to Pilate. And Pilate appealed to tradition: “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.” But of that tradition they wanted no part. So they transgressed the Commandments of God because of their own sinful desires and had Him crucified.

And therein is the everlasting consolation of which Paul writes. The Lord who was handed over died for you. He died the death that your breaking of the Commandments requires. He fulfilled the Law. He breathed His last.

Therein lies the comfort for your soul. For believing in Christ, your sins are forgiven. By God's grace through faith, He hands down to you the tradition of holiness and righteousness He established. He makes it yours by faith, bringing you forgiveness and life.

The Holy Gospel is the Apostolic Word, the Apostolic Tradition rightly understood, the tradition of salvation that dates to God's Promise to the first man. For the Apostolic tradition is nothing but Christ and Him crucified for you, Christ risen and ascended for your justification.

And this Tradition of faith and salvation, this Tradition in which the Apostle bids you stand fast and cling to, this Tradition comes to you this day in what St. Luke calls "the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers", which is the Holy Mass. It is the Divine Service in which the Apostles and their disciples "continued steadfastly." The Mass brings Christ to you.

And the Spirit of God works through the Holy Gospel to create in you the ability to do God's will. He is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. So you eat His Body and drink his Blood this day, the New Testament poured out for you and poured into you. You eat and drink life. By God's grace you kneel and receive Christ in faith, which is to stand fast and to hold the traditions you were taught, by the

Word and by the Apostolic Epistles. So you have everlasting consolation and good hope by grace.

And the Apostle's benediction is rightly yours: "Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ."

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