

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

So much for human pride. The Apostle does not write of his high station, of the respect he is paid by others, of taking the best seat, of being greeted in the marketplace, of his authority in the Church. He who was made equal to Peter, James and John identifies himself as a bondservant, even a servant of the Church in Corinth.

More than that, he doesn't write about beautiful vestments and Eucharistic vessels of silver and gold, of soaring basilicas and ornately carved altars. Rather he writes "We have this treasure in earthen vessels", plain, ordinary, unspectacular, simple, fragile clay pots.

One would expect that God's messenger, the one Called immediately by God in a post-Ascension Theophany, the one sent by the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, would be well received by His creation. But the Apostle writes not of glory, but of the cross: that he is hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down.

So it is with the Christian in the world. These difficulties come to us not only from the unbelieving world, but even inside of the visible church. That's where the devil does his most disruptive work. Between Christian bodies, in our Synod, in our District, even in our Circuit, men disagree on doctrine. And there must be factions, writes the Apostle, that those who are approved be recognized. The Truth always divides. And

those who hold to false doctrine and bad practice rail against the Truth.

So the Lord of the Church preached: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I came not to bring peace, but a sword." And so it will be until the same Lord comes at the Last. So it is in the time in which you live. Those who preach the Truth, like the Apostle, always carry about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. For we too, like the Apostle, have this treasure in earthen vessels.

So each of us, every one according to the flesh, has preferred to believe what we think God ought to teach, rather than studying the Scriptures and subordinating our reason to God's Word. Fallen men are not free, their will is bound only to sin against God and to think wrongly about him. They are bound to sincerely believe wrongly.

Each of us has believed, sinfully, that we can please God, and that if left to ourselves we could earn His favor and gain heaven. So the things of God have been hidden from those the world counts as wise and prudent. We are earthen vessels. We are the pots, not the Potter. Remember that we are descendants of the man made from the dust, and so to dust do we return.

But thanks be to God, that He has given His Word that the Truth of God be revealed. He sent men to preach that Truth, the Truth of Christ Incarnate, Crucified and Risen, the Truth that is a ray of light in this dark world.

Thanks be to God that in His mercy the Apostles, the Martyrs, and our Fathers in the Faith preached even when hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. For in their weakness, the excellence of the power is of God and not of them.

For He who is the Light took on an earthen vessel. Almighty God made Himself gentle and lowly in heart. In Christ's weakness is His power made known, in His humility is His authority seen, in His suffering His mercy and grace demonstrated, in His silence does His love cry out, in His work is your salvation accomplished. His yoke was crushing that yours be light. In His death is His victory for you won, in His resurrection is life eternal made yours.

And with that knowledge, although you be hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down, still you are not crushed, you are not in despair, you are not forsaken, you are not destroyed - for Christ suffered all this in your stead.

In Him all your sins are forgiven. In Him is true unity with all believers - unity with the true Head, making you one Body, the unity you have this day as you are one Holy Communion, made One by His Body and Blood.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels. So does Christ beckon you - come to Him, and He will give you rest. We have this treasure in Bread and Wine. Take and eat, take and drink. In Him you will find rest for your soul.

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