

Wednesday after the Ninth Sunday after Trinity/Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, 2020 A.✠ D.

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

St. Paul writes to present you with a choice: death or righteousness. Truth be told, those are the only two choices. There is nothing in between. And the choice is clear. On the one hand, you can choose to present yourself as a slave to obey sin. On the other hand, you can choose obedience leading to righteousness.

The problem, of course, is that we have been slaves. Indeed St. Paul calls himself a slave. Slavery places one under the control of a master. And according to your first birth, you were born a slave subject to an evil master. That's what theologians call "original sin". It is the sin that you receive when you are conceived, for the flesh you are conceived by is sinful flesh. No man born of human father can escape it.

But in his Epistle to the Romans Paul attributes slavery to sin not only to original, but to actual sin. Born in sin, men sin. He writes "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey? By actual sin you commit yourself to the devil as his slave.

The master of the fallen flesh, the master of all men born of human father, enslaves men by sin leading to death. And that is a horrible, torturous enslavement. Yet fallen men seem to enjoy it for a time. They think that in their ability to sin they have freedom. But it is a deception. Although they seem free, such men are but slaves, slaves to the cruelest of masters. For he uses them in wrongdoing, he uses them to lead others in to slavery, and yet they are the ones who pay the eternal price for it.

So they may revel for a time, but they soon die. And if they die in their sin, that death is an eternal death, and inescapable never-ending slavery. Any sin, every sin, separates man from God. Sins of greed and gluttony, jealousy and pride, gossip and anger, selfishness and haughtiness, can grow to be just as life-consuming and perverse. And according to our Lord's promise, soon the heavens themselves will fall upon all those enslaved to sin, as all sinners are cast into the abyss for eternity with their master.

But "God be thanked...", writes the Apostle, the Pharisee of Pharisees who once persecuted the Church with zeal, "God be thanked" that while you were slaves of sin, a Man truly free was bound in your place. The Master of heaven and earth, Lord of all, humbled Himself, and made Himself a Servant. He fulfilled God's Promise of a Suffering Servant, born of a virgin, who would redeem mankind.

God be thanked that He humbled Himself, even stripping off his clothes, donning a slave's towel, and washing the feet of his disciples. He who prophesied the disruption of the heavens endured the disruption of the heavens - the disruption that brought darkness over all the land from the sixth hour till the ninth at His death.

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Sinless, Holy, Pure and Chaste He suffered as a slave to the master of all evil. And although He committed no transgression, He went the way of all sinners, for all sinners, in the stead of all sinners, as all sinners. And in the ultimate manifestation of His slavery, He was locked in a sealed tomb.

But His slavery was for your freedom. His perfect obedience won your freedom. His shed Blood purchased your soul, winning your life, and freeing you for eternity.

The Word of Promise He spoke is fulfilled as that very Word works faith in you. You are a regenerate, re-born creature of God, born through the font, drawn out of baptismal waters a new man. All your sins are washed away. And having been set free from sin and death by His death, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, you obey from your heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered – the Holy Gospel.

You are delivered to freedom, the doctrine that your salvation comes by God's grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. So the Promise works the faith in you, faith which receives the Promise, faith which receives the Gifts, the power of God unto salvation, the righteousness from faith to faith, the freedom of the Gospel.

In His mercy, God has heard your prayer. He has granted you the Spirit that leads you to ask God for such things as please Him, which is to say you pray "Thy will be done". And because the works of the Spirit are done through you, your works please God. It is the obedience that the Apostle describes – obedience unto righteousness. And in that obedience you find joy and peace.

Set free by Christ, you are no longer a slave to sin, but to righteousness, which is perfect, eternal freedom. You are no longer servants but children, even heirs. And it is you who the risen and ascended Good Master, the Giver of Life, Love Himself invites to eat at His Table.

Through His called and ordained servant the Lord feeds you the Body given, the Blood shed for you, that you be kept steadfast in saving faith to endure the coming great distress, to be preserved when the powers of the heavens are shaken, to be delivered, and to come to the eternal freedom of everlasting life in the presence of God.

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