

2.25.2024 Lent 2 (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8)

The Bible is filled with examples of God calling people to action. God called Noah to build an ark, and Abraham to build a nation. He called David to be a king, and the Blessed Virgin Mary to give birth to the King of kings. God called St. Peter to be a rock, and St. Paul to a life and ministry built upon the Rock - which is Christ. Time and again, for our good and His glory, God calls His people to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this world in many and various ways, but before He calls us to a life of sacrifice and service, God calls us to a life of holiness.

In the Epistle we read this morning, St. Paul declared, *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification,”* and in the same passage he wrote, *“For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness”* (1 Thessalonians 4:3,7). When we consider the heroes of our faith, men and women who in humble obedience heard, received, and responded to the call God placed before them, we often wonder: What is God’s will for my life? What monumental act of sacrifice and service would God have me complete before I leave this world?

In the text we read today, St. Paul answered that question for every one of us when he declared, *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.”* The call God has placed before you and I, and all who love Him, is a call to holiness - a higher, closer walk with God. We often have many of our own grand ideas about the glorious ways we might serve Him, but Scripture teaches us that the first characteristic God wants to instill in His children is not one of doing good, but of being good.

According to the account in Genesis, long before Noah built an ark, he was *“a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God”* (Genesis 6:9). Before Abram’s name was changed to Abraham, before he was given his son Isaac and fulfilled his call to be the father of faith, Scripture tells us that *“Abram believed the LORD, and it was credited to him as righteousness”* (Genesis 15:6). Long before David was the greatest king of Israel, the prophet Samuel told the current king, Saul, that *“the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people...”* (1 Samuel 13:14). Before Mary carried our Lord in her womb,

before she fed, clothed, and in every way fulfilled her calling to be a mother to God, she was addressed by the Angel Gabriel as one who was, “*full of grace*,” Gabriel declared, “*the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women*” (Luke 1:38). Before St. Peter preached so boldly on Pentecost, proclaiming the word that on that day saved 3,000 souls, the rough fisherman traveled with our Lord and entered into a relationship with God that invited the Holy Spirit to speak those salvific words through him. Before St. Paul fulfilled his calling to be “*a chosen instrument*” in the hand of God, to carry His name “*before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel*” (Acts 9:15), he was converted on the road to Damascus, baptized, and spent three years receiving the Gospel, not from men, but “*by revelation from Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 1:11-20).

In all of those faithful examples we recognize the truth that before we can do right for God, we must be right with God. That truth is a reminder of our Lord’s familiar words in which declared, “*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). Without the vine, a branch can do nothing. Without our Creator, creatures can do nothing, and therefore we must put first things first. Before we set out to serve God, we must strive to be in right relationship with God by prayerfully fixing our hearts and souls and minds completely on what is divinely revealed as His will for every one of us: *your sanctification*.

Last Sunday we talked about the cost of discipleship, and considered the vast difference between cheap grace that doesn’t change our lives, and the costly grace of God that flows from the Cross, grace that saves us, trains us, and transforms us completely. Today, as we consider the truth that the will of God for all of His children is this call to holiness, we recognize that, like discipleship, sanctification comes at a cost. Again, we must ask ourselves, are we willing to pay the price?

We may not always recognize it, but the cost of sanctification is found in words we pray to our Father daily. When we pray, “*Thy kingdom come*,” we are acknowledging the truth that sanctification comes at the cost of our kingdom. Our prayer is: Not my kingdom Lord, but Thine. When we pray, “*Thy will be done*,” we are petitioning God to help us in the daily endeavor

of bringing our wayward human will into conformity with His Divine will, and from our limited perspective, this is costly. It isn't easy to stop building our own kingdom, and it's even more difficult to surrender our own will, and our own desires, to God's perfect will for our lives.

Sanctification comes at a cost. All who set their affection "*on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Colossians 3:2), all who strive to be about our *Father's business* (Luke 2:49) instead of our own, will pay a price daily, but as we grow in holiness, as we continue the ongoing, gradual process of drawing nearer and nearer to God, lifting ourselves up, by His grace, to His kingdom, we experience the perfect will of God for all of His children, which is, intimate fellowship with Him - the immeasurable love, unending joy, and abiding peace that is found only in His presence.

St. Paul declared, "*For this is the will of God, even your sanctification,*" and God's will for us actually reveals the depth of His love for us. The word of God instructs Christians "*to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord*" (Hebrews 12:14), and in that instruction we learn that God calls us to live holy lives because He desires intimacy with His people. God's will is for you to *see* Him, not *in a mirror dimly*, but *face to face*. God's desire is for you to know Him, not in part, but fully, even as you are known by Him (1 Corinthians 13:12), and the Father, through His Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit has provided the Way. Our Lord confronted and conquered sin and death and separation from God, and now His gift to us is holiness and life and union with God.

My friends, "*For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.*" God, by the costly grace offered to us through the blood of His Son, would have us be holy. God, by the costly grace that flows from the Cross of Christ, would have us be His.