

## 2.6.2022 Epiphany 5 (Colossians 3:12-17)

Our Epistle this morning is part of a larger narrative in which St. Paul writes about taking off our old self, and clothing ourselves in the new life of Christ. This passage tells us to first “*put off*” (3:8), or “*put to death*” (3:5) everything in our lives that is not of God, to the end that we may “*put on, as the elect of God*” (3:12) all of those holy attributes that are a beautiful reflection of His Divine image. When I read about the process Paul describes, and the fact that we cannot put on what is holy if we have not yet taken off the unholy, I was reminded of a day not too long ago when my wife and I were working on a few backyard projects.

On that day, we noticed a terrible smell coming from the crawlspace vents in the foundation of our home. When I crawled under the house to take a closer look, I found a leaking sewer line, and directly below the leaking pipe was the source of that awful smell, a large area flooded with about 3-4 inches really disgusting water. At this point, I think most people in their right mind would have quickly turned around, picked up the phone, and called a plumber, but this dirty job was one that I knew how to complete, and it didn't take more than a trip to the hardware store and a little time to repair. Yet to fix this pipe, I had to sit right in the middle of this mess, which meant that I ended up covered in filth from head to toe, and when I climbed out of the damp, dark place and stepped into the light, there's a sense in which you could say that I was a picture of the “old self” St. Paul wrote about in this passage.

In that miserable condition, I could do no good. I couldn't sit down to dinner, rest on the sofa, or spend time with my family without all of this grime rubbing off on everything around me. At the time, I also realized there was no masking my condition. This mess couldn't be covered up with a spray of deodorant or a clean shirt. The only solution to this problem was a complete overhaul. I'd have to *put off*, or entirely rid myself of all that I'd become before I could *put on* any good thing, and that is exactly what St. Paul calls us to do this morning.

In this passage Paul speaks in terms of taking off and putting on clothes, he writes, “*But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice,*

*blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him*” (3:8-10). Paul shows us here that there is an order to this process. We must first “*put off*” who we once were, if we are to “*put on*” the image of God. By the grace of God, we must “*put to death*” our old self, often on a daily basis, if we are to be “*a new creation*” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This process that Paul describes of taking off the old and putting on the new is at the heart of what it means to be an authentic Christian. God the Father, through His Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit has reached down and lifted us out of the dark place where we once were, and now, standing in the light of His Son (John 1:5), we are able to recognize the characteristics of the old life, the self-centered, praise-loving, prideful flesh in every one of us. Through the Objective Truth that Christ shines into our lives we recognize, and in His strength reject, who we once were. As St. Paul stated, we “*put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature*” (3:5 NIV), or as he wrote in his letter to the Romans, we “*consider yourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 6:11).

We are *alive to God in Christ Jesus*, and therefore St. Paul exhorts us to clothe ourselves in Christ’s attributes, telling us to “*Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive*” (3:12-13). As we consider clothing ourselves in these Christ-like attributes, it’s important to recognize that they’re all social qualities. Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and forgiveness are all qualities that unite us to one another, and the intimacy that we are meant to share with one another as members of one body (Romans 12:3-8), the Body of Christ, is the reason why St. Paul lists one virtue “*above all*” the others. He writes, “*And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony*” (3:14).

As we continually clothe ourselves in Christ, especially in His Divine, self-sacrificial love, those around us will notice a change. With each passing

day we will act more and more like our Lord, laying down our lives as a living sacrifice out of love for God and for our neighbor, but what other people see happening on the outside is really an ongoing, miraculous transformation that's taking place on the inside. St. Paul speaks of this inner transformation when he directs us to "*let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...*" (3:15).

The peace of Christ which rules the Christian heart is the blessed assurance that through faith in our Lord we have peace with God, and the Comfortable Words we hear every time we celebrate Holy Communion are a beautiful expression of such peace. The peace of Christ is found in our Lord's invitation, "*Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you*" (Matthew 11:28). The peace of Christ is given to us by the Father, who gave His Son, "*to the end that all that believe in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). The peace of Christ is ours because "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*" (1 Timothy 1:15). The peace of Christ is the truth that *we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*, the One, True God who walks on the waves of the sea as if it's dry land, the Creator of Heaven and Earth who governs all things visible and invisible by the Word of His power. He is our Advocate, *He is the Propitiation for our sins* (1 John 2:1-2), He, who is seated at the right hand of God, is the One who restores our fellowship with God. Through our Savior Christ we have peace with God, and it is His peace that rules in our heart.

St. Paul also speaks of the miraculous transformation that has happened within us, and continues to take place within us, when he exhorts us to "*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...*" (3:16). The *word of Christ* that Paul speaks of here is Holy Scripture, and more specifically, the message of the Gospel. He wants us to understand that by faith the Gospel of our Lord must make its home in our soul, and I can't help but see a parallel between the Gospel, the *word of Christ* dwelling in you richly, and the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14). Our Savior Christ, who dwelt among us, now dwells in us, and it is His Gospel, His doctrine, His power that is the Source of the inward change that flows out from our heart and soul and into the world like a river of *living water* (John 7:38).

With His peace ruling in our hearts, and His Gospel dwelling in our soul, our

Lord continually clothes us in His compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and above all these... Love. Love for God, love for one another, and love for the world He gave the life of His Son to save. By the grace of God, may we "*put to death*" everything in our lives that is not of God, to the end that we may clothe ourselves in all of those holy attributes that reflect His Divine image, and may we act, and speak, and live, and love differently, because we're not just wearing Christ on the outside, we're filled with Christ on the inside.