

Twentieth Sunday After Trinity

From the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”

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

As many of you know, I recently retired after working in law enforcement for 27 years. I do think it is fair to say that we live in dangerous, often even downright evil, times. We live in a world where we are constantly under attack from all kinds of enemies, who look to assault us physically, intellectually, and spiritually. Every day our news is filled with accounts of killings, home invasion robberies and other violent crimes. Our values are assaulted from within and without, and if we protest, we are dismissed or attacked because we don't believe what others do. Our faith is ridiculed, our standards belittled, and from time to time we even face physical threats or intimidation because of our beliefs.

It has always been this way, and in today's Second Lesson we read The Apostle Paul's warning to the church at Ephesus regarding the very same thing. To counter the world's influence, Paul counseled,

“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.”

The word circumspect, from the Latin *circumspicio* means to look about on all sides and to be wary and cautious in order to avoid danger and identify enemies as they approach. This kind of caution was certainly called for on the part of the early Church, which was under attack from the Jews as well as the Romans. It is equally apt advice for us today.

St. Paul suggests that the way to achieve this level of cautious attention is to remain focused on God and to continue to attempt to attain perfection in all things.

We should be careful about our own conduct, and by having our lives reflect the importance of God's rule for us, be the examples for change in others.

Our own experiences and journey in life must be the example. Our lives must show forth the rules of life which God has given us. We cannot simply profess the faith, but we must live it. If we profess to believe but then act as the world acts, or the easy and softer path, we achieve nothing but to draw contempt. If, however, we "walk the walk" and "talk the talk" , we can be examples before the world.

Proverbs 13:20 "He that walketh with wise *men* shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." A wise man "*feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident,*"

St. Paul echoes this very caution, urging the Church at Ephesus, and to all of us reading today, to avoid evil rather than taking part in it. We should fear evil, because it endangers not only our mortal lives, but our immortal ones as well. Dabbling in sin is the first step to being immersed in it and dabbling is easy for all of us to do. It is important to remember that Sin separates us from God.

Being immersed in sin is the ultimate act of the fool, for in so doing he throws away eternity for the benefit of the pleasure of the fleeting moment. When we instead "*redeem the time*", we use whatever time and other resources we have to spend them in the most productive ways and in ways that glorifies God. Those ends are the praise and worship of God, the love and encouragement of others to the faith and the rejection of sin.

Our Lord declares His estimation of this kind of wisdom:

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock."

St. Paul offers as his reason for this “*because the days are evil.*” Certainly, the times during which Paul penned these lines were evil. Christians were in fear of their very lives every hour. But today’s dangers are every bit as real and as dangerous as those faced by the early Christians.

In America today, in our own homes and communities, we find attacks against our faith everywhere. People of faith are told not to display crosses and Christmas arrangements, asked not to wear clothing or articles that proclaim their faith, nor to pray in public places. Instead, we are told we should erect a wall between our public lives and our faith as it might “offend” someone who does not believe the way we do. That is what the proponents of the anti-faith world truly seek. They view faith as some kind of embarrassing or self-indulgent display that should be hidden from all sight.

As a result, communities are ordered to cease to sponsor faith-based events that are open to everyone, to tear down memorials, and to ban some kinds of speech because of their religious content. People who believe in God are regularly ridiculed by those in elected office and the media. People will question or dismiss our definition of being a Christian if it doesn’t meet their personal agenda.

These are dangerous times indeed. When we are encouraged or ordered to disobey our Lord, we must make a choice as to whether to obey man’s laws or God’s.

Paul counsels “*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is*”;

The will of the Lord is that we be His children, fit in every way to be with Him. We must try to be holy and pure and devoted to Him in all things.

In order to achieve that end, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit then will fill our lives with His joy, His strength, His grace and courage to allow us to live our lives as a celebration of the love of God.

Paul goes on to caution against certain specific kinds of excess and dangerous living:

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit”, he demands.

Those who drink to excess or do anything in excess are sure to have some short-term euphoria, but not the sort of joy God would have us experience. We should sing songs not of drunken revelry, but instead of praise.

We should interact positively with each other, not through the fog of drugs or alcohol, but through the devotion to the Body of Christ of which we are part. Our conversation should not be the drunken patter of the bar, but the uplifting spiritual words of the Lord.

Paul says we should spend our time *“speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

When we concentrate on God and His Word, and on sharing that Word and its effect in our lives, then we have reason for the joy that prompts us to sing songs to God. This is not the substance fueled joy of the drunkard, but the spiritual joy of the faithful person.

It is one of the ways that we *“give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Thanksgiving is our natural response to our Lord. We have so much to be thankful for, and it is proper and normal that we should want to give Him thanks for the many gifts and benefits He has showered on us.

We are all truly blessed.

My friends, We do indeed live in dangerous, evil times but we have the greatest defender there could ever be always standing by us to help us, to defend us, and to comfort us. If we remain faithful to Him and His will, the very worst those dangers and evils can threaten is to harm us here on Earth.

They cannot prevent us from achieving eternal life with God.

The Lord be with you, Let us pray.

Eternal God,

You more than we know the dangers that lurk in our world. But it is through Your victory over evil and the grace that we can remain assured of the final victory. Help us to remain always faithful to You and Your will, to resist evil in the world and to circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, for we know it is only by Your will and Your help that we can resist the evil in the world. Stand with us when we are weak and help us when we falter.

This we ask in the blessed name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.