

Sexagesima

Psalms: 71

¹ In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion.

² Deliver me in thy righteousness and cause me to escape: incline thine ear unto me and save me.

³ Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress.

⁴ Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.

⁵ For thou art my hope, O Lord God: thou art my trust from my youth.

⁶ By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee.

⁷ I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge.

⁸ Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day.

⁹ Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.

¹⁰ For mine enemies speak against me; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together,

¹¹ Saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him.

¹² O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help.

¹³ Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt.

¹⁴ But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.

¹⁵ My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof.

¹⁶ I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.

¹⁷ O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.

¹⁸ Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.

¹⁹ Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto thee!

²⁰ Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

²¹ Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.

²² I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel.

²³ My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed.

²⁴ My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.

First Lesson: Isaiah 50:4-10

⁴ The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

⁵ The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.

⁶ I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

⁷ For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

⁸ He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me.

⁹ Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

¹⁰ Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 12:1-12

¹² It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

² I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

³ And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

⁴ How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

⁵ Of such a one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

⁶ For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

⁹ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

¹¹ I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

¹² Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

Introduction

Last week, Fr. Chris talked about how our world has become a series of things we want to strive for, of our efforts to gain and store accomplishments on this earth, perhaps in an effort to earn our way into heaven through our good works. From an earthly perspective we do indeed live in a world that measures the value of a person based on these accomplishments. But as we all know, life is not just about good things, and our fallen nature predisposes us to sinful interactions and the consequences of them.

In the book of Job, Satan states that Job is worshipping God because of all that God has done for Him, not purely because He's God. Satan's allegation is that

no one worships God out of a pure motive, but only to receive good gifts from God. Job's endurance and final restoration reveal that righteous suffering can yield deeper understanding. Trials in life often refine character and highlight spiritual realities. Holy Scripture affirms that God disciplines those He loves (Heb. 12:6) and that trials prepare believers for eternal purposes (James 1:2-4).

In previous sermons, I have talked about Viktor Frankl, a brilliant psychiatrist and doctor from Vienna who was stripped of everything and put into a Nazi concentration camp. During his later writings of this experience, we found someone who gave a profound exploration of the human condition. He discovered that many people who had faith and a desire to help others survived. He quoted Nietzsche when he claimed, "He who has a why to live for, can bear almost any how." Others I have referenced in my sermons included Corrie Ten Boom, Harriet Tubman, Saint Maximilian Kolbe and Desmond Doss. All of these people suffered unimaginable hardships, atrocities and suffering during their lives, yet stayed focused on the promises of God and maintaining unshakable faith. It was their faith in God, and a perseverance born of a steadfast belief that God would not abandon them. As all of these people have seen, and as we all can recognize, life is not always fair and positive, and we can often find ourselves in trying, or even hopeless, circumstances. It might seem to us, as we navigate these times, that we are being punished or getting what we deserve in this life. But as Fr. Chris

highlighted last week, the Cross, and our Lord on it, stand as evidence that we do not get the wage we deserve. We deserve hell, but by the grace of Christ we can receive heaven. In our second reading for today, the Apostle Paul also reflects on his life and his many trials, sufferings, and how despite all of it, God's grace is sufficient for us to endure.

Body

Let us start by reading again the collect for today

The Collect for Sexagesima

*O Lord God, who seeest that we put not our trust in anything that we do;
Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

St. Paul has spent the latter part of his life in the service of the Gospel and through this service he was beaten, shipwrecked, and imprisoned. Yet it is not his heroic endurance he wishes to discuss in his letter to the Corinthians, but a persistent, nagging thing he refers to as a "thorn."

"There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." (v.7) He has pleaded with God for its removal, but instead of an act of deliverance, he receives a divine verdict: "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*"

In our Anglican tradition, we recognize that grace is not merely a "spiritual booster" or positive thought to help us get through a distressing day. It is the very presence of God in our poverty and in our suffering. When God says His grace is "sufficient," He is reminding us that we need nothing more than Him. In life we often seek a "grace" that removes the problem; but God offers a grace that sustains us *within* it.

The second half of the divine promise is even more startling: "*for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*" The word perfect here implies a completion or a reaching of its full potential. An example might be to think of the beauty of a stained-glass window; its colors are only truly "perfected" when the light shines through it. On its own, in the dark, it is dull and does not shine. Our human strength is like that dark glass; it often obscures God's glory by drawing attention to itself. It is only when our self-reliance is broken, when the glass is transparent in its fragility, that the light of Christ's strength can truly be seen.

Paul's response to this is a radical shift in perspective. He says he will "*glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*" (v.9)

The Greek word for "rest upon" (*episkenoō*) literally means "to spread a tent" or "to tabernacle." Paul is using the language of the Old Testament, the glory

that rested upon the Tabernacle in the wilderness. He is suggesting that our weaknesses are the very place where God chooses to pitch His tent.

For us as Anglicans, this resonates deeply with our understanding of the Sacraments. We bring the simplest of elements, common bread and ordinary wine, which in their "weakness" become the "tabernacle" of Christ's real presence. When we kneel at the altar rail, we do not come as champions; we come as the infirm, the imperfect, the tired, and the broken. It is precisely there, in our humble kneeling, that the power of Christ rests upon us most fully.

As the Apostle Paul suggested, how do we "glory" in our infirmities? This is not a morbid celebration of pain or a call for attention, but a refusal to be ashamed of our need for God. In the Anglican life, we understand the "thorn" not as a sign of God's abandonment, but as a site of His deepest work. It is the "broken and contrite heart" that is mentioned Psalm 51:7, in our Penitential office on Ash Wednesday, and in the opening Morning Prayer sentences for Lent, that God does not despise. Our limitations are not obstacles to grace; they are the very channels through which grace flows. To glory in our infirmity is to say: "I am not enough, but God is." It is to find peace in the fact that our usefulness to the Kingdom does not depend on our health, our wealth, or our intellect, but on our availability to the Holy Spirit. It is the "broken and contrite heart" that becomes the most effective instrument for the Gospel.

Conclusion

As you leave church today, look at your "thorns" with new eyes and a new perspective. Do not see them as failures or as signs of God's displeasure. See them as the holy ground where Christ has chosen to pitch His tent.

When you feel the weight of your limitations, hear the voice of your Savior speaking to you as He spoke to Paul: "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*" In your weakness, His strength is finding its perfection. In your infirmity, His power is finding its home. As we go forth this week, carry your "thorns" not as burdens of shame, but as reminders of your need for the Savior. Do not be discouraged by your limitations or obstacles. For when you reach the end of your own strength, you find the beginning of His.

Trust in the promise given to Paul, which is given also to you: His grace is enough. It is more than enough. It is a grace we cannot earn, but one that is freely given to us through His sacrifice on the Cross. Open your heart to receive it and trust in God knowing His grace is indeed sufficient for thee.

To the only wise God, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, now and forever. Amen.