

Pentecost IX

Beloved, at first hearing today's readings present us with a very sober image of God's divine justice. St. Paul tells the early Church at Corinth about some severe punishments visited upon the Israelites, His chosen People and our forefathers in faith, for reason of their infidelity to Him and His Covenant. But Paul hastens to add that these punishments are recorded in the OT for our correction, instruction and formation as we pursue our own path towards salvation. Above all Paul warns us against *pride*: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."

The admonition to fidelity is taken up again in today's Gospel reading: Our Lord weeps over Jerusalem because of her blindness in not recognizing the salvation which had come unto her: He Who is the Son of God and Daystar from on High as prophesied by old Zachariah at the birth of John the Baptist, was rejected by the very people to whom He had been promised and sent. Looking upon Jerusalem, Our Lord wept and uttered one of His remarkable prophesies: the city would be utterly destroyed – not a stone of it would be left upon stone, and this would be God's punishment for its refusal to receive its long awaited Messiah.

We would do well to recall that within that very generation, by command of the Romans Vespasian and Titus the imperial armies laid siege to Jerusalem, totally destroying it and the great Temple, once center to the Jewish Covenant and national identity. The city itself was razed to the ground and the sacred treasures of the Temple were carried off as spoils of war. In Rome to this day in the ruins of the ancient Forum one can see the triumphal arch built 2,000 years ago as a pagan commemoration of that military feat over Jerusalem. Sculpted on the inside of the arch are scenes of the sacking of the Temple; the one on the right side shows the carrying off of the great multi branched candle stick, the details for which are so minutely laid down in the ritual prescriptions of the Pentateuch.

Thus it is that the all-seeing eye of divine providence carries forth its plan for our salvation and leaves us signs along the way – often times in unexpected places – urging us along our path to heaven.

So we need to bear in mind that the terrible punishments Paul refers to as being visited upon the Israelites came upon them, not by God's cruelty, but because of their infidelity to conditions of a Covenant they freely engaged themselves to with Him. The divine vocation which they had received in Abraham's call – the type and prefigurement of the eternal covenant made with the Catholic Church in Christ and received by us in Baptism – was not, and is not, an *assurance* of salvation, but rather a privilege and promise by which we can pursue it with God's help.

Saint Paul urges us therefore, to reflect on these lessons from the history of our ancestors so as to offer us this important consolation: *God is always faithful*. He does not, therefore, allow us to be tried beyond what we are able; He sends commensurate means by which we may overcome the temptations to sin we may suffer. This help comes through divine grace, and is always given in measure sufficient for our salvation.

Today's Gospel is a beacon warning us in the face of our temptations and sin: *If you had only known, and in this time, the things that are done unto your peace...*

True peace, my Beloved, that *peace which passes all human understanding*, that peace promised to us by Our Lord, lies in the welcome a person gives to God: in his heart, and in his life. And his *unhappiness* – his destruction both here in time and later in eternity – arises from a person's refusal of God by resisting His divine message and teachings, or by its rejection after once having accepted it.

By Baptism we have been born again in Christ and our bodies made living temples of the Holy Trinity. But through sin – come unto us in pride and presumption – this temple, called to be given over to prayer and praise of God, we very often turn into that den of

thieves our Lord refers to and is capable of the sins cataloged by Paul in today's epistle and many others besides.

Jerusalem was once destroyed by King Nebuchonozor because the Jews refused the call to repentance by Jeremiah. God Himself called Sodom and Gomorrah to repentance and promised to spare them if ten just men could be found. In the Book of Jonas Nineveh was spared because it donned sackcloth and did penance. *God is faithful:* and so it is that He desires not our ruin but our salvation. In Christ, and through the Church, He has come to us, therefore, with the nourishing milk of sound doctrine and vivifying waters of grace. If we would but take stock of our dependence upon Him, and fix in Him our hearts as in our permanent refuge, He would lead us towards that heavenly Jerusalem for which we have been created. Do we do this?

Dear People of God: be faithful to the Church and her teachings. Seek not to change what is immutable – for true peace and freedom comes our faithful inherence to God's will, and the living out of all that that implies in the fabric of our daily lives.

"Lord," we shall soon ask in today's Post Communion Prayer, "may our participation in your Sacrament both purify us from sin and unite us with one another." Let us offer this and *all* our prayers with sincerity; let us renew our desire to follow God's laws by an even closer fidelity to Him and increased charity towards our neighbor. And may the Virgin Mother of Our Redeemer, who set for us a perfect example of fidelity to God, by her prayers and protection, obtain for us that eternal joy which her Son came into this world to make possible: the vision of God and the midst of His saints, and that, even unto the ages of ages.