

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Beloved in Christ,

Two facts determine the growth of the kingdom of God within us: the grace of God, and the attitude which we take towards the working of that grace. In today's epistle reading St. Paul says, "There are diversities of graces, but the same Spirit; and there are diversities of ministries, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but the same God, who worketh all in all. . . . To one indeed, by the Spirit, is given the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge . . . ; to another the grace of healing in one Spirit... But all these things one and the same Spirit worketh, dividing to every one according as He will." To this all-powerful working of grace entirely independent of man corresponds, on the part of man, a humble recognition of his utter helplessness, for St. Paul adds, "No man can say: The Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Spirit". The instruction within this Sunday's liturgical celebration teaches us that wherever man's weakness and inability to fulfill by himself the demands of the supernatural life are acknowledged, there alone is possible the development of the life of grace in man.

For this reason, acknowledging the insufficiency of our own human and natural faculties, as true believing Christians we take ourselves to Holy Mass on this 10th Sunday after Pentecost. Here, in the Gospel reading we encounter a type or figure of the religious man who is self-deceived: A Pharisee stands with proud composure and has the arrogance to pray, "O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men." He meditates upon what he judges to be his self-worth, all too ready to assert of his apparent moral superiority over others. His proud prayer, however, becomes his undoing: "I say to you, this man [the publican] went down to his house justified rather than the other [Pharisee]; because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." God forbid that the Pharisee should ever be, in fact, a figure of you or me.

Beloved, if we recognize before God our frailty, our proneness to sin, our tendency to prefer self to Him, self to others, self to just about anything other than money and other forms of worldly gain – if we confess this real moral failure to Him while also acknowledging the power of His grace as true Christians must do, the humble and repentant expressions of the publican – hardly daring to lift up his eyes to heaven – will be that figure towards which we should always aspire. Our prayer, then, will not be a rehearsal to Him of our marvels in patience, or long suffering the litany of complaints we carefully harbor against our neighbor, but rather a sincere *mea culpa*: a penitent and sincere, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." Acknowledging our unworthiness and weakness, we are bidden by Christ Himself to return to Him, with trust, beseeching Him as one dependent upon His forgiveness and generous mercy. It is this Publican who should be *our* model in today's Gospel, and it is in that vein that we make the Church's prayer our own: for today's opening collect begs: "O God, who dost manifest Thy almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity; in-crease Thy mercy towards us."

Thus my beloved by faithfully responding to the Word of God and the Sacraments of faith we put into act our belief in the working of divine grace in our souls. Grace – the free gift – of God's mercy. All we need to do to bring this to bear on the full fabric of our daily lives is to recognize this irreducible necessity of the God life within our hearts while beseeching Christ at all times to help us live according to His divine will. This has ever been, and will ever remain, the program of true Christian faith by which Christ slowly forms us to receive us to Himself in Glory.