

Saint Thomas' of the Air Church
Epiphany II
January 17, 2021
rmcneely+

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us;
we should exercise them

Today's Epistle picks up where last week's Epistle ended. Paul today exhorts us in the way a Christian must live life.

It is one of those long lists that we get from Paul
But this one is different
Rather than tell us what not to do
Paul very thoughtfully outlines
What we are to do with the Gifts
that God has given each of us

The Church has paired Paul's advice with St Mark's Gospel account of the Baptism of our Lord. Interesting.

Jesus receded into obscurity after last week's story of His
Three days with the elders of the temple in Jerusalem

18 years go by, but now Jesus bursts forth
Begins His three year ministry
His three year journey to the Cross.
In this mysterious scene with John in the river Jordan.

The Baptist fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi
Recites Isaiah
and is Elijah returned from heaven

John has foretold the Messiah, the Anointed One
A messenger
A voice of one crying in the wilderness
And has prepared a highway for our God

All is fulfilled.

The Epiphany of Jesus, the Christ begins, right here
In the river Jordan.

As Jesus, manifests Himself to the crowds thronging
The Baptist.

God proclaims to Jesus for all to hear:

“Thou art my son in whom I am well pleased.”

Each year, we too begin the Epiphany of Our Lord
Right here
In this little miracle church
Of God’s love.

With our renewed life,
the Church must point us to the way
of that renewed life.

And so in 10 verses of his letter to the Romans, St Paul provides
The keys to how we are to live that new life.
The advice we will need to serve God in this life.

Rather than the Jewish sacrifice of the lives of animals
Of things outside of ourselves
Ours is an inward Sacrifice of ourselves,
No longer a dead sacrifice
A living sacrifice

Paul begins with a sobering thought;

Know it or not

Like it or not

We each are given gifts from God

All gifts are different

As each of us is different

And no one gift is better than another

And no gift makes one of us more favored than another.

Possession of a gift is not an index to quality of faith

Rather it is a challenge of faithful use.

Paul notes, since we all have gifts
 Differing according to the grace given us
 We must exercise them to the mutual benefit
 of the Body of Christ in which we live
 in the church which God has given us.

He lists examples of the gifts of God
 Prophecy, Teaching, ministry, giving, leadership, mercy
 With each gift he qualifies how we are to use it
 With simplicity, that is: all your heart
 Diligence
 Cheerfulness.

Paul then turns to a discussion of the Law of life in Christ
 In a fashion reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount
 That radical new way of life with Christ

He says Christian love must be without dissimulation
 Must be similar, without difference one person to another.
 Without hypocrisy.

Abhor evil and cleave to that which is good.
 Sounds trite and over used to our 21st century ears
 But is that because of the fundamental truth of those words?

He says Christian love is to prefer the needs of others before our
 own needs.

Each of us of the Body, in Brotherly love,
 preferring one another over ourselves.
 We become interdependent upon each other
 With each of us counting the other
 as better than ourselves.

Not slothful in business
 Never lazy or idle in our life in Christ

We are to be fervent in spirit
 Burning with the love of God
 Aglow with the Holy Spirit alive in our works
 As we do the will of God in our lives.

Rejoicing in Hope
 The certain expectancy of life hereafter
 Patient in tribulation
 Knowing that everlasting life is before us.
 All the while persevering in prayer.

We must contribute to the necessities of the people of God
 The saints of this world
 The people who have separated themselves
 And dedicated themselves to God
 Just as you have done this day.

Can you hear the echoes of the Sermon on the Mount in this one:
 Paul admonishes that we must bless those that persecute us
 Another interpretation demands that we bless all persecutors
 And curse them not.
 Bless them that curse you
 And pray for them, which despitefully use you.

Paul does not describe a stoic life
 Remote from the emotions of life
 He tells us to delve into life
 rejoice with them that rejoice
 And to weep with them that weep.

We are to be of one mind
 One toward another.
 Paul is not here saying that we must all agree
 Or see everything eye to eye
 This is different.

Paul is saying be of the same mind.
 Let the mind be in us
 That is also in Christ Jesus
 Have the same regard for one another.
 The same respect
 The same love that Christ has for us.

Finally Paul instructs that we must not
 Show pride in ourselves and disdain for others
 Be not arrogant or supercilious
 Or as in Proverbs: Be not wise in our own conceits

We are to condescend (not in the 21st century meaning), but
 “Con” meaning “with” and “descend” meaning “down”
 Or to descend with others
 Of lower estate, manner or place
 To serve the needs of people with less than ourselves.
 Remember Jesus, who spent time with publicans and sinners

The life Paul describes is no simple existence.
 The Christian life is not easy
 It is demanding
 And arduous

It is nothing we can achieve on our own.

So on this day in which the Church focuses us on the beginning of
 Our Lord’s ministry
 This mysterious beginning:
 This day of His Baptism
 By John, who baptized only with water
 The washing away of sin from a sinless man
 The descent of the Holy Spirit upon a man
 Who Himself embodied the Holy Spirit

So on this day we contemplate our new life in the Christ
Our own baptism and the new life we were given
We contemplate how to live the life
That Paul outlines in 10 short verses.
How to take his ancient outline
And apply it to life in the 21st Century.

After two thousand years of the development of mankind
All the progress
All the massive changes in every facet of mankind
Is it any easier to live a Christian life?
Is it any more difficult for us than it was for them?

You know, every week we come to Communion with God
Every week is, in a sense, a new beginning
A new start to try to come closer
to live the life with the gifts He gave us.
Every Communion is an opportunity
For the eternal transfixed in time.
For time spent with Him.
Time to seek His help
His guidance
To seek the strength we need to serve Him.
Every communion is a time for nourishing our souls
With forgiveness
With fortification
With blessing

Let us, when we come together in Communion
In prayer
In fellowship
Contemplate the life Paul has outlined for us
Let us begin that life
Right here in the protective walls of His church

And let that life grow in us
And spread to the rest of our lives
Our lives beyond these walls.

Because as Paul says:

Having then gifts
differing according to the grace
that is given to us;

we should exercise them