

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
 February 2, 2025
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For the last 3 weeks,

The Church has directed our attention to St Paul's
 Epistle to the Romans.

In fact, to chapter 12 and today the first section of Chapter 13
 --28 verses in all.

Paul's subject in this part of Romans is the way Christians are to
 lead their lives.

Something of a new idea for First Century Christians
 Living in Rome at the time.

But an important subject for us
 despite all these thousands of miles
 And centuries later.

What does it mean to be a Christian?
 What does it mean to lead a Christian life?

It is a subject that is appropriate to consider during Epiphany

When we consider the manifestation of Christ to the world,
 Because the manner in which we live our lives
 Reflects or manifests the life of Christ.

And if we display a Christian life, live a Christian life
 It is a beacon for all to see;
 Pointing the way to Christianity and to Jesus Himself.

Paul was in Corinth when he wrote his Epistle to the Romans.

Nero was Emperor of the Roman Empire.

His Empire was in trouble.

There were revolts in the outlying provinces
 In almost every quadrant:

Britain, Armenia, Spain and France.

Things at home were not much better.

His spending drove the Empire to near ruin.
 His depraved life style was notorious
 He persecuted the fledgling Christian Church
 And tortured all its members that he could find.

So, imagine yourself in first century Rome
 And a member of the first Christian Church.
 You were hunted by a madman and his army.
 Membership in the church of Jesus was a crime.
 Services were held clandestinely.
 With fear of discovery.

And then comes this letter from Paul.
 A letter explaining to them how to live their lives
 In a manner that was consistent
 with the new Christian values.

So here we go:
 Paul begins not with the outer world; but within.
 With our bodies.
 He says to think of our bodies as a living sacrifice to God.
 Holy and acceptable to God,
 As our reasonable service to God.
 It is the end of the substitutionary sacrifices
 that the Jews made in the temple under to first covenant.
 The death of innocent animals.
 Ours is to be a living sacrifice of ourselves in the service of God.

Paul writes of how Christians are to relate to the world around
 them:
 Do not conform to the morality and practices of their world.
 Do not conform to the age in which you live.
 The age that the Romans lived in makes ours look tame.

Were Paul standing here he might tell us:

Do not follow the words and example of politicians
Actors, singers, entertainers.
Or other self-appointed celebrities.

Do not be followers of the social customs and suggestions
Of your social media or other teenage phenomenon.

Instead, Paul says:

be transformed by the renewal of your mind

That you may discern by a new standard:

what is good and pleasing to God.

what is the good, acceptable and perfect
will of God.

Paul would say,

Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to.

But examine yourself seriously, carefully, objectively
with moderation and self-restraint.

According to the faith that God has instilled in you.

For we are many and all members of one Body

And each of us has not the same office.

We are one body in Christ, His church

And everyone members of one another.

Paul will expound on this thought in other Epistles (1 Corinthians).

However, the Romans must know and so Paul tells them

Each is an organ of the body

Serving another function to the benefit of the Body.

When one of us is harmed, the body is diminished.

When one of us triumphs, the body flourishes.

We weep together and we rejoice together.

Jesus is in you and you in Him.

I am in you and you in me.

You in each other.

And together we serve the Body; the Church
Serving the will of God in our lives.

Paul tells us about the Gifts of God.

By His grace, God has given each of us gifts.

A gift that can be used for the benefit of the Church.

A gift that is essential to the wellbeing of the Body.

Everyone has a gift of God.

He lists some of them and the qualifier as their use:

If the gift is teaching, let us teach.

If the gift is leading, do it with diligence

If the gift is giving, do it with generosity.

If the gift is mercy, do it with cheerfulness.

Paul counsels that we are to exercise the Gifts of God

Responsibly.

Diligently.

Prayerfully.

With patience.

He writes that a gift is not an instrument of self-aggrandizement.

A gift is not an index to the quality of your faith.

Rather, a gift is a challenge of faithful use.

Paul turns again to the external;

The proper relationship we must have with each other

And with mankind.

How we are to treat each other in this Christian Life.

He tells the Roman Church to be affectioned one to another.

Paul introduces “agape”; Christian love

In the interactions that we have with mankind,

We are to act out of Christian Love,

The motivation of our interactions
 must be one of Christian Charity, brother love.
 Performed out of kindness,
 Out of the spirit of wishing the other person well.

We are to serve the Lord:
 To rejoice in the expectancy of everlasting life
 with God in heaven.

In our human interactions Paul says we are to
 Abhor that which is evil
 And cleave to that which is good.
 Recompense no evil for evil.
 Be not overcome of evil,
 But overcome evil with good.

There is a test for us:
 In our interactions with each other;
 Abhor the evil and stick unwaveringly to the good.

We are to distribute to the necessity of the saints,
 The members of the Church
 And all people who dedicate themselves to God.
 We are to be hospitable to those in need.

Paul writes that we are to live peaceable as much as we can
 and where all possible
 with all mankind.

In an echo of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount
 Paul admonishes us that if our enemy is hungry
 We must feed him
 If he thirsts, give him drink
 To bless them that persecute you.

Paul turns to the thorny issue of the way Christians should
 Relate to the Roman State.

Paul was a Roman citizen by virtue of his parentage
 And was seemingly proud of it.

But he is writing to the Roman Christians
 who were living under a depraved Emperor Nero
 whom some modern historians believe
 was mentally ill.
 Even psychotic.

Nevertheless, Paul schools that Roman rulers were to be obeyed
 Because their power was from God.

He wrote that anyone who resisted the ordinances of the State
 Resisted the ordinances of God.

However, he gave them another and different standard by which to
 behave:

He said; if you wish to have no fear of authority;
 Do that which is good.

And you will receive approval for it.

But if you do that which is evil

Be afraid

because the ruler does not bear a sword for nothing.

He told them it was necessary to be subject to authority
 not only because of the wrath

But also because of the conscience.

Consider the Roman edicts, but consult your conscience
 And to that which is good.

He counseled to pay the taxes and the tolls
 because the authorities are ministers of God.
 give respect to whom respect is due
 and honor to whom honor is due.

A difficult task in the best of times,
But for the Roman Christians of the first century
It must have been baffling.

This has been a whirlwind summary of the main points
of the Epistles of the last four weeks of Epiphany.

An impracticably long list of moral doctrine and life goals
To digest in a 10 minute sermon.

But if any of it caught your attention
If any of Paul's thoughts
Gave you pause,
I suggest you
Go back to the Epistle to the Romans chapters 12 and 13
Go back to your prayer books for the Epiphany Epistles
And spend some time with them.

You might ask yourself how you measure up
And where you might benefit
from some amendment to your life.

No one ever promised that living this Christian life would be easy
Only that the reward of it is Heaven itself.

