

## *Homily for October 8, 2020*

### *Resting in His grace*

Many people think “I will never be a saint, because, well, I’m just not good enough”. But here is the thing with the saints. They are saints not because they thought they were good enough, but rather because they knew that God is good enough! Remember Peter said to Jesus, “Lord go away from me for I am a sinful man”. St Paul said of himself, “I am the foremost of sinners”. But in Jesus both these men saw the one who is true and pure goodness and the one whose life embodies infinite mercy. The saints are people who like a stain glass window allow for the light of Jesus to shine through them and thereby the glass of their lives radiates with the light of Christ. Without Christ the glass’ beauty is shrouded in darkness.

One of the Church’s celebrated saints is Augustine. In 397 he wrote his spiritual autobiography, entitled the Confessions. In this book he pours forth his soul as he admits Jesus superlative goodness extended to a sinner in need of redemption and transformation, One person who read the Confession reacted to it very negatively. He believed that once baptized we are completely saved and we then just have to exercise our wills. Pelagius’ motto was something like “God helps those who help themselves”. Whereas Augustine’s motto was “God helps those who can help themselves”. He understood that while in baptism we truly are forgiven and cleansed of original sin the newly baptized is just beginning a long and precarious convalescence in the “inn” of the Church. The process will only be completed in that final and total healing which is the resurrection of the dead.

What the saint desires therefore is to grow in holiness as we ask, seek and knock on the door of grace. You will remember in the parable the pestering neighbour has no bread but goes to one of whom he knows has an adequate supply. Bread is a staple of life and is representative in the parable of the staple of the Christian life, which is the grace-filled love God made visible to us in Jesus. In the parable Jesus is promising us that the person who desires to grow in holiness so that the light of Jesus will shine through his or her life is to first of all ask. “Jesus please help me to grow in knowing more fully your love for me”. He or she is then to seek God through an intentional life of deepening prayer, reading of the scriptures and actively participating in the sacraments of the Church. Thereby the person will discover within the inn of the Church that community where by knocking on the door they gain admittance into the fellowship of people who are discovering that God helps those who can’t help themselves.

But here is the cautionary warning. We all have a tendency to think that holiness is about my needing to try harder. I’ve got to be a better person, and while it is true that a holy life will enable us to grow in become better people, this is the fruit of grace, not the criteria for receiving grace. This was the problem in the Galatian Church. There were leaders in that community who like Pelagius were saying, “Try harder, because remember Christ helps those who help themselves”. No says Paul, this is a lie. Look to the Cross and pray Jesus, please help me because left to myself I cannot live as you want me to and as I want me to live.

Paul wants us to remember what all the saints discovered that sancty does not start with our keeping of God's rules but with allowing the grace of Jesus to rule our lives. This is why twice Paul has these words in five verses:

***Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?***<sup>1</sup>

***Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?***<sup>2</sup>

It is a deepening awareness of the goodness and forgiveness of Jesus not our works that make us saints. As we persevere in trusting him and asking for his aid in sanctifying our lives.

Persistence is needed because spiritual freedom is something that is progressively achieved. Augustine, as one biographer points out, will "always speak of freedom in comparatives, of 'greater freedom,' 'fuller freedom,' 'perfect freedom.'" The Christian life, for Augustine, is a lifelong process of the recovery of freedom and of healing and transformation of the will that is initiated by grace, sustained by grace, and brought to completion by grace.

May we persevere and rest in Jesus' grace today.

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Ga 3:2). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Ga 3:5). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.