

## Feast of St. Lawrence

August 10, 2016

St Paul speaks in today's Epistle about the fecundity of the Gospel. Fecundity is from the Latin for "fruitful". Just as the land that is rightly tended will produce fruitfully so too with those whose lives are rooted in the soil of grace.

The Apostle tells us that the soil of a healthy fruitful Christian is characterized by cheerfulness and charity.

St. Paul says God "loves a cheerful giver". This is an interesting choice of words. God loves cheerfulness in those who give of their money and time because such a disposition reflects the character of God. The word cheerful comes from the Greek word "hilaros" from which we get the English word "hilarious". Hilarity is that emotional state where laughter wells up from the centre of our being and is infectious. Hilarity is most fully experienced when shared. God loves hilarious Christians because their cheerful generosity is infectious, fruitful and contagious.

It is fruitful not only for those who are the recipients of their kindness but such cheerful charity redounds in the life of the giver in a positive way.

Think about it this way. Someone who lives their life cheerfully and not grudgingly is not only going to enrich the lives of others, their interior life will also be enriched. Our psalm for today expresses the enriching effects of cheerfulness when it observes:

**<sup>6</sup> For the righteous will never be moved;  
he will be remembered for ever.**

**<sup>7</sup> He is not afraid of evil tidings;**

**his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.**

**<sup>8</sup> His heart is steady, he will not be afraid,  
until he sees his desire on his adversaries.**

**<sup>9</sup> He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;  
his righteousness endures for ever;  
his horn is exalted in honor.**

In the Bible "a horn" is a symbol of authority and power. The authority of the cheerful giver is a steady and firm heart that gives freely to the poor.

Today we remember one of God's hilarious givers whose life embodied the fruitfulness expressed in 2 Corinthians and Psalm 112.

The year was 258, the Emperor Valerian began a massive round of persecution. He issued an edict commanding that all bishops, priests, and deacons should be put to death, and he gave the Imperial treasury power to confiscate all money and possessions from Christians.

In light of the news, Pope Sixtus II quickly ordained a young Spanish theologian, Lawrence, to become archdeacon of Rome. The important position put Lawrence in charge of the Church's riches, and it gave him responsibility for the Church's outreach to the poor. The pope sensed his own days were numbered and therefore commissioned Lawrence to protect the Church's treasure.

On August 6, 258, Valerian captured Pope Sixtus while he celebrated the liturgy, and had him beheaded. Afterwards, he set his sights on the pope's young protégé, Lawrence. But before killing him, the Emperor demanded the archdeacon turn over all the riches of the Church. He gave Lawrence three days to round it up.

Lawrence worked swiftly. He sold the Church's vessels and gave the money to widows and the sick. He distributed all the Church's property to the poor. On the third day, the Emperor summoned Lawrence to his palace and asked for the treasure. With great aplomb, Lawrence entered the palace, stopped, and then gestured back to the door where, streaming in behind him, poured crowds of poor, crippled, blind, and suffering people. "These are the true treasures of the Church," he boldly proclaimed. One early account even has him adding, "The Church is truly rich, far richer than the Emperor."

Unsurprisingly, Lawrence's act of hilarious defiance infuriated the Emperor. Valerian ordered his death that same day via grilling on a rack. Hundreds of years later, Lawrence is still remembered for his final jest: while being barbecued alive, he quipped to his executioners,

**"I'm well done. Turn me over!"<sup>1</sup>**

Talk about a cheerful giver!

May the Spirit and prayers of St. Lawrence inspire us this day to remember that yes indeed the Lord loves a cheerful giver.

St. Lawrence pray for us so that cheerful charity will increasingly be our way of life allowing us to ever more be a community marked by gracious fecundity.

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Brandon Vogt for this biography on St. Lawrence. From: <http://www.wordonfire.org/resources/blog/st-lawrence-and-the-true-treasures-of-the-church/4878/>