

Words of Encouragement

Homily for August 26th 2021

Today's first reading is best understood when we know something of the circumstances behind Paul's words. Paul had been in Thessalonica for three weeks, where he had proclaimed Jesus to the city for the first time. During these 21 days a Church was established. Many Greeks in the City had responded positively to the Gospel, as well as a few Jewish citizens. However there was a strong negative reaction from the Jewish majority in the synagogue at Thessalonica resulting in Paul having to leave the city at night, without time to extend a proper farewell. Understandably Paul and his companions were concerned as to how the new Christian community was fairing and so he sends Timothy to gather a report. Returning to Paul, Timothy brought the good news of the Thessalonians faith and love, mentioning that they always remembered Paul kindly and longed to see him.

With this background we can now more readily understand what Paul is writing about when he says:

⁷ For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith.¹

Notice Paul is able to express the distress resulting from the persecution they had experienced in Thessalonica. Having received Timothy's good news Paul is encouraged because they are standing firm in their faith. Listen then to the gratitude the Apostle expresses for this newly established Christian fellowship:

For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord. ⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?

Aren't these words filled with loving, hopeful encouragement? In spite of the challenges they are facing from the opposition in Thessalonica, the Christians are standing firm in the Lord. Note as well, what St Paul says next

¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Here Paul is looking forward to being with this community so he can further instruct them in the ways of the Lord, allowing them to come to a fuller understanding of the Gospel so they can also grow in their relationship with Jesus.

Having celebrated their steadfastness in the faith Paul ends this part of the letter with words of blessing.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. ¹² And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (1 Th 3:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

in love for you. ¹³ And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. ²

In this blessing there are two points of focus, that they would increase and abound in love for one another and they would grow in holiness and so be ready for the day when they will see Jesus face to face.

These verses are words of encouragement for us as well. In the face of those who would challenge and oppose the faith, we can not only stand firm in the faith but grow in our understanding and living of the Gospel. This in turn inspires us to desire the kind of holiness that allows us to radiate the abounding love of which Paul writes in these verses.

I invite you to meditate on these verses today, and tie them into the verse from Psalm 90:

So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart. ³

The wise heart is depicted clearly by Paul. May we calculate well this divine arithmetic.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (1 Th 3:11–13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Ps 90:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.