

*Homily for August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017*

The Gospel acclamation for today is a clear summation of the theme expressed in our readings. Taken from 1<sup>st</sup> John, it teaches:

***Whoever keeps the word of Christ, grows perfect in the love of God.***

In the reading of Thessalonians Paul wrote:

***We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.***

Paul's thanksgiving stems from his experience that while the Gospel was proclaimed in Thessalonica by human voices, that is Paul's and his companions, this congregation heard in Paul's voice, God's voice. As such they wanted to conform their lives to the will of God, thereby knowing that God was working in their lives.

What happens when like the Thessalonians God's word is active in our lives? St John in our acclamation says,

***We grow perfect in the love of God.***

By this he means that our lives become clear expressions of the outworking of God's word.

This isn't something that just happens but takes work.

Let me use a comparison. I love playing the piano. At present, I am working on a sonata by Mozart. The more fully my fingers are able to reproduce on the piano the music written on the page, the more I perfect what Mozart intended in his score. In a sense, our lives are both the instrument, and we are the musicians who are to make the music of grace as we learn the score of God's revealed and holy word.

What does such music sound like? How do we reach this kind of perfection?

First we affirm that we are always living in the presence of the unseen but all present God. This is what David does when in the Psalm he asks:

***7Where can I go from your spirit?***

***Or where can I flee from your presence?***

His answer is nowhere. Wherever I am God is there. So he affirms:

***9If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
10 even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
11If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night,"  
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;***

*the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.*

Knowing that we are living in God's presence inspires us to, like Paul, want to then live with a compassionate consistency where character and genuine motives are exhibited in how we relate to others.

Paul writes that when he was with the Thessalonians he was like a nursing mother and caring father:

*urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.*

In other words his character exhibited genuine care for them. How different this kind of spiritual parenthood was from that of the Pharisees in today's Gospel, who twice, Jesus calls hypocrites, seemingly religious on the outside but self-serving in motive.

A person who is in Christian leadership has to lead by their lives, showing by example their intention to conform their life to that of Jesus'.

What does such a life look like?

*You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers.*

Notice what Paul says here. Both the Thessalonians and God witnessed conduct that was pure of motive; upright in behaviour and therefore deemed blameless; the polar opposite from the biting rebuke Jesus puts forward in today's Gospel of other religious leaders.

When leadership has integrity and the people of God are attentive to the living word of God then we are learning to ever more fully play the sonata of Grace and know that we are abiding in Jesus.