

The Pleasure of God's merciful goodness

Homily for October 13, 2021

The Christian writer C.S. Lewis was a prolific letter writer. In a letter to his friend Arthur Greeves he discussed the "pleasure of anger". He wrote:

*"The pleasure of anger—the gnawing attraction which makes one return again and again to its theme lies, I believe, in the fact that one feels entirely righteous oneself only when one is angry"*

Lewis goes on to describe how when we nurse the pleasure of anger I believe I am right and the other person is wrong. I am enlightened and the other person is in the dark. I am justified and the other person is dismissed.

It is this theme that St Paul is discussing in the passage from Romans. He is writing what is technically called a diatribe. A diatribe consists of a lively debate between a writer (Paul) and a hypothetical conversation partner, the reader.

Here St. Paul warns his conversation partner about the pleasure of anger. He puts this way:

*You have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.<sup>1</sup>*

In other words, says the Apostle be very careful when your heart is filled with a kind of self-righteousness that passes judgment on another and leaves you feeling superior. St Paul wants his reader to realize that rather than nursing the pleasure of anger, we are to cultivate the pleasure of God's merciful goodness. Listen again to what we read in this passage about God's merciful goodness.

*Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?<sup>2</sup>*

Here three qualities of God's merciful goodness are mentioned. His kindness, forbearance and patience. Kindness is synonymous with the word mercy in the Bible. It means God's understanding and compassion towards us. Forbearance differs from patience in that God is forbearing to those who sin out of weakness, but he endures with patience those who sin deliberately and brazenly.<sup>3</sup>

St Paul is calling his conversation partner to realize that God's merciful goodness is to touch and transform each of our lives. Because how we relate to God's merciful love will influence how

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Ro 2:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Ro 2:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>3</sup> [The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament](#). (2010). (p. 259). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

we experience final judgment. If in our lives we have nursed the pleasure of anger then in judgment we will experience the Lord's righteous anger.

***for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury.<sup>4</sup>***

Conversely if we seek to live by grace in the present as those who cultivate the pleasure of God's merciful love St Paul writes:

***to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.<sup>5</sup>***

My beloved brothers and sisters, how easy it is to nurse the pleasure of anger and how much harder to cultivate the pleasure of God's merciful love.

Jesus himself warns us of the danger of the pleasure of anger in today's Gospel. The Pharisees, whom he addressed in the Gospel are being chastised by the Lord because they are so quick to judge others and feel self-satisfied and self-justified.

May we examine our hearts and ask for the grace of God to guard them from the pleasure of anger so that our souls are, in the words of today's psalm, waiting upon the Lord so we delight in the pleasure of the Lord's merciful goodness and love.

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<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#). (1989). (Ro 2:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#). (1989). (Ro 2:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.