

Homily for September 7, 2018

One of the gifts of Liturgical Prayer are the Collects. I think today's Collect especially beautiful because it concisely expresses how we, as Christians, are to live our lives. If you have your missalette please follow along as we pray it slowly.

It begins, as all collects do, with addressing God: "Almighty, ever-living God". To address God as "almighty" indicates that he is the one upholding the universe and orders it by his providential love. People who trust in God, Almighty, affirm with David, in today's psalm:

"Trust in the Lord, and do good", "Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him and he will act".

This is a central theme of the Bible. As we trust and commit our ways to the Lord, God acts through our actions because he is ever-living. As we cultivate an attitude of trust, we also discover that he is ever-living and thus always present in our lives. The psalm also encourages us to "take delight in the Lord", and "he will give you the desires of your heart". What are to be the heart's desires? The Collect answers that question this way.

"Almighty, ever-living God, increase our faith, hope and charity". Faith, hope and charity are the theological virtues. We are to desire them above everything else. Virtues are to the Christian life what the ingredients are to a recipe. In order for the recipe to turn out well all of the ingredients need to be put together and cooked with care. The theological virtues are the key ingredients given to us by the Holy Spirit enabling us to live the Christian life so as to conform us to the person of Jesus Christ. The more we grow in the virtues the more we realize they are the heart's desire.

Faith is that virtue that allows us to believe all that God has revealed to us in the Scripture and Tradition that left simply to human reason we would not know. The central tenet of our faith is God is Love and therefore Trinitarian in nature. We only know this to be true because God has told us so. We believe by faith that after this life we will face judgment, purgatory and ultimately heaven, and for some, tragically hell. We believe this to be the truth revealed most fully in the person of Jesus Christ. If faith is the virtue by which we accept God's Revelation, hope is our acceptance of God's promises. In our psalm for today we hear articulated a wonderful promise.

"He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noon day sun". This is one of the most important promises of Scripture. Truth and Justice will triumph. So often from the perspective of this world evil seems to have the upper hand. But Christian hope affirms that the darkness does not win, because it cannot withstand the light of truth.

Then there is love. I like to say that love is the fruit of the tree that has faith as the roots, hope as the trunk and love as the branches bearing the fruit of grace. St. Paul in 1st Corinthians 13 says that the most important virtues are faith, hope and love and concludes that the greatest virtue is love. That is because while in this world we need all three, in heaven faith and hope

will no longer be required because we will see God. In heaven love will be all and in all. That is why our collect goes on to say: "Make us love what you command, so that we may merit what your promise" What does God command? That we grow in the virtues and cultivate them intentionally so that we will be a people who grow in affirming with our psalm:

"The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their refuge in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and rescues them from the wicked, and saves them, because they take refuge in him."

Deliverance from all evil and eternity spent beholding the beauty of the Lord is what God' promises us. Let us ask him to increase within us the theological virtues of faith, hope and love and thus live with great purpose in the present so that one day we will live forever with Him.