

TRINITY XIII  
6 September 2020

Readings: Ezekiel 33.7-11; Psalm 119.33-40;  
Romans 13.8-end; Matthew 18.15-20

In our first passage, the Lord tells Ezekiel to warn the people when they go astray, because He has "*no pleasure in the death of the wicked*". God would much rather that they, and all of us now, would repent and live a full life in Him.

This theme is continued in our epistle from Paul who warns his readers in Rome to give up their "revelling and drunkenness – debauchery and licentiousness – quarrelling and jealousy". Such a specific warning may seem unusual to us now, but not so in Rome at that time, and Paul knew that such behaviours prevented those Romans involved in them from living a full life in God.

The wonderful words of Paul in this passage are focussed on love, repeating the essential Gospel message of Jesus where, if our aim is to love God and love others with His love, then everything else will fall into place. If we truly love others, it's impossible to hurt them, steal from them, or be jealous of them. We'll be focussed on the best interests of others and therefore be unconcerned about their position, possessions, status, language, race, colour, sexual orientation, or culture – all things which the world deems important, and some of which, sadly, are particularly relevant globally at this very time, solely because of prejudice and the breakdown in our love for others.

To love is to live in the light, happy for all to see because what we're doing and being is something to be proud of and not ashamed of. When we're confronted with choices, we do the honourable thing. Sometimes those choices are hard choices to make because, as humans, we're weak and frail and we so often fail. But God loves us regardless if we always try to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ".

Jesus gives us His Spirit and His grace so that we can overcome our frailty and our weaknesses. "Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" means walking in His light, spending our lives living in His love, respecting others and restraining from wrongdoing.

If we love, we'll never kill, because love seeks to build rather than destroy. We'll never steal, because love is more concerned with giving than getting. We'll never be covetous, because true love eradicates unhealthy desires.

Among people we know, opportunities to demonstrate love may be many. But those opportunities to love also extend beyond the limits of the horizon of our sight. We can strive for God's peace among people we barely know - even people we'll never meet. We can work for right relationships to prevail, because divine love wants to work through us to establish justice and peace everywhere.

The Spanish Catholic priest and mystic, John of the Cross, said that "we will be judged on love alone". We won't be judged on success or wealth or knowledge, or anything else that the world often counts as ultimate. This absolute priority of love challenges us, but love is the chief of Christian graces. It's the one thing we always owe to one another. And, at life's end, it will be the deciding criterion. All this requires that, as God's Church, we are a community which is learning to love.

There's so much in this world which counters and blocks the progress of love. Hearts and relationships and communities can all become infected. So love in action must take the form of reconciliation - the mending of relationships. We mustn't deny that clashes and conflicts occur. We mustn't pretend they're not there, or paper over them. Nor must we keep them alive and hurtful. The alternative to aggression and denial is to resolve whatever conflicts we have with one another. And when we labour for reconciliation, we experience even more of that divine love, which is greater than any of us, and available to all of us.

Jesus spoke of that love overflowing into reconciliation in the reading from Matthew's Gospel. He tells us to sort problems out, knowing that the worst thing possible is to allow grievances to fester. If we aren't reconciled to those we have a grievance with, the worst harm is to ourselves, because our stubborn refusal to forgive eats away at us and erodes any love within us.

And we have no time to lose as far as forgiveness is concerned, because, as Paul says, NOW is the time for us to wake up from sleep. Let's lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light right now, while we still have the opportunity, because we never know when it will be too late and, as Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel *"whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"*.

The task of living in the light is enormous! It's nothing less than working with the Creator of the universe to try to bring about the transformation of a world which is sometimes full of darkness. With God, we can help to overcome that darkness, and so we stay awake and alert in His love. We stay awake and we continue to hold out the hope that we have - hope in a Kingdom coming where all that is broken will be made new; where all that is wrong will be made right; where all pain and sickness and death

will pass away. But we must choose the way of God, not the way of the world.

None of this is easy. It requires us to love people who don't necessarily love us back; to love people who aren't very lovable; to set aside our own desires, instead putting first the well-being of others. It requires us to choose to live so much like Christ that we're wearing Him and allowing His light to shine through us. None of this happens by accident – we must first “put on Christ”.

Let us pray that we may all put on Christ and live as those who love their neighbours; that we wake up from our sleep and stay awake and alert; and that we all love and reflect the light of God.

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