

Trinity 16

I take as my text today, from St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians:

*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole
family in heaven and earth is named....*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be alway acceptable unto Thee, O
Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

The Epistle appointed for today from St. Paul's Letter to the Church at Ephesus is another marvelous passage. In it, Paul intimates something special; but he first prefaces the passage with a plea which he expresses in these words:

*I DESIRE that ye faint not at my tribulations for
you, which is your glory.*

Paul suffered many tribulations during his ministry which he accepted readily as necessary for the welfare of his followers, for the Church. And as he endured the sufferings imposed upon him so he encourages his followers that they should not *faint*, using a Greek word that means essentially, to lose one's courage.

He was certain beyond any doubt that his sufferings were for their benefit and he knew that they, too, must face many sufferings of their own for their faith in Jesus Christ which they must hold steadfast.

This leads in to what comes in the next verse:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ....

What is the *cause* that Paul is talking about?

To help us understand better what Paul has written, we need to look at when and where he was writing as well as to whom. Was it really the Church at Ephesus to which the letter was specifically directed? Or was it perhaps something, maybe a circular letter?

First of all, the letter to the Ephesians is considered the *Supreme Letter* and ranks at the top of the devotional and theological literature of the Church; but it is quite different in style and thought, even tone, from Paul's other letters.

From its style and tone, it is apparent that Paul was writing at a time when he was unhurried, most likely because he was a prisoner in Rome. He does refer in the letter to being a *prisoner for Christ*.

And most Biblical scholars pretty much agree that the letter was written in that period when Paul was being held in Rome, written while awaiting the appeal process to Caesar that he had begun in Jerusalem.

We probably could put the date sometime around the year 62.

In all likelihood, this letter was written just after the letter to the Colossians. It is almost as if in addressing a situation there that Paul realized he had stumbled upon something that must be shared with all the churches; thus, he composed what we refer to as a circular letter, in that it would be passed from one congregation to another.

One clue to that is the lack of a personalized greeting, such as is found in his other letters.

But more to the point, the whole tone and style of the letter indicates that Paul took great pains in drafting it; drafting a letter that most assuredly he intended to be circulated among the congregations; a letter that would eventually end up in Ephesus and, perhaps, as a result it would become so associated with the congregation there, it would gain the title: **Epistle to the Ephesians**.

With that as an introduction, what was it that Paul had stumbled upon? What was this *cause* that needed to be universally addressed; so painstakingly addressed?

Simply stated: **the unity of all things in Jesus Christ**.

Paul had traveled widely during his ministry. Now, he was in Rome, the center of the known world, Rome representing a kind of civil stability. He saw something in the cohesion of the *Pax Romana* that provided a certain spiritual revelation.

Despite this semblance of stability, the world was filled with chaos; everywhere there was division, *disunity*.

Even today as then, we see the same as did St. Paul: division between nations, within the Church, within families, between individuals — even within each individual, there is a bitter conflict between good and evil.

Paul carefully thought out this whole concept of disunity. His conclusion is that it is God's design that there be *unity*; that all people, all nations should become one in Christ.

To this *cause* the Church is called. It must go out into the world. It must tell everyone, every nation of God's love and mercy.

To achieve this end, the members of the Church themselves must be united, joined together in fellowship. They must themselves experience the all-encompassing, limitless love of Christ.

This is such a *cause* that for it Paul offers prayer in earnest. He drops to his knees; more than that, he is prostrate before God in prayer, lying face down on the ground.

He prays to God that Christians may be able to grasp the full meaning of the *Love of Christ*, that we Christians may come to understand as best we can the *fullness* of God's love in Christ.

The infinite *Love of Christ*: what is its breadth, length, depth, and height?

It is so broad that it includes every individual that has existed, does exist, and will ever exist;

It stretches as far as Christ accepting the agony and pain of the Cross;

It reaches to the depths of his death;

It ascends to heaven.

No one, no place is beyond the reach of Christ's Love.

Paul's prayer is that we may be filled with the *Love of Christ* until that time when we become one with him.

He prays that we may be strengthened in our inner being as we progress, as we evolve in Christ's Love.

Our inner being: that is, our reason, our conscience, our will.

In reason, we would be granted the wisdom to discern between right and wrong;

In conscience, we would remain sensitive and alert;

In will, we would be enabled to carry out our intentions.

This strengthening would come about when we let Christ take up permanent residence within our hearts and be present in our lives.

Just as our bodies are strengthened and nourished by earthly food, our souls are strengthened and nourished by *Divine Food*. That Divine Food is the *Bread of Life*, Jesus Christ himself.

But, as we say, there is more. That more is the approachability of God.

Under the New Covenant, we have access to God the Father.

Unlike the Old Covenant, we can approach God, individually.

Unlike the Old Covenant, access to God is not restricted to the High Priest who is the only one to enter the holy of Holies, once a year on the Feast of the Atonement.

And, unlike the Old Covenant, the Fatherhood of God extends to all of us, all of us.

Furthermore, we must remember that we owe everything to God. Yes, he provides many gifts to us — helps to us in moments of need, indeed our very lives, our every breath, and our very salvation.

Paul ends this passage with a prayer, a hymn of praise that focuses us on God's Love that our roots as Christians may be one as part of his consecrated people, united in that love.

And we can never mention enough the word *love* in relation to God, God to us and, as it should be, us to him that in love, and through love we are at unity in him and through him with our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

In his prayer, Paul also discloses to us something else about the *Love of God*: it can be found right here, in the fellowship of the Church. Right here at All Saints'.

It is amongst us. Here we can experience the breadth, length, depth, and height of the *Love of Christ*.

We may be far from perfect; but united in the fellowship of the Church, we can experience the fullness of that **Divine Love** and become instruments of our Lord and Saviour; instruments of Christ in the universal reconciliation of each individual to one another, in the reconciliation of all humankind to God our Father, in **the unity of all things in Jesus Christ**.