

Trinity 20

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

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools,
but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days
are evil.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

This short passage from Paul's circular letter, under the title, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, gives us a very good look at the life of the early Church from two perspectives: the danger from without, and the joy within.

Why a circular letter? Many scholars believe that the *Letter to the Ephesians* was not written directly to Ephesus but was intended by Paul to be circulated among the many Churches he had established, Ephesus being the final Church in the circuit.

First of all, St. Paul exhorts Christians to take heed in how they live their lives: he says they should walk circumspectly.

In last week's Epistle passage from Ephesians, Paul exhorted Christians not to walk as the Gentiles walk, with the implication that their *walk* led to a *blindness of heart*. More than a *blindness*, it was a hardening of the heart, described as a *petrifying* of the heart, where it is turned into something harder than marble.

Here, in the South, we might be reminded of the *heart of pine*, so infused with pitch that, over time, it becomes petrified and almost impenetrable.

This *hardening* of the heart led to a loss of feeling that could only be restored when the person put on Jesus Christ, clothed themselves with our Lord and Saviour, casting off the old self, and allowing the light of Christ into their hearts.

In this week's passage, also from Ephesians, Paul continues his exhortation with another kind of walk: to walk circumspectly.

This is an interesting concept. What Paul is getting at is that the Christian walk is both inward and outward.

The inward is his faith in Jesus Christ; the outward is his conversation among men. When we say conversation, we mean an encompassing relationship with those in the world around us.

With our inward walk, we draw strength from our faith in Christ, which we need if we are to exercise prudence and patience with courage. It is a progression, growing in wisdom with the Holy Spirit as a guide.

At the same time, the outward walk must reflect that inward faith. It requires diligence, caution, accuracy, and exactness, being aware of our surroundings, which are fraught with danger for a Christian.

To walk circumspectly, thus means to keep one's eyes open, and to keep one's wits about him.

Paul warns that the world is abounding in iniquity, where wicked men live; there are heresies, afflictions, and persecutions. All-in-all, the world can be an unsavory place, and the Christian must always be on his guard.

Moreover, the Christian must be mindful of his time, and not squander it. Every opportunity of doing good and discharging one's duty to God must not be neglected. Time is of the essence, but it also should be enjoyed.

From Paul's terse passage, we can glean that the Christian must stand out in the world as a shining example, showing forth the Light of Christ that is in his heart. The Gentile world, in the meantime, walks in darkness; their way is crooked and destructive; they lack the garments of a Holy Life. Their conversation reflects as lamps without oil.

Paul further exhorts the Christian to be *not unwise*. This is a call to *talk the talk, and walk the walk*, so to speak. By this, the Christian comes to understand that time is short and that his walk in life is dependent upon coming to understand the Will of God revealed through the Gospel of Christ, as well as the Law and the Commandments. There is no time to waste.

Diligently pursue the Light of Christ and avoid drunkenness, not just the excesses of strong drink, but other excesses as well, that can lead to a perversion of the individual spirit and expose a person to shame and untold afflictions of body and soul.

We must allow the Holy Spirit to take possession of ourselves, our affections, our thoughts, and our understanding — in other words be filled with the Holy Spirit, perhaps expressed as the inward dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The *walk* of a Christian is not easy, and the time we have is just sufficient to fulfill God's purpose for us.

To *redeem* the time is to recover it from waste. We accomplish that by:

1. gaining knowledge of God through Holy Scripture;
2. doing good to others;
3. employing our time for the purpose of an honest livelihood;
4. prayer and self-examination;

5. seeking salvation and endeavoring to do the will of God.

How else do we Christians, living in such a world as Paul describes, *walk circumspectly* and *redeem the time*?

Paul simply tells us to engage in the joyful worship and praise of God. In this charge, Paul also offers an insight into the early Church.

Early Christians were joyful. Their worship was joyful, drawing from the Psalms as well as from hymns and melodies that come from the heart; always giving thanks to God, for he is Love and is the Source of all good things.

Though not explicit in this passage, we do know from Paul that the early Church celebrated the *Breaking of Bread*, what we know as *Holy Communion* or the *Holy Eucharist*. In keeping with his theme of joyfulness and thanksgiving, we come to understand the *Breaking of Bread*, the *Holy Eucharist*, as a *Sacrifice of Thanksgiving*.

St. Paul has given us so much to think about in this short Epistle passage. If we put it all together, we find that the walk of a Christian is unique: it is both inward and outward.

Pause for a moment. What is a sacrament? How is it described in the Catechism? An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

What more is the life of a Christian than just that — an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

More fully, it is an outward expression of an inner faith in God, in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour; it is our witness to Christ, expressed in joyful praise and worship; it is in our partaking of the *Sacrifice of Thanksgiving*, the *Holy Eucharist*, that we receive the *Bread of Heaven*, by which we are strengthened spiritually in our Christian walk.