

## Trinity 4

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

*I RECKON that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

It's a beautiful day! Didn't I just say that a few minutes ago? Yes, it is a Beautiful Day — truly, every day is a beautiful day, whatever the weather may be. Why would I say that? Well, there's good reason — to see every day for its beauty is to get a glimpse into the unimaginable beauty of the whole of God's creation.

For example, each day when I awaken, I look outside the window and I am amazed by what I see. It's just a small portion of the world, yet what beauty. And small though it may be, it is, nonetheless, representative of the greater universe meticulously created and set in order by a loving God.

Now, granted, our yard isn't so meticulous and could use a lot of work to unveil more of its intrinsic beauty but, as I affirm, even weeds have beauty when examined closely.

Yet, as we all know, everything in this world has a fleeting beauty. It is here today and gone tomorrow, as our Lord said in Luke 12:27:

*Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

In its moment, each creature, each created element, animate or inanimate, has its splendor. Our world — this small sphere in the midst of such a vast universe — our world is a paradox of beauty and death — a paradox.

Now, when we read the passage from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, we, confronted with this paradox, can ask the question: is all of creation beautiful as we perceive it, or is this just a dying, decaying world in which we live?

As we consider this particular passage from St. Paul, we may well find that it is not so easy to understand, and the answer to our question that pits the perception of beauty against the idea of a decaying world equally difficult. So, we shouldn't be surprised that we are faced with this paradox. Even among various Bible scholars and commentators, it evokes diverse interpretations, but that's to be expected.

I often think that theologians and, what I call *theosophers*, work hard at removing the beauty that emanates from God.

But what about St. Paul, especially as we examine today's Epistle passage — what might he be thinking?

To begin to understand, we must take into consideration Paul's vision of redemption, that it involves the glorious transformation of the whole universe, all of creation, animate and inanimate.

We go back to Adam's Fall when we and all of creation were brought into a state of suffering; by this disobedience, this abuse of free will, we were made subject to pain, sickness, and death.

Paul does not single out mankind but **all** living creatures, even the inanimate, the whole natural order — for **all** of Creation is subject to death and decay.

Very simply, our present state is not a pretty picture, and, if we dwell on this picture, there is a sense of gloom and impending doom that overshadows the beauty around us and erodes the beauty within us. Remember the sage advice: stop and take time to smell the roses.

But, as St. Paul tells us Christians, there is hope; moreover, he tells us that the sufferings of this present world, our present life, are nothing compared to the glory of eternity with God, an incomparable beauty which, as is all that is beautiful, derives from Divine Love.

Made Christians through Baptism, we begin a journey that leads us to our eternal home, for in Baptism, we become adopted children of God, so we can look forward to the day when we will receive the full blessing of adoption: that day is the day of judgment when we who have departed the worldly life in Faith enter fully into the eternal life, our souls clothed in our resurrected bodies, to share, with Christ, an inheritance in the Heavenly Kingdom,

Remember, after we are fed at God's Table with Heavenly Food, we offer our thankfulness and acknowledge in the **Prayer of Thanksgiving** that we are *heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom*.

We are kept, preserved, and sustained in our trials by that hope of *an everlasting kingdom* — a hope not in our possession, but an *earnest expectation* which we eagerly await as we scan the horizon for the first signs of that dawn, the daybreak of Glory, as we crane our necks for that first glimmer of light, and though it is fleeting, we do have the beauty of all God's creation that surrounds us as a reminder of the glory that awaits.

In the meantime, we have the power of the Gospel and the sacraments of the Church to sustain us, without which it would be all too easy to give way to a sense of futility, of despair.

As Christians we have joys that the world does not know. Yes, we do have sorrows, but we are blessed with the *first fruits of the Spirit*, in that we have died with Christ through baptism and have risen again to a new life — a new life filled with the *first fruits of the Spirit*, where we see beyond worldly despair in hope of a new age to come; we see life, not death.

The world may despair but we Christians do not despair, for we are alive in Christ for all of Eternity.

We say *first fruits of the spirit* — but what are they?

We find them listed in St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians:

*....the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

Each *Fruit of the Spirit* has a special meaning to the Christian:

**Love** is at the top of the list, the fulfilling of the law, the bond of perfectness, and without which a profession of religion is insignificant;

**Joy**, which comes in the love of God;

**Peace**, coming about as the result of reconciliation with God;

**Long-suffering**, not just in affliction and trial, or when injured by others, but a patient bearing and enduring of present evils with joyfulness, being strengthened by the Holy Spirit; being slow to anger, ready to forgive injuries, putting up with affronts, and bearing with, and forbearing one another;

**Gentleness**, as a disposition; mildness of temper, calmness of spirit, an unruffled disposition, and a disposition to treat all with urbanity and politeness;

**Goodness**, being the sense of beneficence, or a disposition to do good to others;

**Faithfulness**, or perhaps *fidelity* is a better translation of the Greek, being the word for trustworthy or reliable;

**Meekness**, expressed in *humility* and *lowliness of mind*, of which Christ is an eminent example and pattern; and

**Temperance**, or *continence*, being, particularly, moderation in eating and drinking.

While St. Paul paints a picture of this world fallen into sin and decay, he uses this picture to bring into focus his vision of the transformation of the whole realm of creation from the curse of suffering and corruption to full restoration by Christ to the way it was in the beginning, before the *Fall of Adam*.

No doubt, St. Paul's message in his letter to the Romans is quite sobering; but his vision of our future as Christians reflects his understanding of God's unfailing love for all his creation, and God's desire that we truly choose to love him as our Heavenly Father as he loves us.

As Christians, we live not only in the world, but also in Christ; we see not only this world, but also, we look beyond this world to the glory that awaits. We have one foot in the physical world, and one foot in the spiritual world. We are both physical and spiritual beings.

As Christians, we see not only the sin and corruption of the world, but also God's mercy, his grace, and his love beautifully displayed around us.

As Christians, we see so great a love, as when God took on our flesh and sacrificed himself on the Cross, being resurrected in his glorified body that we might have the hope of redemption, that we might also be resurrected from death and corruption. God did not forsake us but sent the Holy Spirit to comfort us and sustain us 'til the day of redemption.

As we await that glorious day of redemption, we are left to marvel at the beauty of all God's creation, each creature, each sunset, each sunrise; even the sounds of music, the birds, the wind, rain, thunder.

Yes, we live in a paradox: the beauty of all of creation in the midst of a dying, decaying world.

Truly, when we take the time to observe all the beauty that surrounds us, the magnificence of all God's creation, and the solemn beauty of his **Presence** in the **Eucharist**, then we can only long for that moment of redemption when we will regain our true destiny as Children of God and enter into a peace and beauty that transcends our human comprehension.

The beauty of *Christ's Presence* on the Altar in the *Eucharist* is just a foretaste of what is to come, based on **Love** — a love that knows no bounds, is selfless, and so exquisitely expressed by St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians as the ultimate ideal of the Christian life, an example of what we ought to be.

The ultimate ideal of the Christian life — **love** — the ideal to which every spiritual exercise and discipline should draw us, unveiling for us that Divine Love, the true Nature of God as revealed through the beauty of all his Creation; revealed by Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross; revealed in the *Eucharist*, our Thanksgiving and Communion with God; and revealed through Holy Scripture, which should motivate and sustain all our thoughts and actions as we await the daybreak, the dawn of glory, when Jesus Christ returns to raise us up to an Eternal Life in his Heavenly Kingdom.