

Trinity 4, 2017

“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to compared with the glory that shall be revealed unto us.” (Romans 8.18)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Last Sunday’s Gospel brought us the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. Through them, we had the opportunity to reflect on the human condition – our spiritual lostness without Christ. In spite of all our amazing engineering exploits and intellectual accomplishments; and in spite of all our advancements in technology, we continue to struggle with deep issues of the soul – with true charity, peace and hope. These struggles are obvious: for example, consider the abuse and violence that occurs daily in our society; the confusion around our sexuality and the weakened state of the family unit; the incredible poverty in which many people live, even in the shadow of their neighbours; the exploitation and abuse of children; and the millions of people who are being trafficked as sex slaves.

This week, the Epistle and Gospel take us one step further in helping us to understand our situation. The Epistle tells us that our struggles as human beings are actually shared with the creation itself. St. Paul says, “We know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only so, but we ourselves groan within ourselves.” According to one definition, to groan means “to make a deep, inarticulate sound in response to pain or despair”. When used for an object, the verb ‘to groan’ describes how a table might “make a low creaking or moaning sound when pressure or weight is applied”. So, St. Paul says we and all of nature are groaning under the weight of “the bondage of corruption”. “The creation itself,” Paul says “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”. Let’s pause for a minute and dig into this phrase “the bondage of corruption”. We know what bondage means – it is to be bound; tied; chained; to be a captive. St. Paul says we, and all of nature, are under the bondage of corruption.

Matthew Henry, the 17th century Welsh Bible scholar explained ‘the bondage of corruption’ this way: “There is a present vanity,” he wrote “to which the creature,

by reason of the sin of man, is made subject. When man sinned, the ground was cursed for man's sake, and with it all the creatures ... became subject to that curse. There is an impurity, deformity, and infirmity, which the creature has contracted by the fall of man: the creation is sullied and stained, much of the beauty of the world gone. There is an enmity of one creature to another; they are all subject to continual alteration and decay of the individuals, liable to the strokes of God's judgments upon man." Then, Matthew Henry added this statement: "The creatures are often abused to the dishonour of their Creator, the hurt of his children, or the service of his enemies. When the creatures are made the food and fuel of our lusts, they are subject to vanity, they are captivated by the law of sin."

It is true, we are often captivated by things and ideas and desires that miss the mark of true charity, of God's holy way. As a result of Adam and Eve's original sin – and also because of the sins we actually commit ourselves -- we are bound by corruption, and therefore we groan within ourselves; and not only us humans, but all of creation.

This is where this morning's Gospel comes in: under the weight of our present situation, we tend to be judgemental of others. We tend to condemn and to withhold mercy and forgiveness. We tend to be very calculating and tight-fisted with our charity and our love for others. We enter into relationships with the idea of a contract – "I'll do that for you in hopes that you will do this for me". We tend to isolate ourselves and abuse ourselves, even when we know it is not healthy to do so. We easily get distracted and invest in material things instead of what is heavenly and eternal. It is all part of our lostness – our bondage to corruption -- and we can be a lot like the blind leading the blind. The Lord Jesus underlined our situation well when He likened us to hypocrites. He said, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

Amazingly, the Lord continues with us with great patience and mercy. In spite of our lostness, He came to rescue us. Instead of saying, "I told you so. You made your bed and now you will have to lie in it," He offers us His help and His Hope. Through God's Word and by the operation of His Spirit, He continues to urge us

on in the new life of His Resurrection. Today, for example, He tells us, “Be merciful, as your Father is merciful”.

And that is exactly what St. Paul is saying in the Epistle: “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed unto us.” Yes, there is glory awaiting us. Every morning, when God brings light out of darkness, we are reminded of the glory that is coming. For now there are struggles. We continue to experience the effects of corruption – the effects of our sins. But we do so in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

When God could have abandoned us to our pain and groaning, He did not. Mercifully, He entered into our pain and groaning in the Person of His only-begotten Son. Jesus truly suffered and died, and descended into the territory of death for us. He did so in order to free us from the bondage of corruption. And, by His Resurrection, He has done it! Graciously, He offers us the benefits of His victory: forgiveness and new life – Everlasting Life -- by His Spirit.

And so what St. Paul said is true: “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed unto; for the earnest expectation of the whole creation is waiting for the revelation of the children of God”. Once we were the children of Adam and Eve, the children of darkness. But now, by the mercy of Christ, we are the children of God and of the Light; and we await our full adoption, even the redemption of our body. Alleluia!

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...EM!