

The INTROIT (Ps. 31:1-3)

P: Be Thou my strong Rock;

C: for an house of defense to save me.

P: Thou art my Rock and my Fortress;

C: therefore for Thy name's sake lead me and guide me.

P: In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed;

C: deliver me in Thy righteousness.

The COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 35:3-7 (NKJV)

Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, And the thirsty land springs of water; In the habitation of jackals, where each lay, There shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

The GRADUAL

(Ps.77:14-15)

P: Thou art the God that doest wonders; Thou hast declared Thy strength among the peoples.

C: Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph.

The EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 13 (NKJV)

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then

face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The TRACT

(from Ps.100:1-4)

P: Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands; serve the Lord with gladness.

C: Enter into His gates with thanksgiving.

P: Know ye that the Lord, He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves;

C: we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 18:31-43 (NKJV)

Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.” But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.

Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

He said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

1 Corinthians 13 — “Now and Then”

INTRODUCTION

I. WE SEE FOR NOW THROUGH A MIRROR IN ENIGMA (OBSCURITY)

II. THEN, HOWEVER, FACE TO FACE

III. BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

CONCLUSION

1 Corinthians 13 — “Now and Then”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today is Quinquagesima, the fiftieth. With fifty days till Easter and Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent this week, the appointed Epistle reading is 1 Corinthians 13.

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

INTRODUCTION

It is rather funny, I suppose, that we tend to look upon the congregation in Corinth and observe them to be a very troubled and confused group of Christians. Then at the end of this portion of St. Paul’s epistle to the congregation in Corinth we hear that we are seeing through a mirror.

I. WE SEE FOR NOW THROUGH A MIRROR IN ENIGMA (OBSCURITY)

In verse twelve St. Paul says, **“We see for now through a mirror in enigma.”** An enigma is an obscure saying or a riddle. What do we see in a mirror? We see our reflection, our image. When we look through a mirror we do not see ourselves as we are. This is true for several reasons. First, everything that we see is backwards. We do not see ourselves as we really are when we look through a mirror. When we look through a mirror, we see ourselves from our own perspective. Our perspective is reversed from what someone sees from the other side of reality. We are unable to see ourselves in our environment. We can only see ourselves as we peer out into our environment, looking back at ourselves through a mirror.

Secondly, as we look through a mirror, the mirror is imperfect. Our modern mirrors are better than the mirrors of antiquity, but nevertheless they still are imperfect and the image that we see is an obscured image of who we are. Both the glass and the silver or other reflective material has variations in the surface and in the thickness and in the purity of material. All these things distort or obscure the image reflected back to our eyes. The mirrors of antiquity were made of metals such as polished bronze. Thus these mirrors added the obscurity of mingled colors and were even more uneven in surface and thickness.

The point that St. Paul is making is that for now, we can only see ourselves as through a mirror, and this is not a true image of ourselves. This fact is true of when we look at ourselves through the mirror of our human reason as well. In fact, our human reason is actually the poorest of all the mirrors, causing the most distortions and obscuring reality the most of all.

Yet for now, this is how we see ourselves. We look through our own human reason at what is shown to us through the mirror of the Law, and we interpret that reflection through our own human reason. That human reason changes from infancy to adulthood, and because we are better able to reason, we are better able to distort the true image that the Law shows us. Thus we look at our works and find ways to interpret that we are improving by our efforts. We look at the advances in our human reasoning and we interpret these as better than when we were children. Yet we are still seeing ourselves through a mirror that is distorted and impure.

This is true even regarding the restored image that God gives us through faith. Since the faith that God gives us is viewed through our human reason, it is a distorted view. It leaves us lacking in what we desire to see.

II. THEN, HOWEVER, FACE TO FACE

This is why God does not leave us with only what we can perceive through our human reason. He gives us His means of grace. From the perspective of our own reason and strength and from our own personal faith embraced by our own spirit, we cannot see clearly the new Adam that God has regenerated within us. Thus He gives us His Holy Spirit to interpret things rightly for us. He gives us the preaching of the Gospel, through which the Holy Spirit teaches us. He gives us the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit so that we see the Old Adam drowned daily and the New Adam rising again to the newness of life that is in Jesus. As we look to our baptism, we are no longer looking into a mirror. In our baptism we see that the faith that reconciles us to God and restores us unto His righteousness is not dependent upon our works nor even upon our own faith, but upon His works and the faith that He regenerates within us. The same is true regarding the Sacrament of communion in Christ's death. God calls us not to our own table to partake of things that we have prepared, but to His Table to partake of the things that He has provided. He calls us to come not by our own accounting of ourselves, but by the accounting that the death of Jesus provides. Thus as we come to His Table we look not to our accounting of our own faith, but rather, we hear Him calling us to receive the accounting that Christ purchased for us with His suffering and death in our stead.

Through God's means of God's grace we are shown what we cannot see through a mirror. Through God's means of grace we are shown how God knows us. In God's means of grace we are shown what God has done for us and that our faith is not dependent upon what we do, but upon what God has done for us. In God's means of grace we are shown that we are not what we make of ourselves through our own efforts, but we are what God makes of us through the Holy Communion that is instituted in the body of Jesus and effected through the blood of

Jesus. Thus as we commune with Jesus in His body, we come face to face with the image of God and see ourselves as God has declared us to be.

Yet because we always approach God with our human reason, we even distort these pure images of what God has declared concerning us. Thus we wait for that glorious day when we are removed from this world of perversion and finally know ourselves as God knows us. As St. Paul so wonderfully declares, **“Now I know from a region, then, however, I will know just as also I am known.”** From a region or out of a portion I now know what I will know in the fullness of God’s Holy Communion when all things are restored at Christ’s coming in glory. This word for region or portion is the same word used when Jesus traveled from one region to another during His ministry. He went from one part to another part, bringing the Gospel to each part. He came from heaven to the regions of the earth. He ascended to heaven with the command to preach the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. From this part of God’s kingdom, from this region of this world of death and corruption, we know our place in God’s kingdom. But when the Lord Jesus comes to take us into the fullness of His presence, we will no longer know who we are from a region, but from the very throne of God in His glory. Then we will see face to face who we are in Christ Jesus. Then we will no longer need a mirror to see who we are.

III. BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

This is why St. Paul speaks of the things of the earthly Church as things that will fade away. Once the Lord Jesus comes for us, there will be no more need for tongues or prophecies or the knowledge that we now know or even for faith or hope. Then all that will remain is Love, for we will be fully in the presence of the One who is love.

In 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 St. Paul assures us:

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

For now we see the glory of the Lord as through a mirror. Even though our vision of the Lord’s glory is obscured by our human reason, as we partake of the means of grace we do see Jesus, who is the very glory of the Father. It is when we turn to Jesus in the means of grace that we know the glory that is ours. In His face we see who God counts us to be.

Thus St. Paul concludes this chapter: **“Now, however, abides faith, hope, love, the three these, and the greater of these: the love.”** For now abides for us the trio. For now our life depends upon the trio of faith-hope-love. Faith provides the hope by which we life free of the despair of what we see according to our flesh. For by grace we are saved through faith, and this is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. Thus, even though with our human reason we do not see the love of God and we despair on account of our fleshly nature, faith restores us to the hope that we have because of the proclamation of the death of Jesus. Thus in hope we obey God’s command to do this often and we partake of His Holy Communion in spite of the weakness of our flesh. For now we live in the trio of faith-hope-love, until that blessed day when faith and hope are no longer necessary, because we then shall see face to face the Love that we only now perceive as through a mirror. Then we will no longer know anything of the need to believe God’s love and we will no longer need to look with hope to that day of restoration, for then we will know fully, God is love, and we are of God, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

CONCLUSION

So then, why do we keep looking to displays of our own works? Why do we continue to try to find hope through the things that we do? This is the challenge that the apostle sets before us. God is love. Without love, nothing else matters. We know God's love in that He gave us His Son. We know that we continue in His Son when we abide in His words. How do we abide in His words? **"Do this into My remembrance."** We are to return again and again to the place of His remembrance, that is, His sepulcher, where we are buried with Him in Baptism and raised with Him through the faith of the operation of God to walk in the newness of the life of hope in His Holy Communion. (Romans 6:4 & Colossians 2:12)

As we gather for the divine service we fall down into the water of Baptism and we rise up to partake of the Holy Supper of new life in Christ. Through these blessed means of God's grace we find that the trio of faith-hope-love truly does abide with us and we abide in it until our prayer of "Come Lord Jesus" is answered with the trumpet blast and all that remains is the glory of God's love in His everlasting presence. No more mirrors, only everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.