

The INTROIT

(Ps. 44:23-26; 44:1)

*P: Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord?*

**C: Arise, cast us not off forever.**

*P: Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face;*

**C: and forgettest our affliction?**

*P: Our soul is bowed down to the dust;*

**C: arise for our help and redeem us.**

*P: We have heard with our ears, O God;*

**C: our fathers have told us what work Thou didst in their days.**

The COLLECT

O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

**Isaiah 55:10-13 (NKJV)**

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. "For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills Shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; And it shall be to the LORD for a name, For an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

The GRADUAL

(Ps.83:18,13)

*P: Let the nations know that Thy name is Jehovah; Thou alone art the Most High over all the earth.*

**C: O my God, make them like a wheel and like chaff before the wind.**

THE EPISTLE

**2 Corinthians 11:19 - 12:9 (NKJV)**

For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. To our shame, I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold; I speak foolishly; I am bold also.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ?; I speak as a fool; I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen,

in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago; whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows; such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man; whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows; how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.

For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

The TRACT

(Ps.83:13,18; 60:2,5)

*P: Thou, O Lord, hast made the earth to tremble and hast broken it.*

**C: Heal the breaches thereof, for it shaketh.**

*P: That Thy beloved may be delivered,*

**C: save with Thy right hand.**

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 8:4-15 (NKJV)

And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable:

"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?" And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.'

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word

with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

“Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

“But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.”

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## 2 Corinthians 11:19 - 12:9 — “Lest I Be Exalted above Measure”

### INTRODUCTION

- I. LEST I BE EXALTED ABOVE MEASURE
- II. A THORN IN THE FLESH WAS GIVEN TO ME
- III. THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY REST UPON ME

### CONCLUSION

2 Corinthians 11:19 - 12:9 — “Lest I Be Exalted above Measure”

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

Today is Sexagesima and the appointed Epistle reading is 2 Corinthians 11:19- 12:9, of which we shall hear again the first nine verses of chapter 12:

**It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago; whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows; such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man; whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows; how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.**

**For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.**

**Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

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

INTRODUCTION

2 Corinthians is the second of the epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians that we have available to us. It appears that he very likely wrote other letters to them as well. The congregation in Corinth caused the dear apostle much heartache. They truly broke his heart, over and over again. They kept turning from the pure Gospel to other approaches to holiness. They kept turning to worldly wisdom and human reason and strength rather than relying solely upon Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Nothing could be more painful to the dear apostle, for he knew that this was not merely a dangerous thing for them, but that it was separating them from God.

In all of his dealings with the Corinthians in particular, St. Paul was extremely careful not to exalt himself. He was extremely careful to keep the focus entirely upon the preaching of the pure Gospel. Because of this, the members of the congregation turned to others, who did exalt themselves, who claimed to be superior to St. Paul. Now St. Paul was having to remind them of the nature of his apostleship so as to call them back to the true faith by which they would not lose the salvation that they had received.

## I. LEST I BE EXALTED ABOVE MEASURE

In verse seven of chapter twelve the dear apostle pulls together the facts of life in Christ. He brings forward what most Christians frequently set somewhere in the background of their understanding. St. Paul brings it forward to a point that cannot be ignored. He brings forward the nature of the office of Christ ordained for the life of the Church. He brings forward the fact that the holy office of the ministry is not about the abilities of the man to whom it is entrusted, but the ability or power of the one who gives it and makes it what it is.

**. . . also on account of the overthrow of the unveilings. In order that I should not be over-raised, was given to me a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan, in order that he should buffet me, in order that I should not be over-raised.**

“ . . . also on account of the overthrow of the unveilings or revelations.” This is the conclusion of the apostle’s statement in verse six, where he says,

**For if ever I should determine to boast, I will not be thoughtless, for truth I will utter. But I refrain, lest anyone into me should account over what he sees about me or hears from me, also on account of the overthrow of the unveilings.**

Truly the Lord unveiled amazing things through Saint Paul. In Acts 19 Luke records:

**And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.**

**And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.**

**Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?**

All these things were worked by God so that Saint Paul would be recognized as the apostle to the Gentiles who spoke truly from God with the power of God for salvation. These are very powerful revelations from God in the highest. The loftiness of such powerful revelations from God can have a two-fold effect. First it can show the genuineness of the apostle and his message. But secondly, it can raise the opinions of the people over what is proper. It can cause people to look upon the apostle as so exalted that they imagine that his faith is far above theirs, so far above theirs that they turn to another gospel.

This was St. Paul's concern whenever he preached and especially when the LORD performed mighty miracles through the apostle. St. Paul was always very careful to avoid focusing upon himself, so as to be able to say as he says in 1 Corinthians 2:2, **"I judged to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."**

This is what he means when he says he refrains from boasting about the powerful revelations or unvelings of God's power worked through him as an apostle. He does not want anyone to make too much of the miracles, for the power of God that the people need to take into full account is the Gospel. Temporary miracles such as healing from cancer or being rescued from third degree burns or saved from a plane crash, these are not the things of everlasting salvation. They only point to the mercy of God which is fulfilled in Christ. This was always St. Paul's great concern, especially among the saints at Corinth, who so easily turned to seek after the revelations.

## II. A THORN IN THE FLESH WAS GIVEN TO ME

To help with this, St. Paul reminds them that God gave him a thorn in the flesh. While it is true that this thorn in the flesh was for St. Paul's benefit as well, he points out to us that this powerful temptation was given to him for our sake. He says:

**In order that I should not be over-raised, was given to me a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan, in order that he should buffet me, in order that I should not be over-raised.**

This thorn in the flesh, this angel of the Tempter, was given to the apostle so that we would not raise him up above ourselves. God does not want us to look upon St. Paul too highly, for this would destroy the truth that St. Paul preached. St. Paul needed God's grace just as much as we do. He was not in a special category of sainthood. He daily faced all the same trials and temptations as we do, even more. His sinful flesh worked against him as powerfully as our sinful flesh works against us. All of the things that work against us to separate us from the true faith worked against St. Paul in his daily life as well.

If we look upon St. Paul as being different from us as though he were above us according to his life as a saint, we will be deceived in one of two ways. Either we will think that it is impossible for us to embrace the purity of sainthood or we will make it our goal to become pure by our own efforts. Either way, we lose Jesus. Either way we set the Gospel aside for some other way.

Actually, it seems that these two deceptions go hand in hand. For as soon as we begin to strive to be good Christians by any means of our own efforts, we begin to make comparisons between ourselves and others. We begin to look to see who the better saints are. We create our own criteria for saintliness. Then we begin to see that no one lives as a person should. We begin to focus upon the shortcomings of the saints around us and then we despair of what God has promised. We begin to see the sins of the saints who still have their sinful flesh adhering to them and we begin to imagine that because the saints are simultaneously sinners that the Church cannot be pure. Then we imagine that no one can be certain of having the pure Gospel. Then we also imagine that purity of practice in the Church cannot be really observed either.

What this way of thinking fails to recognize is that the purity of the Church and of the Church's doctrine and practice is not measured by the lives of the saints. Rather, it is accounted by the merits of Christ. When we listen to St. Paul so that rather than setting him above us we turn from him to the one that he proclaims, then we see that the Gospel is God's work, not ours. Then we see that the pure Gospel is not accounted by what we confess from our own hearts, but by the preaching of Christ crucified. Then we are not afraid to say, **"This is the pure faith by which we live!"** This is because as St. John writes,

**Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us.** (1 John 4:17-19)

When we stop looking for perfection in what we do or in what the pastor does or in what the apostle did so that we look again upon the pure love of God that is in Christ crucified, then all our fears are cast out from among us. For the perfect love that restores us is God's love. This is the Gospel that St. Paul preaches to us. As he says, it is about nothing other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He points us to this regarding the doctrine of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper and the life of the Church in these Sacraments of life.

### III. THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY REST UPON ME

This is why when St. Paul prayed that the LORD would take away his temptations the LORD said, **"Sufficient to you is the grace of Me, for the power of Me in weakness is filled up."** Upon hearing this from his Lord Jesus, the apostle turned aside from his prayers for the Lord to remove this temptation and thorn from his flesh. Rather, he held this weakness of his before the Church to show that the Gospel he preaches is genuine and that it is the power of God unto salvation.

Therefore, rather than boasting of all the revelations of God's power that God worked through him, St. Paul boasts to us of his weakness as someone who is just like each of us.

**With great pleasure, therefore, all the more I will boast in the infirmities of me, in order that should tabernacle upon me the power of Christ.**

This is a modified form of the word in John 1:14 where we are told that the Word of God became flesh and tabernacled in us. This is the language of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This is the fullness of God's grace in which we live as members of the body of Christ. For like a tent or tabernacle, Baptism clothes us with Jesus, who is our robe of righteousness by which we stand before God with a good conscience. In the Holy Supper we eat the body of Jesus and drink His blood, by which the tent with which we are covered also fills us through and through with the protection unto life that is in Christ Jesus who with great love and joy took our weaknesses so that we may receive His power.

And so from beginning to end the one who is exalted before us is Jesus, and in Him we are lifted up from the mire of our sinful flesh into the everlasting purity of God's holiness. From beginning to end, the Church's life is filled up with the power of the preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

## CONCLUSION

It truly is amazing how wonderfully easy life is when the proper perspective is maintained. It also is disappointingly strange how quickly we turn this into something that is hard. That is why the pure Gospel is not a goal for the Church, but the mark by which the Church is identified. We are not to strive to obtain the pure Gospel. Rather we are to abide in the pure Gospel. The difference is the difference between life and death, hope and despair. For when we follow the example of St. Paul so that we, too, boast in our weaknesses, the preaching of Christ crucified fills us with His power for life. Then the tabernacle of Christ's power rests upon us and protects us from all that would steal our life with God away from us. When we trust in His works rather than our own, when we turn to the means of grace rather than our own reason and strength, since God is all-powerful, how can we fail? 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.