

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

Hymns: 250, 238, 351, 374

The INTROIT

(Ps.86:1,3,5)

P: Be merciful unto me, O Lord

C: for I cry unto Thee daily.

P: For Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive

C: and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee.

P: Bow down thine ear, O Lord,

C: hear me for I am poor and needy.

The COLLECT

Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, and reigneth, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Deuteronomy 32:39-40

See now that I, *even I, am* he, and *there is* no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither *is there any* that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever.

THE GRADUAL

(Ps.102:15-16; 115:11)

P: The heathen shall fear the name of the Lord:

C: and all the kings of the earth Thy Glory.

P: When the Lord shall build up Zion:

C: He shall appear in His glory. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

P: Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord:

C: He is their Help and their Shield. Hallelujah!

The EPISTLE

Ephesians 3:13-21

Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

The SENTENCE for the Season

(Ps. 119:124)

P: Hallelujah! O Lord, deal with Thy servant according unto Thy mercy and teach me Thy

statutes. I am Thy servant, give me understanding:

C: that I may know Thy testimonies. Hallelujah!

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 7:11-17

And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare *him* stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.

And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about.

Ephesians 3:13-21 — “My Tribulations: You-all’s Glory”

INTRODUCTION

I. MY TRIBULATIONS: YOU-ALL’S GLORY

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Ephesians 3:13-21 — “My Tribulations: You-all’s Glory”

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

The Epistle reading appointed for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity is Ephesians 3:13-21:

Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

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

INTRODUCTION

As we prayed the Collect of the day, did you hear what we asked? How often to we pray without really even hearing what we are asking and without really acknowledging the one to whom we present our request? Do we really know what we are asking? Do we really know what to ask? In today’s Collect we pray:

Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, and reigneth, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

If we listen to what this prayer teaches us we learn what true prayer is and what it really means to live by grace through faith. In this prayer God teaches us His good and gracious will for us and He teaches us the source of all good works. Do we understand this prayer? Do we understand what it means to pray? In our Epistle reading St. Paul teaches us to understand the life of those who pray.

I. MY TRIBULATIONS: YOU-ALL’S GLORY

Our Epistle reading begins with the apostle saying: **“Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”**

St. Paul is actually more explicit than our translation conveys. St. Paul says, **“Through which I ask not to be from *kakos* in the tribulations of me over you-all which is glory of you-all.”**

Kakos means bad or base or worthless. It is used here in the same sense as when we complain that we have a bad back or a bad knee. It conveys the sense of weakness and frailty, of something that limits the goodness and strength that had ought to be.

Our translations follow the common sense in which an infinitive is used, where we commonly assume that “you” should be supplied in the context so that we commonly assume the meaning to be **“I ask *you* not to be weak.”** However, St. Paul does not in any way supply the word for you, nor does he use a verb form that includes this sense explicitly. The context would seem to indicate that this is deliberately omitted by the apostle.

Why? Why would he omit this? Leaving this out the sentence actually conveys a double sense. It conveys both that the apostle asks this of his hearers as something that they should follow, but it also conveys that he asks this of God, both for his hearers as well as for himself as their apostle. St. Paul is indicating that what he asks of his hearers is impossible for them to carry out according to their own reason and strength, and that the strength for this must be supplied by God. In fact, the doing of this must be God’s doing, which we receive as being put into action in our hearts and minds and souls and actions, put into action not by our own will, but by the grace of God at work in us which produces the work that we cannot generate for ourselves.

Often we hear demanded of us and often we demand of ourselves, **“Don’t be weak!”** When we find ourselves helplessly acknowledging our weakness, does it help to be told not to be weak?

I have often observed children at play with their daddy, and sometimes children have done this with me. In their playfulness they take hold of Daddy’s legs and attempt to lift him. He can say, **“Don’t be weak. Keep trying. Try harder.”** But no matter how hard they try, not even one leg can they raise. However, Daddy can extend his arms upward to a tree branch and lift himself, and while the children cling to his legs, not only is Daddy lifted up, the children are lifted up with him, not by their strength, but by his.

St. Paul, however, is not addressing children at play but children under duress. And in this case, the children are under duress not because of what they experience directly, but because of what they experience through the trials of their beloved father in the faith, the apostle whom Christ has set over them to administer the Gospel to them. Moreover, St. Paul is Christ’s apostle to the Gentiles. St. Paul has been imprisoned and kept from being present with the struggling congregation in Ephesus. St. Paul has proclaimed to them the mysteries of God in Christ Jesus. He has proclaimed the unity of the body of Christ wherein God joins by His own flesh and blood the Jews and Gentiles as one body with one Lord, one faith, one baptism. But with Paul in prison and being punished for the open preaching of this Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, the saints are in danger of depending upon themselves and finding themselves unable to bear up to the tribulations.

In this regard the beloved apostle says that he asks in connection with the glory revealed earlier in the epistle, asking not to be from bad. He asks this of God both for himself and for the saints who look to him as their faithful apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He asks this of himself and of them, knowing that neither he nor they are able according to their own sinful flesh to stand

strong. He asks this of himself and of them according to that which is their glory and their strength, the tribulations that are Christ's. For these tribulations that they endure are in fact the devil's attack on the body of Christ. The devil and the world are at war against God and persecute God's children. So, when we face tribulations in this world, it is our glory, for the world and the devil are openly acknowledging the identity that has been poured out upon us in our baptism. And when we recognize this fact, suddenly we no longer seek to be strong by our own strength and we find that we are empowered by the one who has endured all things for us. When we realize that our God has already extended His arms to the branch of the tree and has lifted Himself up for us, carrying all of our burdens and tribulations for us in His own body, we naturally cling to Him by faith and we find that we are lifted up with Him.

II. OF THIS GRACE I BOW THE KNEES

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . .

Again, the dear apostle says much more than our translations convey. He actually says:

Of this grace I bow the knees of me toward the Father of the Lord of us, Jesus Christ.

Here again, the apostle directs us to the exact opposite of what we expect. St. Paul does not pray according to his own will and desire. Rather, he tells us that his prayers flow from the grace of God. It is God's grace that moves the apostle to pray what he prays. According to his own strength and will the apostle lived his life as a persecutor of Christ and His Church on earth. But according to God's grace at work in him, the apostle endures persecution and is moved in his heart to pray for the saints and for the work of the Gospel. Moreover, he speaks in the manner of John the Baptist, counting himself as one who must decrease that Christ should increase.

Do you hear the spirit of what the apostle says? **"Of this grace I bow the knees of me."** This is the power of God's grace. It brings us to our knees. It strips us of our arrogant pride and brings us to our knees. It does not merely cause one knee to bend, as when we make a token gesture of humility, but both knees are bowed to the ground. With one knee bent we are postured to raise ourselves to our feet again. With both knees bent and planted on the ground, we are not at all prepared to raise ourselves up again. From the grace of God flows the honest appraisal of ourselves as poor, miserable, and helpless sinners who must depend solely upon the mercy of God for all things, including the strength to stand before God to hear His declaration of righteousness.

It is only by grace that we recognize that we are God's dependent children who must receive all good things from our heavenly Father. Moreover, it is only by grace that we truly acknowledge that God is our Father only through the merits of the Lord of us, Jesus Christ. It is by grace that we stop trying to be strong by our own efforts so that we find our strength only through the means that our Lord has ordained to be administered to us in His Church on earth. It is only by grace that we realize that it is not by the fervency of our prayers that God hears us, but that by the fervency of God's love to us in Christ that we pray.

III. FROM WHOM ALL LINEAGE IS NAMED

Of this grace I bow the knees of me toward the Father of the Lord of us, Jesus Christ, from whom all lineage in heaven and upon earth is named.

In this passage the perfect unity and constancy and consistency of the Holy Scriptures is affirmed. All divine lineage is named from whom? From whom does St. Paul proclaim the family of God to receive its name? **“Of this grace I bow the knees of me toward the Father of the Lord of us, Jesus Christ, from whom all lineage in heaven and upon earth is named.”**

We are named with one name just as we are made to be one family with one body and one Lord and one faith and one baptism. We are baptized into God’s holy family in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Son and the Spirit are one. They are Yahweh, the LORD. They are God. The great name of the Triune God is poured out upon us. By His grace we are empowered to know ourselves as what He proclaims us to be, His beloved sons of His kingdom of grace, heirs of the kingdom of heaven with Jesus Christ.

We are named by all that proclaims the one true God. Thus we hear Isaiah prophesy: **“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”** (Isaiah 9:6) We also hear Isaiah prophesy, saying, **“I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.”** (Isaiah 45:23) St. Paul quotes this in Romans 14:11 and again in Philippians 2:10: **“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.”**

The one who sends forth His Word to accomplish His will says of Himself that unto Himself every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear. Yet of the Word that has gone forth from the mouth of God we are told that at His name, Jesus, every knee shall bow. Jesus and the Father and the Spirit are truly One. When we bow to One, we bow to the entire Godhead. God’s grace comes to us not as a divided grace, but as the singular grace of God. God works His grace for us through the faith of Jesus Christ that is imparted to us through the preaching of Jesus Christ in connection with Baptism and renewed to us in the Holy Supper. This is entirely God’s doing in connection with the power of His own holy name, which He declares to be our name as coheirs of Jesus. Those who have gone before us such as Adam and Noah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, all the saints in heaven as well as all who are with us now on the earth and even those who shall live after us, the entire lineage of the kingdom of heaven is named with the one name so that we are in communion with the One God and all who are conjoined with Him through the one true faith of Jesus Christ.

This is the prayer that is of God’s grace, the prayer which St. Paul says that he prayed. St. Paul leads us to know the love of God in Christ not by mighty acts and eloquent words, but by the power of the preaching of Christ crucified, by the power of God’s grace that brought the apostle to his knees. St. Paul leads us not as one who stands strong like a mighty warrior, but as one who submissively kneels to receive God grace and mercy. It is with such humble dependency that true prayer flows from God’s grace. It is with this humble posture that the apostle prays:

. . . that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

This is the manner of God's grace. By grace we are saved. By grace we are given faith. By grace we believe in accord with this faith. By grace we are named as God's children. By grace we are taught to know God's gracious will. By grace we hear the Gospel and believe in the merits of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. By grace we rejoice when the tribulations of the Lord Jesus are in small ways counted as our tribulations in our lifetimes as well. By grace we count these as our glory, as we look to the suffering and death of our Savior and God by which we are counted to be free from sin, death, and the power of the devil and of our own fleshly nature. By grace we receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through whom the power of God works in us so that we live in His holiness all the days of our lives. By grace Christ dwells in our hearts, as we receive His name in Baptism and as we partake of His body and blood of God's Holy Communion and of His forgiveness to us in His body. By grace we comprehend, that is, we receive and hold fast, the one true faith by which our hearts are grounded in the love of Christ by which we have the breadth and length and depth and height of the fullness of God which is in Christ and made to fill us in connection with Christ.

CONCLUSION

Is it any wonder that the apostle speaks of his tribulations as our glory. The apostle suffered because he preached nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The saints at Ephesus suffered the loss of their beloved apostle because of the preaching of Christ crucified by which they were made to be included in the lineage of Christ, the lineage of salvation and everlasting life. After we come to the Table to receive the body and blood of our Lord, we shall join in singing of this with the words of Simeon in the Nunc Dimittis:

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, For mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation: which Thou has prepared before the face of all people, a Light unto the Gentiles and the Glory of Thy people Israel.

Truly Jesus is the Light and the Glory of all who are named with His name of salvation through the one true faith of the one holy washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Truly we are named as one family, one holy lineage, with the name by which we are made to be sons of God in His holiness forevermore. Truly, when the devil moves the world to hate us and attack us on account of this blessed identity that is ours by grace, and when our own flesh fights against us to try to cause us to forget or to deny the separation that God has worked for us by His grace with the name that He has given to us, and when we feel the agony of the curse that God graciously cast upon the ground for our sake to call us continually to repent of our own strength so that we bow the knees to receive the strength that God gives through the means of grace, truly this is our glory and cause for thanksgiving and rejoicing. Truly all good things and all good works, including the good work of believing, are by God's grace, even as we pray in the Collect of the day: **"Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works."** Truly His tribulations, suffered for us and for our sake, in which we also share in this world, are our glory as we bow the knees and ask not to be from kakos but from grace. 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.