

## The First Sunday after the Epiphany

Hymns: 105, 129, 130, 133

The INTROIT

(Rev.19:6; Ps.100:1-2)

*P: On a throne, high and lifted up, I saw a Man sitting, whom the multitude of angels adores, singing together:*

**C: Behold, His dominion endureth forever.**

*P: Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands:*

**C: serve the Lord with gladness.**

The COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech You mercifully to receive the prayers of Your people who call upon You; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; 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 61:1-3**

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

The GRADUAL

(Ps.72:18,19,3, 100:1,2)

*P: Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things:*

**C: and blessed be His glorious name forever.**

*P: The mountains shall bring peace to Thy people:*

**C: and the hills righteousness. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!**

*P: Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands:*

**C: serve the Lord with gladness.**

The EPISTLE

**Romans 12:1-5**

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

*P: Hallelujah! Oh, praise the Lord, all ye nations, and laud Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us:*

**C: and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Hallelujah!**

**The HOLY GOSPEL**

**St. Luke 2:41-52**

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

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Romans 12:1-5 — “By the Mercies of God”

INTRODUCTION

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Romans 12:1-5 — “By the Mercies of God”

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

Today is the First Sunday after the Epiphany and the appointed reading of the Epistle is Romans 12:1-5:

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.**

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

## INTRODUCTION

Today is the First Sunday after the Epiphany. It is the first Sunday in the season of Christmas for the Gentiles. With the Epiphany the celebration of the nativity of our Lord extends onward and outward to all the world. What begins in the little town of Bethlehem and a very limited awareness becomes manifest by the special star that drew the Magi to the house of the LORD, the house of salvation, the very body of Jesus. No longer would the separation of nations and cultures and races be an obstacle for those who would draw near unto the LORD. Now all the peoples of every nation and tongue hear of the LORD and are able to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. Now the mercies of God are manifest and available freely to all in every time and place. The familial relationship that was lost on account of sin is now restored to all who hear and heed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Epiphany is truly the manifestation that life and salvation are by the mercies of God given purely by the grace of God in Christ.

### I. BY THE MERCIES OF GOD

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.**

St. Paul is writing as the apostle to the Gentiles to the church in Rome. This is not one of the congregations that came to be through the apostolic ministry of St. Paul. This congregation is one to which the dear apostle writes out of loving concern and encouragement. It most likely continued from the synagogue that had been established in Rome long ago, and then from St. Peter's sermon and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and the testimony of all the apostles at Pentecost. St. Paul addresses these people as brethren. They are family. They are his brothers and sisters.

He writes to them with an urgent plea of deep and abiding love.

**I beseech (call beside) therefore you-all brothers through the mercies of God to present (to stand beside) the bodies of you-all a sacrifice living holy well-pleasing to God the logical service of you-all.**

This sentence begins a wonderful explanation and exposition of the life that is shared by all who are members together of the Holy Communion of body of Christ. This sentence begins what the final sentence of today's text concludes.

**"I beseech or I call beside,"** the dear apostle writes. This word is *parakalo*. *I beside call*. The next verb is *parastesai*, which is *beside stand*. The apostle is calling to the members of the congregation as one who stands beside them in the body of Christ to stand beside one another in Christ's body. This is a call to unity, living, holy, well-pleasing to God unity. He is calling the members of Christ's body to recognize themselves as God has called them into being. Through Baptism God has called each of them into the regeneration of the Holy Communion. Together they are one, in Christ Jesus.

**"I beseech therefore you-all brothers."** How beautiful this is. I stand beside and call beside you-all brothers. The apostle acknowledges much with this statement. He states that he stands beside them as his brothers. He also states that they are brothers of one another. He also states that he is calling them to stand beside him and beside one another as brothers.

Then the dear apostle states the cause and foundation of this calling. He says that he calls beside through the mercies of God. This calling of the apostle is the same calling that God Himself speaks in calling beside of all who will believe. He is calling with the same calling that all the prophets and apostles call. He is calling through the mercies of God. These are the means of grace, through which God baptizes us into His everlasting kingdom and through which He communes with us and makes us communicants with Him.

These mercies of God, through which we are called to be generated into God's Holy Communion, are also the mercies of God through which we continue to stand beside God and all who are standing with God in His kingdom. Both the call to stand beside one another and the actual standing beside one another are through the mercies of God. The mercies of God call to us and actually accomplish that which they call us to embrace.

In connection with this calling through the mercies of God, is worked among us the life of communion and unity that God has called us to share. It is wonderful language that the Holy Spirit moved the apostle to use. He does not use an imperative or a subjunctive, but rather an indicative and an infinitive. In other words, while the apostle would certainly be right to command this, rather he speaks a tender invitation toward what God has already worked and promises to continue to work for His saints. This is like the explanation that Luther gives for the introduction to the Lord's Prayer, saying, **"God would thereby [with this little introduction] tenderly urge us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently, with all assurance, as dear children ask their dear father."**

Now consider what the apostle calls beside to us: **"to present (to stand beside) the bodies of you-all a sacrifice living holy well-pleasing to God the logical service of you-all."**

He calls us to the side of one another to stand beside one another the bodies of each member as a single sacrifice. How often do we turn this upside down and inside out? How do we imagine that evangelism is to be accomplished? Don't we imagine that it is by our personal sacrifice and our personal testimony?

St. Paul calls us beside him to recognize that this is exactly the opposite of what God works through His mercies. God does not call us to go out as individuals into the world as His witnesses. He calls us in the exact opposite direction. He does not call us to stand by ourselves in the world but to come together through His mercies. He does not call us to be strong by our own strength but to come together in His strength which is given to us in His body as we stand together beside one another as one in Him.

How can we imagine that we can be faithful witnesses unto the Gospel by our individual lives when the Gospel is God's call to be regenerated into His Communion of the Saints? Our faithfulness is rightly presented only when by His mercies we stand beside one another according to His mercies. We are not to make individual sacrifices of time and possessions and energies, but we are to present a single sacrifice together as we stand beside one another as those who truly live in and through the mercies of God. This is a sacrifice living, holy, and well-pleasing to God. This sacrifice is living because it is the presentation of which St. Paul writes in Ephesians 5, saying,

**Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.** (Ephesians 5:25-27)

This is what St. Paul means by saying that he calls beside through the mercies of God to stand beside. This is the presentation of the sacrifice living, holy, and well-pleasing to God. This is the sacrifice of Christ, of which we are communicants as we stand beside each other, confessing our sins and receiving God's absolution, hearing the Gospel preached to us, and ultimately eating and drinking the body and blood of our Lord.

This, St. Paul says, is the *logical service of you-all*.

## II. THAT YE MAY PROVE

When we hear this as our calling in Christ together, St. Paul says that we are metamorphosed into the proof or discernment of what is the will of God. He says,

**And be not conformed (fashioned alike) to the age this, but be metamorphosed to the renewing of the mind of you-all into the to discern (to prove) what the will of God, the good and well-pleasing and complete.**

This discerning is the exact same as what St. Paul writes to the Corinthians regarding discerning the body of Christ so as not to eat and drink the body and blood of the Lord to their judgment. We are not to be fashioned alike to this age but to be metamorphosed to the will of God. We are not to be fashioned alike in the way that the current evil age seeks unity but according to the mercies of God. We are called through the mercies of God to stand beside as the body of Christ, which is God's will for us, His good and well-pleasing and perfect will.

This is not something that we do for ourselves. No. That is the kind of unity that is sought after according to the wisdom of this age. In the Church, God is the one who works unity. He accomplishes this through the calling beside of His mercies. Through the pure administration of the Gospel and the Sacraments God works this for us. Through the pure doctrine and practice that He instituted, He works this amazing unity in His body. This is His good and well-pleasing and complete testimony. This is what He calls us to partake.

When we hear His call to stand beside one another in the body of Christ, unified as one true body, called together through His mercies, communing together as communicants of His mercies, this is the proof to the world that His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. This is the witness of the Church to the world. It is the witness of the mercies of God at work accomplishing what God promises.

### III. ACCORDING AS GOD HATH DEALT

This is what St. Paul explains in the next sentence, saying,

**For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.**

What grace was given to St. Paul? Through what grace does he speak? It is the grace of God in Christ. It includes the grace of the gift of apostleship, the grace that is given not to an individual, but as St. Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, to the Church. What is given to an individual as the holder of an office in the Church is given for the Church. Thus, St. Paul uses his own apostleship as the example, saying that what is given to him as an apostle is not his but God's, given for the sake of all.

Therefore, no one is to esteem himself more highly than is necessary and proper. Rather, we all are to think soberly, that is, with sound minds that function logically rather than selfishly and emotionally. For it is not sound to esteem oneself as more important than is necessary and proper. It is not logical nor sane to imagine oneself to be more important than one really is. At the same time, one does need to know one's own real value and importance.

Each member of Christ's body is important and valuable. No one should ever consider himself to be unimportant. After all, consider the price that Christ paid for each of us. We all are of such great importance to God that He planned for Christmas and Epiphany and Good Friday and Easter Sunday from eternity. Truly, we each are of more value and carry more importance than we can even properly estimate.

Yet we need to be on guard against estimating our own importance and value in God's kingdom. For it is not for us to make such an estimate. It is not for us to determine and declare our self-esteem. Rather, we are to hear from God what He declares as our value and our importance in His kingdom. We are to receive from Him our measure of faith by which we know how properly to esteem ourselves and one another. As God enriches us with His gifts, so then we look to one another, realizing that these gifts are not a reflection of our personal value or importance or faithfulness, but of God's merciful love and grace. His gifts to us as individuals are reflections of His merciful grace to us all. When this is the sober discernment with which we think of ourselves, then we truly esteem ourselves rightly and have a truly healthy self-esteem. For this is the sober thinking of faith. This is the sound mind of true faith, worked by God through His mercies.

## CONCLUSION

The dear apostle ties this together saying:

**For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.**

When we sit down to the supper table to eat, we do not esteem the various parts of our bodies higher than others. We do not think that the feet that carried us to the table and help us sit at table are less valuable than the fingers that hold the utensils and lift the food to the mouth. Nether do we count the mouth as more important than the stomach. Each part of our body functions and does its part and all the body enjoys the benefits of the meal together.

So it is in the body of Christ. Everything that we receive we receive together through the mercies of God purely by the grace of God. What He gives for one He gives for us all. Together we enjoy all the blessings of God's kingdom of grace. Together we hear the Gospel and eat and drink and live and work and play and sing and pray according to His rich and abundant mercies. Together we rejoice and give thanks. This is the proof or witness unto the world of God's good and well-pleasing and perfect will for His Church and for all who will be joined in Christ Jesus through faith. Thanks be to God. 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.