

33C 2019 SML
2THESS 3:7-12
LK 21:5-9

This evening's/mornings reading from Paul to the Church at Thessalonica is one of many passages throughout the writings of St. Paul that shed light on the imperfections of the early Church. In Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul takes the community to task: "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among the pagans." (1COR 5:1) And although Paul is obliged to condemn divisions, scandals and abuse, in spite of it all, Paul has no fear ending his letter with these words: "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (15:57-58)

Similar sentiments appear in his second letter to Timothy, where Paul is embittered by the failure of Christians to help him when he was held prisoner: "You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me." (2TIM 1:15) "At my first defense, no one took my part; all deserted me. May it not be held against them." (2TIM 4:16) And yet, despite the

understandable sadness of the imprisoned Apostle, he fervently urges his disciples to know no limits. “I charge, you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus . . . : preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.” (4:1-2)

Although the letters of Paul were written between 51 and 67 AD, think not that some in the Church were starting to go south just 20 years after the death and resurrection of Our Blessed Lord. Nope, some in the Church went south right out of the gate:

- ✓ Out of the 12 apostles, one betrayed
- ✓ Out of the 72 disciples, some walked with Him no more
- ✓ Out of the 8 deacons, one lapsed

Worse, yet, some in the Church going south was predicted by Our Blessed Lord, for He predicted:

- ✓ there would be chaff among the wheat
- ✓ there would be bad fish among the good fish
- ✓ there would be foolish virgins among wise virgins
- ✓ there would be goats among the sheep
- ✓ and there would be wolves in shepherd’s clothing

Within such banal humanity, a humanity as wretched as the symptoms just listed, there was a certainty of a new humanity,

the humanity of Christ capable of transforming any kind of miserable humanity, provided it runs the “race” of the 12 apostles minus one, setting out on a journey supported by grace. That’s the reason why:

- ✓ 11 apostles became apostolic
- ✓ While some walked, most stayed
- ✓ Seven deacons were faithful
- ✓ Seven virgins were wise
- ✓ There was wheat to harvest
- ✓ good fish to catch
- ✓ And good sheep to be shepherded

The Church has been saved through the centuries by all those who, in their pursuit of the truth and in their love for the ideal, were not shocked by the limitations, circumstances, and the apparent incomprehensibility of human affairs, and who set out in search of the pearl of great price, to find the buried treasure in the mud. In this way, they showed the world and history that their eyes and their hearts were trained on the treasure and not the mud. And as a result, the fervent would not drop their commitment because others dropped theirs.

The alternative would be either to leave the Church or to lose their faith. Let’s start with losing faith. I’ll quote (Pierre

Lecomte du Noüy), a French biophysicist and philosopher, whose name I could never pronounce, who wrote:

Those who, without any proof (as has been demonstrated elsewhere) systematically force themselves to destroy the idea of God, have done cowardly and unscientific work. I proclaim this with all the more force and conviction in as much as I do not have that faith, that truth, which should gush from deep within our being. I do not believe in God more than I believe in the reality of evolution or the reality of electrons. ... And I have the scientific certainty of not being mistaken. Far from being (as other men of science whom I envy) supported and aided by an unshakable faith in God, I went into life with a destructive skepticism that was very much in fashion those days. I had to spend thirty years in the laboratory in order to arrive at the point of being convinced that those who had the duty of enlightening me, if only by confessing to me their ignorance, had instead deliberately lied to me. My conviction today is rational. I have arrived at it by the pathways of biology and physics and am persuaded that it is impossible for any man of science who reflects, not to arrive at this point, unless it be because of blindness or bad faith. But the path that I followed is a tortuous one and not a good one. And it is so that others may avoid the immense loss of time and the fatigue that I have suffered

So there is the testimony of a scientist who says you cannot disprove the existence of God by science.

Let's continue with those who have left the Church. Here at St. Mary of the Lakes, we were grateful for increased attendance for the last four years. But sadly, this year, our attendance has decreased.

So if you notice that someone who used to sit near you is not now, it would behoove you to reach out to them and ask if all is well and that they are missed at Church. Often times, what we hear is in a parish our side with a weekend attendance as large as ours, if I didn't show up, I wouldn't be missed. We don't want the fallen away at SML to feel that way.

The crisis of pedophilia is a societal problem, not just a church problem. But for the Catholic Church, scandal is so much worse, because the world expects so much more of a Catholic, and especially a Catholic priest.

Any fallen away Catholic or fallen away Catholic priest whose name is quoted as a by-word of sin, and who is supposed to be an argument against the Church, is really a strong Catholic credential. The seriousness of any fall depends on the height from which one has fallen, and since one can fall from no greater height than union with Christ in His Church (especially as a priest), the fall is obviously greater. Nowhere does evil become so visible as when contrasted with the ideal.

The very horror the world expresses at the fall of a Catholic priest is the measure of the high virtue it expected of him.

That is why the greatest enemies of the Church are not the persecutors who bear the rack and the sword as described in today's gospel, nor the anti-Catholic bigot handing out pamphlets on the boardwalk, with his lies and half-truths, but rather her own priests.

Only those entrusted with the sacred can betray effectively. It was only Judas who knew where Jesus could be found after dark: in the olive trees of the garden; only he who had been with the Master could lead soldiers to the vulnerable parts where Christian faith can be most deeply pained; only they can go straight to the Christian core without hesitation, utter "Hail Rabbi" with a kiss to His cheek and 30 pieces of silver clinking at his side, to testify that Divine Truth is always sold for something far less.

To justify his break from the Church, the Catholic may give many reasons, and in recent years, the scandal, but the world has yet to hear of anyone who left the Church because he wanted to live a more saintly life.

Because of scandals, the Church must always reform herself, and this the Church has done. Since the reforms of the

Dallas Charter were put into place in 2002, credible allegations in the Church have dwindled to .007 percent. No other institution can boast of this safe statistic.

Yet there will come times when Our Blessed Lord will seem asleep at the bottom of the boat, and the whole Church will appear to be sinking. And this may seem disastrous to a man without faith, but that is because a man without faith can see disaster only when it happens, never before it happens. For the man of faith, the Church will never ruin. Infused with the Spirit of God, She has the power to repair Her own organism, grow new members, and surmount Herself by a reform.

Though some of Her children have left Her and saddened Her soul, there is joy in Her heart because of the children She still nourishes; there is gladness in Her eyes because of the faith She still preserves; there is understanding in Her soul for while She has known the frailty of our flesh, She also knows how to nourish us back to life.