

32nd Wednesday II

Titus 3:1-7

Beloved:

Remind them to be under the control of magistrates and authorities, to be obedient, to be open to every good enterprise.

They are to slander no one, to be peaceable, considerate, exercising all graciousness toward everyone.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deluded, slaves to various desires and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful ourselves and hating one another.

But when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Psalm 23:1b-3a, 3bc-4, 5, 6

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

*In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
Beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul..*

*He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side*

*With your rod and your staff
that give me courage.*

*You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.*

Luke 17:11-19

As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem, he traveled through Samaria and Galilee.

As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him. They stood at a distance from him and raised their voice, saying, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" And when he saw them, he said, "Go show yourselves to the priests."

As they were going they were cleansed. And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.

He was a Samaritan.

Jesus said in reply, "Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?"

Then he said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."

✠... *in hope of eternal life.*

That is how our letter to Titus ends.

Our hope...

Our hope is in the mercy of God, not in our good deeds. You see you aren't good enough. You are good enough for me on your good days, but then there are days I'm not so happy with you, and of course that is your fault, not mine.

And yet, you do inspire me on occasion.

Today is a special day for those who inspire me, our Veterans. We did not send our little angels off to war. Their rough vocabulary would make Mary Magdalene blush. But they did go forth ready to sacrifice themselves for our survival, our well-being, and for our freedoms. Such are they who offered themselves in the image of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. And may I say to my Muslim and Jewish friends and friends of other faiths and philosophies, that I hold your sacrificial offering in the same honor, esteem and appreciation. My prayer is that I may be ready to sacrifice for you as well.

Our hopes have been preserved by their blood, sweat and tears, as well as the blood, sweat and tears of those who are on the front lines domestically, placing themselves in harm's way for others, for the sake of God's love for us.

May we give a nod to our health care workers during this pandemic. They take care of us when we are afflicted, and yet strive to stay healthy to go home to their loved ones, only to return the next day to care for us.

May we honor our essential workers who help us stay-at-home folks by putting groceries in our trunks, for keeping our gas pumps operating, who replace my hot-water heater and who minister at our altars during live-streams for us who hunger spiritually at home.

Tonight, my heart goes out to another veteran, not of military service, but in service to the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed. He's found serving in soup kitchens, leading marches to end racism and arranging round tables for the homeless in their self-organizing efforts. Some would say, though, that he smells... like the sheep he feeds, that is.¹

My friend, a brother deacon, is currently in the ICU after surgery for knife wounds sustained in a robbery. In the shadow of the church doors, the assailant demanded money, and when money was not at hand, my friend was viciously and repeatedly stabbed, the assailant fleeing the scene. Thanks to the live-saving actions of near-by parishioners and first responders, my friend was rushed to the ER and surgery. His condition improves every day.

All of our battles are a reflection of the universal war against evil. Who's the good gal or the bad guy is sometimes hard to determine. Not so that night in front of the church doors. My friend's arms were full of his liturgical alb and stole. The assailant's hand was holding a knife. It may appear that the one is destined for Paradise because of his goodness and the other is destined for Perdition because of his malevolence.

However, our Father in Heaven sentences both of our poor souls to His love. Eternity is not devoid of justice, but I'm just so glad that it is governed by mercy.

I count on this... and so may anyone who reads Paul's Letter to Titus.

But when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

When the ... love of God our savior appeared – Do you hear Christmas bells?

Not because of righteous deeds – My good enough is not enough?

But because of his mercy – God's mercy is more dependable than my goodness.

Through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit – Certainly the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, but may we reflect on the spiritual reality that these signs signify?

Through Jesus Christ our savior – “By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”ⁱⁱ

So that we may be justified by his grace – not by our goodness

And become heirs in hope of eternal life – “Heirs” is a claim of family, because we live in relationship, a relationship of love of God and of neighbor.

... in hope of eternal life

✠

ⁱ Pope Francis, March 2013: “Be shepherds with the smell of sheep.”

ⁱⁱ Said by the deacon in the Liturgy of the Eucharist