

Scripture Reading

A Reading from the Second Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 4:7-9)

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. The Word of the Lord. R. Thanks be to God.

Reflection – We may be like clay pots but God's unsurpassing power is within us

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Baptism removed original sin and all our personal sins and the punishment due to them. It does not, however, remove some of the other inherent consequences of original sin: concupiscence – an inclination to sin; death (physical) and suffering. Thus, after Baptism, we still need to work at our salvation and to freely cooperate with God's grace which will lead us to our sanctification and salvation. It is a sharing of the Cross of Christ, the Christian vocation to embrace the Cross and be willing to suffer – which St Paul explains well: *Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His Body, which is the Church (Colossians 1:24).* We have great help from the sacraments to keep our souls in the state of grace.

Everyone (even Jesus when He was in the flesh) is subject to temptation. God allows His children to be tempted and to exercise their freewill. Without temptation and trials there would be no way for us to prove our faith and trust in, and love for God. God's laws are naturally written in the hearts and conscience of people. However, through indifference to the existence of God and by following the selfish aspirations of the heart, the conscience is not formed in the righteousness of God. A human life is either led by the Spirit living within or by the body with its concupiscence which inclines the soul to sin. The Spirit leads to inner peace and harmony. However, those who are led by the body, its senses and feelings will find restlessness and remain unfulfilled. In the evil times we are now living, it is increasingly difficult to discern temptation and sin as they come camouflaged with labels that appeal e.g. "choice", "freedom", etc. We have to be very vigilant to discern the occasions of subtle temptation. Sin is always sin notwithstanding popular human opinion or thinking.

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). Satan re-doubles his efforts in tempting a Christian compared to a non-Christian because a fallen Christian is a higher victory for his dark kingdom. In the same way, Satan will intensify his efforts to cause the fall of a just and righteous soul. *The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all (Psalm 34:19).* If we desire to walk in the ways of the Lord, we will face all kinds of afflictions, be confused, be persecuted and may fall many times from grace. But the Lord is always near to those who love His will (cf. John 8:29) and delivers them from all their troubles. Therefore, we should not be afraid of afflictions and sufferings as we will never be forsaken by God. We should never give in to despair because with God on our side, we will never be destroyed by the enemy of our Salvation. *God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13).*

Our faith should not rest on human wisdom but on God's powers (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:5). Our faith starts to falter once we allow ourselves to be led by our human feelings and logical thinking. St Peter, the Apostle was able to walk on the water when Jesus commanded him to do so. However, when he saw how rough the sea and how strong the wind was, he started feeling afraid and began sinking. God's power cannot work in us if we choose to be led by feelings instead of faith. When Jesus was on earth, there were places in which He did not perform miracles because there was no faith. On the other hand, for those who demonstrated strong faith in Jesus, they received what they were hoping for e.g. the centurion's servant's healing.

Conversation with Jesus: Precious Lord, You did not promise that our life will be free from temptations or suffering but You say to me as You said to St Paul: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (1 Corinthians 12:9).* May I never despair of my weaknesses because Your grace is always available to me, and it is only in my weaknesses that Your power can be manifested to me. The deeper I fall, the greater the height You will help me climb. Deepen my trust in and love for You so that every trial and temptation that come my way can be used to fortify my faith in You. Without Your grace, I can do nothing. But with Your grace, I can say together with St Paul: I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me (cf. Philippians 4:13). Mary, Mother of Salvation, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.