

The Second Sunday of Advent

Romans 15:4–13

I do not know how many of you actually had ancestors on this continent at the time of the Civil War; some of you do, I am sure, but probably not all that many; even fewer of you had ancestors on this continent at the time of the Revolutionary War. Nevertheless, you all consider the Revolutionary War part of *your* history, do you not, and the Civil War. Of course you do. At some point your family was *grafted* into this nation, and this means that this nation is *your* nation, and the history of this nation is *your* history, also, and you have every right to claim it as your own.

There is something similar at work, when we hear it today that the Apostle writes that *whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction*. With this, he is referring to that which was at that time known as *Holy Scripture*, that is: the Old Testament, with the promises God gave to His people of old that the *Anointed One* would come, the *Messiah* in the Hebrew, or the *Christ* in Greek, with salvation from slavery to suffering and sorrow and sin and restoration to perfect peace and prosperity.

What the Apostle wrote to the Romans he wrote to a Church composed of different kinds of Christians. Some were Jews who had come to know and believe that Jesus is *the Christ*, that is: the Anointed Saviour sent from God in accordance with His promises to their fathers. Others had never been Jews; they had only come to know the God of Israel as His love had come upon them in the Word of Christ crucified. And when this had happened, they had been *grafted* into Israel, that is: into the people of God; and not as visitors and strangers, foreigners and aliens, but with full birthright as children of God and heirs to His Kingdom.

More than that, in fact: from what we hear today, we learn that this was always what God had in mind with His promises to His people of old, and with calling Israel as His own people altogether. *For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, writes the Apostle, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.*

With His promises to His people of old, and in all His dealings with His people, God always had in mind the gathering of sinners of all nations and tribes and tongues into His true Israel, His people of faith.

The history of ancient Israel was a parable performed in history of how God, in His goodness, would restore all His lost children to the glory from which we all have fallen, with our sin, to live in His presence, in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. His love for Israel was always His love for all of Mankind. The love He showed to Israel was always for all people to see, in order that all might be drawn to His love and grafted into His people.

As it is written, as we hear it today that the Apostle quotes it: "Therefore I will praise You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name." And again it is said: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people." And again: "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol Him." And again Isaiah says: "The Root of Jesse will come, even He who arises to rule the Gentiles; in Him will the Gentiles hope."

And the fullness of His love to Israel, and to all people, was shown in this: that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.

The Son of God, who is Himself God from eternity, anointed as Heir of all things, came into the world for the salvation of all sinners.

He had Himself born into the lineage of Jesse, the Father of David, and into the royal line of Israel. More importantly, though, He had Himself born into all of sinful Mankind, and made one with us in our sin, baptised with the Baptism of sinners to take upon Himself the sin of all sinners and bear Himself His own judgement against it, to pay the price and penalty for all evil and ungodliness and impurity that is in our hearts and minds, and in our lives, in full and in abundance, so that we might stand righteous and right before His judgement, free from all sin and guilt, from all impurity and evil.

This is and was always the only righteousness available to sinners before God: the forgiveness of sin He Himself would win for all sinners. The righteousness He required of His people in the Law was always meant to show His people their need for a *greater* righteousness, a righteousness given to sinners only out of the goodness of God. And that this greater righteousness was to come, that was not only taught in His *promises*, but also shown in the sacrifices He had given to His people for atonement of their sins. They were but foreshadowings of this: that the Son of God would suffer as the only sacrifice sufficient to make up for the sin of sinners, for the great evil and injustice against God that all sin is.

Only in Christ is righteousness available for sinners.

He is Himself the only real righteousness of sinners. And He really is the righteousness of *all* sinners.

With His Word of His love and what His love has done for sinners He claims us all as His own, won with His bitter sufferings and death. He promises us full forgiveness for all our sins and shortcomings, rescue from eternal death and damnation, and eternal life with Him in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. And with His promise, all that He promises is given, really given, to all who hear His promise in faith, and take it to heart.

And nothing else matters; ultimately, nothing else matters. This is what the Apostle meant to teach with what we hear today: that there should be no distinction in the Church of Christ, in Rome or elsewhere, between different kinds of Christians. Differences in origin or culture should not take precedence over the faith that binds faithful Christians together in the love of God, in obedience to His Word and worship of His salvation, as His beloved children. *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, as he writes it, as we hear it, in accord with Christ Jesus that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Yes, for for the worship of the congregation to be a *common* confession of a common faith, that is what is *in accord with Christ Jesus*, or in other words: that Christians in a congregation *with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. After all, there is but one God, although He is Father and Son and Holy Spirit, for these Three are One, and the Truth of God is one, also. *Is Christ divided?*, the Apostle asks elsewhere, in another letter. Obviously, the answer is no, and the obvious implication is that neither should the Church be, being that she is His body. Christians should submit to the common faith, entrusted by God to His Church in Holy Scripture, and confessed by His faithful Church in her preaching and teaching and worship. If what your Church preaches and teaches is not *your* faith, well, then your Church is not really your Church, and it is deceitful of you to pretend that it is, by claiming membership, and by receiving the Sacrament there. It is deceitful to the congregation, to those who think they commune in a congregation of the common faith. And you are deceiving yourself if you think it is healthy for you to just sit through worship and know so much better and not take to heart what is preached and taught, but do your own thing instead, and have your own religion.

What is *in accord with Christ Jesus* is this, as we hear it that the Apostle writes it: *that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. For you to mentally isolate yourself from the Church, thinking that you are above everybody else, it is not *in accord with Christ Jesus*, to insist on your own opinions and rules rather than submit to the common faith. Christ is not divided, nor should His Church be.

And her unity will be disturbed, also, by jealousy and pettiness, when each insists on his or her own interests. *Welcome one another*, as we hear it today that the Apostle writes it, that is: *make room for each other, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God*; or as he writes it elsewhere: *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*. The Church of Christ is to be united not only in a common faith and confession of Him, but also in His love.

In His love, yes; for this must come from God. As we also hear that the Apostle writes it: *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus*.

As the Church in Rome was composed of Christians of different kinds, so Christians in any congregation may very well have nothing in common, except *everything*; except all that matters! All that matters, ultimately, is Christ and His love, what His love has done for us, what His love gives to us, and what His love will work in us. Of this the Apostle writes, also: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope*.

With His Word of His love and what His love has done for us He breathes His love into us, and His life, with His Holy Spirit, so that we come alive from the death of disobedience and defiance and doubt and come alive to Him, so that we believe His promise of rescue from eternal death and damnation and eternal life with Him in glory. And so He fills us *with all joy and peace in believing*, as the Apostle writes it, *so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope*.

Certain of our salvation as we are, as we hear His promise, and He makes us to believe it, how can we not *abound in hope*? How can the joy of our salvation not overflow in *joy and peace in believing*, when we see that we have nothing to lose from *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*; that anything and everything we could ever lose is *nothing* compared to what He gives us, which cannot and shall not be taken away from us?

Blessed is He that comes, in the name of the Lord. *Amen*.