

“We have put our faith in Jesus Christ, in order that we might be justified through this faith, and not through actions dictated by the law.” (Galatians 2:16)

Today’s readings for your perusal are: Psalm 107: 1-7, 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13 and Matthew 23: 1-12.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

One of the enduring delights of the book of Psalms is how they capture and express the full range of human emotions as we struggle through life. We have a good example here in today’s reading from Psalm 107 where we have the Psalmist encouraging the people to praise the Lord for His unfailing love which he shows to all those who believe, that is us, in that He hears the prayers of those in need and saves them. The Psalmist reminds us of how the Lord has saved the Israelites from various hardships that they have faced reminding them that it is through their prayers that God has heard of their plight and has responded to their need, as He does for us today. This calls for praise and thanksgiving to be given up to God for His bounty and His unfailing love, grace and mercy.

1 "Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good; his love is eternal!" 2 Repeat these words in praise to the Lord, all you whom he has saved. He has rescued you from your enemies 3 and has brought you back from foreign countries, from east and west, from north and south. 4 Some wandered in the trackless desert and could not find their way to a city to live in. 5 They were hungry and thirsty and had given up all hope. 6 Then in their trouble they called to the Lord, and he saved them from their distress. 7 He led them by a straight road to a city where they could live.

What is comforting about this Psalm is God’s redeeming love for His people. The love mentioned within the Psalm is the committed, unchanging, loving determination of the Lord who will never give up on those whom he has chosen for himself. No wonder the Psalmist is telling the people to *1 "Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good; his love is eternal!" 2 Repeat these words in praise to the Lord, all you whom he has saved. He has rescued you from your enemies.* It is God who takes it upon

himself the burden of care and who rescues us from the dangers we face in life. It is good to be able to give praise to a God who loves us and cares for us, and all he wants from us is a committed service to him, devoted lives made spiritually pure so that we can live a full life in his service.

In today's world service has different meanings, but for the Christian service means working hard for God or as Paul puts it: **9** *Surely you remember, our friends, how we worked and toiled! We worked day and night so that we would not be any trouble to you as we preached to you the Good News from God.* Unlike the Greeks of Thessalonica Paul did not despise manual labour. The Greeks viewed manual labour as only fit for slaves, but Paul was not ashamed of doing any sort of work that would help further the Gospel message and neither should we. Paul also did not want to be a burden on the people by relying on their hospitality. Again, the desire to serve God is strongly felt here, to show love rather than to burden the Thessalonians can be seen by the hard work that was done by the missionaries. They worked day and night at their respective trades to earn their keep; Paul himself was a tent-maker. Instead Paul saw it as an opportunity to meet with the people and to press upon them the urgent need to believe and to keep the faith strong. For many Christians today this is how they to interact with other people and witness for Christ, by working alongside others and letting them see what it means to be a Christian and being open and honest about their faith, this is in many ways quiet evangelism, allowing people to ask questions of a believer. All the Apostles did this.

10 *You are our witnesses, and so is God, that our conduct toward you who believe was pure, right, and without fault.* **11** *You know that we treated each one of you just as parents treat their own children.* **12** *We encouraged you, we comforted you, and we kept urging you to live the kind of life that pleases God, who calls you to share in his own Kingdom and glory.* Here Paul appeals to his readers and asks them to remember their own experiences of Paul and his fellow workers; he asked them to remember how he (Paul) and his fellow missionaries lived upright lives and at the same time how they treated everyone as if they were his

children. For his main concern and our main concern today should be to encourage a way of life that is fitting for the Saints of God. I like how the KJV puts it *“That ye would walk worthy of God”* So let us walk with God today, commit ourselves to working hard for Him by living our lives by His command because: **13** *...there is another reason why we always give thanks to God. When we brought you God's message, you heard it and accepted it, not as a message from human beings but as God's message, which indeed it is. For God is at work in you who believe.* Paul never preached anything other than the word of God, and so should we, we should always preach the Gospel message from the heart, unchanged, because if it is watered down to fit in with societies views then it makes it useless. We must never tailor the Gospel message to fit popular outcomes, or modern ideas, after all the Gospel message flies in the face of such worldly ideals and so we must stand firm in our faith and not bow to societal pressure to conform. The word of God is unchanging from generation to generation and those who will hear will understand, but those who refuse to hear or who ridicule its message will be judged accordingly. God is at work in your life right this very minute, whether you know it or not. A well-known preacher called Joyce Meyer puts it: “I encourage you to say every day “God is working in me right now. He is changing me!” Speaking from your mouth what the Word says, not what you feel.” In other words, speaking God’s Word out loud strengthens your faith, it makes it known to the world and brings strength to the Christian because hearing yourself say it makes it more real and affirming.

That brings us to the Gospel reading today where we find Jesus challenging the authorities and bringing to the fore the fact that there is a contrast between the values of God’s Kingdom and the superficial approach of the Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders, who promoted man made rules over God’s teachings.

1 *Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples. 2 "The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees are the authorized interpreters of Moses' Law. 3 So you must obey and follow*

everything they tell you to do; do not, however, imitate their actions, because they don't practice what they preach. Jesus was not against these teachers of the Law, he recognised that they were earnest, moral people but he did not like what they stood for, a burdensome code of religious practise which ignored the inner workings of the soul and instead put emphasis on this burdensome system of religious rules and regulations as more important than obeying the will of God and the teachings of God, that was why they were referred to as hypocrites. **4** *They tie onto people's backs loads that are heavy and hard to carry, yet they aren't willing even to lift a finger to help them carry those loads.* **5** *They do everything so that people will see them. Look at the straps with scripture verses on them which they wear on their foreheads and arms, and notice how large they are! Notice also how long are the tassels on their cloaks!* **6** *They love the best places at feasts and the reserved seats in the synagogues;* **7** *they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have people call them "Teacher."* Again, all the Pharisees and teachers of the Law seemed to be bothered about was their appearance in society, 'look at me aren't I important'. We must never be like that and yes there are people within our Church body who see themselves as more important than others from ministers, priests, pastors down to members of the congregation. The warning is there for all of us to take note off. The warning is against seeking titles of honour which in turn fosters the sin of pride and it is this we should avoid. **8** *You must not be called "Teacher," because you are all equal and have only one Teacher.* **9** *And you must not call anyone here on earth "Father," because you have only the one Father in heaven.* **10** *Nor should you be called "Leader," because your one and only leader is the Messiah.* **11** *The greatest one among you must be your servant.* If we wish to seek titles for ourselves, and seek attention then that is a sure sign that that man or woman of faith is beginning to stray from the values of the Kingdom of heaven. Instead as Jesus puts it **12** *Whoever makes himself great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be made great.* As I said previously the warning is against seeking titles of honour which foster pride but instead as the Saints of God we must ever strive to ensure that we live Godly lives, with hearts full of love and

forgiveness, earnestly seeking to do God's will. We must be humble followers of God, people who are modest in what they do and who put all the glory towards God after all it is only through Him that we are able to achieve what we have in life. It is not my will that is done but His will always His will. To God be the Glory! Amen.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father we come to you today to seek your strength, to find your peace. We ask you in Jesus name to guide us with your Holy Spirit so that we can walk with you through life, keeping you central always, for you are our rock and our salvation. Keep us from seeking praise from mankind, but instead help us to diligently serve you, carrying out your work and will so that we can be a blessing in your Holy name to those whom we meet.

Give us compassionate hearts, bless us with discernment so that we can know and see what needs to be done and then guide our words so that our prayers can be meaningful and full of love for those around us. Help us Lord to meet the needs of those in our families, in our neighbourhood and in our places of work, help us to be there. Help us to be a listening ear, or a helping hand, help us to genuinely show warmth and love to other peoples so that through us they will witness your love and come to know your peace.

To many people today Lord are struggling in life with nowhere or no one to turn to, help us to direct them to you, who is always there, who is always willing and able to help, if only those in need would believe and reach out to you, so help us Lord to be there for those who are hurting or who are lost. In Jesus name we ask that you go to those who are hurting and lost and make them whole and bring them your healing peace.

For the leaders of our communities and our governments grant them wisdom to lead wisely and make wise decisions so that the country can overcome the burden of Corona Virus. Help us all Lord to stay strong and follow the guidance and also helps us to look out for each other and to pray for each other and for a recovery. Bless our doctors and nurses, the workers in the care homes and all those who look after us. Amen.