

**14th Sunday, Year B, July 7, 2024.**

**“My Grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”**

**-Second reading: (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)**

“Brothers and sisters: That I, Paul, because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming (elated) conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ***‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’*** Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

**Who is St Paul:** No person, apart from our Lord Jesus Christ himself, shaped the history of Christianity like the Apostle Paul. A convert, whose life had a turnaround - he was transformed by God from a persecutor of Christians to a preacher for Christ. Paul preached for Christ throughout the Roman Empire on three missionary journeys. St Paul wrote Letters to various churches, which became part of the New Testament, and read almost every Sunday at Mass. He is often called the Apostle to the Gentiles. His life teaches us that God does not waste our time; he will use both our past and present so we may serve him in the future.

**Thorn in his flesh:** We do not know exactly what Paul’s thorn in the flesh was because he doesn’t tell us. Some have suggested that it was malaria, epilepsy, or a disease of the eyes (see Galatians 4: 13-15). Whatever the case, it was a chronic problem – it affected his strength, and at times kept him from working. This thorn was a hindrance to his ministry, and he prayed for its removal, but God refused. Paul was a very self-sufficient person, so this thorn must have been difficult for him.

Three times Paul prayed for healing and did not receive it. He received, however, things far greater because he received greater grace from God, a stronger character, humility, and an ability to empathize with others. In addition, it benefited those around him as they saw God at work in his life. God, according to his sovereign plan, doesn’t heal some believers of their physical ailments. We don’t know why some are spared and others are not. God chooses according to his divine purposes. Our task is to pray, to believe, and to trust. Paul is living proof that holy living and courageous faith do not ensure instant physical healing. When we pray for healing, we must trust our bodies to God’s care. We must recognize that nothing separates us from his love

(Romans 8: 35-39) and that our spiritual condition is always more important than our physical condition.

Although God did not remove Paul's affliction, he promised to demonstrate his power in Paul. The fact that God's power is displayed in our weaknesses should give us courage and hope. As we recognize our limitations, we will depend more on God for our effectiveness rather than on our energy, effort, or talent. Our limitations not only help develop Christian character but also deepen our worship because in admitting them, we affirm God's strength.

When we are strong in abilities or resources, we are tempted to do God's work on our own, and that can lead to pride. When we are weak, allowing God to fill us with his power, then we are stronger than we could ever be on our own. When obstacles come (Rejection, ridicule, hardship, ill-health, death of a loved one), we must depend on God. Only his power will make us effective for him and will help us do work that has lasting value.

### **A lesson in rejection and prejudice:**

#### **A Prophet Without Honor: (Gospel of Mark 6: 1-6)**

“Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, ***“A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.”*** He could not do any (mighty) miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.”  
(Mark 6: 1-6)

**Jesus was disappointed with the people of his native town because of their pride and unbelief. His teachings and all the miracles he performed had little effect on the people because they did not accept his message or believe that he was from God. They "knew" Jesus. They knew his background and his family. It's been said that an expert is anyone who has come from out of town. There's truth in that. Jesus looked elsewhere, seeking those who would respond positively to his miracles and message.**

The question is, why did Jesus take his disciples with him? The disciples needed to see how Jesus acted in times of denial. They had been part of his successes. They had witnessed miracles at wedding feasts, seen a bleeding woman healed, and the miracle of a dead daughter brought back to life. Now the disciples needed to witness how Jesus reacted to rejection and prejudice so they would know how to react when they faced those realities.

**1. *God says, don't let the limited faith in others limit your faithfulness to God.***

Sometimes in life, the most severe critics are often very familiar people - family members, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, or people who have some reasonable knowledge of your vulnerability.

In the ministry, the measure of success would not be how well the people responded, but how well the minister/disciple obeyed God and thus fulfilled God's purpose for him/her. Ezekiel's message was rejected (today's first Sunday reading). Isaiah and Jeremiah also prophesied with little positive response. Jesus was rejected in his town, and at his trial was again rejected by the Jewish nations (they asked for the release of Barabbas and demanded the crucifixion of Jesus). The disciples of Christ will also later be rejected, wrongly accused, tortured, and killed for their faith in Christ. God's truth does not depend on how people respond. God always gives us the strength to accomplish what he asks us to do.

You and I do not have to be honored or respected to be useful to God. We, as well as those first disciples, need to remember that if friends, neighbors, or even family don't respect your Christian work, don't let their rejection keep you from serving God. If there is anything for you and me to recognize, it is that sometimes rejection is the cost of discipleship. Don't let it discourage you. Believe, trust, and stand firm, for God stands with you and keeps you strong.

**2. *God says, to stay close to and learn from others in the faith.***

Jesus took his disciples with him. He allowed them to share his experiences so they could learn. They learned while they were with him. Standing together they saw the reaction of the people and the love of their teacher. In the book of Acts, when people accepted Jesus as Lord, the first thing they would do is bond together in a church. Suffering would come, and they needed each other's support and help. So do we.

People who come to Hope, come because they are looking for something. And what many times we are looking for is warmth, friendship, and acceptance. As dynamic disciples here at St Pius X church, our primary goal must be that each person who

enters that church door sees here the acceptance and love they are longing to find. That takes time and effort on our part. Jesus took his friends with him when he went back home. Nazareth reminds us that we have an obligation in friendship too.

3. *Never allow what others do or say to deter us.* Prejudice, rejection, and ridicule did not stop Jesus. Other people's reactions and words must never obstruct our walk with Christ. God longs so much for each one of us to be with Him. Don't let what anyone does rob you of that relationship that God wants for you.

4. *Jesus died for all:* The Scriptures did not indicate that Jesus ever went back to Nazareth. But that day on Calvary (Good Friday), it was for the people of Nazareth that Jesus died. It was for the crowd who cried "Crucify him!" Christ died for the people of Billings, Laurel, Wolf Point, and Nigeria. Jesus Christ suffered and died for all people, including the men and women who today turn him away and ignore him. And nothing they or anyone else could say or do to him would change that divine love and mercy. That is the Savior we follow! Amen.

Thank you, and God bless you.

**Fr. Martin Ezeihuaku, MSP.**