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Letting ourselves be challenged by St Paul

Welcome and Presentation

Prayer (Charles Wesley):

He owns me for his child,
his pardoning voice I heard.
In Jesus reconciled, I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And “Father, Abba, Father” cry.

1) Eph 1:3-14 - God’s plan of salvation

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.
5 He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,
6 to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace
8 which he lavished upon us.
9 For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ
10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
11 In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will,
12 we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.

13 In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,
14 which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Summary: the 6 blessings mentioned in this letter:

- 1) We have been chosen to be holy and without blame, in love.
- 2) We become God's own children, by Jesus Christ; through adoption as our true vocation.
- 3) We are redeemed, according to the riches of his grace.
- 4) He has made known to us the mystery of his will that we will all be one in Christ.
- 5) We (people of Israel) have been elected to be witnesses in the world to the coming of Christ.
- 6) You (pagans) received, through his word, the Holy Spirit as a sign of the fulfilment of his promise.

Questions:

- How do we experience these blessings in our life?
- What does it change in our lives, in comparison to others, say non believers.

Take a piece of paper and write a few words which describe these blessings.

Sharing

We will write these words on the white board.

Prayer:

Thanksgiving.

2) Phil. 2:1-11 - Preserve unity in humility!

1 So if there is any encouragement (a) in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit (b), any affection and compassion (c).

2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

3 Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves.

4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Reflect on these few words:

Literal meaning of the original Greek word:

(a) For “encouragement” (consolation): the same word as the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit who is the true consoler).

(b) For “participation in the Spirit”: community or communion of the Spirit = action to have in common, compassion, to be ONE with,

(c) For “affection”: guts.

- being in the form of God - took upon him the form of a servant,
- he emptied himself - God has highly exalted him,
- he humbled himself - God has given him a name.

Silence (10 min)

Prayer of Br Charles

Surrendering to God and making ourselves humble in front of Him.

Sharing

3) 1 Co 4:9-13 - Suffering for Christ

9 For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.

10 We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute.

11 To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless,

12 and we labour, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure;

13 when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things.

Question (5 min personal reflection):

In what is our suffering as Christians different from that of others?

- we are fools - you are wise,
- we are weak - you are strong,
- we are in disrepute - you are in honour,
- hunger, thirst, being ill-clad, buffeted, homeless,
- being reviled, we bless,
- being persecuted, we endure,
- being slandered, we conciliate,
- the refuse of the world.

Sharing

Intercession:

For the suffering in the world and around us.

4) 2 Co 9:8-15 - God's generosity

8 And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.

9 As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever."

10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

11 You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God;

12 for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God.

13 Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others;

14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you.

15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Statement:

Everything is given freely to us: life, air, water, food, instruction, love.

Offering

Collect 2 objects outside or anywhere and place one on the altar and give one to your neighbour. In preparation for the following questions (sharing).

Sharing:

- How can we escape exchanges which are ruled by money?
- How can we practice a way of passing on freely what we have received freely?
- What is essential in practising generosity?

Prayer (Isaac Watts):

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ my God.

All the vain things that charm me most.

I sacrifice them to his blood.

5) Col 2:16-23 - Against false asceticism

16 Therefore let no one pass judgement on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath.

17 These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,

19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations,

21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"

22 (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines?

23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

Sharing

- Which forms are important for you in the celebrations at church?
- What do you miss in the celebration in our parish?

Final prayer:

Father, you have promised that nothing in all creation can separate me from your love.

Put your love between me and all those things which trouble me,
so that I may see them in their perspective.

I entrust my present and my future to your faithful and unending care.

Amen.