



March 1987 #108

For the Third Sunday in Lent -- Romans 5:1-11

A Call to the Exultant Life

The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.
-- Rom. 5:5

In the Noonday Office, we may read this very short reminder of a remarkable passage in Paul's Letter to the Romans. The passage begins, "Therefore, now that we have been justified through faith, let us continue at peace with God..." and continues, "Let us even exult in our present sufferings ... we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus, through whom we have now been granted reconciliation." We exult, we "leap for triumphant joy," even now, even in our suffering, because of that reconciliation.

Reconciliation is ours, says Paul, because "suffering trains us to endure, and endurance brings proof that we have stood the test, and this proof is our ground of hope... Such a hope is no mockery, because God's love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit." From this hope flames the faith which causes us to leap for joy and to be at peace with God.

It is then, in our daily living, in the small things as well as the great, that we build the patterns and the disciplines which help us to mature in the faith to the point where we realize not only in intellect, but in heart, that what we thought was true and hoped was true, is *really* true: as Christ said, we are children of God, and not lost. That realization then floods our hearts.

How can one recognize a truly holy person? Through that joy which pervades an already good life, that joy which allows one to bless God, to thank God, even in the worst troubles as well as in prosperity, not for the troubles, nor even for the prosperity, so much as for their peace in God. That peace allows one to see even adversity as a gift

from God (as Paul did), a gift which fosters hope and strengthens faith.

Here, each day, we are called to a holy life of peace and triumphant joy. This particular call comes at noon, in the middle of the activities and perhaps troubles and exasperations of the day. Each of us can be caught up sometimes in that dreadful trap of guilts, wrongs, and might-have-beens, whose logical end is despair and depression. In ancient days, blood sacrifices and scapegoats were instituted to appease the wrath of God and invoke the return of the joy of his favor. Paul reminds us that Christ has been the blood sacrifice for all, and that believers no longer need that scapegoat (whether animal or human) to carry our sins off into some wilderness. Christ has gathered, gathers, and will gather those wrongs and recriminations to himself and throw them away for all time. For time with faith to accept this promise, that relief of guilt comes now, in this life.

In order to break the cycle of guilt, a person has only to reach out in faith, and that suffering can be lifted. The very sufferings we endure, as Paul says, can bring patience, then endurance, then hope -- and hope is the seed of faith. If we act in the faith that Christ died to *free* us, then we may trust joyfully in God, knowing that Christ has been there before.

In the face of his own bleak despair, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that all that was left was a leap of faith. That leap, though it might begin in sadness, is an exultant leap, a leap of triumphant joy. +

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Despised, Rejected, Acquainted with Grief

We are in the time of year when these words bring to mind all kinds of images. And the image of rejection is the one that hits home . All of us have been subject to rejection at some time. Some of us deal well with it and some are unable to cope . But rejection is a terrible word for most .

Jesus knew this rejection . A parent knows this word too, when so much has been done for a child, only to result in rejection. The superior or master of postulants and novices in a religious family also knows the rejection that can and often does come after months or years of nurture and care . We are sometimes rejected by those for whom we have done the most , gone the extra mile .

Sometimes though, people have the feeling they have been rejected when in fact they have not . They are too deeply buried in themselves to realize that it is they who are doing the rejecting. They and we are tempted to say when rejected: "What's the use?" Well, rejection can be used And for good

When you are tempted to say, "What's the use of going on when everyone around me seems to be against me?" turn it around and say, The times I feel useless may be the times I am needed most . " What others think of you is not important. What you *do* is important. If you can accept rejection as part of life's strange mystery, you will be enlarged. Your feeling of inadequacy will be replaced by the conviction that God can use you, as you are, young or old, weak or strong. Remember what Jesus said about the stone that the builders rejected

I wonder how many of us know that the piece of marble used for the carving of the Pieta was originally purchased by someone else, who never paid for it . Michelangelo got it "on sale"! -- it had been made avail-able to anyone who could use it .

Keep the spirit and mind of Jesus in this Lenten season. No matter how often others reject you, God never rejects you.

-- RTB

Kerygma Kerner

Generous to a Fault

They also are to be had accused that presume to say, That every man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he professeth , so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that Law , and the light of Nature . For Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved .

At the recent Trinity Institute, Dr. PHEME Perkins gave a fine talk on the importance of the Bible in Christian thought in a "post-modern" age. A comment from the audience left a sour taste in my mouth. "You're a Christian triumphalist, then," said a man unsatisfied by her response to his question on the fate of Jews, Hindus and Moslems.

Why be a Christian if it doesn't make any difference? If all are saved through their own sect, why evangelize? Why baptize? It is difficult in this oh-so-polite and considerate age to state that good intentions aren't enough. Now, I'm not saying that God cannot (and I hope God will) bring about

-- *The Articles of Religion*
universal salvation should the Church fail in carrying out the great commission to teach, preach and baptize in all the world. And I am not saying that we can't learn from other religious traditions; nor that people should be forcibly baptized. But we have been given a job to do -- to bring Christ to the world; to abdicate our assignment out of misplaced generosity is irresponsible . Perhaps the Church is so ineffectual in dealing with the ills of the world because we have lost confidence in the primary task we have been given. *If we no longer believe that salvation is through Christ alone, why on God's green earth should anyone else? -- The Editor +*

Lord Jesus Christ , you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit , that we , reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you , for the honor of your Name. Amen .