

## Homily for Lent II -2023

The second letter to Timothy from which today's epistle is taken is the last letter that came from Paul's pen.

Paul wrote this second epistle to Timothy from Rome around 65-66a.d. He had arrived there because he had appealed to Caesar. Back in the year 57a.d. at Jerusalem, Paul had been arrested after a riot had broken out in the temple. He was put into protective custody, as we would say, and was transferred to Caesarea when it was discovered there was a plot to kill him. For two years he languished in prison in Caesarea without ever facing charges. Finally, he appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome.

He arrived in chains in Rome about 60a.d. and was allowed to rent his own private quarters, though he was constantly under Roman guard. What followed was nothing short of amazing, as a great revival broke out in Rome, though he was a prisoner in chains. The whole praetorian guard heard the gospel through Paul. Many came to visit the famous apostle and hundreds came to faith in Christ. Many historians believe that when Paul eventually appeared before Caesar he was exonerated and released since there was no basis for the charges levelled against him.

In 64a.d. a fire broke out in Rome that destroyed nearly three quarters of the city. Many citizens of Rome began to suspect that Nero himself had the city set on fire so he could bypass the Senate and rebuild it as he wished, becoming the great architect of the city.

When Nero saw there was growing suspicion against him, he blamed the Christians and had Peter and Paul executed, (in about 66-67ad). As well, Nero ordered the torture and persecution of Christians throughout the city.

In II Timothy, Paul writes to give Timothy instruction in how to lead the churches at Ephesus, how to confront certain teachers who were teaching strange doctrines, and what qualities of godly character he should look for, and expect, in those who will lead the church.

Paul writes as a mentor to Timothy, telling him to discipline himself for the purpose of godliness, to take pains with his duties to be absorbed in them, and to persevere in these things.

Realising that his ministry was coming to an end; he writes with a sense of urgency. This is clear from his comment in II Timothy 4:6 where he famously says: *“My life has been poured out like a drink offering and the time for my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*

Knowing that he didn't have much time left, Paul wrote one of the most personal, most compelling, most inspiring, and one of the most quoted letters that came from his pen. It's powerfully moving and inspiring to anyone who takes their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and redeemer seriously and especially so for any one who considers Paul to be their inspiration and mentor in living the Christian Faith. All of that is by way of a very brief introduction.

The best thing you could do this week is read the Second letter of St Paul to Timothy and let it inspire you too!

Now, let us turn our thoughts to chapter 1 verse 6: *“I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God did not give us a spirit of timidity (cowardice) but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-control.”*

It would appear that Timothy is downhearted. Possibly he had heard of Paul's predicament in Rome. We don't know. Although we do know that Nero was one of the most horrendous of all the Roman Emperors. Perhaps after some 7 or 8 years in Ephesus Timothy has been worn down by the demands of his oversight of the churches. We really do not know. Possibly the loud opposition of false teachers within the churches under his jurisdiction has taken its toll. Again, we do not know. Nevertheless, Paul's words to Timothy in this epistle are a great reminder to us to not become complacent or downhearted.

My grandfather, comes clearly to my mind when I read this epistle. I've told you this before, I'm sure, how he used to say... *“Put yourself into the pages of the Bible that you are reading. One of the characters there is you. So apply what is said and the*

*lessons to be drawn, to yourself.*” With that simple method of reading the scriptures in mind it’s clear when I read II Timothy, that Timothy is me. Very clear actually, for I have had the hands of a successor of the apostles laid upon me three times... at my my Confirmation, my Diaconal Ordination and my Priestly Ordination.

Let us consider briefly the Rite of Confirmation. Everyone here today who is Confirmed, (and that certainly includes me along with most of you... the great majority of us in fact), ..... at OUR Confirmations WE promised:

To renew the solemn promises and vows that were made in our name at our baptism, acknowledging that we are bound to believe and do all those things which our parents and godparents undertook for us.

Just to remind us all, at our baptisms our parents and godparents promised three things on our behalf:

1. To renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with its covetous desires and the carnal desires of the flesh and not to follow them or be led by them.
2. To believe in the faith of the church as expressed in the Apostles Creed.
3. To obediently keep God’s will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our life.

Immediately prior to our confirmation the bishop prayed over us saying: *‘Strengthen them, we beseech thee O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter and daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and fill them, O Lord, with the spirit of thy holy fear, now and forever.’*

As the bishop laid hands upon us he prayed: *‘Defend, O Lord, this thy child with thy heavenly grace that he (or she) may continue thine for ever; and daily increase in the Holy Spirit, more and more, until he (or she) comes unto thy everlasting kingdom. Amen.’*

We made our vows, the bishop prayed, he laid his hands upon each candidate and we received grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit needed to fulfil the vows we had made.

God is good. Yes He expects us to keep our vows. BUT we are not left alone to get on with it. God gives us the graces (the gifts of the Spirit, that is) that we need in order to do what we have said we would. We do have within us the spirit of power, of love and of self-control.

Why is God so good to us? His favour rests upon us because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We call that favour 'grace' ... something we have not earned, it is an unmerited gift bestowed upon all who place their hope in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Are you downhearted? Is your life a struggle? Is your faith faltering? Does your faith need to be rekindled? If so: read the Second Letter to Timothy. You are not on your own. Help is at hand! Take heart and remember the grace that is yours in Christ Jesus, And to quote St Paul from the last verse of today's epistle: *"guard the good treasure that has been given to you, with the help of the holy Spirit who is living within us."*