

Homily for Trinity XVIII 2022 – Some Very Sound Advice

There is nothing new about facing up to hard times, nothing at all, nothing whatsoever!

Today's Epistle (2 Timothy 3:14 - 4:2) is a small but critically important part of a letter written by St Paul to his dear younger friend and fellow disciple, Timothy. In the year 52AD, Timothy became St Paul's disciple, and later his constant companion and co-worker in preaching. Often mentioned by Paul in his epistles and often mentioned by St Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, Timothy was a man who Paul had mentored, encouraged and ordained for a share in the responsibility of leading the church in the first generation of the existence of Christian faith. The whole of this epistle (2 Timothy) and the one that precedes it in the New Testament, (that is 1 Timothy) is written to encourage and advise a loved younger man in his role as a leader of the church.

There are 3 parts to today's short epistle which we shall look into shortly but first, immediately before hand Paul gives Timothy a cautionary warning about days that are coming saying:

“grievous times will come.

For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money,

boastful, arrogant, blasphemers,

disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,

without natural affection,

unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, fierce,

no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, conceited,

lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God;

holding a form of godliness, but having denied its power. Avoid them!” (3:1-5).

Paul calls upon Timothy to turn away from these people who will be led by lust. He then urges Timothy in the first sentence of today's Epistle firstly to: *“Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it, and that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul is telling Timothy to remain in “the things that (Timothy has) learned and (has) been assured of.” We could call that the first rule of living for a faithful Christian: *“Hold fast to the faith we have received.”*

It takes great faith and a good deal of courage to remain in the things we have learned in church or at the feet of Christian parents when the common culture is awash with deception.

It takes great self-discipline to practice faith, honesty, and sexual fidelity when inundated by pressures from the common culture that are calculated to lead us in the opposite direction. Paul is calling Timothy to have that kind of great faith and self-discipline.

Given the condition of our world, which is, in so many respects, very like the world that Paul was describing in the verses I just read to you 3:1-5, we need that kind of faith and self-discipline too. We can gain those qualities only through prayer, through worship within a community of believers, through sacramental grace received in Holy Communion and through the study of scripture and its application to our lives.

Paul next reminds Timothy of a great and fundamental truth when he says: *“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*

Some English translations of this verse say “*All Scripture is ‘God-Breathed’ and is useful for teaching*” etc., the term ‘*God breathed*’ being a very literal translation of the original Greek word used. We are more familiar with the term “*Inspired by God*” because the word “*inspire*” come from the Latin ‘*inspirare*’, which means “*to breathe into.*” God’s breath brings life where there was no life. God’s breath animates and inspires. But what does it mean that God inspired the scriptures? God has breathed into His scriptures the breath of life and has given them life—so that those scriptures might inspire and instruct us—breathing their breath of life into us.

It takes self discipline and faith to become a reader of the Bible and to hear God speaking to our hearts through the sacred pages.

It takes self discipline, faith and a good dose of humility to subject one’s self to God’s revelation as found in the pages of Holy Scripture. As Paul says: In the scriptures we find sound teaching about God, about Jesus Christ and about every aspect of life and the human condition. In the scriptures, time and again, we find reproof of human sinfulness and correction of false ideas. In the scriptures we will always find clear guidance for every aspect of our everyday living, no matter what our situation in life may be. But here is the rub; they have to be read if the breath of God is going to inspire and instruct us, not read about or argued about!

So many times from this pulpit for over a decade now, have I urged and now I do it again: To anyone in this church today who is not a reader of the scriptures, with all my heart I beg you, ask God for the grace you need to become a daily reader of your Bible, so that you may hear His voice speak to every aspect of your life from its pages.

Today's epistle concludes with Paul giving Timothy a solemn charge: *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.*

Paul is encouraging Timothy to preach diligently. To preach the word, — the living Word, that is— the Lord Jesus Christ - God's ultimate revelation of himself to the human race—God's ultimate agent of salvation. Timothy is to preach the word whether it is popular or not. He is to tell the truth, whether people like it or not. Timothy is to do that whether it seems to have effect or not, and to use every tool of persuasion at his disposal. And so are we! We too are required to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. We are to persevere with all patience and keep to what we have learned and received, whether it be convenient or inconvenient.

Never forget, dear people, that God is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power of the Holy Spirit that is at work in us. To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.