

Trinity 12 2022

I take as my text from St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians:

...our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

Amongst Christians, we repeatedly hear the term the *Good News of the Gospel*; we may even be familiar with a publication of the Bible in modern English that is called the *Good News Bible*. It was and is an attempt to make the Scriptures more easily understood but instead, unfortunately it has also deprived them of the beauty. Not to mention that in far too many instances it has altered the meaning of the text.

Well, at the very least, an admirable but lacking attempt to put the Bible into the realm of the common man.

But then, what do we mean by *Good News*? What is the *Good News*? And how do we put into context all the various editions of the Bible that, so often, are attempts to subtly reinterpret the Bible to put forth a specific agenda.

In today's selection from St. Paul's Second Letter to the Church at Corinth, we find an exposition that gives insight into what is meant by the *Good News*.

In a few words, Paul puts into context the difference between the **Old Testament** and the **New Testament**, the **Old Covenant** and the **New**. That difference truly is good news for us who have come under the dispensation of the **New Covenant**.

Though the explanation of the passage can be complex and involved, we can glean from Biblical scholars a simple approach to understanding its significance.

Precisely, it is that the **New Covenant** represents a totally different kind of relationship between God and man from that of the **Old Covenant**.

First of all, the **Old Covenant** was based on the **Ten Commandments**, essentially a written document given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai, a set written laws, engraved on stone, for the Hebrew people to obey. But as we shall see, it became more than that as time passed.

But, the root of the **Old Covenant** was more than just a set of laws, for the **Old Covenant** produced a relationship between God and man, predicated on man keeping the **Law** in order to maintain that relationship. It set God as the judge, and man in a continual state of being judged, as man would always be in default before God as the judge. In a sense, under the **Law**, man was destined to be the criminal because, simply being human, he could not keep completely all aspects of the **Law**.

But the Law was expanded over time to become a millstone for the Jews.

Now, Paul saw the **Old Covenant** in its negativity which he labeled as deadly; he saw through the minutia of the Law as expanded over time to encompass all aspects of Jewish life. The Law had become a millstone.

First of all, it was deadly because it killed hope; it killed the spirit. There was never any hope that man, because of his human nature, could keep the law.

Secondly, the **Old Covenant** was deadly because it killed life in the sense that under the **Law**, a man could earn nothing but condemnation, and condemnation meant death.

Thirdly, it was also deadly because it killed strength, in that the **Law** could tell a man what to do, but could not provide the help, the strength to do it.

Under the **Old Covenant**, the Jews were intent on keeping the letter of the **Law**, which could not afford a means of life. But the letter of the **Law** had been expanded to include more than 600 precepts which covered every aspect of life. These precepts were not only religious in nature but also legally binding.

With their narrowed vision, the Jews could not see **Law**, as given on Mt. Sinai, in a spiritual setting; neither did they endeavor to find out its spiritual meaning, and, as a result, they were destined to reject Jesus as the Messiah.

We must not misunderstand what Paul is saying. He is not in opposition to the **Old Covenant**; indeed, it was God's means of establishing a relationship with his **Chosen People** and preparing the **Hebrew Nation** as the people through whom he would reveal himself, and through whom the salvation of the world would come.

It is, however, the **New Testament**, or **New Covenant**, that gives meaning to the **Old**, the completion of God's Self-revelation through Jesus Christ, the *Good News*, yes, indeed, the *Good News*, the **Gospel of Jesus Christ**.

This **New Covenant** is based on the life-giving Spirit, the Holy Spirit, providing a very different relationship with God as the father, rather than judge, and we as his adopted children through baptism.

In the **New Covenant**, the Spirit works to change a man's heart, as opposed to being a document of external laws. It is the Gospel that offers atonement for sin.

So we have in the **New Covenant**, a relationship of love, we have a relationship between a father and his son, we have a relationship that changes the heart, and a relationship that gives us the strength to obey God, an empowerment. **Empowerment** — in giving ourselves to Jesus Christ, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to embrace God in a new relationship of Love whereby we commit our lives in service, not as we understand service, but in a new light of offering self to God who in turn uses that self to proclaim his Kingdom on earth.

So, this **New Covenant**, this new relationship, between God and man made possible by Jesus Christ, exceeds the splendor of the **Old Covenant**.

While born in glory, as represented by the splendor with which the face of Moses shone when he brought the **Ten Commandments** down from the mountain, it was a transient splendor. As we may recall, though no one could look upon the face of Moses because it shone so, that shining faded with time.

Thus, Paul connects that fading splendor with the **Old Covenant** in so far that the splendor of the **New Covenant** will never fade because its product is forgiveness and life, not condemnation and death.

With the fulfillment of the **Law and the Prophets** in the **New Covenant** brought about by Jesus Christ, we have hope; we have forgiveness; we have a new relationship with God, born in love; indeed, we have the **Law of Love** hidden in our hearts and published by Jesus Christ.

But there is more.

This new relationship brings with it new obligations.

Foremost, we are now obliged to see our relationship with God in the *light of love*, sharing in, and in turn sharing with others, that love.

We have an obligation to publish abroad the *Good News*.

Just as God chose the Hebrew people to be the instrument of his revelation of himself to the world through his Son, Jesus Christ, so we, who have accepted his Son into our hearts, are to be God's instruments on earth to spread the *Good News of Salvation* for all mankind.

We have an obligation to pray, corporately and privately. Prayer is our way of keeping in touch with God, our way of telling him our needs, as we strive to find out his will for us. Granted, he knows our needs far better than we do, but part of the beauty of God's relationship with us is his desire for us to communicate to him what we perceive our needs to be.

As we mature in our spiritual life and develop in our relationship with God, we can begin to recognize for ourselves, through his grace, some of those things which are good for us. Most especially, we may come to realize that the object of our prayer life is to bring us into conformity with his Will. *Not my will, but thy Will be done.*

We have an obligation to worship God in a self-oblation, offering ourselves completely to him, our souls and bodies as living sacrifices. This we could not do under the **Old Dispensation**, but Jesus Christ has made it possible under the **New Dispensation**.

We worship God the Father, Creator of heaven and Earth;

We worship God the Son, Redeemer of the World;

And we worship God the Holy Spirit, Sanctifier of the Faithful.

Truly, we worship one God, the holy, blessed, and glorious **Trinity**, who has been so lovingly revealed to us in the *Good News* of the **New Covenant**, the **Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ**, who has given us hope and strength, and through whom we find eternal life.

Thus, in the **Christian Era**, we see the completion of God's Revelation of himself in the **Old Covenant** and we enter the end times of the **New Covenant** under a **New Dispensation** and a new relationship as adopted children of our Heavenly Father.

What we see is the **Old** giving way to the **New**; we see the **Promise** fulfilled, the **Promise** made to Abraham and his seed, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to all his descendants both of natural birth and adoption, we see that **Promise** fulfilled in Jesus Christ.