

2015

Lent 2 • Romans 5:1–11 • March 1, 2015

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Sometimes it seems as if our lives have wandered into one of the survival shows on television and we are about to be eliminated, or at least have questions about lasting longer than a few more weeks or months. Too many false calculations, too many wrong-headed decisions. Paul tells us in this lesson that this is the normal condition of those who have been claimed by the God who makes his strength perfect in his people's weaknesses (2 Cor 12:9).

In Romans 5 Paul is moving from his presentation of the sinful state of all (1:18–3:20) and of God's gift of righteousness, the new identity we have in Christ (3:21–4:25) into his discussion of life of the justified sinner, both from God's perspective and from that of sinners in the midst of the struggle with sin (5:1–8:39). Today's lesson addresses this situation in the present with the promise of a great future on the basis of what Christ has done in the past. He just gives us the facts. The present fact of the matter is that we are justified through Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 4:25)

and we are at peace. We have every reason to trust the promise of God's presence in the face of the chaos and uncertainties that afflict us.

1. The future fact of the matter is that glory awaits us, the completion of our being righteous, truly human, the kind of creatures in whom God takes delight, and the completion of our being at peace, the shalom—the peace and order of Eden restored, with everyone—God and his human creatures—and everything in their right places. As in the German “Gloria,” “all the fighting has ceased” (*all' Fehd' hat nun ein Ende*).

2. The past fact of the matter is that Christ died for us while we were in revolt against him. His was a real corpse, his was a real resurrection. He cashed in the wages of our sin; he has given us the free gift of life. His promise of future glory rests on his already having accomplished transfer of ownership of our sins to his tomb and transfer of his immortal life to our accounts (Rom 6:3–11).

3. We are no longer the persons we often think we are. As Abram and Sarai received new identity in today's Old Testament lesson (Gn 17), so our baptismal certificates constitute new identity documents for us. Abraham and Sarah henceforth lived from God's promise to make them more than citizens of Ur; they became father and mother of the people of God. We live out of our new identity as children of God, trusting his promise of his presence, his forgiving love, his provision, and his protection in our lives.

God identifies us with Jesus, whom Peter identified as the Son of the living God in the gospel lesson. Jesus promised the disciples the prospect of suffering and death because of their association with him (Mk 8:34–35, Jn 15:18–25), but he also promised everlasting life in his presence (Lk 23:43, Jn 14:2–4).

That is the reality of this world and its struggle against God's people. But our sufferings give us reason for boasting, that is, broadcasting loud and clear just who we are (*καυχώμεθα*): we do not try to make ourselves great through seeking affliction or talking about it. However, in our excitement and joy we do want to tell everyone how we have been able to find true joy and satisfaction in the sufferings attracted to us by the fact that we belong to Jesus Christ. With the enthusiasm of little children we tell of our experience with the gifts of God. That can make other children so jealous they strike out at us.

But it is in suffering that we learn to endure, not on the basis of our own strength of will, but because we rest in the peace Christ gives: we know that the sufferings do not define our identity since Christ already has. Endurance builds character (*δοκιμή*, the definitive form that something takes on once it has been tested and proven). The character that the Holy Spirit develops in us is stamped with the image of Christ: the Holy Spirit has imprinted us with him as our identifying mark (Rom 8:29), and he enables us to live out this new identity according to this character (Col 3:20). That experience of enduring is possible only through faith, and at the same time it strengthens our ability to live by faith, in total trust in the God who remains with us even when he seems to have forgotten us.

Conclusion: Suffering does not save, but those who have found salvation and peace in Christ can expect the hostility of Satan in the midst of daily life as it manifests

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itself in attacks and temptations of various kinds. The gospel comes to remind us day in and day out that God's word of forgiveness, life, and salvation has given us a new identity as children of God and the will and desire to live in the peace and joy that produces service to the world and love for sisters and brothers in the company of the saints.