

MORNING MEDITATION

Wednesday, Twenty-third Week in Ordinary Time

**“Have patience with everyone, but especially with yourself.
I mean, do not be over-troubled about your imperfections, but always have
courage enough at once to rise up again when you fall into any of them.
(St. Francis de Sales)**

1 Corinthians 7:25-31

Paul challenged the Corinthian converts to set their priorities in light of the fact that “the world in its present form is passing away”. At the time he wrote this letter to the Corinthians, Paul was convinced of the imminence of the return of Jesus. In light of the expectation of Christ’s return, Paul invited his readers to reassess their priorities and align them with their commitment to Christ. The expectation of Christ’s return should shape and direct their thoughts, plans, choices and actions. Christians should not invest themselves into the issues and affairs of the world. Their life should characterize their expectation of the coming of Christ.

Though the exhortation of Paul was to a community that expected Christ’s immediate return, it still has meaning and value for our times. Paul’s teaching invites us even today to set our priorities straight, to invest our life into the enduring and the eternal rather than the passing realities of life, to be cautious of the standards of the world and to live our life in the context of the eternal existence of love and truth.

Psalm 45

**Hear, O daughter and see, turn your ear,
Forget your people and your father’s house.
So shall the king desire your beauty;
For he is your lord, and you must worship him.**

Luke 6:20-26

Jesus proclaims a new set of values, each of which is a challenge and radically different from what the world has to offer. He takes the accepted standards and values and turns them upside down. “Woe to you rich because you have all the comfort you are going to get”. The word Jesus uses for “have” is the word used for receiving payment in full for an account. It simply means that if we set our heart and bend all our energies to get the things which the world values, we may get them, but that’s all we may ever get.” It’s another way of saying: “You have had it!”

If you set your hearts on things of the “Kingdom” and channel your energies to being loyal to God, you may get into trouble, but “eternal joy” will be yours - “eternal” - not in the sense of

lasting or everlasting, but in the sense of “what befits God”, joy that is characteristic of God. We are offered a choice: the ways of the world or the ways of God.

Saint of the Day, September 11 - St. Cyprian and 18 other saints are remembered this day.

Cyprian was born into a rich, pagan, Roman African Carthage family sometime during the early third century, between 200-210. He was baptized when he was thirty-five years old. After his baptism, he gave away a portion of his wealth to the poor of Carthage. Not long after his baptism he was ordained a deacon, and soon afterwards a priest. Sometime between July 248 and April 249 he was elected bishop of Carthage,

Christians in North Africa had not suffered persecution for many years. Cyprian complained that the peace the Church had enjoyed had weakened the spirit of many Christians and had opened the door to converts who did not have the true spirit of faith. When the Decian persecution began, many Christians easily abandoned the Church. It was their reinstatement that caused the great controversies of the third century and helped the Church progress in its understanding of the Sacrament of Penance.

The Emperor Decius issued an edict ordering sacrifices to the gods to be made throughout the Empire. Jews were specifically exempted from this requirement. Cyprian chose to go into hiding rather than face potential execution. Novatus, a priest who had opposed Cyprian's election, set himself up in Cyprian's absence and received back all apostates without imposing any canonical penance. Cyprian held that those who had actually sacrificed to idols could receive Communion only at death, whereas those who had only bought certificates saying they had sacrificed could be admitted after a more or less lengthy period of penance.

During a plague in Carthage, Cyprian urged Christians to help everyone, including their enemies and persecutors. A friend of Pope Cornelius, Cyprian opposed the following pope, Stephen. He and the other African bishops would not recognize the validity of baptism conferred by heretics and schismatics. This was not the universal view of the Church, but Cyprian was not intimidated even by Stephen's threat of excommunication. He was exiled by the emperor and then recalled for trial. He refused to leave the city, insisting that his people should have the witness of his martyrdom.

On September 13, 258, Cyprian was imprisoned on the orders of the new proconsul, Galerius Maximus. After trial, Cyprian was sentenced to be executed with the sword. The execution was carried out in an open place near the city. A vast multitude followed Cyprian on his last journey. He removed his garments without assistance, knelt down, and prayed. After he blindfolded himself, he was beheaded by the sword on September 14, 258 in Carthage.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

