

Today's lessons focus us upon transformation. The obvious transformation is first about salvation, coming into the Church and relationship with God: "O GOD, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee...." We may hear about a person somewhere making a good decision, living an upright life, and think, "Well, that's well and good." But if the person has no connection to us, then those actions are just information. In order to receive praise and love from us, in order for us to be pleased with them, there needs to be relationship. We need to know the person before his actions have a positive effect upon us.

The same principle is in effect when talking about pleasing God. If you do not love God, if you have not come into His family, then you remain estranged from Our Heavenly Father. We must be brought into relationship with God before we can please Him. Considering that we are all here this morning, worshiping together, it seems fair to say for most of us that at some point we have made that leap of faith. We have confessed Christ and been baptized into the church. We have that relationship that is the prerequisite to please God. We can act out of love for our Savior instead of being motivated out of love of self.

So, everything is perfect? I'm sure we all have lives that perfectly reflect the peace and love and joy of life in Christ all the time.... Or maybe not. At some time in our lives, every one of us, even with a relationship with Jesus, does things or says things that do not please God. We will sin. I would also bet that all of us will pass through severe struggles. Depression, anxiety, lack of purpose or motivation: at some point in life, something won't be connecting for us.

But why? We've come into the church, we've done the things we were supposed to do, and yet there is an emptiness that we can't seem to shake. We've been saved, so why does it not

feel like it? What must we do to experience that transformed life?

If you recall, we are in the “Union” cycle of our series on the seven deadly sins. Today’s sin is that of acedia or dejection. The beginning of the epistle lesson tells us:

THIS I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

Let us repeat that again, “in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” It is also important to note that St. Paul issues this to us as an imperative, a command that we should not be like those who have not been brought into the Church. He is commanding us to live differently from the unsaved Gentiles. And this is why accidie is a sin. Now, it might feel more like a prison without a way of escape. We become habituated to life being a certain way; we can’t imagine that it can be any other way; and so our minds and hearts build walls which feel impenetrable. But at some level, it is a choice.

As mentioned earlier, all of us will deal with this to some extent or other during our lives. We must remember that salvation is not only an already-done fact, but it is also a continual process of growth that will one day be completed when our sinful natures are completely purged from us by the grace of God. We were saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. Let us not imagine that baptism completes our salvation. It is instead the beginning of our life with God. It is our birth into the Church. Thus, the million dollar question for us this morning is, “How do we live in the life of Christ daily? live as men and women who have been transformed by the grace of God?”

First of all, it is not easy. It requires that we think differently and act differently from those who do not know Jesus. It requires that we change our behavior, to get to the point where we desire to fight against our old habits of life and of thought. We have to start tearing down the prison walls that we have erected around ourselves. And as they were built up brick by brick, so they must come down brick by brick.

So, it begins with a decision of the will, with the courage to make the decision to live as the joyful disciples of Christ rather than be intimidated by the work it requires. And for us baptized followers of Christ, that decision has in some sense already been made. We were convinced enough, convicted enough, to be baptized into Christ, and for some of us, to be confirmed in our faith. This is our beginning. We have learned Jesus Christ. And yet, just as St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians, he exhorts us today as well, “that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

So, first, as mentioned above, this is an intentional decision. But next, we have to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. We have to believe correct things. We have to drive the lies from our minds, and we have to replace them with the Truths of Christ. This means being aware of what we expose ourselves to and minimizing the influence of the world that is hostile to our faith. In our culture, that hostility is most readily comprised of the ungodly media with which we are constantly bombarded. So a large part of this involves limiting our exposure to social media and worldly entertainment. This isn't to say that all of social media is evil or even that most of it is. The problem is that it changes our perception of reality and turns us

into the ultimate consumers of garbage. It changes how we perceive the real world and kills our agency as redeemed human beings.

Doom scrolling is a real thing. "Oh, just one more youtube video," or "Just one more Facebook reel." Of course, one more leads easily to multiple wasted hours that turn us into mush. Then we realize, "That's an hour of my life that I can't get back." Why do we sit there and keep clicking? Because our brains easily get addicted to the effortless sensory input, and therefore it is a form of escapism. It trains us to be numb and passive consumers. We might be looking for real information at first, but the form of how that information is passed to us should be approached with caution. In the early 1980's, Marshall McLuhan was famous for noting that "the medium is the message." He was talking largely about television, but the same warning should be applied even more strongly with social media.

So first, let us rid ourselves of the soul-sucking media all around us. Then let us remind ourselves of the great doctrines of God. God created us to be in fellowship with Him. He gave Himself for us even when we rejected Him. God became one of us, lived and died for us, rose for us, and now reigns for and through us. These creedal truths must become the basis for our lives. We must hear them over and over, every day. We want them to be a part of us and to shape how we understand the world and all that is in it. Read the creeds; read and study your bible; be renewed in the spirit of your mind by filling it with what is of God, with what is True, Good, Beautiful. Don't seek after the deceitful lies and fleeting addictions of the world. Seek after the knowledge of God, which is all righteousness and holiness.

So having decided to live in the life of Christ, and having taken care what we feed our minds, intentionally selecting the precepts of the faith and that which is transcendent, we get the

final step. Go out and do what we are called to do. St. Paul lists a few of these things for us. Our goal isn't to just say we want to do better. Our goal isn't just to think the right thoughts. Our goal is to live beautiful lives – lives that reflect the love and beauty and goodness of God – lives that bring us joy, peace, and satisfaction – lives in which we interact with the real world and with real people, where we give because we know how much we have received from the hand of God. Lives that are directed by the Spirit of God in us, and therefore lives which please God.

Let us look at just a few of the things that the Apostle commands us to do. Stop lying and speak the Truth. Be angry, yet sin not. In other words, there are injustices in the world that you can address, but not in a wrathful way. We must wisely pick our battles as the Holy Spirit leads us. Do not steal, but instead work diligently to provide for yourselves and your families and to give to those in need. Do not be obnoxious in your speech, but speak to each other in encouraging ways. Be kind. Forgive as we have been forgiven. Let your lives be marked by grace and by the love of God.

And as mentioned previously, we are dealing today with the sin of acedia, which is also known as dejection. We are often tempted to think that we have no agency in this world, and that we have no agency in our own lives. We are tempted to act like the paralyzed man in our Gospel lesson. Get up and walk? We can't do that. We are paralyzed. Go out and work with diligence and faithfulness? Why? It doesn't accomplish anything. Sacrifice for the kingdom of God? I can't do anything. These are the beliefs that rule our lives instead of living in the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we age and approach the end of our lives, we don't want to look back upon what we have

done and think, “Well, that’s a lifetime of nonsense that I can’t get back, that I’ve wasted in perpetual paralysis.” Christ calls to His redeemed people, Arise, take up thy bed, and go to thine house. We are a people of action. We are agents of real change and transformation in this world. So let us first believe it for all things are possible with God. We do not have to be numb and powerless. Let us instead be reminded of the objective truth of the gospel of Christ everyday. And then let us heed Christ’s call. Arise, take up thy bed, and go. Go to thine house, go into the world, go and make disciples of all nations. Last time I checked, “all nations” included the Five Cities as well.

Life in Christ is great. It really is. Let us not live with in the vanity of our darkened minds. Let us be close to God, not alienated from the life we have in Him. We live for something eternal, and even during frustrating times, painful times, times of suffering, even during years-long seasons of our lives where things are not working out as we hoped. We know in our perseverance with Jesus that God is pleased with us. If that is not your case, then heed St. Paul today. Heed Christ today. Be paralyzed no more. Let the people of God, you and I, arise.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.