

A NEW HERITAGE
Proper 6 + June 14, 2020
Romans 5:6–15

While we were weak, Christ died for us.

While we were sinners, Christ died for us.

While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

Three times, in short order, at the beginning of this passage,
St. Paul iterates our helplessness—even our hostility—to God.

And yet God died for us.

When these iterations are juxtaposed,
it could not be clearer that our salvation is God's work alone,
without any help from us.

Indeed, God has to work against our hostility to save us:
while we were still weak, while we were still sinners,
while we were enemies . . . *Christ died for us.*

What is it that makes us so weak?

And what is it of Christ's death that is so powerful—
so wonderful that it overcomes eternal death of all
and brings us eternal life and reconciliation with God?

Our text gives us opportunity to meditate on these two questions today:
What is at the core of our weakness?

And what about Jesus' death so powerfully revives us?

St. Paul asserts a mystery: sin came into the world through one man;
as one man sinned, all sinned.

How can this be?

How can it be that the sinful act of one man, Adam, means that we all sin,
even all of us who were not born when Adam sinned?

The Bible does not explain this connection explicitly,
but by the implication of a number of passages,
we can come to understand that Adam, as the father of all,
shares his human nature with all his descendants.

As he sinned and turned aside from the good to which God called him,
human nature became corrupt,
despising God's righteousness, pursuing sin, and suffering shame.

This lack of righteousness, pursuit of sin, and experience of shame
is the plight of all men.

Thus David confesses that he was **“brought forth in iniquity”** (Ps 51:5) and that the **“wicked are estranged from the womb”** (Ps 58:3).

St. Paul tells the Ephesians that they were **“by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind”** (Eph 2:3), and Job judges that of all mankind, none **“can bring a clean thing out of an unclean”** (Job 14:4).

Although the inner logic and structure of original sin is not explicated for us, Scripture testifies to its reality, and the weakness and corruption that comes with it from the day of birth. As the father of men, Adam, who turned to sin, begets descendants in accordance with this sinful nature.

This is, of course, why Jesus’ birth from a virgin is so significant.

Adam’s nature is bypassed by Jesus since Jesus is not begotten of a man but of the Holy Spirit.

Although Jesus receives human nature from his mother, Mary, he avoids the particular corruption of this human nature by being conceived not of Adam or one of Adam’s descendants, but of God.

Thus Jesus is made like us in every way, even tempted as we are, yet without sin, without enmity toward God, without corruption of the human nature (Heb 2:17; 4:15).

As sinners, death is our lot;

death enters the world through sin and spreads to all men because all sin.

Thus we are weak; we have no power to keep ourselves alive.

We are sinners, on our way to death.

We are even enemies of God, choosing the path of sin rather than receiving and embracing with trust and love the good path God set before Adam.

This is the core of our weakness: an enmity with God and an impotence that makes reconciliation with God and restoration to life impossible on our own power.

For none can bring a clean thing out of an unclean.

Yet the free gift of salvation is not like the trespass!

When Adam sinned, he brought all into sin.

But when Jesus dies and rises on our behalf, he has no need to save himself.

All that he does is on our behalf.

The free gift is not like the trespass, imprisoning all in eternal death; it releases all into the joyous, reconciled life with God in which Jesus already abides.

How can Jesus' death and resurrection accomplish this?

How does one man's activity, no matter how righteous, make up for the unrighteousness of others?

Here the comparison with Adam helps us to understand.

Adam's fall led to his own corruption, and his place as the father of all humanity means the communication of this corruption to all his descendants.

Now, you might say, Jesus has no descendants, so how can he communicate his life and death to us?

He does it in a spiritual and supernatural way: through Baptism.

In Baptism, you are born again of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:3, 5).

In Baptism, you become a child of God.

You are begotten of God.

He communicates to you his nature, that is, the gift of his Holy Spirit.

By God's Spirit, the old nature is put to death, and we are born again into a new nature, the pure, living, immortal nature of the Son, by which we have life.

All who believe and are baptized are begotten of God, receive his nature, and live eternally.

In this way, just as the children of Adam all sin, all die, and all are enemies, so the children of God have sin put to death in them, are restored to life, and become reconciled to God.

Finally, Christ's death shows us God's great love for us.

Although we were enemies, although we were sinners, going against God's will, Christ dies for us.

In his death and through Baptism, we also die with him.

The old nature of sin, the heritage of Adam, dies with Christ on the cross!

More than this, in his resurrection, we rise to new life.

Christ's resurrection, to which we are joined in Baptism, gives to us the new, living, eternal Spirit by which we also now live forever.

CHRIST OVERCOMES OUR SINFUL NATURE AND GIVES US A NEW NATURE IN HIS SPIRIT.

So, we have been justified—

judged righteous and made righteous by the pouring out of Christ's blood,
by his death.

Sin has been forgiven and put to death in us.

We are saved from the wrath of God.

Furthermore, by his life and resurrection,
we also now are saved and reconciled to God,
living in newness and holiness forever.

Rejoice in God through Christ!

Burst forth in songs of thanksgiving!

Give praise to our Father,

who has rescued us from our heritage in Adam

and given us a new heritage as his children!

All this he has done by his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,

who proclaims to one and all:

you are forgiven all of your sins

in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen