

VIVERE CHRISTUS EST

A Homily for the Twenty-fifth Sunday of the Year (A).

Texts: Is. 55: 6-9; Ps. 144; Phil. 1: 20-24, 27; Matt. 20: 1-16.

“To live is Christ. To die is gain”. My dear brothers and sisters, these words of St Paul, which we have heard in the Second Reading summarise the lesson that the Lord has for us today. Here is the lesson: to be with Christ is our highest good, our quest, our goal and our reward. St Paul, whom we are studying more closely in our parish in this *Year of St Paul*, teaches us, more than anyone else, what it means to be a Christian. He teaches us that it means to let go of everything we may hold dear and so to let in Christ. Indeed he equates it with death to oneself. What he says to the Philippians as we have just read, he also says to the Galatians: **“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).”** To be a Christian means therefore to live entirely as Christ lived, to live in Christ, by the power of Christ, and for Christ. This also means that I have to unite my will with the will of God. That I prefer nothing whatever to what God wills for me. This is because often our human thought is different from the thought of God. We often understand the affairs of this life differently from how they really are. Uniting our will with the will of God then means to see issues “with God’s eyes” – to see them from the true perspective – from God’s perspective. This lesson was revealed long ago to the Prophet Isaiah. This is what we have heard in the First Reading.

But to give up my ways and my thoughts and adopt those of the Lord is not easy. It comes to us as a gift. St Paul, by his own example, teaches us that we can only do that if we die to the self and allow Christ to live in us. This perfect obedience to the will of God is also what we express in our prayers. In that pattern of all prayers, “The Lord’s Prayer”, we tell God, **“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.**

In the Gospel Reading of today we see that it is the will of God that every human being will be saved. He himself, in his infinite wisdom, calls people of different nationalities, at different times, to serve him in this great task of bringing people to salvation. And everyone who is converted in turn becomes one who is sent to convert others. The people of Israel were the first to get the message of salvation. The immediate audience of Jesus was made up of those whose ancestors by physical descent were given the promise. By becoming man, Jesus created a new Israel – a new people of God – that goes beyond the boundaries of race. And this is the will of God. It is also the will of God that everyone called by Christ into the fellowship of the adopted sons and daughters of God should inherit the joys of heaven. That is what the Lord means when he tells us “The Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard”. Even among those who are Christians, some people heard the call of the Lord much earlier than others. Some of us have been Christians and have been serving the Lord for a long time. There are those who have been Christians only for a short time. And there are those who are yet to be converted. But the same reward awaits us all: the life of the blessed in heaven. This parable often generates needless arguments. Some people mistakenly argue that the Lord would be unjust to give equal reward to each person regardless of when that person began to serve in his vineyard. These people miss the point of the Lord’s teaching. They fail to understand that to serve the Lord – to be a Christian in the Lord’s service - is to have a foretaste of heaven. The danger of losing heaven and the anxiety that accompanies it – “waiting in the market square without being hired” for nearly the whole day – is not to be preferred to the peace and assurance of heaven that go with being a servant

in the Lord's vineyard. The glorious life of the blessed is the common destiny of all the followers of Christ. And this reward will satisfy everyone to the full.

*Thank you, Lord for this message.
Teach us to accept and to live according to your will.
And like St Paul proclaim, "To live is Christ. To die is gain".*

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Gävle, Sweden, 21 September 2008.*