

Romans – session #3

This morning we pick up with Chapter 1: vs. 8-15 (read).

It was typical of Paul's letters to have a thanksgiving for his recipients of the letter.

Vs. 8 – “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world”

Such an expression of thanksgiving is found in 12 of St. Paul's 13 Epistles, all except Galatians – where Paul has instead an admonishment when he says to the Galatians: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the Him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different Gospel”.

Vs. 8 – Paul thanks God for what He has done in the church in Rome. Though he begins with the word “First”, he never does get around to a “Second”. This may be due to the way Paul wrote his Epistles. Paul usually dictated them to a secretary, who was busy writing down what Paul spoke. Paul's Epistles often have lengthy sentences, as the scribe tried to keep up with Paul's dictations of his thoughts and theology. Paul's Epistles are often a grammatical nightmare, and the Greek is often very hard to figure out from the grammatical standpoint.

Vs. 8 – Paul address God as “My God”, something he rarely does in his other Epistles. Only in II Corinthians 12:21, Philippians 1:3 & 4:19, and Philemon vs. 4 do we see Paul using the phrase “My God”. By using this phrase Paul is claiming a personal faith in Jesus Christ. He is “my” God.

Vs. 8 – “through Jesus Christ” – Paul approaches God through Jesus Christ. Jesus is Paul's emissary and pathway to God. Jesus is his entrance into the Godhead. This possibly reflects the long standing understanding of the Old Testament of God's primary attribute of Holiness. When Moses first experienced God, at the burning bush, - he was instructed to remove his shoes for the ground on which he was standing was holy. In his ensuing trips up Mt. Horeb to speak to God, he wore a veil over his face to hide it when he returned to speak to the people to communicate God's law and will. This was because his face literally glowed from being in the presence of God's Holiness.

Vs. 8 – “The Roman churches faith is being proclaimed all over the world” – This reflects that Paul has heard glowing reports about the church in Rome. Remember Paul has never visited the church in Rome, though he longs to go. What Paul extols about the church in Rome is “their faith”. That is a great measurement of any church in any generation. Do the people have faith? That is the question and that is the sign of a true church. Do they believe and have they placed their trust in Jesus Christ? It is the litmus test for St. Bede's. Do our people have faith in Him? The church today is not measured by how many programs they have, how large their budget is, or how many members do they have? The real question is do the members have faith. The reason for Paul's praise of the church in Rome is that they have faith in Jesus Christ.

Vs. 9 & 10 – “for God is my witness” – Paul claims that the testimony he gives is verified and attested to by God, who knows Paul's heart and own faith.

Vs. 9 – “whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son.” – Paul proclaims that his life is dedicated to the service of the Gospel. The Good News of Jesus death and resurrection. That has always been Paul's message – the proclamation of what God has accomplished through the cross of Jesus Christ. He serves the Gospel – “with his spirit”, that is with his innermost being. The spirit of a man reflects the essence of who that man truly is. Paul gives his all.

Vs. 9 – “without ceasing, I mention you always in my prayers”. The best way we can show our love for others, especially those we have never met by virtue of a personal knowledge of them, is to remember them constantly in our prayers.

Vs. 10 – Paul mentions that he prays that God would enable him to visit the church in Rome. That is Paul's desire to be with the brethren in Rome, the faithful. They are God's community of faith in the great capital city of Rome. So they are very important strategically to Paul. Rome is a city of great impact and influence. They need a strong Christian church there for the spreading of the Gospel. By adding the small phrase “by God's will”, Paul claims that his desire to visit the

church in Rome is God's will not his own. He isn't going because Rome is an impressive city with wonders to behold. He is going as God's chosen one to carry out his apostolic ministry there. This trip to Rome is not Paul's plan, it is God's plan.

Vs. 11 – Having said that, Paul admits he has a “longing to visit the Christians in Rome”. His reason is made clear – he wants “to impart to you some spiritual gift” to strengthen the church in Rome. The word translated as “gift” is “charisma” The word is normally used of the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit, listed in I Corinthians 12. But the Greek word “charisma” can also be used to describe the sort of general spiritual gifts God gives to every believer – I Peter 4:10-12. The use of charisma in chapter 1 is meant in the general sense, rather than the supernatural spiritual gifts of I Corinthians 12. All Christians are called to use their spiritual life to edify the body of Christ. God expects all members of the church to use our gift of faith to bless the members of the body of Christ, by offering our service to the church. We capture this in the prayer of self oblation in our Holy Communion service when we say: “And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto thee”.

Vs. 12 – Paul speaks of the reciprocal nature of his impending visit. He says: “that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith”. What a wonderful and critically important understanding of the church. Our responsibility and role in the church is to encourage one another. Shame on the church where members are always negative or back stabbing other members, or grumbling like the Hebrews in the wilderness about church life and members. That is not the spirit of Jesus Christ. If you want to do something sacred for your local congregation, be an encourager, not a judger.

Vs. 12 – Paul adds “both yours and mine” at the end of vs. 12. Paul is saying that in the church **everyone** has something important to offer to the church family. Paul is saying that the Romans in the church have something to teach him and he has something spiritually to teach them.

Vs. 13 – Paul tells the Romans that he has often wanted to come to them for a visit, but he has, up to now, always been “prevented” from doing so. He doesn't say just what has prevented him from coming, but the word prevented is a strong word. Something always stood in his way. He wants to come – “in order that I might reap some harvest among you and the rest of the gentiles”. Paul is most likely using the word harvest here to speak of gaining converts to Jesus Christ.

Vs. 14 – Paul states that this calling he has been given is an apostolic ministry to all people – sophisticated Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and the foolish. God's plan is for **everyone** to come within the saving embrace of Jesus Christ. And that is why St. Bede's is seeking to expand our church. So that all of us can help people who do not yet know His love, find Him.

Vs. 15 – Paul concludes the introduction to his letter by telling the Romans he is eager to preach the Gospel to all in Rome. We will pick it up with Vs. 16 next week.