

O Almighty God, who pourest out on all who desire it the spirit of grace and of supplication: Deliver us, when we draw near to thee, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may worship thee in spirit and in truth; in the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning!

I'm so glad to be back among you today! I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have had some time off, not because of any desire to be away from you, dear ones, but simply due to the fatigue that sets in after a long haul. And of course, those of us who can get away from time to time are not only gifted with a chance to rest, leaving behind the tyranny of the work schedule, but also an important opportunity to reflect without the distractions of the ordinary day. For Beka and I, I think that time comes most readily when we can go into a church, enjoy the liturgy and surroundings, and pray. We have done this any time we've gotten a chance to get away together and the past couple of weeks were no different. And after such a season of ministry marked by great challenges to overcome, and great joys to relish (not the least of which is being called as your rector, priest, and friend), there was certainly much to reflect on and pray through.

Given that, it's really nice to have such a great reading from Ephesians to help me summarize the exhortation that wells up for a pastor even when he is away from his flock. Listen again to how Saint Paul prays for his friends in and around the ancient city of Ephesus:

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

As Paul put his prayer to page, while he was "Bowling to the Father," he awaited the continuing work of the other two persons of the Holy Trinity in the lives of so many of God's people in those Earliest of Christian communities. He prayed that the power of the Holy Spirit would bring strength to their innermost being. I don't know about you, but this prayer for strength is among my most common for myself. There are many times that the challenges and pressures of life, vocation, and relationships seem like too much for me to handle on my own strength. I'm sure everybody in the room can think of some aspect of life that seems like an insurmountable trial; some problem at work or school where a solution seems beyond us, some person with whom we have some seemingly intractable issue. But we can call on the Holy Spirit to give us strength way deep inside to deal with whatever is in front of us, individually and together. Paul prayed that for the churches in and around Ephesus, and I pray that for you, my beloved friends.

Next, Paul bid that Christ would dwell in the hearts of his flock. Honestly, I can think of no greater desire for a pastor like St. Paul. Faith, trust, in God and his works is like an invitation into our hearts, where Christ would very much like to dwell. And when Christ is within us, that which is true of him becomes true of us by his grace. This makes the imagine run wild; just think about what it would be like if each person in the room worked through their lives in the way that Christ worked through his. Look at his great example of kindness, care, and generosity from our lesson from John this morning. As Chapter 5 ended, his authority as the Son of God had just been put to the test. But in Chapter 6, instead of throwing his weight around, smiting everyone who questioned him, he instead fed a few thousand people to illustrate what kind of messiah he is, to show them what real authority looks like in his

compassion and care. That same Christ, who worked such wonders, who was acclaimed as king immediately after his incredible work, who walked through the waves to embolden his frightful disciples, that same Christ wishes to make residence in our hearts, to abide in and with us, and enliven us with the life of heaven such that we, each one of us, can be rich blessings here on earth. Paul prayed that for the churches in and around Ephesus, and I pray that for you, my beloved friends.

And in awaiting God's work in our lives, knowing that He is good, loves us, seeks our hearts, and desires our blessing, we are reminded that in all our doings, we ought to give glory to God. Listen again to the final verse of the lesson:

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

I love this doxological ending to today's Epistle lesson, especially because as it is a staple of the daily office observance. In fact, this verse is one of the optional ways the prayer book offers the faithful as a closing encouragement from Scripture. It's a reminder that in humility to the Father, with Christ dwelling in our hearts, with the Holy Spirit empowering our innermost being, even our greatest imagination cannot contain what wonders God has for us when we seek after him. We can overcome the challenges set before us as a community. We can expect reconciliation between people truly at odds. But even those things, incredible as they are, are just the beginning. I stand before you as someone who could never have imagined, at the outset of a life of faith, to be a priest in Christ's church, to be surrounded by so many blessings at a place like Saint John's, to live in such an amazing community as Tulsa. In my wildest dreams I couldn't have told you this is what God would be up to in my life. And yet, God in His amazing power and grace, Beka and I have the privilege to live and serve here with you. God is good and we are grateful.

Therefore, as we look towards this coming week, I pray that you seek after what God would do in and through you, empowering you by His Holy Spirit, His Son dwelling in you. I pray that you open your hearts to ever trust in Him so that his unexpected blessings will encourage you through challenge and uplift you in triumph. And let us continually bless the Lord and make known the wonders of His Kingdom because as the Psalmist reminds us:

*The Lord is righteous in all his ways *
and loving in all his works.*

*The Lord is near to those who call upon him, *
to all who call upon him faithfully.*

To the Living God be all glory. From Age to Age. Amen.