

The Epistle-Romans xii. 6.

HAVING then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether **prophecy**, let us prophesy according to the **proportion of faith**; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on **exhortation**: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with **diligence**; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without **dissimulation**. **Abhor** that which is evil; **cleave** to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour **preferring one another**; not **slothful** in business; **fervent** in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in **tribulation**; continuing **instant** in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but **condescend** to men of low estate.

prophecy: speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit

slothful: lazy

proportion of faith: the measure of faith given by God

fervent: intensely ardent

exhortation: urging earnestly

tribulation: affliction, trial

diligence: great effort

instant: constant, urgent, without delay

dissimulation: hypocrisy

condescend: be gracious

abhor: hate and avoid

cleave: cling

preferring one another: putting others ahead of self

Background: This continues last week's lesson, in which Paul is teaching the Church in Rome how to be united in charity. We left off at his saying no one should think of himself more highly than he ought, but use the gifts of God for the good of the church. Christian faith is active.

Summary: Paul goes into detail on use of God's gifts of grace:

prophecy: preaching the word; warning the people against sin, and of their duty. One who prophecies must believe first, then speak.

ministry: service to the church, to the poor and needy -- the outward business of the House of God.

teaching: explaining and proving gospel truths.

exhorting: applying gospel truths to the people; practical instruction and encouragement.

giving with simplicity: sharing without ulterior motives, in order to glorify God and do good.

ruling: keeping things in order within the church.

showing mercy with cheerfulness: tending to the needy or sick, who are commonly grouchy because of their trials, with a smile and good cheer.

Paul continues: Love sincerely, hate evil, embrace goodness. Give honor to others, not self. Since we know more evil of ourselves than we know of anyone else, we can do this in sincerity. Then follows a summary of practical and spiritual duties of Christian Life, which, if practiced by God's grace, will produce an unselfish Christian character.

The Gospel-St. Mark i. 1.

THE beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of **repentance** for the **remission** of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; and preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

repentance: deliberate turning from sin to righteousness

remission: forgiveness

Background: For four centuries, Israel had had no prophet. Suddenly, John the Baptist appeared, wearing camel's hair and a leather belt as the great prophet Elijah had, living a life of self denial in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance.

John is a type of the Jewish Law. The Law is a Law of Love. It shows God's love to us by His wanting to be in covenant with us. It teaches us how to love God and our neighbor. It can show us what sin is, but not forgive it, or give sinners the power (grace) to live righteously. The repentance John preached prepared the way for the forgiveness and grace Jesus brought.

Summary: Jesus' baptism shows us a great mystery. The sinless Son of God, by whom all things were created, took His place in line with sinners, to receive John's baptism of repentance.

Jesus' humble descent to unite Himself with sinners prompts the outpouring from heaven of the Holy Ghost, descending upon Him like a dove, and the Voice of the Father. We see that it pleased the Father that the Son identified Himself with sinners.

We also see that God loves us so much, that His Son became a Man, and for the first time ever, the fullness of God existed in a human heart. It is the Father's will that all believers be made like His Son, so that Jesus might be the "firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

Jesus' baptism, at the beginning of His public life, is the beginning of His redemptive Mission of making Man holy before God. His sacrificial death three years later completed it -- He had lived our life, been tempted, but never sinned nor made Himself remote from our sufferings, or from the penalties we suffer because of sin. His life and death fulfilled God's Law of Love, which sin had broken. Therefore, since death was the punishment for sin, His resurrection broke the power sin and death had over the race of Man.

John's baptism was one of repentance. Baptism into Jesus is one of the Holy Spirit, in which we are united to Him Who presents us to His Father. It washes away our sin, and gives us grace so that we can please God. It unites us to Jesus, whose love will never fail us nor let us go, in Whom God is eternally pleased.