

The Epistle - 2 Corinthians 11:19

YE **suffer** fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. For ye suffer, if a man bring you into **bondage**, if a man **devour** you, if a man take of you, if a man **exalt** himself, if a man **smite** you on the face. I speak as concerning **reproach**, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in **stripes** above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. **Thrice** was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine **infirmities**. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.

suffer: tolerate

reproach: blame, rebuke

bondage: slavery

stripes: strokes with a whip

devour: consume or destroy

thrice: three times

exalt: praise, raise in status

infirmities: weakness, both physical and

smite: hit

moral

Background: Paul wrote his second letter to the Church in Corinth partly to deal with lies against him by false teachers. His slanderers had done some damage to Paul's reputation as an apostle. His good reputation was essential to his effective ministry. He did not want the Corinthians' faith to be corrupted. He was forced to commend himself, and apologized for it.

Summary: The beginning of today's lesson appears to be ironical. Paul called the Corinthians "wise" for being taken in by the false teachers, who even treated them harshly, compared to Paul's gentle treatment, which by comparison could appear weak. Then he used boldness in telling his qualifications for apostleship.

He could not be excelled in his Jewish heritage. But that was nothing compared with his sufferings as an apostle. When Paul sought to prove himself an extraordinary minister, he did so by showing that he was an extraordinary sufferer. He listed his sufferings, not to boast, but to the honor of God, who had enabled him to do and bear so much for Christ.

Paul received punishments from both Jews and Gentiles. He was the "apostle to the Gentiles," and so was hated by the Jews. Five times he was whipped by the Jews. Three times he was beaten with rods by Gentiles. Once he was stoned, and was thought to be dead.

Besides the punishments he suffered, he endured the great tasks of his ministerial duties. There was not a weak Christian with whom he did not sympathize, and remember in prayer. The lists of people to whom he sent greetings at the end of each of his letters shows us how many he carried in his heart.

The time in which Paul lived and wrote was not an age which boasted about how much

suffering was endured. Winning in a worldly sense was much more attractive. Yet, Paul gloried in these his sufferings, and not only these, but in his infirmities, necessities, reproaches, distresses for Christ's sake, all of which made the strength of Christ perfect in Paul's weakness.

The Gospel - St. Luke 8:4

WHEN much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a **parable**: A **sower** went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the **way-side**; and it was **trodden** down, and the fowls of the air **devoured** it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way-side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

parable: story with a moral lesson

trodden: stepped on

sower: one who spreads seed

devoured: eat greedily

way-side: edge of a road

Background: In Mark's account of this parable, Jesus asks His disciples, "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" This is a basic parable, and less obscure than some others of Our Lord. He then explains the meaning to them:

Summary: Christ says that the Sower is Himself; the Seed is the Word of God. The sower scatters the seed everywhere, even on bad ground. The various soils on which the seed falls represent various states of the human heart. The Lord does not do things for no reason. If He scatters His Word on infertile ground, it must be because the ground can become receptive.

Character, our will, is formed in us over a lifetime, by the moral choices we make and by our conduct. Christianity is lived in the will. We are responsible for the receptivity of our hearts to God's Word. Repentance and change of life, with God's grace, can transform bad "soil" to good.

A heart like the wayside has been made hard by the traffic of the world, sinful habits, evil thoughts. The Word will not be understood by such a person, and will be lost to him. The remedy (repentance and change of life) is to take time apart from the world, and by action, prayer and meditation, take the Word into the heart and make it one's own. He who seeks, finds.

The heart like the rocky soil has no depth -- no inclination to endure trials. Such a person no doubt immediately sees his own advantage in believing, but loses interest when sacrifice is required. The remedy is to nurture the hidden inner life, and seek wisdom, so that the Word can take root, endure, and produce fruit.

The thorns are unavoidable in life. The curse upon Adam after the Fall included the ground bringing forth thorns. The burning bush in which Moses met God was said to be a thorn bush. Christ wore a Crown of Thorns. The thorns of the parable (riches and cares of the world) can entice the heart away from the eternal treasure of Christ.

Lent is the ideal time to think upon the qualities of heart that will produce fruit from the seed of God's Word. We are blessed to have a God Who wants the seed to be productive in us, and blessed to need His help. He will give us the fullness of His Grace to become the good soil, if we seek Him diligently.