

## 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

*Note: This homily is based on Colossians 2:6–15. Please read that passage to the congregation before preaching this homily.*

Sometimes you hear really important news. News which changes your life. The Apostle Paul had not visited the town Colossae, but he heard from Epaphras how these people believed the news about Jesus. News which had changed their future for all eternity. Paul writes now to encourage and strengthen them. He reminds them that through Jesus' death and resurrection God the Father had "rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (vs. 13-14) Indeed, his readers had come to believe that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God; that by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or powers or ruler, or authorities, all things were created by him and for him." (vs. 15-16) They have come to believe that "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus, and through him to reconcile to himself all things ... by making peace through his blood shed on the cross." (vs. 19-20)

What an immense change! Rescued; brought into God's kingdom; redeemed; forgiven. All done by Jesus. His readers had grasped the amazing love of God, demonstrated through the death of his own Son to rescue and redeem his people. The gospel they heard produced a rich outflowing of love in them. A love which the Spirit produced.

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Well, that was some time ago now. Now Paul has written this letter, and as well as looking back to what God had done in them, he also looks forward. How are they to continue to live? So we come to today's reading: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built in him, strengthened in the faith ... and overflowing with thankfulness." (2:6-7) They started well, believing in Jesus; they are to continue well by living in him.

But it's not that easy.

Paul knows that they will face various trials and threats which aim to discourage them, or overwhelm them with doubts. Or they may be tempted by some new better way.

When life tough it's easy to wonder 'where is God?' As time passes it's also easy to get stale, even disillusioned in our expectations. It this all? Why is life so difficult; so much of a struggle? We wonder why more people don't share our conviction in Jesus. Perhaps I'm not trying hard enough? Or perhaps there's an easier way?

So in vs. 8 Paul outlines the threat they may face: "see to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive ideas, rather than on Christ." What does he mean by 'hollow and deceptive ideas'? In vs 11-12 Paul specifically refers to circumcision, which was an essential Jewish rite.

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While a few of his readers would have been Jews, most were not. It appears that some Jewish teachers have claimed that believing in Jesus was a good start for the recent converts. But in order for them to have the full blessings God had promised they really ought to be circumcised as well.

However, this additional requirement means that Jesus' death and resurrection itself did not secure all God's blessings for these new Christians. So in vs 9-10 Paul declares that in coming to Jesus they have come to all God's fullness. You cannot get any extra blessing than you have in Jesus "For in Jesus the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." Paul outlines the blessings they have: in Jesus they have already been circumcised - not in their outward body but in their hearts. Since they have given their lives to Jesus as their Lord, house is death was their death to living for self - now they were to live for him. They were buried with Jesus and they were raised with him in his resurrection. God's power working in them achieved this for them.

In vs 13-15 Paul reminds them that God himself made them alive with Christ - God did this before they heard of Jesus. In his death Jesus paid the penalty for our sins - the charge sheet against us has been nailed to the cross - it has been dealt with; it has been canceled. God has forgiven your sins. This means that in Jesus Christ we have all God's fullness- we already have life with him. We already have the fullness of God's blessings.

This is vitally important for us for several reasons.

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First, we cannot win extra blessings from God by doing extra religious rites or worship. It means our good deeds cannot persuade God to answer our prayers or give us something we want. Instead we ought to respond to God's amazing generosity and kindness by thanking him.

Second: instead of focusing on what we can do, we can rejoice in what Christ has done for us! He is the one we can adore, praise and honour. He has given us a secure standing in heaven. Right now we have access to the Father through Jesus.

Third: since we already have fullness in Christ, our identity is in him. God has adopted us into his family; we are God's children. Deeply loved, valued, secure and protected. His promise is that nothing in all creation can separate us from him. This means that while our world is confused about personal identity, God has given us clarity. We identify as a child of God, a disciple of the Lord Jesus. This means that my identity is not found in my sexuality, or my politics, or my profession. My identity is found in Christ. In him alone is my hope, my security, my life. God has given each one of us fullness in Christ. Fullness as a person is only found in Christ.