

Paul describes the church at Thessalonica as “the church of the Thessalonians IN God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Triune God drew the Thessalonian church in when she received the Word of God “in much affliction” (1 Thess. 1:6). A careful reading of our passage shows how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit make their presence especially available to the church in her greatest moments of weakness. As 2 Corinthians 12:9 puts it, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” May we find this to be our daily experience as we walk with the Lord through daily trials, afflictions and even persecutions; God’s Triune mercy and aid are especially present for us at the times we need Him most.

Monday/Tuesday: Read 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-6 and 5:28

The Suffering Church in the Trinity

The Triune attributes of love, grace and comfort are evident at the beginning of the Christian life and actually *grow in their effectiveness* during seasons of trial. This is the great discovery which the suffering church makes in her trials. God promises to draw near to us at such times, and this is not at all dependent on whether we feel His nearness as we ought. Consider, for example, how each member of the Trinity rises to the occasion for the Thessalonians in their trials:

- In terms of the Father’s love, the Thessalonians are “beloved by God the Father” (1 Thess. 1:4). Paul knows that the knowledge of such electing love will have a great stabilizing effect on this storm-tossed fellowship. The Father’s electing love is the first comforting truth Paul mentions.
- In terms of the grace of 1 Thess. 1:1, the Thessalonians will need daily reminders of this grace especially associated with Jesus. Paul prays in 1 Thess. 5:28 that they would constantly experience the power of this grace towards them in Jesus Christ. Grace and peace only come from God to His church “through Jesus Christ.” All our grace is purchased grace, given to us at the price of Christ’s blood on the Cross.
- In terms of the comfort from the Holy Spirit, Paul reminds the Thessalonians how the joy of the Holy Spirit was theirs even in the midst of their sufferings: *You welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit* (1 Thess. 1:6). In other words, Paul sees the power of the Holy Spirit lifting the afflicted Thessalonian church *above* her sufferings through joyful communion with God’s Spirit.

Praise God that His powerful love, grace, and comfort are most evident in trials. Though Paul and his fellow-laborers were stymied by the “hindrances of Satan” in their attempts to visit the Thessalonians, (1 Thess. 2:17-18), the Triune God moved with unfettered freedom to come down with mercy and help to the Thessalonians. They would not be left to the wolves! Surely the Lord will prove Himself just as faithful in preserving us when we feel lonely, discouraged and isolated. Use Hymn # 348 in our Red Trinity Hymnals to pray for stranded and suffering saints whom you know:

1 Jesus, with thy church abide, be her Savior, Lord,
and Guide, while on earth her faith is tried: we
beseech thee, hear us.

2 Keep her life and doctrine pure; grant her patience
to endure, trusting in thy promise sure: we beseech
thee, hear us.

3 May she one in doctrine be, one in truth and
charity, winning all to faith in thee: we beseech
thee, hear us.

4 May she guide the poor and blind, seek the lost
until she find, and the broken-hearted bind: we
beseech thee, hear us.

7 Arm her soldiers with the cross, brave to suffer
toil or loss, counting earthly gain but dross: we
beseech thee, hear us.

8 May she holy triumphs win, overthrow the hosts
of sin, gather all the nations in: we beseech thee,
hear us

Wednesday/Thursday: Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 & Revelation 1:12-17

In the Midst of the Lampstands

Paul claims that his prayers are offered “before God the Father” (1 Thess. 1:3). Think about this language; How can Paul get that close to God as he prays for the suffering church? There is a profound and vital truth to be appreciated here.

Christ-less religion rejects such language of proximity between the believer and God. Muslims consider it blasphemy to ever speak of God in biblical language of Fatherhood and family intimacy. They reject as blasphemous the notion that God could have a Son, and likewise deny any human the intimate privileges of “beholding God” in the face of Jesus Christ. The Jews of old often removed references Old Testament heroes’ standing or serving before the *face* of God and even removed references to God altogether by substituting the word “Name” for God Himself. That way, it was never God whose face was seen, nor God Himself who walked in the Garden or appeared to men – but only His abstract name! Thus man-made religion rejects personal communion with God in favor of a distant law-giver who can only be approached by our good works and human effort. All Divine condescension towards us in grace is forgotten behind the barriers set up by man-made religious prejudice and tradition.

But the New Testament has no such prohibitions against God coming close to sinners. For example, God’s Son cares for His suffering church in Revelation 1:12-17 “in the midst of the lampstands” on earth. In other words, it is in the midst of the church on earth that Christ acts as our Comforter and Defender! He rules in the midst of His church for her preservation in this world. He even extends a real human hand from the midst of His fiery splendor in order to comfort John (Rev. 1:17). A real Divine hand of comfort! No wonder, then, that Paul can speak of himself as praying “before our God and Father” in 1 Thess. 1:3; that is how close Jesus Christ has brought Paul to the Father. Moreover, Paul knows that his prayers for the suffering Thessalonian church will avail before the throne of God. The Trinity has come down to reassure Paul that his prayers – and ours – are not in vain!

Meditate and Pray: Lord Jesus, thank you that you intercede for your suffering church, and carry her every need and concern to the throne of God the Father. Thank you even more that you don’t have to go far away from us in order to deliver our prayers to Heaven – for you have brought Heaven down so that we can actually gather around the mercy seat to behold you carrying our prayers to the Father, and even mingling our halting prayers with your prevailing ones! Hallelujah! Use the first two verses of Trinity Hymnal # 628.

1. Come my Soul, thy suit prepare; Jesus loves to answer prayer. He himself has bid thee pray, therefore will not say thee nay, therefore will not say thee nay.
2. Thou art coming to a king; Large petitions with thee bring. For His grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much, none can ever ask too much.

Friday: Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 and Revelation 8:1-5

Our Prayers in Heaven

Paul's closeness to the throne of God the Father as he offered prayers of thanksgiving for the Thessalonian church in 1 Thess. 1:3 is inspiring to us. In the same way, we step back with the Apostle John and view the whole history of the suffering church's prayers in Revelation 8:1-5 marveling at how the imperfect, weak and faulty prayers of the suffering church ascend even to the heavenly altar where they are mixed with the fire of Christ's perfect sacrifice. How can our prayers in Revelation 8, along with Paul's in 1 Thessalonians 1, climb up to God's throne in order to ensure they are heard and answered? Once more, it is the Trinity at work to help the suffering church.

- The Holy Spirit helps believers in their agonies and afflictions to pray when they don't know what to say (Romans 8:26-27), and is able to communicate our prayers to the very mind of God, in the Name of Jesus Christ.
- These Spirit-aided prayers then find their way to Heaven because of the perfect "Way" which Jesus has opened through His blood to the Holy of Holies.
- God the Father then responds to His Son's sacrificial mediation of our prayers before His Throne, sending down fire and judgment in response to the prayers of the church.

Meditate and Pray: Dear Lord, thank you that you do not leave the all-important duty of prayer merely in the hands of the suffering church. Through the Spirit's intercessions on earth in our bosoms, and through Christ's intercessions for us in Heaven, we can be confident that God the Father will indeed hear us when we pray! No wonder, Jesus, you urge us to pray directly to the Father because of His love for us. Increase our faith to pray more effectively Lord! Amen.

Saturday/Sunday: Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 and hymn # 631 (Trinity Hymnal): Faithful in Persecution

The hymn at the bottom of this entry speaks eloquently of our access before our God and Father and has been sung through the decades by Christian people amidst varying degrees of trial and difficulty. Never has it been sung with more dramatic meaning than in 185. In Cawnpore, India, eight American missionaries, the Rev. Albert Johnson, John E. Freeman, David E. Campbell, John McMullen and their wives, sang this hymn just before they and the two Campbell children suffered the death of Christian martyrs by order of the blood-thirsty Nana Sahib. Historians remark that, despite thousands of slain Christians in India at that time, the list of those who recanted was surprisingly small. As historian George Smith points out, even Christians of "weak physique who just the day before had been of the same religion as their murderers" now stood firm in their infant faith!

Meditate and Pray: Evidently the same Triune God who predestines persecutions in the lives of believers can also by His Spirit ensure that they will “not be unsettled by them” (1 Thess. 3:3)! How is that possible? Because *even the youngest believer who is claimed by Christ has the full potency of the indwelling Holy Spirit from the earliest moments of their new life!* To paraphrase Romans 8:9, All who belong to Christ have the Spirit of Christ with all His power engaged for them.

1 From ev'ry stormy wind that blows,
from ev'ry swelling tide of woes,
there is a calm, a sure retreat;
'tis found beneath the mercy seat.

3 There is a spot where spirits blend,
where friend holds fellowship with friend,
tho' sundered far; by faith they meet
around the common mercy seat.

5 There, there on eagle wings we soar,
and time and sense seem all no more,
and heav'n comes down our souls to greet,
and glory crowns the mercy seat.

6 O may my hand forget her skill,
my tongue be silent, cold, and still,
this bounding heart forget to beat,
if I forget the mercy seat.

2 There is a place where Jesus sheds
the oil of gladness on our heads,
a place than all besides more sweet;
it is the blood-stained mercy seat.

4 Ah, whither could we flee for aid,
when tempted, desolate, dismayed,
or how the hosts of hell defeat,
had suffering saints no mercy seat?