

Twentieth Sunday after Trinity 2022

Have you taken your ten thousand steps today? That's the number of steps we're advised to walk daily so we can *feel* good physically. But what about our spiritual walk?

The Apostle Paul admonished the Church in Ephesus to look around as they walked through their city—not just physically, but spiritually.

The Ephesians faced a myriad of struggles in their town, with much of society living lives of sin; giving themselves over to lust of the flesh--fulfilling their carnal desires, drunken orgies and bacchanalia, glorifying sin and depravity. Paul may as well have been writing to the Church in modern day America.

As a side note, that is what makes the Bible so applicable to Christians today. The troubles faced two thousand years ago are not so different from those we face today. In fact, they are no less *public* today than they were back then. And yet, the Church has enjoyed periods of time when their influence was strong among the governments of the world as well as society.

"..walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil"

Ephesians v. 15.

This short verse said a lot to the first readers, and echoes loudly to us in 2022--a time when COVID, crime, hurricanes, social media, and elections all vie for our attention. When the seemingly over-abundance of sin and vice seem to drown out expressions of goodness and peace and love for our neighbor.

2000 years ago, Paul advised believers to "**walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise**" -- being careful, discriminating and vigilant about the evil times happening around them. Not to ignore the goings-on of the day per se, but to not get mired in it, seduced by it and obsessed by it. No matter how grievous the sins of the day are, they were then, as they are now--temporary. It's all about *feelings*.

A song from the 1990s says:

Well, I feel like I have to *feel* something good all of the time
With most of life, I cannot deal, but a good *feeling* I can *feel*

Even though it may not be real
And if a person, place, or thing can deliver
I will quiver with delight
But will it last me for all my life
Or just one more lonely night?
The lust, the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life
Drain the life right out of me.

Can you relate to those words? What can we do to avoid falling into the *feelings* trap?

We live in an evil time like the Church in Ephesus did. Therefore, we have the duty to walk circumspectly. Matthew Henry, who was a minister in the late 17th to early 18th centuries and wrote one of the most well-known and most well-used Bible commentaries, said that circumspect walking is the effect of true wisdom.

Therein is the meat of what Paul was trying to get across to the churches to whom he wrote his Epistles. How do we gain wisdom? In Job, we read, “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that *is* wisdom; and to depart from evil *is* understanding.” The Psalmist said in chapter 111, “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom.” That is a really good start. And in society today, there is little of that fear.

The question for us today, is how do we gain wisdom, now that we have established that we have a holy fear of God? The answer is in the Epistle. “...be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

In order to be filled with the Spirit, and knowing the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs is to study the Word of God. It is not enough that we come to Mass on Sunday. God does not call us to a once-a-week Christianity. He calls us to a lifetime of service to Him and his Church. He calls us to avoid the lust of the eyes, which is desiring things we *feel* we should have. To avoid the lust of the flesh, which is desiring the carnal impulses, *feelings*, that are unwholesome. To avoid the

pride of life, which is exalting ourselves, our accomplishments, and our *feelings* above the Word of God.

Dennis F. Kinlaw, a Methodist theologian, said: Satan disguises submission to himself under the ruse of personal autonomy. He never asks us to become his servants. Never once did the serpent say to Eve, "I want to be your master." The shift in commitment is never from Christ to evil; it is always away from Christ to evil; it is always from Christ to self. And instead of His will, self-interest now rules and what I want reigns. And that is the essence of sin."

Sin uses glitz and glamor and salacious gossip to distract us away from what is real and eternal to those things that make us *feel* good. We can't go anywhere without being assaulted by the temptation to stop and listen to what terrible crime was just committed by a celebrity or politician. "More news at 11! Tune in..." We *feel* an urgency to know everything so we won't *feel* left out.

It's all diversionary tactics. Schemed and put into place by The Enemy, Satan--who is alive and well and renting out free space in our minds, our hearts, our souls, and our *feelings*. If he can separate even one of us from the Lord's flock, even for a little while, just long enough to plant a seed, it's a victory for him.

Paul wants us to be wise. He doesn't tell us to ignore the evil that exists around us, but to fill our hearts and minds with "**psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**", conditioning ourselves to living in the Spirit so we can be receptive to God's Voice and be sensitive to His Will, so we can see beyond the momentary evil of the day and focus on the Life Everlasting.

Just as we wear sunscreen to protect us against the sun's UV rays, we can protect ourselves from temptation by putting on the whole armor of God.

Paul doesn't want us to live in a state of paranoia either, wringing our hands over what might happen next. We are encouraged to live joyously and thankfully, filling the space around us and in us with praise and love for God, to '**making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things**'.

Let's continue to pray that we will desire the things of God so that in these times of trouble and wickedness, we will walk circumspectly, as the Apostle Paul says,

keeping an eye out for evil, choosing God's path rather than giving ourselves over to the lust of the eyes and the flesh, and the pride of life, all of which are based in *feelings*.

You don't have to take ten thousand steps to walk circumspectly. Instead, take a few moments to spend in prayer. Take time to read God's Word. Take time to help our neighbor. By doing these things, we fulfill the Lord's command to love others as ourselves.

And it also *feels* good.

Amen.