

HOLY TRINITY Sunday - Cycle C – 2007

"Why? Why is this happening to me?"...These are words that a frightened 12-yr old girl cried out to her mother in the Emergency Room, tears pouring down her face...words that most of us – sooner or later - will cry out in the midst of troubles or pain ...As I stood by her bed...groping for an answer to her question, I recalled times when that same pleading question had come from my own lips: "Why? Why is this happening to me?", ..And I thought of how often I'd heard similar words uttered in hospital rooms and in counseling sessions...Two days later – still haunted by that ER scene - I was looking over the readings for today, Holy Trinity Sunday, and there in our 2nd reading was Paul telling us how to handle troubles and afflictions, and I knew then that was what God wanted me to preach on today...So, I won't be preaching on the Trinity,.... but you can check out my Holy Trinity homily on our web site (or read my book).

So, what is Paul telling us in Rom 5:1-5? Wut is God telling us through the apostle Paul?...There's a Peanuts cartoon that kind of has the same message...Charley Brown is telling his troubles to Schroeder...and Schroeder tries to comfort him by saying, "Don't be discouraged Charley Brown. These early defeats help to build character for later on in life."...Charley Brown asks, "for what later on in life?"... Schroeder answers," More defeats!" ..Poor Charley Brown.. ...Schroeder meant well, but St. Paul said it much better: "We can boast of our troubles, because troubles produce endurance,..endurance produces character, and character produces hope." ...That's right, you heard it right. Paul is telling us that we can **BOAST** of our troubles...Is he crazy? I mean, are we supposed to go around saying things like: "I don't mean to brag, but I just lost my job...and my mother's cancer has come back...and my kid's been busted for drugs...Ain't that great?"

No, Paul is saying that troubles, pain and suffering are going to happen to us, but these trials can work for us – not against us – when we accept them and let God use them to help us become more of what He wants us to be: Christian men and women of strength and character and hope...And that's something we certainly **CAN** boast about...There's another Peanuts cartoon (I do read the rest of the newspaper too) where Charley Brown tells Lucy that every life has its UPS and its DOWNS, and Lucy gets all huffy and says, "Why should it? Why can't my life be all UPS?...I don't want any DOWNS. I just want UPS and UPS and UPS!"...I'm sure all of us are with Lucy on tha. Why can't we just have UPS? ...Why do we have to have DOWNS.? ...Why doesn't God make it easier for us?...Paul has the answer: DOWNS are good for us because - if we let Him - God will use them to help us develop in three areas: **endurance, character and hope**...Now Paul knew what he was talking about, because he went through quite a few DOWNS in his service to Christ: being stoned and whipped and put in jail; ...being ship-wrecked and adrift at sea;..going hungry, thirsty and cold....He was speaking from experience.

He says the 1st thing we can gain from trouble is **endurance**. Some Bible translations call it patience, others call it perseverance...They all mean the same thing: staying power, the ability to stick it out...When trouble strikes,.. when the bottom falls out and life tries to pound us into submission,.. we could fall apart, or try to run away,.. or lose hope and give up,.. we could ignore the problem and hope it goes away...or even turn to drugs or drink to escape from it all...But, St. Paul tells us there's a better way...Instead of agonizing over **why** it's happening, we have to face whatever comes believing/trusting/knowing that God will give us the strength and the grace to tough it out, get through it and come out stronger...That's endurance. Parents learn this when they're dealing with a sick child...Spouses learn this when their husband or wife becomes incapacitated...Some of us have learned this when we lost our job...Kids learn this when their parents get divorced. ...We learn this whenever we are hit with troubles beyond our

control....and when we do, we learn the lesson that GOD CAN BE TRUSTED to give us what we need to get us through them...not make them go away...but get us through them.

So, troubles produce endurance...Then Paul says, “endurance produces proven character.” ...There are different definitions of character. The one I like compares character to reputation: “Your reputation is what other people think you are...Your character is what God knows you are.” The only thing we take with us when we stand before Jesus at the Final Judgment, are the character traits we have developed in our life...When my turn comes, I want Him to say, “Ron, you have real character,” ...I don’t want Him to say, “Ron, you are a real character.”...Our character can’t help but grow when we face our troubles, hang in there, work through them, ...We will grow in the strength and confidence and courage that we’ll need for the next time...and take it from those of us who’ve been around the block a few times: there will be a next time...When we face up to trouble,.. fight our way through it,.. come out on the other end – maybe a little battered and bruised – but heads high and banners flying,.. then we know something about ourselves that we couldn’t have found out any other way: We have got what it takes... We have withstood the test. We have let our troubles make us better. That’s what Paul means when he says that endurance produces character.

Then he says, “Character produces hope.”...Now, we usually think of troubles as more like dashing our hopes, not building them up, but Paul tells us it doesn’t have to be that way...We can’t avoid troubles, but we can turn the whole thing around and make it work to our advantage. ...As Christians, hope is central to our faith...Hope means we have confidence and trust in what lies ahead because we know we are not alone...Jesus told us so: “I am with you always, until the end of the world.”...One of the main ways He is with us is in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, here for us whenever we need Him to strengthen and sustain us by His Body and Blood....The worst thing we can do when trouble strikes is to stop coming to church, stop receiving Jesus in the Eucharist,..because He’s the One who can help us....Still, it’s not easy to have that hope and trust if we have never had to persevere through trials or troubles, never had our character built up. ..Once we do, though,..once we face a test,.. have Jesus help us get through it, and come out stronger and more confident and courageous... we will see the future differently...We will march into it with more hope and less fear and anxiety...That’s the hope Paul is talking about,..the hope he says that will not disappoint us...That’s the hope that God wants in every one of our hearts.

I began by quoting a scared young girl lying in the Emergency Room...who, by the way, is on the road to recovery and is doing fine...St. Paul has given an answer to her question and our question: “Why? Why is this happening to me?”...His answer: God allows troubles into our lives because troubles produce staying power; staying power builds character; and character gives rise to hope...Now, trouble is never fun, and we certainly don’t go looking for it...But when it finds us, if we meet it with faith and courage, we can come out of it a little stronger, a little better,.. a little more confident of the future, a little more of what God wants us to be...I hope that’s what happened for that young girl...I hope that’s what happens for each of us...

My friends, God never promised us a perfect life.... What we were promised is that no matter how much we suffer, if we learn to endure our sufferings and grow through them,.. we will end up at hope – and that’s where God wants us to be. We will get what we need, when we need it. God promised it. And that’s a promise we can stand on. That’s a promise for which we need to thank God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - each and every day...AMEN.