

WEDNESDAY OF THE TWENTY-SECOND WEEK OF THE YEAR

Reading I: Fidelity amid trials

2 Tm 1, 1-18

The Second Epistle to Timothy is a moving pastoral from a veteran missionary to a younger colleague urging endurance as the main quality of a preacher of the gospel. (1) Paul recalls his earlier sorrowful parting from Timothy, commending him for his faith and expressing the longing to see him again. (2) Timothy is exhorted to bear his share of the hardship which the gospel entails. (3) Redemption from

sin and the call to holiness of life are not won by personal deeds but gratuitously bestowed through the incarnation according to God's plan. (4) Let him be confident that God will be able to guard the deposit of faith until Christ's second coming. (5) Paul concludes by commending Onesiphorus for standing by him in his imprisonment.

Paul, by the will of God an apostle of Christ sent to proclaim the promise of life in him, to Timothy, my child whom I love. May grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Christ Jesus our Lord be with you.

I thank God, the God of my forefathers whom I worship with a clear conscience, whenever I remember you in my prayers—as indeed I do constantly, night and day.

Recalling your tears when we parted, I yearn to see you again. That would make my happiness complete. I find myself thinking of your sincere faith—faith which first belonged to your grandmother Lois and to your mother Eunice, and which (I am confident) you also have.

For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God bestowed when my hands were laid on you. The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving, and wise.

Therefore, never be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but with the strength which comes from God bear your share of the hardship which the gospel entails.

God has saved us and has called us to a holy life, not because of any merit of ours but according to his own design—the grace

held out to us in Christ Jesus before the world began but now made manifest through the appearance of our Savior. He has robbed death of its power and has brought life and immortality into clear light through the gospel. In the service of this gospel I have been appointed preacher and apostle and teacher, and for its sake I undergo present hardships. But I am not ashamed, for I know him in whom I have believed, and I am confident that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that Day. Take as a model of sound teaching what you have heard me say, in faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the rich deposit of faith with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

You know that all in Asia, including even Phygelus and Hermogenes, have turned their backs on me. May the Lord have mercy on the family of Onesiphorus, because he has often given me new heart and has not been ashamed of me, even in my chains. When he was in Rome, he sought me out earnestly and found me. When he stands before the Lord on the great Day, may the Lord grant him mercy! And the many services he has performed for Christ in Ephesus you know even better than I.

Reading II: The royal road of the cross

Thomas a Kempis¹

Born in 1380 at Kempen near Cologne, Thomas whose surname was Hemerken entered the Order of St. Augustine in his nineteenth year. From the time of his profession five years later until his death in 1471, a period of some 66 years, he remained in the monastery of Zwolle—writing, preaching, and copying manuscripts, and widely sought after as a spiritual adviser. His writings are

of different kinds—ascetical, homiletical, poetical, biographical, etc.—but they are all pervaded by the devotional spirit which finds its classical expression in his greatest work, *The Imitation of Christ*. The following selection from this book aptly illustrates why it has remained an arsenal of moral armament and spiritual consolation for the last 500 years.

To many this seems a hard saying: “Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.”² But it will be much harder to hear that final word: “Out of my sight, you condemned, into everlasting fire.”³ For those who now love to hear and follow the word of the cross shall not then fear the sentence of eternal condemnation. This sign of the cross will be in heaven when the Lord shall come to judge. Then all the servants of the cross, who in their lifetime have conformed themselves to the Crucified, will draw near to Christ their judge with great confidence.

order all things according to your wish, and as seems best to you, and you will still find something to suffer, either willingly or unwillingly: and so you will always find the cross.

Why then are you afraid to take up your cross through which lies the road to the kingdom? In the cross is salvation; in the cross is life; in the cross is protection from enemies. In the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the cross is strength of mind; in the cross is joy of spirit. In the cross is height of virtue; in the cross is perfection of sanctity. There is no health of soul, nor hope of eternal life, but in the cross. Therefore, take up your cross and follow Jesus, and you will go into life everlasting If you die with him, you will also be his companion in glory.

For you will either feel pain in the body or sustain tribulation of spirit. Sometimes you will be deserted by God, and at other times you will be afflicted by your neighbor; and what is more, you will often be a burden to yourself. Nor can you be delivered or eased by any remedy or comfort; but you must bear it as long as it will please God. For God wants you to learn to suffer tribulation without comfort and to submit yourself wholly to him, and become more humble by tribulation.

In the cross there is everything, and everything rests in our dying; and there is no other way to life and to true interior peace but the way of the holy cross and of daily mortification. Go wherever you wish, seek whatever you want, and you will not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below, than the way of the holy cross. Dispose and

No man has so heartfelt a sense of the Passion of Christ as he who has suffered similar things. Therefore, the cross is always ready and waits for you everywhere. You cannot escape it, no matter where you run; for wherever you go, you take yourself with you, and you will always find yourself. Turn yourself upward or turn yourself downward; turn yourself inward or turn yourself outward: everywhere you will find the cross. And everywhere you must of necessity be patient if you desire inward peace and want to merit an eternal crown For “we must undergo many trials, if we are to enter into the reign of God.”⁴

¹ *The Imitation of Christ*, bk. 2, ch. 12. (Orval K42.)

² Cf. Lk 9, 23.

³ Mt 25, 41.

⁴ Acts 14, 22.