

Romans 11:33-12:8 - “From Conformed to Transformed”

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Our Epistle reading from Romans begins with St. Paul’s concluding comments as he considers all that God has done for our salvation. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has provided sinful mankind with the perfect and only way of eternal salvation when God the Son became a man so that He could forever free us from our sins and the ultimate consequence of our sins (which is eternal death) through His damning death and glorious resurrection.

We, through the Holy Spirit’s gift of faith in Jesus Christ, sit in utter amazement and thanksgiving at God’s merciful, gracious and almighty work of salvation. *“Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!...For **from** Him and **through** Him and **to** Him are all things.”* All things come **from** God, from our creation to our salvation. They come to us **through** Him, especially through Jesus Christ. And all things will eventually return **to** God for His final judgement on the Last Day.

Through our faith in Jesus Christ, God gives us the humble, joyful ability to say: *“To Him be glory forever. Amen.”* We give all praise and glory to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for all that He has done and continues to do to give us eternal life in paradise.

But St. Paul doesn’t stop with a simple *“Amen.”* Instead He focuses next on some of the ways our faith in the works of God are displayed or **not** displayed in and through our relatively short lives in this fallen world. He focuses on how we build on the foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ for the good of others or how our sinful nature works against the building of God’s Church. Therefore, in light of the eternal life in paradise that has been graciously given to us through all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ, God through St. Paul, appeals to each one of us *“Do not be **conformed** to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewal of your mind.”*

A topic that stimulates a lot of discussion these days is the change of moral standards in the world around us from what were, in a loose way, based on the Word of God, to now a set of moral standards which are based on the word of sinful man. Like most things in this world, the more commonplace, or should I say publicized things become, no matter how wrong they may be in our eyes as children of God, the more they are generally accepted by those without the Spirit of God. A ‘go with the flow’ mentality, because it’s easier.

As a result, behavior which was once, within most of our lifetimes, looked upon as shameful even in the eyes of most “go with the flow” unbelievers, has become acceptable. What’s unacceptable in the minds of these same people is anyone who doesn’t “go with the flow”—those who don’t conform to the word of sinful man.

It’s no surprise, therefore, that God appeals to us to *“not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”* Because of the sinful nature we were born with, we are by nature conformed to this world. Apart from God, mankind has no choice. To a certain degree a person can rearrange the nature they’re born with, from correcting a birth defect to transgenering their gender. But we can’t transform ourselves from a sinner into a saint. This is something only God can do, and He does it through His Word and Sacraments.

When God transforms us, He doesn't transform our old sinful nature. Instead, through His Word and Baptism, God gives us a new sinless nature. This new nature is like the nature Adam and Eve were created with, before their fall into sin—before they conformed to the way of Satan.

What happened to Adam and Eve is a good reminder of what can happen to our new nature in Christ. Once God gives us this new nature which is able to understand and believe in God's merciful forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ, we then, according our new nature, can choose between God's word and will for us and Satan's word and will for us. And the devil, through our sinful nature, is in a sense with us every moment of our lives in this world tempting us to choose his way instead of God's way.

So, God, through St. Paul, appeals to us to not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think of ourselves. Don't think that we can overcome sin in us and around us on our own. While the gift and new life of faith God gives us, is perfect and sufficient to save us if we were to die this very moment, if we continue living in this world, we continue to need God to continue transform our lives because of our sinful nature's continual conformity to sin.

Consider the struggle that St. Paul experienced in his life once God gave him faith in Jesus Christ as his Savior. Earlier in chapter seven of his letter to the Romans, he said: *"I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me...making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members"* (vv. 7-25).

Where does St. Paul go to be set free from his captivity to the *"law of sin"*? Not to himself, but to the law of God in Jesus Christ who promised, *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved"* (Mark 16:16).

Instead of thinking too highly of himself, like he used to when he was a Pharisee and thought that he was able to save himself by his good works, Paul now believed the truth that sin was a continual part of his life in this world, making him dependent on the continual transformation and salvation that only God could provide for him through Jesus' good works as our Savior. If this was true for St. Paul, it's certainly true of you and me.

The more we run to God's Word and Sacrament for the peace of mind and salvation which He alone can give us, the more we show those in the world around us where they too can go for help and salvation, resulting not only in our growth as Christians but also the growth of the Church.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] An important thing God lets us know in the Bible is that we can't get along without Him. Even though God gave us life through our parents, and eternal life through His Word and Baptism, this doesn't mean that we can now manage on our own without God. While we might be able, when we're older, to manage without our parents. We will never be able to live without God.

Sometimes when we're young, and looking healthy and beautiful, like these flowers, we can think that we can manage on our own without God. But the longer we live in this world, the more we will start to look like these flowers, especially when we forget about our continual need for God to remind us through the Bible about how wonderful and powerful He is to not only give us life, but to keep us alive forever through Jesus Christ.

This morning I'm going to give you all one of these beautifully looking flowers to take home with you. When it starts to look like one of these flowers, what will it remind you of about your life in this world? That it will come to an end. But what does God keep on reminding us in the Bible? That we have nothing to worry about when it comes to things like getting old and dying, because Jesus died and rose again so that when our life in this world comes to an end we will continue to live forever in paradise with Him. So, during good times and bad times in this world, God wants us to keep on reading our Bibles so that we remember and keep on believing this Good News.