

18 Sunday Year A 2020 A reflection

Today we have reached the half-way mark of Paul's *Letter to the Romans* that has been our second reading since we returned to Ordinary Time just over two months ago. Today's short passage, just four verses, celebrates the mystery of God's love. God's plan for his creation, rather than being derailed by human sin and its consequences, in fact is revealed in its hidden depth as the plan of God who is faithful and loving.

The Father's plan is centred on Jesus and our freedom. God frees us to love by means of Jesus' death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit. And we embrace God's promise with the assurance of hope as Paul encourages us to do in today's reading when he says that "nothing can come between us and the love of Christ [i.e., Christ's love for us]."

Paul speaks of what he has encountered in his own ministry that might be thought of as undermining his faith in Christ's fidelity to him. These obstacles he lists as troubles, worries, persecutions, hunger and threats to life. All of these were Paul's companions at different times throughout his ministry, and he never seemed to have lacked at least one of them. But rather than being defeated by them he says "these are the trials through which we triumph by the power of him who loved us."

In the second section of his letter Paul will address God's faithfulness, the subject, as we have seen, of his letter so far, in the context of the Jewish nation, Israel. Early on in *Romans* Paul had stated, "[the Gospel] is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (*Romans*, 1:16) But Israel had not embraced Jesus as its long-awaited Messiah while the Greeks had responded favourably. So it makes sense that Paul, having written about God's fidelity or righteousness, would then take up that issue in relation to Israel's disbelief.

In the final chapters of *Romans* Paul draws on what he has written about the fidelity of God and the moral life in the first chapters of his letter to exhort the Christians at Rome, who formed small household churches, to express in their actions what it is to live in Christ according to the Holy Spirit.

Finally, as we wonder about our future as members of society and belonging to families let us reflect on what Paul says in today's reading: "nothing that exists, nothing still to come, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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