

Fourteenth Sunday in Year A

My beloved brothers and sisters, quite often I hear people say to me, especially in the Confessional; Father, I just keep failing in the same areas of my life, how can God forgive me and continue to be merciful to me? In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul begins with a discussion about our absolute need for salvation, and the fact that this salvation is given to us through our faith in the Saving Lord Jesus Christ! However, in today's reading, which is from chapter 8, Paul focuses on those who are already living the life of faith begun in us at Baptism.

By faith, we receive God's merciful and infinitely plentiful grace, and God sends us His Holy Spirit, to make us the beloved children of God, new creatures in Jesus Christ- in other words: Christians! By this fact, we have the full power of God dwelling within us to live lives of courage, wisdom, kindness, joy, self-sacrifice, holiness and prayer. We become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. We often feel this as an impulse to give ourselves more to Christ and to reflect His goodness to us in our love for our families and for others! St. Paul tells us, that we "are in the Spirit Christ," and by Him, His Spirit dwells in us!

In merely human terms, we often recognize family traits. If you were to see the pictures of my uncle and grand-father, and my great-grandmother, you would say: "no wonder he has a round face, bald head and is fat!" We see similar looks, mannerisms, and habits, (how many times have you said to one of your children: "you're just like your father!") In the same way, St. Paul is teaching us, that everyone should be able to recognize that we are Christians, because we are living Christ-like lives!

Like an acorn that grows into a huge tree, so was our Christian identity planted in us at our Baptisms. The Acorn is impelled by its very nature; so too, are we! However, like the acorn, it needs good and deep soil in which to grow and thrive. Like any plant, there are forces at work trying to destroy it. That is the reality of sin and selfishness- we cannot do this work by ourselves, it requires our active participation in Divine Grace by prayer, self-denial, living for others, the Sacraments. Every single day, is a war against the strong pull of our selfishness, spiritual sloth, lust, greed, and all of the other temptations now at work in the

world! This is due to our fallen human nature, it is what St. Paul calls the world, the flesh, and our adversary, the Devil! There are weeds in our lives, trying to suck out the nutrients of our spiritual lives. We have to root them out! It is living in Christ, that roots out the noxious weeds from our lives and lets the life of grace flourish! St. Paul says it all: "Live in Christ!"