Lent 2, February 21, 2016

**Having the Right Mind-Set**

Philippians 3:17–4:1

Dear Friends in Christ!

The season of Lent has been observed by the Church throughout time. But somehow and gradually Lent is becoming a mystery even among Christians. It is either considered an outdated tradition or its observance has lost its meaning.

Lent, which basically means “spring,” is a time when Christians all over the world prepare for Jesus Christ’s resurrection of the dead.

Three practices have been observe in Lent: Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving or works of mercy. It is a time when Christians mourn over their sin in repentance, and learn again to trust in their Savior, Jesus Christ.

Lent invites us to refocus on what is important, but refocusing on what is important requires that we think and meditate. However in culture is not easy to think and meditate. We are surrounded by noise, we are promoted to input. I mean our culture is inundated with input. How many times we are disrupted by several things at once. Although we call it multitasking the reality is that our minds are always busy and occupied with some many things going at once. Sometimes it’s a wonder we can think at all!

Lent is a good time to refocus, but in order for us to refocus we must also learn to focus less on some things and more on what is important. And for that something has to change. That’s why Lent invites us to give up something during this season as a way of fasting, something that is a regular part of our lives, thinks like certain kinds of food or drinks, games, or maybe even Facebook, and instead focus on that whish is very important, Jesus Christ, who gave up everything for us, even life itself.

But to refocus, we do need a different Mind-set, Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians, chapter 3, the epistle reading for this morning.

The dictionary defines mind-set as: “a particular way of thinking : a person's attitude or set of opinions about something”

Many religious gurus, pop psychologists, motivational speakers, and other “experts” on leadership talk about having the right mind-set for success. They’ll tell you that your way of thinking, your set of assumptions, how you make decisions is everything. Actually, there’s a lot of truth to that. To be sure, the wrong mind-set, such as holding on to former failures or pain from the past, can hinder you from much in this life. I won’t argue with that. But while positive thinking and steps to recovery can help one move forward in life, it’s not at all what the apostle Paul offers in today’s Epistle.

Experts on psychology and behavioral studies say that there are two kinds of mind-sets, one is called “The fixed mindset.” Someone with a fixed mindset, will not be happy with just succeeding and looking smart and talented, but that person has to be pretty much flawless. The “fixed mind-set” will believe that your qualities are carved in stone and that there is an urgency to prove yourself over and over. If you have only a certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character, well then you’d better prove that you have a healthy dose of them. It simply wouldn’t do to look or feel deficient in these most basic characteristic. Their goal in life is to prove themselves—in the classroom, in their careers, and in their relationships. Every situation calls for a confirmation of their intelligence, personality, or character. Every situation is evaluated: Will I succeed or fail? Will I look smart or dumb? Will I be accepted or rejected? Will I feel like a winner or a loser?

Now the second is called the “growing mind-set.” Those who have this mindset will consider their traits not as written in stone but they are the starting point for development. This growing mind-set is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments – everyone can change and grow through application and experience. These people will believe that although they cannot become geniuses, they can accomplish unforeseen greatness through years of passion, toil, and training.

Interesting isn’t it. Now, there is another kind of mind-set as well, a new one, and yes a growing one. It is the kind of mind-set the apostle Paul is talking about in the his epistle reading. This mind-set is a gift from God given to you in your Baptism and will be complete on the last day. It is the New mind-set, and this mind-set focuses on Christ and our heavenly home.

Now this mind-set Paul says clings to the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. This mind-set puts aside anything that could give us confidence in the flesh instead moves us to put our eyes of trust and faith only on Christ and his redeeming work, his work on the cross of Calvary.

That’s what Paul did and in his letter to the Philippians invites them and us to imitate doing as well. He says: “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (3:17). Often when today’s prominent leaders give their sermons or pep talks, they come off as incredibly arrogant as they hold themselves up as examples to imitate on the road to success. Paul is far more than some religious guru or expert offering practical advice based on his own experiences. He’s no arrogant model. He’s an apostle, a servant of Christ Jesus. And what he has to share with the saints at Philippi and with you is much more than seven steps to transform your mind-set for success. To imitate Paul has little to do with him at all and everything to do with Jesus.

While the “successful” leaders and preachers of today may tout their accomplishments, Paul counts his as loss, he says: “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” (Phil. 3:8a)

Anything that could give him confidence in the flesh he sets aside, clinging only to the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The mind-set that we are to have imitates Paul by clinging to the righteousness of Christ, which comes through faith.

This new mind-set we are given, laments the rejection of the cross of Christ for self-glory, as others were doing at Philippi. While Paul himself put away the things that brought confidence in the flesh, the “fixed mind-set” had at one point, there were many in the Church who did not. This isn’t the first time the apostle had written about such enemies of the cross of Christ. And in this chapter he warns about them again, this time with weeping, lamenting their ambitions toward self-glory and their rejection of Christ in so doing. “For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (3:18–19).

The letter to the Philippians is, for the most part, upbeat and encouraging, even though Paul himself is in chains for the Gospel. But there’s a threat more dangerous than imprisonment or even death. It’s a rejection of Christ and his righteousness won on the cross for a righteousness that comes from the Law and ends in destruction. The issue here is a false confidence in one’s own flesh, basically having and living in a “fixed mind-set” when it comes to us insisting to prove ourselves worthy of even God’s love.

It’s so easy to fall back on our accomplishments and cling to a confidence in one’s works. Even in Lent that’s a temptation for us. What did you give up for Lent this year? Chocolate? Soda? Social media? It’s fine to practice self-discipline, in fact we are encouraged to do. It can be a great spiritual exercise, but sometimes it’s easy to go too far, like when your self-discipline becomes something you hold over God or your neighbor. The old man in us wants always a bit of credit. We want to impress God and our neighbor too. It may seem harmless on the surface, but ultimately it rejects the cross and all that Jesus accomplished for you there. This is the “fixed mind-set” with a hint of the “growing mind-set” of the old Adam, not of the new one you were given at your baptism.

This was our Lord’s lament over Jerusalem in the Gospel—that God’s people had such a mind-set. They had rejected the prophets, stoned and killed them, just as they threatened Jeremiah in today’s Old Testament Reading. And so they reject God’s promised Son as well. The voice of the prophets was ignored, the call to repentance unheeded. Just before he wept over Jerusalem, Jesus talked about the narrow door. Why will many who seek to enter not be able? Because of confidence in the flesh clinging to self-righteousness, and thereby rejecting Christ and his cross.

Many even today live in the “fixed mind-set” of the flesh, even when we do aspire to have a “growing mind-set” still do in the context of the old Adam, what can I do for myself and by myself. If you are one of those then the invitation is for us to repent and to allow and rejoice in the New Mind-set we have been given in Christ.

And live in the new mind-set, given to us as a gift given in the waters of Holy Baptism, a washing and renewal, filled with the holy Spirit, working in us continually working in us a change of mind, a changed mind and changed heart, leading us always to focus on Christ, but molding us to walk in His ways and do the things He did to some degree. For Jesus did strove not for self-glory but for God’s glory. His mind-set was to glorify God by giving up everything for you, even his life. Paul so beautifully proclaimed that in chapter 2—that Christ became a servant, obedient even to death for you. He emptied himself of everything, to be filled with all your sin, your flawed ambitions, your filthy self-righteousness. He forgives your self-righteousness and assures you of his love. And now, he covers you with his own perfect righteousness.

It began at the font, where not only your mind but your whole self is renewed. And now that new mind-set looks ahead. It looks for the return of Christ and your own resurrection: “We await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore . . . stand firm . . . in the Lord, my beloved” (3:20–4:1). That’s the goal, not self-glory but God’s, his glory bestowed on you fully when Jesus comes again. In your baptism the transformation begun and is going to be made complete when your lowly bodies will be transformed to be like his glorious body at the resurrection. And Jesus has the power to do it because all of which he emptied himself and more was given him back in his glorious resurrection.

So press on dear People of God. You have a new mind-set that looks beyond the successes of this world, greater than confidence in your own flesh and accomplishments. The new and different mind-set is really the Christian mind-set. It’s much more than positive thinking or steps to a better you. It’s a mind-set that glories in Christ and revels in daily repentance and faith. That’s the mind-set Paul invites you to imitate, returning each day to your Baptism. It’s also why you can stand firm in the Lord. He’s done everything for you and for your salvation. Your citizenship is in heaven, even now as you walk the way of the cross here on earth.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.