

14th of Ordinary Time
The Paradox of Power and Weakness

Jesus ironically finds that those who've known him longest are least inspired to believe in him... "a prophet is NOT without honor except in his hometown, and among his own kin and in his own house." In Nazareth his power was weakened. Weakness! St. Paul speaks of it as a mystery in God and something of a paradox! The Scriptures are full of paradox!

We see unseen things.
We conquer by yielding.
We find rest under a yoke.
We reign by serving.
We are made great by becoming small.
We are exalted when we are humble.
We become wise by being fools for Christ's sake.
We are made free by becoming bondservants.
We triumph through defeat.
We find victory by glorying in our infirmities.
We live by dying.
We gain strength when we are weak.

St. Paul teaches that "power is made perfect in weakness". What? I would have thought power was made perfect in 'control' or 'domination' or 'personal popularity or wealth', but weakness? St. Paul drives home this paradox: "So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of God may dwell in me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong."

Chesterton on the weakness of Peter!

This informs the Church's proper affinity for the weak, vulnerable, voiceless and powerless. And where did Paul's paradoxical insight come from? Through suffering in, with and through Jesus! Specifically, a 'thorn in the flesh' that St. Paul says provided a message of Satan to prevent him from the greatest of all vices – pride! What is Paul's thorn? St. Jerome offers the oldest and likely best of all theories. He suffered from severe migraines from the blinding conversion on the road to Damascus. In spite of his threefold prayer for relief from the suffering, Paul experiences what most Christians have heard: God's overwhelming silence which interpreted means NO! But he also hears God say: "My grace is sufficient for you".

As we face our contemporary weakness with historic grieving, papal blaming and Churches burning, let's cling to God's sufficient grace in order to avoid revenge and seek reconciliation
reveal prejudice while being peacemakers
and denounce sacrilege even as we embrace sanctity.

When we are weak, then we are strong.