

Epistle (Eph.4:1-6)

How are you doing this morning? And how are you preparing to answer that question? Most of us take our answer from our circumstances. We take stock as to whether we're rich or poor, owning or renting, employed or unemployed, young or...umm..."mature," physically healthy or not so much, and so on. Then we compare ourselves to others and see how we measure up. From that comes our answer: "OK" or "Could be better" or "Hanging in there!" For most, the bottom line is "Nothing special." But today's Epistle, Ephesians 4:1-6, says you and I **are** special because in Christ we have received "*the calling with which [we] were called:*" the calling to be the children of God, the family of God, to be what 1 Peter 2:9 calls "*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, [God's] own people, that [we] may proclaim the praises of Him Who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light.*" Not that we've received this calling because we're just so wonderful or deserve it! We're sinners still in the process of being saved by God's grace alone. But in Christ, the Father extends this same call to every person on this planet. John 3:16 insists that the gift of eternal life is for "**whosoever** believes in Him;" it's completely open-ended. Because we have put our trust and are continuing to put our trust in Christ and in what He accomplished on our behalf in His Cross and Resurrection, says St. Paul just in Ephesians 1, God has "**blessed us** with every spiritual blessing; God "**chose us** in [Christ] before the foundation of the world;" God "**predestined us** to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself" and "**made us** accepted in the Beloved." In Jesus "**we** have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins," not grudgingly or sparingly, but "*according to the riches of His grace.*" And **we** have been "*sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, Who is the guarantee [down-payment] of **our** inheritance.*" So how are we doing? In terms of our calling by and gifting from God, pretty great, actually! **But**, does our conduct match our calling? Does our daily walk match our Christian words? As Christians, we've been called by God to live a life that demonstrates His great love for our human race.

And doing so starts with having **the right perspective**. In verse 1 Paul says, "*I, therefore, the prisoner **of the Lord** beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you are called.*" He's in jail because he surrendered his entire life to Jesus Christ; in a sense he sold his life in order to do what Jesus laid upon him to do, while if he had never fully yielded to Jesus, he could probably have avoided jail, persecution, and suffering. But his perspective is that regardless of his circumstances he's still in the Lord's hands; he's the Lord's prisoner, not Rome's, because he's exactly where the Lord needs him to be. And that full surrender to Christ is crucial for both our living and our witnessing. Look: our calling, says Romans 6:4, is "*that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*" and model that new and eternal life to the world around us, such that, as it says in 1 Peter 2:9, we "*proclaim the praises of Him Who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light.*" Sometimes that seems scary, and it's always impossible apart from God's grace empowering us. But if we have the right perspective, we see that it's not a bothersome burden but a precious privilege which turns a chore into a cherished labour of love.

However, nobody wants to hear somebody tell them to do this or that if that somebody isn't also doing it. The rule of thumb is still "At least try to practice what you preach!" Double standards, compromises, and contradictions are all stumbling blocks and barriers to authenticity. That's why St. Paul says "*I beseech you to walk **worthy** of the calling with which you were called,*" something

we can do only as we grasp at gut level all that God has done for us: that we're loved with an everlasting love; that we are His people and the sheep of His pasture; and that we have been given every spiritual blessing to walk humbly with our God! The proper perspective is that we are not the initiators and that God is not the responder in this relationship. You know what I mean: If I just pray enough, give enough, do enough, then God will bless me; so I'm trying to walk worthy, really going for it. But that doesn't work; instead, it leads to frustration and disappointment! Why? Because we can never do "enough" to essentially put God in our debt, so that He owes us His blessing. Unless and until we become truly "poor in spirit" and see ourselves for who and what we really are, total and complete debtors to God for everything we have and everything we are, we cannot walk worthy of our calling because we're not walking in our calling.

Along with right perspective comes right position. In verse 2 Paul bids us walk "*with all lowliness [humility] and gentleness [meekness], with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.*" The word "lowliness" obviously has to do with being low, the opposite of having one's nose in the air. True humility, the opposite of pushing self to the centre of everything, is knowing who by God's grace I am, what I by God's gifting I can do, and where by God's designing I belong. Some people are never happy unless their ideas are preeminent, their voice is heard, and they occupy center-stage. But the way of Christ, says Philippians 2:7-8, lies in following Him Who "emptied Himself, *taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*" To live together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, under the lordship of Christ, demands humility.

It also demands "gentleness" [meekness], which is not weakness. The Greek word "meekness" describes power under control, especially power under another's control. It's used of a race horse, whose humungous size, strength and ferocious power are all so disciplined that a skinny little jockey can control the horse. In Matthew 11:28-29 Jesus says "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle [or 'meek'] and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*" But nobody who actually reads the Gospels could ever think that Jesus was weak, a doormat, a push-over. It's the weak person who's full of pride and self-delusion about their own importance; it's the weak person who's so scared that he always tries to control everything and everybody. The truly humble and meek person is content to allow God to work His way on His timetable according to His plan and simply be occupied with their own life and not meddle in or destroy the lives of others.

Meekness expresses itself in "*longsuffering*" [patience] and "*bearing with one another in love.*" The word "patience" comes from the Latin *pator*, "I suffer." So the word means hanging in there, and especially hanging in there with someone else, for as long as it takes, even when it hurts. Now we don't want to hear that. We don't want to suffer at all; and we want gratification immediately. But godly patience, "*the fruit of the Spirit,*" is committed to the long haul. Only when we're walking in the Spirit, controlled by the Spirit, led by the Spirit, can we hang in there and "*bear with one another in love*" rather than in anger, resentment, bitterness, grudge-bearing and outright conflict. All our power, all our ability, all our "rights" surrendered into God's hand and held under His control: that's the only way we're every really fit to live with one another in love.

Lastly there's the need for **right purpose**: "*endeavouring* [laboring diligently] *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" Our unity as the family of God is based on and created by the Holy Spirit, not as a result of anything we can do. Our being God's family is based, not on common ethnicity or intelligence or personal wealth or shared political views or anything else in and of this world. That unity is rooted in our shared acceptance of and shared participation in "*one body and one Spirit, just as we are called in one hope of our calling; one Lord; one faith; one baptism; one God and Father of all, Who is above all and through all and in all.*" And if our focus as individual believers and/or as a parish or diocese is on anything else, anything at all, we doom ourselves to discord, disunity, disaster, and being dismantled as useless.

But we're not totally passive here. To "endeavour" means "to exert one's self." That exertion centers on continual self-examination and repentance, to uproot from our affections anything which isn't lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and self-sacrificing love; and it centers on consciously and deliberately choosing day by day to walk worthy of our calling, rather than stumbling through life led by our passions. We have to work at thinking the best of each other, at listening carefully and with the heart to one another, at forgiving one another, at serving one another. No one ever grew in Christlikeness by living on autopilot, OK? Ah, but if we do what it's our part to do in making our decisions match our doctrines and our actions match our attitudes, it will revolutionize our life as individual believers and our life as a parish, revitalize our walk with Christ and rekindle in us our passion for Jesus Christ. But as always, it's your move...and mine too.