

## Lent Meditation 5 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021



2Cor.1,3-4

**“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”**

Let us not suppose that Paul is here speaking about the experience of suffering and hardship as a “misfortune”, as though he was saying, ‘I’m sorry you have to suffer; but consider what might come from it, consider the following strategy...’, as though he held that the normal and better state of things for a Christian was to be free from any need to receive God’s comfort or if there is need for it that it should come in terms of “good fortune”. No, he is speaking about the very meaning of the Christian life and faith. Because that meaning is ‘service’, and the rendering of comfort is at the heart of Christian service. [ see Job who says to the friends who won’t comfort him: *“Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.”*(6,14)]

The comfort which we are called to render to *“those in any trouble”* is *“the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”* It is not from a position of strength, or of eyeing up ‘good fortune’, that we can know how to comfort, but from weakness, from exposure to suffering, from places of need for God’s comfort. Paul puts it strikingly later in the same epistle: *“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in*

*hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (12,9-10*

These are extraordinary words and thoughts, hardly acceptable to our modern individualism for which the goal that everything must serve is personal fortune and well-being. This, however, cannot be reconciled with the Christian faith which tells us that God brought his saving power into play through a *wounded* healer. The attempt to do so empties faith of its strength to comfort and disables its call to serve.

Only if and as we receive God’s comfort will they who need comfort find in us people who can give comfort.

In weakness, then, and suffering, is delivered and experienced the comfort of God, not in order to make us more fortunate (in a worldly sense) but so as to equip faith with the strength, the wisdom, the compassion to comfort, that is, to equip faith with the will to serve.

But where is this comfort experienced except in the Son of God on the cross, Christ, the grace of God, who *“did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (Mk.10,45) *“For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.”* (2Cor.1,5)