

First Epistle of the apostle St. Paul to St. Timothy 1,12-17: I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit + We're now in week 2 after Easter. Last Sunday was called *Quasimodogeniti*: Like new born babies... It's a celebration of God's miracles and wonders in baptism and through his gracious gospel. The watchword sums it up: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* (1Pe 1:3 ESV) Baptism is the effective gospel means of God's grace and mercy. Through baptism we are incorporated into him, made one body, one cake - inseparable. Through baptism we are buried with Christ into death, but through baptism we are also raised to share his new life of righteousness and holiness every anew. His death becomes ours, but his new life is ours also and even more so, because life swallows death, conquers it, beats it. Thus we are saved by Baptism. Baptism grants forgiveness of sins and where you have forgiveness of sins, there you have life and eternal salvation. That is why holy Baptism is our most treasured gift and free reward from our God and Lord. For by the waters of Baptism, God the Holy Spirit has effectively and objectively born us again so that we too now have living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Christ lives in us – always and for good. That has changed everything for the better. That's what we mean with "Happy end!" Praise be to God Father, Son and Holy Spirit for we too can gratefully confess: "*Baptizatus sum*"¹

In our reading this morning St. Paul opens up to St. Timothy in a very personal way. He shows, where he came from, what he was all about in his earlier life and how he then became a Christian, an apostle & slave of Christ and the greatest missionary of all times. This all thanks to the triune God's intervention. ***All honour and glory is due to him the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, forever and ever. Amen.*** At first St. Paul was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. The Christian Church knew him as a sworn enemy of the new way, a terrible threat and plague to those putting their hope and trust in the crucified and risen Lord. A terrorist of sorts, and one of the worst kind: A real front ranker, not just a backbencher. He does not cover this up, but owns up to it. Titles himself Nr1 sinner! Yet IX came into this world to save sinners, real ones, like me Saul a

¹ Cf. Luther in his affliction. This blessed salvation and confession is the subjective consequence of that historic victory at Easter. It is all God's doing. 2k years ago & there outside Jerusalem just down the road from Golgotha he did this once and for all. Objective benchmark of subjective salvation. That history gives us living hope. Not just a short bonfire of vanities, but everlasting to everlasting built on the firm foundations of his effective and sure promises. That's all for us and our salvation, yes for the salvation of humanity right from God's center to the very outposts of this world. That's the reason why IX came into this world – it's the essence of his mission to save sinners from death and eternal condemnation and to bring them life and eternal salvation – not just amongst the Jews, but also amongst the gentiles right to the ends of the world. Saul, but all. If he can do it for Saul, he can do it for you.

blasphemer, persecutor and archenemy of the living Lord IX and his beloved congregation. IX got in Saul's way, stopped him in his tracks, turned him around 180 degrees. Not just a cover-up, but conversion, rebirth, new creation. Saul is converted from unbelief, false confidence and downright hatred of the crucified and brought to true faith and trust in the true and living Lord of all and King of kings. Changed him from Saul to Paul, the old is gone, behold it has become new. New name, new man, new everything. All this was not Saul's doing. On the contrary. Saul fought nail and tooth against this Christ and his people. Still it was God's pleasure and he delighted in doing this miracle and wonder of conversion. He showed the greatest mercy and perfect patience with this greatest sinner of all, converting him and making him into what we know him now to be: St. Paul, the apostle of the Christian Church and Christ's faithful missionary to the gentiles. This happened as an example to us so that we would gain confidence and trust in God's goodness and mercy, in his loving willingness to forgive sins and in his perfect patience to change our rotten hearts and lives to faithful and loving Christians instead. If he can do this to Saul Nr 1 Sinner, well, then he can handle anyone really.² Even me – even you. Don't despair in your sin. Trust in IX. He came to save sinners.

Think of **St. Francis**³. In his biography he writes, that Lepers were for him the most bitter, deplorable and detestable stinking scum. Then however Christ the crucified appeared to him and converted and changed him deep inside, so that they were to him "sweeter than honey!" So he sought out their company to serve, help and even live with them. No longer bitter, but sweeter than honey!⁴ That's the change God and IX brings about by the HS: bitter to sweet, sinner to saint, persecutor to missionary.

Perhaps you know examples like that too. How God is changing the lives of sworn enemies of his and his own people into good friends and even close family, heirs and children, members of his church. Dr. Simon-Netto wrote this week about Muslims becoming Christians in masses around the world: Called through dreams, taught and evangelized by missionaries and pastors until they are baptized and received into the body of the Christian Church. So let's laud, praise and worship God for what he has done and still is doing to forgive sinners and displaying his mercy and perfect patience with them. Conversion of sinners is God's great miracle and wonder. He does that out of his wonderful loving mercy and perfect patience through W & S, through the office of the ministry.⁵ Praise, thanks & glory to him now + forever. Amen.

The Peace of the Lord be with you +

² The NT is really quite full of these conversion stories. e.g. the adulteress probably **Mary Magdalene** (I too don't condemn you! Jo8), **Peter the denier**: (Go and feed my lambs! Jo20) **Thomas the doubter**: Don't be unbelieving, but believing! (Jo19) **The murderer on the cross**: Today you will be with my in paradise!

³ Not the pope, but his name patron from the Middle Ages!

⁴ "The cross and the switchblade (David Wilkerson 1962). Or the old farmer Brockmann from around Rorkes Drift in KZN. He was a typical racist, who treated the Zulus on his farm and elsewhere like dirt, like vermin. By God's grace he was converted and became a missionary amongst Zulu people for the rest of his life - Something like St. Francis – first bitter, deplorable and detestable scum, later "sweeter than honey!" Or the **Joosten twins** in Wartburg High School in the Natal Midlands. They were the biggest bullies around and a missionary's kid was their favourite victim. Until they went to a Youth Camp, got converted and where turned around by God's grace and mercy so that they became the most friendly and helpful boys around. Even today they are still friends of that missionary's kid.

⁵ Cf. CFW Walther in Treasury of Daily Prayer Pg. 212