

Consecrated to God (Roman 6:19-23)  
Trinity 7 (July 19) 2015

In this tiny little portion of Romans chapter 6 that is our Epistle reading we have St. Paul's (and hence the Holy Spirit's) teaching about personal consecration to God. Most of us know something about the idea of various material items being consecrated in the church. Every Sunday Fr. Piotr or I pray the Prayer of Consecration over the bread and wine and our money offerings to God. During this prayer we ask God to bless and accept these offerings from us and to sanctify them by his Word and Holy Spirit so that they may become for us the body and blood of Christ. Some of us may know something about the consecration of a church building. Or we may know something about the consecration of other holy objects such as a chalice or paten or cross jewelry.

But what about personal consecration of ourselves to God? Do we know anything about this? Later in Romans, Paul writes, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). And in 1 Corinthians 6 Paul writes that "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own. For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

In the Bible to *consecrate* means "to set apart." For example, in the Old Testament God ordered various things to be consecrated, or set apart, for him. The Israelites were to be a holy people set apart for God. The tabernacle was to be a holy place set apart exclusively for the worship of God. This got carried over to the Temple in Jerusalem, where the daily morning and evening sacrifices took place. You may recall that Jesus got very mad when he found buying and selling taking place in the Temple grounds, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and drove them out with whips. So much for Jesus being a totally tolerant and accepting person! He did this because the Temple was to be holy, set apart for God and these moneychangers were polluting the Temple by their transactions. Other things that were consecrated, or set apart in the Old Testament, include the first fruits, the firstborn, the Levites, the promised land, the Aaronic priesthood, and so on.

The notion that Paul is speaking about here is the idea of something being presented to a greater power and thus becoming a servant, slave, or instrument of that greater power. This includes the parts of the body, which were slaves to our evil desires and longings before we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. But now that we have, we are servants to God. "I am using these everyday examples," Paul says, "because in some ways you are still weak. You used to let the different parts of your body be slaves of your evil thoughts. But now you must make every part of your body serve God, so that you will belong completely to him."

In this 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans, from which we read the first part last Sunday, Paul is dealing with the issue of sin in the lives of Christian believers. He says that before we came to Christ and were baptized, we were the slaves of sin. But now that we have become Christian believers, we're no longer in slavery to sin. "We know that the persons we used to be were nailed to the cross with Jesus. This was done, so our sinful bodies would no longer be the slaves of sin. We

know sin doesn't have power over dead people" (vv. 6-7). Because of our faith in Christ we have become as it were dead to sin but alive and God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

One of the issues hanging over this whole 6th chapter of Romans, as we saw last week, is antinomianism. This is the idea that since God freely saved us through the death of Jesus on the cross, we no longer need to follow or keep the Ten Commandments in order to be saved. In other words, because of Jesus Christ Christian believers are no longer bound to the law, as the Jews were, in order to be in a covenant relationship with God. Moreover, to continue the argument of antinomianism, since God freely rescued us and poured out his grace on us while we were still sinners, and before we ever turned to him, shouldn't we just sin with abandon so that more of God's grace will be poured out?

This idea, which may seem strange to us, is one that Paul's Jewish opponents were accusing him of teaching. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and he was adamant that Gentile Christians did not need to follow the Jewish dietary and ritual laws in order to be saved. If keeping the law in this way could make a person right with God, Paul argued, then there was no need for Jesus Christ to come into the world.

This idea, often summed up in the famous expression of Martin Luther, "sin bravely in order that grace may abound," probably seems strange to us because we are all Gentile Christians. We were not brought up in the Jewish faith and customs, and so this mindset seems strange and foreign to us. And of course today we are dealing with the exact opposite mindset, which says that we're all okay with God; that sin is an outdated superstition not worthy of enlightened minds. We're all going to be saved, and no one is going to hell. In fact, hell doesn't even exist. This mindset, so totally prevalent among people today, is called universalism. And it's the exact opposite of the Jewish faith of the Old Testament. But universalism totally destroys any need for a Savior like Jesus Christ. If God loves everybody and we're all going to be saved, then it doesn't matter if you follow Jesus or Buddha or Mohammed or anyone or no one at all. It doesn't matter if you go to church or not. It doesn't matter if you're a practicing Christian or not. The result will be precisely the same.

Well, both of these ideas—antinomianism and universalism—are false. And Paul did not teach that Christians don't have to follow the moral law of God. Just the opposite. Because Christians are servants of the living God, and know that they have been put into a new relationship of grace, mercy, peace, and love with God because of Jesus, we are now servants of righteousness, which leads to holiness and eternal life.

As Christian believers we need to continually remind ourselves of this fact. We need to remember who we are in Christ and act in ways that align and comport with our new identity. As Paul writes in vv. 12-13 of this chapter: "Don't let sin rule your body. After all, your body is bound to die, so don't obey its desires or let any part of it become a slave of evil. Give yourselves to God, as people who have been raised from death to life. Make every part of your body a slave that pleases God."