

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: Romans 6:19-23

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Saint Paul speaks to us today in such a way because of the weakness of our flesh. We are pigheaded, hard-hearted, and stiff-necked people. We confess our faith in JESUS CHRIST and all He endured to save us, but like pigs to the trough, time and again, we return to our old sinful ways.

Do you not know that the one whom you obey is your master? Are you not aware that you are a slave to whom or what you serve? When you serve unrighteousness and your sinful desires, you are a slave to sin. Therefore, remember the words of our LORD, *“No slave can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.”*

We Americans have an aversion to the words *“slave”* and *“slavery”*. In some sense, this is understandable. Slavery has left a well-deserved dark stain on the history of our great land. To quote a line from the recent film, Sound of Freedom, *“God’s children are not for sale.”* No man, woman, or government of any country has the right to own and enslave another human being.

Still, *“slave”* and *“slavery”* are apt terms when it comes to your salvation, even if your pride rankles at the mere thought of being enslaved to anyone or anything. That was the point of our LORD and His apostle, St. Paul; either you are a slave of *“sin leading to death,”* for as Paul wrote, *“...the wages of sin is death,”* or you are a slave to *“obedience leading to righteousness.”*

You see, sin has its wages. Death is earned. It is the consequence of sin. Sin leaves us with a bill that must be paid, and it can only be paid by the death of the sinner. The forgiveness of sin and the eternal life it brings, on the other hand, cannot be earned, they are gifts of God. Freely given and freely received, they are gifts poured over us in Baptism, poured into us in the LORD’s Supper, and pronounced to us in our LORD’s blessed words of Absolution.

Consequently, one is either a slave of sin, and therefore, to Satan, or a slave to righteousness, and therefore, to God. Thus, there is a line of demarcation of sorts in the life of a Christian—a clearly defined line between life and death. Every worship service serves to renew and highlight the contrast between slavery which leads to condemnation and death, and slavery which leads to righteousness, salvation, and the gift of eternal life.

So, to whom do you yield? Who is your master?

When sin is your master, it is ever-demanding and never satisfied. With sin as your master, like one addicted to drugs or alcohol, you are fully dependent on the needs and desires

of the flesh—a lust that can never be satisfied. With CHRIST JESUS as your Master, you are fully dependent on the Blood of JESUS and the promises of His Gospel.

Simply put, Paul’s point is that there is no real alternative to slavery. Either one is a slave to sin, or one is a slave to CHRIST. There is no third choice. There is no middle ground. Everyone serves one or the other—sin or CHRIST.

To present oneself as a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness is an option only for one who is baptized. Before Baptism and conversion, no one has the ability to serve God. Instead, we are born as slaves to impurity and unrighteousness. As King David writes in Psalm 51, “...*in sin my mother conceived me.*” Before Baptism, sin has complete dominion, holding its tyrannical sway over us.

Yet, Baptism does not end the battle but initiates a great struggle. Before conversion by water, Word, and SPIRIT, we are happy to sin, being unaware of the Law of God, or in complete denial that there is even such a thing as God and His Law. We serve as slaves to sin because our flesh rebels against righteousness.

Being baptized, we become aware of the Law of God and the price that violation of the Law, or sin, demands. St. Paul warns us against returning to sin’s domain and becoming again slaves of unrighteousness. He tells us that the battlefield upon which the war against sin is fought lies in our flesh—in our hearts.

But, as baptized children of God, we have died to sin, sharing in the death of our LORD as the payment that our sins and the violation of God’s Law demand of us. Therefore, sin no longer reigns over us. The chains of our slavery to sin, and the death that sin imposes, are loosed. The wages of our sins, the wages we earned, were paid out as JESUS suffered and died, nailed to His Cross on that first Good Friday. We are freed from the demands of the Law and its wages. Sin no longer has dominion over us for we are not under the Law but under grace.

Yet, “*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!*”

Sin, and our weak flesh, fight to enslave us again and again. With every sin, our capacity for life, intellect, and morality are spiritually diminished. Sin darkens the intellect, dulls the conscience, and destroys the soul. Sin kills! We struggle in this life against our flesh. Yet, the pain we endure is not a result of an arbitrary god who delights in watching us squirm. No, what we suffer in this vale of tears is a direct result of sin—our sins and the sins of the world around us.

In the same way, the joy we experience is not a result of our righteousness but that of the righteousness of CHRIST; a gracious and merciful gift in spite of our unrighteousness. Death we earn and deserve, but God’s grace, mercy, and love cannot be earned. Eternal life cannot be earned. They are a gift of God!

Thanks be to God that though we were once slaves of sin, He has opened our eyes to see, our ears to hear, and our hearts that we may believe, making us slaves of righteousness. God has showered us with His compassion. He has seen our frailty; He has seen our poverty of spirit; He has seen our weakness and our need.

God's compassion caused CHRIST to give up the joys of heaven, stepping down from His heavenly throne to assume our flesh, becoming human and living among us. Being fully man and yet, fully God, He was subject to all our sinful desires and tempted in every way as are we, and yet, He did not sin but overcame them all.

This God/Man, our LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, has known all our pain, all our frustrations, and all our sorrow. He gave Himself up to our vindictiveness, our cruelty, and our hatred. Then for us, He gave His life, and dying our death, He has paid our debt and redeemed us from the wages of sin. He has forgiven us all our sins to make us holy just as our Father in Heaven is holy. This is God's compassion and our righteousness.

You were slaves to sin and unrighteousness, *"...when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in CHRIST JESUS our LORD."*

Now, JESUS bids us, to come unto Him, to follow Him, listen to Him and believe in Him. He is here to feed us with His own hand. When CHRIST JESUS is in our midst, none who hunger for righteousness are sent away hungry.

JESUS gives to us more than we can or would ever ask for, more than we ever knew we needed. He gives us life and salvation through the forgiveness of our sins in Water and Word, and with His very own Body and Blood, given and shed for us so that we are freed and no longer slaves to sin that we may live with Him forever. With these, He crucifies our sinful desires and strengthens us for the struggles against our flesh. With these, He gives to us His love and compassion. With these JESUS says: *"I forgive you all your sins."*

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