

**Thorns in our Side**  
**Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
July 8, 2018

Life has a way of bringing us difficulties, thorns in the flesh. Some of these come from our mistakes or bad decisions. Some come as complications from our bad habits and addictions. Some are quite humbling and embarrassing. Some are debilitating and result in us not being able to do the things we used to be able to do. Some are losses over which we have no control such as death, an accident or loss of a job. Some are health problems that seem to come from nowhere. Some are temporary and go away while some are permanent. We often wonder the purpose these thorns in the flesh serve.

In the second reading today Paul today speaks about a thorn in the flesh that was given to him by satan. Many explanations have been put forward, but whether Paul is referring to a physical, spiritual, or emotional affliction—or something else entirely—has never been answered with satisfaction. Some of the more popular theories of the thorn's interpretation include temptation, a chronic eye problem, malaria, migraines, epilepsy, and a speech disability. Some even say that the thorn refers to a person, such as Alexander the coppersmith, who did Paul "a great deal of harm" (2 Timothy 4:14). No one can say for sure what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, but it was a source of real pain in his life. Paul clues us in concerning the thorn's purpose: "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations." So, God's goal in allowing the thorn in the flesh was to keep Paul humble. Anyone who had encountered Jesus and was commissioned personally by Him (Acts 9:2-8) would, in his natural state, become "puffed up." Add to that the fact that Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to write much of the New Testament, and it is easy to see how Paul could become "haughty" or "exalted above measure" or "too proud". Of course, no one likes to live in pain. Paul sought the Lord three times to remove this source of pain from him (2 Corinthians 12:8). He probably had many good reasons why he should be pain-free: he could have a more effective ministry; he could reach more people with the gospel; he could glorify God even more! But the Lord was more concerned with building

Paul's character and preventing pride. Instead of removing the problem, whatever it was, God gave Paul more overwhelming grace and more compensating strength. Paul learned that God's "power is made perfect in weakness".

As stated the exact nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh is uncertain. There is probably a good reason that we don't know. God likely wanted Paul's difficulty to be described in general enough terms to apply to any difficulty we may face now. Whether the "thorn" we struggle with today is physical, emotional, or spiritual, we can know that God has a purpose and that His grace is all-sufficient.

We too would like to be pain and misery free and we can take comfort that there is a purpose for our thorn in the flesh. We attempt to overcome our addictions and bad habits to live better lives. Our mistakes hopefully result in lessons learned that we hopefully do not repeat. The losses, the debilitations, the health problems let us know that we are vulnerable, must rely on God and hopefully teach us to be more compassionate to others who experience those same difficulties. Arlene's mother, after a wonderful long life, wasted away from dementia giving us empathy for families on this same journey. They give us new ways in which to relate to others. My hip, knee, cataract and hernia surgeries over the past few years give me new ways to have conversations with those having similar situations. Yet at times, no matter how hard we pray or work against these thorns in the flesh they may not go away. For, through God's sufficient grace, our power is made perfect in our weaknesses, in our struggles, in our difficulties. So like Paul, "we will rather boast most gladly of our weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with us. Therefore, we are content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when we are weak, then we are strong."

## Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Lectionary: 101**

**Reading 1** [EZ 2:2-5](#)

As the LORD spoke to me, the spirit entered into me  
and set me on my feet,  
and I heard the one who was speaking say to me:  
Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites,  
rebels who have rebelled against me;  
they and their ancestors have revolted against me to this very day.  
Hard of face and obstinate of heart  
are they to whom I am sending you.  
But you shall say to them: Thus says the LORD GOD!  
And whether they heed or resist—for they are a rebellious house—  
they shall know that a prophet has been among them.

**Responsorial Psalm** [PS 123:1-2, 2, 3-4](#)

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**R. (2cd) Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

To you I lift up my eyes  
who are enthroned in heaven —  
As the eyes of servants  
are on the hands of their masters.

**R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

As the eyes of a maid  
are on the hands of her mistress,  
So are our eyes on the LORD, our God,  
till he have pity on us.

**R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

Have pity on us, O LORD, have pity on us,  
for we are more than sated with contempt;  
our souls are more than sated  
with the mockery of the arrogant,  
with the contempt of the proud.

**R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

**Reading 2** [COR 12:7-10](#)

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Brothers and sisters:

That I, Paul, might not become too elated,  
because of the abundance of the revelations,

a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan,  
to beat me, to keep me from being too elated.  
Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me,  
but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you,  
for power is made perfect in weakness.”  
I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses,  
in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me.  
Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults,  
hardships, persecutions, and constraints,  
for the sake of Christ;  
for when I am weak, then I am strong.

### **Alleluia**CF. LK 4:18

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**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
for he sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

### **Gospel**MK 6:1-6

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Jesus departed from there and came to his native place, accompanied by his disciples.

When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue,  
and many who heard him were astonished.

They said, “Where did this man get all this?

What kind of wisdom has been given him?

What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands!

Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary,

and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon?

And are not his sisters here with us?”

And they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them,

“A prophet is not without honor except in his native place  
and among his own kin and in his own house.”

So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there,

apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them.

He was amazed at their lack of faith.