

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Awareness of Growing Sanctity Twenty-third Week in Ordinary Time Saturday,
September 16, 2017 8:15 AM **1 Tm 1:15-17;** Lk 6:43-49 Sts. Cornelius, pope, and
Cyprian, bishop, martyrs (St. Paul was a great follower of Christ; why would he be the
foremost of sinners?)

“This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost.”

Now you may be thinking to yourself, well, that’s an exaggeration, St Paul calling himself the foremost of sinners. It happens to be that this text is used in the Byzantine Rite for bishops. Bishops whenever they preside always say this. And you may say again, well, it’s obviously an exaggeration. **St. Paul was a great follower of Christ; why would he be the foremost of sinners?**

Well of course if we look at things from the outside, we see one set of relationships. And from the outside St. Paul is very close to God, as are all the great saints. But if you look from the inside, it’s a different picture, and this is from the inside. **The closer we get to God the more we recognize that our basic life is very corrupt, imperfect, dark, petty, sometimes even depraved.** So St. Paul and Teresa of Avila and the saints in general, the closer they get to God, the more they realize that we are created to be in union with God and in a way part of God, although that’s the wrong word, but to be utterly in the life of God. The more they realize this, the more they actually are conscious of it, the more they are also conscious of their own pitiful, little life. And that’s what this is. **It’s an awareness of the growing sanctity, the growing conscious holiness, that St. Paul experienced.**

Now how are we supposed to work with this? What we have to work with is realizing that **the person we take ourselves to be is not the person necessarily God has called us to be.** In this way we have to make distinctions. The distinction is not based on a feeling of separation. That

feeling of separation is really part of the problem. But it's rather based on **the awareness that God really has called us all to sanctity, to holiness, to godliness, to goodness.** And it is all achievable because God wants it. And **what God desires is not only possible, but is full of potential.** And so God is leading us to this new life, but **leading us to new life means also letting go of the old life. And letting go of the old life is letting go of a lot of things that we think really are essentially who we are and what we are like** and so on and so on. This Thomas Merton rightly called the "false self." Psychologists call it the "ego," the sense we have of who we are. But it becomes less and less relevant as we grow into God. And that's what this text is about; **it's about letting the past flow into the past and opening ourselves to the future, which is God.**