



*“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace; in His flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” (Ephesians 2:13-14)*

In the second reading this week we hear from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Throughout this letter Paul is trying to emphasize that many issues which had been causes for division must now be set aside. The Church in Ephesus had many believers who had been Jewish mixed together with Gentiles, people who had never followed the Jewish faith before. This led to fighting and debates, as many of the Jews believed that the Gentiles needed to accept Jewish traditions and laws, such as circumcision and dietary restrictions, in order to become a part of the church. It was an important question, with many people believing that this was essential for their salvation, yet it was also leading to division in

the Church.

Paul addresses this by pointing to the unity we are meant to have in Christ. Through His cross, we are all united into “one new humanity”. If our human nature and God’s Divinity have already been united in Christ, then surely uniting the Jews and the Gentiles is a far easier task for God to do. Even more importantly, Paul points to the power of the blood of Christ. It is through His blood that we have been saved, not through our own observance of laws and traditions.

Despite Paul’s insistence that our salvation was earned by the sufferings of Christ, not by our own works, there is often a tendency to try to earn our own salvation. Whether it’s a belief that we must follow a fixed list of rules, or a particular set of devotions which we believe are absolutely necessary, or a particular group we need to belong to, it can be easy to look at the things we do and think “this is what people *need* to do in order to be saved.” We may not say it so directly, but we sometimes act like it. And so, it’s important occasionally to take a step back and remind ourselves that Jesus is the one who actually saves us. We may have our own preferences for certain devotions we like, or a particular style of liturgy, or local traditions we grew up with, but those aren’t the things that will save us. At the end of the day, it is Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary which brings us to Him.

This tendency to overemphasize the external actions of our faith is one of the oldest and most persistent difficulties in the spiritual life. It is something which even the saints have struggled with, but it is not impossible to overcome. As Paul reminds us, it is the blood of Christ which has brought us into the faith, and it is through the cross that we have been saved. As we strive to grow closer to God, we need to ask Him to keep us humble and to remind us of our need for His mercy and love.