

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The clay vessel is the least noble of the vessels. There are vessels of gold and silver, of crystal and alabaster. They are fine, noble vessels, costly vessels, royal vessels. They are durable, lasting centuries. They are strong, not easily broken. They are pleasing to the eye and give honor to their user.

But we, writes the Apostle, have this treasure in earthen vessels. Like a vessel, the Apostles carried something of great worth – the Holy Gospel, the Truth of Christ crucified and risen. And yet that Divine and Saving Truth was not born by men of sterling outward appearance and gleaming attractiveness. The Apostle likens himself to an earthen vessel. Earthen vessels are ignoble. They are made of the dust of the earth. They are easily broken. They are not attractive, not costly, and speak to the poverty of their user.

One would expect that God's messenger, the one sent by the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, would be well received by His creation. But the Apostle writes that he is hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. Like a clay vessel, there was nothing comely, nothing desirable about them. Of and by themselves they would attract no man.

So those who preach the Truth, like the Apostle, always carry about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. Fallen men are not free, their will is bound only to sin against God and to think wrongly

about him. They are bound to sincerely believe wrongly. They are bound to imagine that they can save themselves.

Each of us has seen ourselves as a vessel of gold, an unblemished specimen of great worth. And as such, each of us has believed, in sin, that, like an object to be desired, we can please God, and that if left to ourselves we could earn His favor and gain heaven.

So, O wise and prudent, the things of God have been hidden from you. The fact is that we are earthen vessels. We are the pots, not the Potter. We are made from the dust. We are fragile, fatally flawed, ignoble, and broken. Like an earthen vessel, we are incapable of containing the Divine. We are incapable of hearing and believing the Gospel.

But thanks be to God, that He has given His Word and Spirit that the things of God be revealed. He sent men, fallen, ignoble men, to preach the Truth, rays of light in this dark world. Thanks be to God that in His mercy they preached even when hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. For in their weakness, the excellence of the power is of God and not of them. And so it is with us.

For He who is the Light took on an earthen vessel. Almighty God made Himself gentle and lowly in heart. So in Christ's weakness is His power made known, in His humility is His authority seen, in His suffering His mercy and grace demonstrated, in His silence does His love cry out, in His work is your salvation accomplished, His yoke was crushing that

yours be light, in His death is His victory for you won, in His resurrection is life eternal made yours.

St. Paul preached not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, that through the hearing of faith you might believe - and that by that faith you receive the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And with that knowledge, although the Christian be hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down, still you are not crushed, you are not in despair, you are not forsaken, you are not destroyed - for Christ suffered all this in your stead.

In Him all your sins are forgiven. In Him is true unity with all believers - unity with the true Head, making you one Body, the unity you have this day as you are one Holy Communion, made One by His Body and Blood.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels. So does Christ beckon you - come to Him, and He will give you rest. We have this treasure in Bread and Wine. He bids you come, drink of the most noble of vessels on earth – the Chalice that bears His Blood. Take and eat, take and drink. In Him you will find comfort and peace, healing and restoration, and rest for your soul. And soon you will be transformed from an earthly vessel into a heavenly vessel.

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