

St. Therese Catholic Church

St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians
Chapter 3

May 16, 2023

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Overview

Philippians 3	
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Paul's Autobiography	VV. 5 - 6
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Forward in Christ	VV. 12 – 16
Wrong conduct and our Goal	VV. 17 – 21

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Role Models

- Paul has presented examples of faithfulness to the Father and love for others:
 - Christ himself (Phil. 2:6-11)
 - Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:19-30)
- Paul is aware that a leader teaches by modeling the behavior that he desires in his disciples.
- Paul now becomes bold in presenting *himself* through the grace of his serenity in dealing with imprisonment and immanent Roman judgment (Hamm, 120).

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Circumcisers

- **Beware of the dogs:** A derogatory term for outsiders.
- Jews sometimes referred to Gentiles as “dogs.” They are subhuman.
- **Mutilate the flesh:** Paul uses a little hyperbole here. A band of Jewish Christian missionaries who demanded circumcision and adherence to Jewish ancestral traditions of the Old Covenant.




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Circumcisers

- **Mutilation:** The word “mutilation” could also be translated “incision” and plays on the word “circumcision.”
- Those misguided by imposing circumcision on Gentile Christians impose the whole Jewish ethnic lifestyle it represents (Hamm, 121).
- **True circumcision:** For Paul, true circumcision is circumcision of the heart, i.e., complete dedication to God with your whole heart and not mere external observance (Hamm, 123).
- **Boast in Christ:** Paul boasts in God and not in himself, including his abilities or accomplishments.

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Paul's Resume

Paul's Credentials	Explanation
Circumcised on the eighth day	God instructed circumcision in Genesis 17:9-14.
Race of Israel	Israelite by birth; Paul has all the privileges of the chosen people (Rom. 9:1-5).
Tribe of Benjamin	Benjamin has the city of Jerusalem and the temple (Judg. 1:21); also has first king, Saul.
Hebrew of Hebrew parentage	Paul was <i>raised</i> Jewish; he wasn't just a biological Jew, but a faithful Jew.
Pharisee (righteous)	Taught the Torah and modeled how to live it; he was extremely devout in the law of Moses

~Hamm, 125

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Paul's Zeal

- **In zeal:** Prior to his conversion, Paul is honest about his zeal in persecuting the Church. Christians posed a threat to Jewish faith and worship.
- **Righteousness:** Paul caps his credentials in that he is blameless in following the 613 laws of the Torah.
 - **Gen. 17:1:** I am God the Almighty. Walk in my presence and be blameless.
- **Rubbish:** Paul's renounces his Jewish credentials and considers them "trash" or "dung" compared to the blessings he receives in Jesus.

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Reflection and Application

- All of Paul's points of pride, including his heritage, upbringing, education, and accomplishments are utterly transcended by Jesus the Messiah and Lord (Hamm, 126).
- Paul's credentials, as great as they are, were powerless to bring salvation. His identity is now rooted in Christ, who alone bestows "the righteousness that comes from God" and, ultimately, resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:7-8) (Hamm, 126).
- Like Paul, we have our heritage (biological and ethnic) and accomplishments (degrees, skills, and honors). At the end of the day, do you place my trust in them or "boast in Christ Jesus?"

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Paul's Righteousness

- **Supreme good:** For Paul, the benefits of being a Pharisee are counted as trash in comparison to the blessings of knowing Jesus Christ. What God gives us in Christ *far exceeds* in greatness and worth anything we can give back to him.
- **St. Thérèse:** In the evening of life I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I am not asking you, Lord, to count my works.
- **Knowing Christ:** Paul's encounter with Christ marked the difference between *knowing about* Jesus and beginning to *know* Jesus directly – as the Messiah who fulfilled the Scriptures and as the Lord of all (Hamm, 127).

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Personal Note

- Naturally, seminarians spend many years in formation that includes human, pastoral, intellectual, and spiritual. A young man learns *a lot* about Jesus and His Church.
- Coming out of the seminary, I had a love for Jesus and was ready to go deeper by learning more about him and sharing him with others.
- However, in reading St. Thérèse's *Story of a Soul*, I was deeply struck at *how much* she loved Jesus. In reading her beautiful autobiography, I thought, "I love Jesus, but not like *she* does!" I asked St. Thérèse to help me love Jesus like she does.

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Justification

- In Catholic theology, justification (being right with God) is a process that includes:
 - **Conversion:** Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;
 - **Detachment from sin:** God offers forgiveness and frees man from enslavement to sin;
 - **Acceptance of God's righteousness** through faith in Jesus Christ, which is merited by the passion of Jesus Christ;
 - **Cooperation with God's grace:** Cooperate with the Holy Spirit;
 - **Sanctification** of our whole being: Renewal of "inner man" (CCC 1987- 1995)

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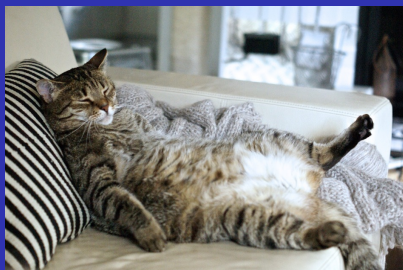
I Press On

- **Continue my pursuit:** Paul sees the life of faith as a race where he presses on to win the prize of salvation. He has not won the prize yet since the competition is still in progress.
 - **1 Cor. 9:24-25:** Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.
- **Key:** The Philippians were infatuated with sports just as the Corinthians were. Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things and push themselves so as to win. For Paul, if they do this for a crown that withers, how much more should Christians strive (struggle) for an imperishable crown?

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Not Striving vs. Striving



Lazy Cat – No striving



Goldy - Striving


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Toward the Goal

- **Forgetting what lies behind:** The evil one often romanticizes the past – “How good things were” to cause sadness and discouragement in the present moment.
 - **Numbers 11:5:** We remember the fish we used to eat without cost in Egypt, and the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.
- **This attitude:** The humility and obedience of Christ as exemplified in Phil. 2:6-11, as well as the striving and hope of attaining the prize of perfect union with Jesus Christ.
- **Key:** Christ and Paul (His Apostle) model the proper attitude.


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Toward the Goal

- **Imitators of me:** Paul presented Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus as models. Now, he encourages the Christian Philippians to imitate *him*.
- For the Greeks, learning is best done by imitation. Like the Greeks, we learn best by imitation (e.g., Biblical characters, saints, and saintly people in our lives).
- The saints become sign posts on how to embody the self-emptying of Christ. The saints are an extension of the incarnation of Christ – they are Jesus “in the flesh” - embodying Christ with their personalities and gifts in every culture, place, and time.

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Saints in Every Age

Years	Saints
0 - 312	Apologists, martyrs, confessors
313 – 499	Theologian bishops
500 – 999	Monks, missionaries
1000 – 1299	Scholars, mendicants (begging orders)
1300 – 1499	Women saints (Catherine, Bridget, Gertrude)
1500 – 1544	Defenders (John Fisher, Thomas More)
1545 – 1699	Reformers and Jesuits
1700 – 1957	Various (Seton, John Vianney, Thérèse)
1958 – Present	Lay faithful and lay movements

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Loving the Saints

- The saints are ordinary men and woman who do extraordinary things by the grace of God.
- They are various colors on the color spectrum or the sparkle of a diamond.
- We love the saints because we love Jesus Christ who lives in them and works through them!



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Paul's Opponents

- **Their stomach:** Paul's opponents have an aversion to suffering (enemies of the cross of Christ), are gluttonous (their God is their stomach), and glory in shameful conduct (their glory is their "shame").
- **Enemies of the cross of Christ:** Embracing the cross is authentic Christianity. The health and wealth gospel is contrary to the true gospel of Jesus Christ.
- **Occupied with earthly things:** Instead of seeking what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:10), their minds are occupied with earthly things (wealth, fame, power, pleasure, honor, etc.).

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Focus on the Mind

- **Citizenship is in heaven:** The Philippians prided themselves on being an outpost of Rome. They were a “little Rome.” Paul is telling the Christian Philippians that they are an outpost to spread the kingdom of heaven in their little region.
- **Key:** Paul focuses on the formation of the mind in this letter!
 - Strive to be of one mind (1:27; 2:2)
 - Have the mind of Christ (2:6-11)
 - Focus on the things of heaven (3:20-21)
- **Romans 12:1:** Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the *renewal of your mind*, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.

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Citizenship in Heaven

- **Key:** The Roman citizens who lived in Philippi looked to Rome as the source of their sense of identity, allegiance, and security. Indeed, they even worshipped the emperor as “Lord” and “Savior” (Hamm, 136).
- **We also await a savior:** It is not Caesar who is “Lord” and “Savior,” but rather Jesus Christ. Their identity, allegiance, and security are found not in Caesar, but Christ.
- **Note:** Think about the people or things that people find their identity or security in today (e.g., sports, political party, spouses, job, possessions, state, country, ethnicity, family). For Paul, as Christians, our identity is rooted in Christ.

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Transforming Bodies

- **Change our lowly body:** Christ will complete the work of salvation in us when he transforms our frail and mortal bodies into glorious and immortal ones like his own (Hahn, 21).
- The more literal translation of the verse is, "He will *transform* the body of *humiliation* that it may be *conformed* to the body of his glory, by the *power* that also enables him to make all things subject to himself" (Hamm, 137).
- Notice the vocabulary is similar to that in the Christ-hymn in Phil. 2:6-11. Again, our lives are to mirror or imitate Christ's humility and obedience that Christ may exalt us.

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Eucharistic Prayer III (Masses for the Dead)

- Remember your servant [Name], whom you have called from this world to yourself.
- Grant that he (she) who was united with your son in a death like his, may also be one with him in his Resurrection, when from the earth he will raise up in the flesh those who have died, and transform our lowly body after the pattern of his own glorious body.

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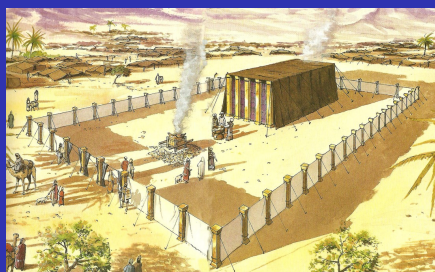
Paul's Metaphors

- Paul often spoke in terms of metaphors and images, which were borrowed from Jewish life, the Scriptures, and sometimes from Greco-Roman culture.
- In 2 Corinthians 5:4, he uses the metaphor of a “tent” for our bodies. In 1 Corinthians, he uses the metaphor of a “temple” for our bodies.
 - **1 Cor. 6:19:** Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?
- **Key:** Paul alludes to the images of “tent” and “building.”

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Earthly Body & Glorified Body



Ex. 40: Tent of Meeting
 Transient, move in wilderness
 Stretched sheepskins
Symbol: Earthly Body



1 Kings 8: Solomon's Temple
 Permanent, in Promised Land
 Precious gold, silver, metal
Symbol: Glorified Body

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Next Time

- Tuesday, May 30th

Philippians 4	
Live in concord	VV. 1 – 3
Joy and peace	VV. 4 - 9
Gratitude for the Philippians' generosity	VV. 10 - 20
Farewell	VV. 21 - 23