RADIO SERMON
4th Sun. After Trinity

Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

2 Cor. 12: 7-10: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me: My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

PLENTEOUS GRACE

"What does Jesus Christ offer us today?" "What can we get out of the Christian religion?" "Why should we go to church?" -- These are questions which our profit-seeking, money-minded age hurl time and time again at the Christian Church. "We want a creed that brings its benefits in this life, not only 'by and by, up in the sky,'" the cry continues. "We must have a religion that speaks in terms of food and clothing, jobs and money, that offers a farm and a labor program, that will show us how to pay our rent and our fuel bills, that will relieve the aches and pains, the trials and hardships of life. We are looking for a church that will help us financially, socially, materially."

Some insist that the modern Church should meet all these requirements, that preachers should quit talking about the purifying blood, the redeeming cross, the sin-atoning Crucifixion of Jesus Christ and give the world something useful, something practical to meet the needs and necessities of life. "But where," I ask you, "is there anything useful, is there any practical help without Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Most High God, without His all-sufficient sacrifice for our sin-cursed world, without His divine promise of never-failing comfort and peace to those who believe on Him? Where is there any hope without Christ for the millions who are still groping in the murk and fog of darkness, whose hearts are shattered with grief, whose lives are filled with emptiness, failure, incompleteness?

By maliciously and stubbornly trying to by-pass Christ who has declared, "Without Me ye can do nothing," many have sought the secret to a

complete, satisfying life in riches and fortune. Yet experience in harmony with the Word of God has taught that all the money in the world cannot bring true, lasting happiness. Louis XIV of France spent millions for his pomp, parade, and palaces. When he held court in the glittering splendor of Versailles, he stood on a throne of solid silver, robed in garments that cost twelve million dollars, while his French peasants went barefooted. Even his limitless luxury could not bring the inner joy of life.

Others believe that by following the lure of the flesh and obeying the lusts of life their eyes shall be opened to true satisfaction. Abd-Ur-Rahman, one of the most pretentious rulers of Moslem Spain, practised this theory on a vast scale. He gave his unbridled passions free reign. He gathered a harem of six thousand inmates. He drafted the services of ten thousand workmen for a period of twenty-five years to build a royal city for one of his favorite concubines. It was all in vain; not even a trace of that grandeur remains today. On his death-bed Abd-Ur-Rahman confessed that the moments of his meager happiness were few and brief, while the sorrows were frequent and prolonged.

Still others, recognizing that without peace of mind there can be no satisfying existence, have determined to find that quietude in culture and learning. But it is not long before they find out that at many of the crossroads of life, education fails woefully. Solomon in all his glory showed an astonishing wisdom, which attracted curious visitors from the ends of the earth. Yet, not even his marvelous intellect could restrain him from repeated blunders. His mournful cry, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" reechoes as the surrender of the human mind to its own defeat.

Turn where you will, go where you will, do what you will -- there simply is no complete, happy, satisfying life without Jesus Christ. In all the world He is the one and the only Way which can lead the empty, disappointed hearts of our age to real hope, assurance, and deliverance. He alone brings the practical, every-day help which many of you have vainly sought elsewhere.

Speaking to those who ask: "What does Jesus Christ offer us today? What can Christ give us for our discouragement and distress?" I answer on the basis of our Scripture reading: "Plenteous Grace." There we find this promise in the words of the Savior to St. Paul (2 Corinthians 12: 9): "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

This divine comfort was given to the apostle Paul in a moment of great anguish, when he suffered in soul and in body from what our text calls the thorn in his flesh. Whatever this much-discussed affliction was -- malaria, eye trouble, epilepsy, or even more devastating diseases -- St. Paul turned to Christ, beseeching Him that this thorn, ripping and tearing his peace, might be removed. Three times he besought his Lord, just as the Savior Himself had prayed thrice in the Garden: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." Yet, as Christ was to drink the cup of His suffering to the bitter dregs of death, so St. Paul's affliction was to continue; the thorn was not to be removed; he was to live in perpetual pain.

Right here in this continuance of St. Paul's suffering we find what often seems to be the hardest part of Christianity. The Christian faith does not offer a paradise on earth as many would have you believe. It does not insure freedom from assault, misery, affliction. It does not do just what people want, when they want it, and in the way they want it.

Many of you, I am sure, are torn by a thorn in your flesh. It need not be the cutting thistles of sickness, although there is plenty of that in our homes, with patients who have been shut-in, even bedfast year in and year out, with sufferers who have undergone operation after operation, with broken limbs that refuse to mend, raging fevers that will not subside, greedy diseases that consume your flesh and bones. Your thorn in the flesh may be a bleeding mind, torn by quarrel and hatred, broken peace in your home, blasted ambitions in your life. Your thorn in the flesh may be the same grievous plague of suffering

that hangs over so many of our fellow-countrymen in this day of overproduction -- namely, complete poverty and destitution, without enough to live properly, to clothe themselves adequately, to eat the right kind of food, and to sleep in the right kind of houses. And now comes the factor in our faith that short-sighted human vision cannot see nor our limited intellect understand. Sometimes when you approach God with your sorrows it seems as though Jesus never hears your prayer and that the thorn pierces even more deeply.

I cannot sufficiently emphasize this divine truth of the Christian faith: Jesus Christ never issued, nor did He authorize His followers to issue, any manifesto promising that He will remove the thorn in our flesh. Since Scriptures clearly declare that "we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God," since the sharp thorns of death cut into our beloved Savior's own "bleeding head and wounded," since He told us that "the disciple is not above His Master" and "if they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you," since the summons into His Kingdom is still accompanied by the demand "Take up thy cross and follow Me," since His words before Pilate still ring as clear today as they did nineteen centuries ago: "My Kingdom is not of this world"-- how can we, without becoming disloyal to every principle of Christ's faith, use this GOSPEL MEDITATIONS BROADCAST to tantalize and betray the sufferers in this age of thorn-bearing by promising that Christ will painlessly extract the thorns scratching through their flesh and to their very souls?

While the thorns remain, Christ, our Savior and our good and gracious God, does much more than simply remove these sorrows. If you have crowned Him Lord of all in your faith because you firmly believe that His atoning death has removed your sins and His triumphant resurrection broken the power of death in your life -- in and through that faith you have something more glorious and profitable than anything else in this world. With such faith in Jesus you have the healing, life-giving, hope-restoring, joy-sustaining gift of God's limitless love.

When the apostle Paul pleaded with the Lord to remove the thorn of his suffering, the Savior told him in effect: "Paul, don't worry about the thorn; don't be distracted by the pain that prods you incessantly. I have something so glorious for you that you can forget your infirmity. I give you My grace, and 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' If you have My grace, nothing else matters in your life; all problems are solved; all burdens lightened."

Stop and think for a moment of the indescribable riches involved in the Savior's promise of GRACE. Here is the unmerited love of the Savior for us despite our sinful hearts and lives; the unending devotion that existed before the foundation of the world and that will exist undiminished after this earth crumbles to pieces; the immeasurable compassion which brought Jesus from the realms of glory in heaven to the vice-infested earth so that He might take my place and yours, bearing our sins in His holy, sinless body, bring us back to God, and bless us with the sure seal of our salvation. Here is the mightiest power in heaven and earth -- the grace that promises our souls everything, yet for our salvation demands nothing.

Once you have this grace, this mercy, you know that the God who loved you and who spared not His own Son will watch over your life every minute that you live, always directing your destiny to high and holy ends. His mercy may permit that thorn to remain in your flesh, for as our text tells us: His strength is made perfect in weakness. Paul was given this "messenger of Satan to buffet him" so that he might be kept humble and untainted by self-glory and the delusion of his own importance. Likewise, God lets some of us stagger along the road of suffering to make us retain the sense of our own weakness and our complete dependence upon Him, to help us destroy all thoughts of our own righteousness.

Here then is the crown and glory of our Christian creed -- that while it does not offer ease, wealth, comfort, success, popularity, culture, exemption from life's paralyzing hardships, Christ's strength, made perfect in

weakness, grants us the power to meet and defeat adversities, to find spiritual advantage in affliction. When in our own eyes we are nothing -- poor, weak, miserable, sinful -- when we have emptied ourselves of all pride and pretenses, then, through faith, Christ becomes everything and fills us with His grace, His glory, and the strength that can overcome all opposition as completely as a glacier pushes a pebble in its path; then everyone of us can exclaim with St. Paul: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Oh, that God would give everyone of you the dedication to Jesus which John Hooper, bishop of Gloucester, England, had. Under the reign of Bloody Mary he was led to the stake because he had adhered loyally to Christ. When his executioners brought iron chains and would have fastened him to the stake to prevent his running away when the flames would leap high to consume his body, John Hooper told the soldiers, "God will give me power and strength to remain in the midst of the flames without these iron fetters. For although I am only weak and human, I trust in the Savior who told me, 'My strength is made perfect in weakness.'"

If you have thus been burned by the fires of affliction and adversity, then turn to Christ your only Help and hear His promise of limitless comfort and strength: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." God grant all of you such grace for the Savior's sake.

Amen.