Romans Class 5

Notes for Romans 8 by Fr. H. Linsinbigler

--8.1-2 Verse 2 mentions the same "law of liberty" mentioned in James 1.25. Contrary to what some scholars might say, St. Paul and St. James are obviously very familiar with each others' teaching and propose and uphold the very same principles:

1. Working faith which makes a person just or righteous

2. Working freely under the law of the Spirit, which is the law of liberty and freedom. St. James calls the faithful Christian a "doer of the work" of the law of freedom, whereas St. Paul calls these same people those who "walk according to the Spirit," whose law has made us free, which reminds us of the words of the Lord "the Truth shall make you free."

--8.3-4 Another issue in the talk about original sin is this: If ancestral sin (i.e. the original sin of Adam and the implications passed down through the generations) refers to more than mortality/corruption (that the Fathers have taught), but rather implies a personally inherited guilt of sin (which is a seed planted by Tertullian which later Germano-Frankish writers have emphasized), then why is Christ said to be merely "in the likeness of sinful flesh?" Our flesh is not sinful of itself, or else it would be evil, which is a heresy combatted heavily by the early Church. St. John Chrysostom reminds us again not to interpret this verse amiss, but to understand that St. Paul is "using the word flesh here again not for the essence and subsistency (of the flesh) itself, but giving its name to the more carnal sort of mind, in which way he acquits both the body and the Law of any accusation." Hence "sinful flesh" refers neither to the flesh nor to sin strictly speaking, but to the base will of man which assents to sin. We do not do away with the phraseology, even though this is an instance of St. Paul using "language contrary to usage" so that we must depend upon the whole of Apostolic teaching to come to the correct doctrines on this matter, and also so that we may know that Christ did not have a base mind even though he was truly man.

For truly Christ was not born free from the "bondage of death," though he was Himself sinless. This He willed prior to His coming in the flesh and not after. "Okay Harry, what is your point?" you might ask. The point is that His will to be incarnate corresponds with that to undergo suffering, the breaking down of the body, and death; there is not one without the other, since the one co-incides with the other for our salvation. He was fully human except for sin, but he still took upon himself death and suffering--Christ did not make himself exempt from the state of Adam, except for sin itself, that is to say, He never personally was guilty of any sin Himself, even though He did not cut Himself off from the ancestral curse of Adam, but became the second Adam, to deify the flesh, to raise it from the mortal state to an incorruptable state. "For it was not sinful flesh that Christ had," says St. John Chrysostom, "but He was truly likened to our sinful flesh, though sinless, yet in nature the same with us. And so even from this it is plain that by nature the flesh was not evil. For it was not by taking a different one instead of the former, nor by changing htis same one in essence that Christ caused it to regain the victory; but He let it abide in its own nature, and yet bound it to the crown of victory over sin, and then after the victory raised it up and made it immortal" (St. John Chrysostom).

--8.4 St. John Chrysostom offers an explanation to the problem of trying to understand the Biblical understanding of justification and righteousness: "What does the word righteousness mean? Why, the end, the scope, the well-doing." Though this concept is slightly distinct from sanctification, it goes hand in hand. For sanctification is the purifying and hallowing presence of the Spirit cleansing us, whereas justification and righteousness both refer to the sinlessness and the well-doing of Christ working within us and us co-operating with it. Both of these, of course, refer us to theosis. All of these combined refer to the salvation process.

--8.8 "They who are in the flesh cannot please God." What does this mean? Tertullian (3rd c.) answers that "in the flesh" here applies "not, of course, to those who are in the substance of the flesh, but in the care, the affection, the work, the will, of it" (On Fasting, ch. 17).

--8.9-10 "you..are in the Spirit...And if Christ be in you..." "Now this he says, not affirming that the Spirit is Christ, far from it, but to show that he who has the Spirit not only is called Christ's, but even has Christ Himself. For it cannot but be that where the Spirit is, there Christ is also. For wheresoever one Person of hte Trinity is, there the whole Trinity is present. For it is undivided in Itself, and has a most entire Oneness" (St. John Chrysostom, Hom.Rom 8).

--8.11 The Trinity's unified action in salvation.

--8.15 Just as with an earthly father, so also (and much moreso) with the heavenly Father, we have a certain fearful respect that in no way does away with an intimate and loving relationship. These two things are not contradictory but are co-requisite.

--8.16 How does the Spirit bear witness with our spirit? In many ways.

--8.17 Suffering (by which we mean undergoing a process that is trying, yet draws us closer to God) is part of God's plan for bringing about of the salvation of the human race. Suffering to the Christian should not indicate misery but rather joy. If you undertake misery that leads to despair, then you murder hope and faith and love right along with it. God has already given us our yokes and our duties. The passion of Christ included the last supper and the praying in the garden. And though there will be spots of character-growing agony, joy must not pass from us. We can agonize over periodic earthly torments and sufferings (8.22-23), but never despair over this life, which to the Christian means a prayer-filled and charity-filled life in the Holy Spirit.

--8.18 As St. Paul said in an earlier passage "tribulations produce perseverence which produces character." Of course it does not say that tribulations are the only thing that produce character. But different forms of the joyful undertaking of things that to the world would consider to be suffering, as well as patiently undergoing physical, psychological, or spiritual trials is certainly the Christian way. Different times produce different tribulations, and the ones that are not physical and obvious are often worse than those that are outwardly evident to others. In the early days it was martyrdom. But what about the many Saints who did not undergo martyrdom? They still had character, and yet many of them did not undergo suffering and outward tribulations like the martyrs did.

The holy Fathers distinguish between the distinct kinds of suffering and martyrdom. One is "red" martrydom. The next kind is that of the monastics, by which they renounce the world, and suffer a lack of possessions, stripping themselves of all except for Christ. The next kind is that of the "warrier for Christ" in the world, battling the forces of wickedness while bringing the peace of God. Labor and direct struggle with constant and immediate temptation is the cross that the person in the world must bear. Marriage is another gift which produces character.

Marriage is a shield of Christ by which the Christian family, the champion of God, is able to battle Goliath, with the stone being little, yet "he who is faithful in little is faithful in much," and Goliath falls. And what is the stone that makes Goliath fall? The Truth of the Spirit. And who is Goliath? The wickedness of the world and the sinful passions that we must combat every day, as well as the powers of the air that stir them: the legion in the possessed man.

If undertaken in faith and love, then, three basic character-building gifts from God are 1. martyric persecutions (leading to physical torment, confession, or martyrdom), 2.virginity/monastic life, and 3. marriage/parochial life/raising a family (though there are certainly many other elements included in character-building--God is limitless in His salvatory approach toward each person and the means by which He accomplishes each person's salvation; nevertheless, these are the three basic character-building situations). Of course, a person might find himself at different times of his life in all three of these situations. These each carry with them their own types of sufferings, torments, and struggles which God has accorded for each of us according to our situation and gifts.

8.21 Theosis!

8.24-25 "Character produces hope" St. Paul said back in the early verses of chapter 5. Here he defines hope somewhat. This shows us the connection of character to hope, in that hope is an "eager waiting" accompanied by perseverence.

8.26 Here again is another example of where, contrary to many modern scholars, St. Paul and St. James are obviously "on the same page" as we say. "We do not know what we should pray for as we ought," says St. Paul, "You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss" says St. James (4.3). "Instead," he advises, "you ought to say 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'" (James 4.15). In other words, though sometimes we speak (as did the ancients, and even the Apostles) using assumptive phrases such as "I'll see you tomorrow" or "see you later," which is a natural way of expressing God's creative ordinance, we should never think such phrases as being absolute or apart from God's will, and must also realize that God could change any situation, and we must be prepared to accept that. In either case, then, we should always approach life with the prayerful state of mind of thankfulness for God's normal ordinance, thankfulness for the changes he brings about, and in either case a willingness to say in our hearts: "nevertheless, Thy will be done."