

We wait for Jesus to Return

Our Second Reading for today showed that Paul quickly discovered that whenever he entered into a conversation with a Christian who had visited in Thessalonica, it wasn't necessary to say anything about the wonderful miracle God had accomplished there. He wrote, "... *Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.* ⁹ *For they themselves report concerning you what kind of reception you gave us, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God,* ¹⁰ *and to wait for His Son to come from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, namely, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*" Before Paul could even mention his experience in founding that congregation, the visitor would give Paul a complete report of everything that had happened.

First the visitor would tell Paul all about how the Thessalonians had received Paul. Imagine, instead of Paul telling his own story, these people told Paul the story about himself in Thessalonica! We can just see Paul standing there listening with a smile on his face as he heard each new person coming from Thessalonica telling him the old familiar story. He listened gladly because he didn't want to dampen the joy these people had experienced in their visit to Thessalonica and now had to share, even with the man who knew the full story better than they.

It must have warmed Paul's heart even more when the visitors went on to describe how the Thessalonians who had once worshipped idols now turned to the living God. These people had once bowed down to gods made of wood, stone, gold, and silver - gods made with their own hands. Now they knew the true God. They knew that the true God was not made from created things but that He was the Creator of all things. They knew He was a God who was living and could and would fulfill all His threats and promises. He was a God who demanded His whole creation to be holy as He was holy. They also knew that this living God was a God of love who had sent His only Son to give His life for a sinful world that otherwise would have been lost forever.

The visitors reported it was obvious that the Thessalonians had "turned" to God. They had turned completely away from their idols. There were no regrets that they had left an old way of life for a completely new one. They had no second thoughts about the sinful pleasures they had left behind, no longing for the wealth or fame that some of them must have lost because of the persecution that was their lot as Christians in Thessalonica. Instead of regrets, they were filled with the desire "*to serve the living and true God.*"

Paul had mentioned earlier how they had served God. He wrote, "*We continually remember before our God and Father that your faith is working, that your love is toiling and that your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ is enduring patiently*" (v.3). Paul's smile must have grown wider when he heard these visitors declare that they were going to make the Thessalonians a model for their own lives.

But Paul had still more reasons for rejoicing in these reports. They went on to relate that the Thessalonians were waiting eagerly for Jesus' return. As they busied themselves in service for their Lord, the Thessalonians always had one eye looking heavenward. The thought was always with them: "Are you coming today, Lord?"

They knew exactly for whom they were waiting. They were waiting for God's own Son from heaven. They knew He was the same Jesus who had been born in Bethlehem and died on Calvary's cross. But God had raised Him from the dead. This, they knew, was God's seal of approval on Jesus' atoning work, and so they confidently waited for His promised return.

They also knew exactly why they were waiting for Him. Jesus was their "rescuer." The term rescue emphasises both the peril of the person rescued and the power of the rescuer. The Thessalonians were aware of their helpless condition in face of "*the coming wrath.*" They, like all mankind, would someday appear before the judgment throne of God to answer for their sins.

By faith these people were assured that Jesus had rescued them from the coming wrath of God. When He came to earth the first time, Jesus Christ had removed sin's guilt and condemnation. On the cross He took upon Himself God's wrath for all people's sins. So whenever Jesus would come again, they could be sure He was coming to take them safely home to heaven. There forever they would rejoice in God's presence. For that day they eagerly waited.

Serving the living and true God and waiting for His Son from heaven is a short yet comprehensive description of what the Christian's life is all about. Remember, this was not the result of a faith that the Thessalonians worked in themselves. Rather, God's Word produced this faith in them.

The Thessalonians are a model for us. We can't work ourselves up to this model, but God can and does work it in those who make His Word the centre of their lives.

May the gospel also come to us "*simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with great conviction*" (1:5), and may God in this way also turn us from all the idols of our day to serve Him as we wait for His Son from heaven!