

Paul and Assurance of Salvation (8th Sunday in Ordinary Time)

1 Corinthians 4:1-5—I Do Not Judge Myself

¹ This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. ³ But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. *I do not even judge myself.* ⁴ *I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.* ⁵ Therefore *do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes*, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God. (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

1. Judgment: Paul does not “judge” (Greek *anakrinō*) himself (4:3)
2. Personal Awareness: “I am not aware of anything against myself” (4:4)

But who can discern his errors?

Clear thou me from *hidden faults*. (Psalm 19:12)

3. Justification: “I am not thereby justified” (Greek *dikaioō*) (4:4)
4. Final Judgment: “Do not pronounce judgment before the time” of the *Parousia* (4:5)

Living Tradition

Council of Trent: [*I*]t must not be asserted that those who are truly justified should unhesitatingly determine within themselves that they are justified and that no one is absolved from his sins and justified unless he believes with certainty that he is absolved and justified and that absolution and justification are brought about by this faith alone (Latin *sola fide*), as if whoever lacks this faith were doubting God’s promises and the efficacy of Christ’s death and Resurrection. For just as no devout man should doubt God’s mercy, Christ’s merit, and the power and efficacy of the sacraments; so also, whoever considers himself, his personal weakness, and his lack of disposition may fear and tremble about his own grace, since no one can know with a certitude of faith that cannot be subject to error that he has obtained God’s grace...

[S]ince “we all offend in many things” [James 3:2], everyone ought to keep in mind not only God’s mercy and goodness but also his severity and judgment. Neither should anyone pass judgment on himself, even if he is conscious of no wrong, because the entire life of man should be examined and judged, not by human judgment, but by the judgment of God, “who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God” [1 Cor 4:4-5], who, as it is written, “Will render to every man according to his works” [Rom 2:6]. (Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, Chapter 9, 16; in DS nos. 11534, 1549)

Catechism: Since it belongs to the supernatural order, grace *escapes our experience* and cannot be known except by faith. We cannot therefore rely on our feelings or our works to conclude that we are justified and saved. However, according to the Lord’s words —“Thus you will know them by their fruits”⁵⁷—reflection on God’s blessings in our life and in the lives of the saints offers us a guarantee that grace is at work in us and spurs us on to an ever greater faith and an attitude of trustful poverty. A pleasing illustration of this attitude is found in the reply of St. Joan of Arc to a question posed as a trap by her ecclesiastical judges: “Asked if she knew that she was in God’s grace, she replied: ‘If I am not, may it please God to put me in it; if I am, may it please God to keep me there.’” (CCC 2005)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (8th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. What does Paul teach about his own subjective certainty of “justification” or being ‘saved’? Why is claiming absolute certainty a problem, according to the Council of Trent

For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. Gerald Bray, ed. *1-2 Corinthians* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1999).
3. George T. Montague, SM, *First Corinthians* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).