

Sermon 1 Thessalonians 5 16 24 3rd Sunday in Advent Series B

Sermon: 3rd Sunday in Advent – (Confirmation Service)

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Theme: A confirmation wish

Goal: May God bless and preserve Zenka and all of us in His grace.

Dear Friends,

Dear Zenka,

Introduction: It is the time sharing good wishes: “*I wish you a Merry Christmas*” is the most common one. But other wishes are shared as well: Holiday wishes, safe trip wishes, New Year wishes, and so on.

The Apostle Paul wishes something very special to his friends in Thessaloniki. Now we take these wishes and make them as our wishes to Zenka on her Confirmation Day, and as a wish to all of us as God's blessing upon us for this Christmas Season and for the New Year.

I – May God sanctify you

The first wish says: “May God Himself, the God of Peace, sanctify you through and through.”

God began His work of sanctification in Zenka's life when she was baptized, exactly one month after she was born. In the Holy Baptism, God washed her from all her sins, declaring that she, from then on, is a holy child, God's child. Faith was lit in her heart, she was no more in darkness, and the Holy Spirit came to live in her life. And this all happened because of Jesus' death and resurrection. The Baptism is a Mean of Grace, through which God comes to us to give us Jesus' blessings achieved on the cross.

The same happened to all of us in our Baptism. But we know by experience how weak we are and how many times we run to darkness

again, in spite of God's gracious intervention. God comes and calls us back to the light daily, forgives our daily sins, and sanctifies us, as we confess in the explanation of the Third Article of the Creed: *“I believe that... the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.”*

While God sanctifies us, He produces fruits through us in our lives. It seems that we are producing these fruits; but we know that without God's grace we can do nothing. So, Paul says: “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

In Christ Jesus only we can “be joyful always”! We have so many sorrows in our lives, that it is difficult – not to say impossible – to be joyful always. But the Christian joy has another reason than just parties, health, good friends, etc. It is the joy in Jesus, in His love and forgiveness. In spite of what can happen to us, in spite of our tears and pains, when we look to Jesus we can rejoice, because He gives us hope and the true joy. The big message of Christmas, proclaimed by the angel, says: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ, the Lord.”

In Christ Jesus only we can “pray continually”! We have so much to talk about with others... and we reserve little time to talk with God in prayer. - How can we pray continually? We pray not only when we sit quiet at home or in the church in a specific time set aside for prayer. Every time we do something or we face a new challenge, and we lift up our minds to God as our Helper, we are praying. We cannot separate our daily deeds from our faith. We are in Christ and we pray continually in Christ Jesus!

In Christ Jesus only we can “give thanks in all circumstances”! It is more common to complain than to give thanks. This is part of our daily struggle and of God's sanctification of our lives. To recognize the blessings, to give thanks in all circumstances, even when something hurt us, is a practice that we need to exercise more by God's grace.

“May God Himself, the God of Peace, sanctify you through and through.”

II – May you...be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus

The second wish of our text says: “May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the final goal of our faith and of our life. If our faith is something for this life only; if our life is just to please ourselves and those who are around us; if our hope goes as far as the casket only, ...we are living a lie. But we know and believe that Jesus comes again to rescue us from this valley of tears! Therefore we celebrate Advent, looking forward to His Second coming, remembering that he came a long time ago and promised to come again.

But how can our “whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless”, if we are still sinners? This is God's grace as well. He took our blame and put it on His Son Jesus Christ. He carried it for us on the cross. He paid for it. In Jesus we are blameless. And God helps us to fight against what tries to make us guilty again. - Paul shows us some of the ways that God uses to help us to be blameless:

“Do not put out the Spirit's fire.” The fire that was lit at our Baptism is nourished by oil, the oil of God's Means of Grace. Remember the story of The Ten Virgins? Five of them didn't have oil to replace when the bridegroom came; and they remained outside, in the darkness. - When we listen to God's Word, when we come to the Lord's Supper, God is filling our lamp with His oil of love and grace, and is strengthening our faith. The fire of the Spirit will shine through our deeds and words!

“Do not treat prophecies with contempt.” “Prophecies” are the revelations of God in the Holy Scripture. The Explanation of the Third Commandment says: *“We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”*

“Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” God gives us wisdom in His Word to know what is good and what is evil. The 10 Commandments are clear on this to guide us as God's children through the right path.

Conclusion: To assure that these wishes are not just “wishes” but also something real and true, Paul concludes saying: “The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it.” God is faithful and He will never abandon us. God is faithful and He will accomplish it in us, through us and for us! Our salvation is assured by His grace in Jesus Christ!

Zenka chose as her Confirmation Verse Palm 27:1: The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? - This is her assurance that God is faithful to her.

I had the privilege to walk with Zenka through the paths of the Bible and of the Catechism during this year, following Jesus' deeds for us and coming closer and closer to Him and to His love. It was a blessed year for both of us. Zenka gave a good testimony of her faith and of her knowledge in her presentation. “May God Himself, the God of Peace, sanctify you, Zenka, through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” These are our wishes as you confirm publicly our faith and your Baptism today. God who calls you is faithful and will do it. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
Cape Town, 11 December 2011

