

In the name of God, who through the Word and in the Spirit creates, redeems, and sanctifies. Amen.

Our Epistle reading from Ephesians today has a lot for us to contemplate. Just prior to the verses we read, the writer reminds the listeners that they must put off their old selves and be clothed in newness, clothed in the image in which God created them. The writer then goes on in the passage we read to make it clear that being clothed in newness is not a passive event. It doesn't just happen to us; we work with the Spirit and with our selves to grow toward that renewal.

The writer of Ephesians has already encouraged us by reminding us that God's Spirit working within us can do much more than we can ever ask or imagine. God sees in us the image of God's creation, no matter how far we've strayed from it; and as we allow our wills to surrender to God's will, God sees the unimaginable possibility of our goodness and our wholeness.

So what are some of the changes in heart and mind we have to practice in order to fully surrender our will to God's will? Be angry, but do not sin. A Jewish commentary on this verse reminds the reader that in Leviticus,

loving one's neighbour can mean reproofing them when they are doing harm. But in telling the truth to that neighbour about their harmful actions, we must never let ourselves slip into hatred of that neighbour. We can harness the anger that is inspired by the love of what is healing, what is life-giving, to speak out against whatever runs counter to the wholeness and love that God envisions for the created world. But we do not let our passion for God's vision devolve into hatred. We continue to strive toward what heals, what proclaims God's unsurpassed love for us, and we continue to let our love for God change and renew us; and we profess that life work to our neighbour, putting away all falsehood, not sugar-coating or watering down the intense call to love that God in Christ has given us.

Striving for what is healing and what is loving changes what we do. When we work to surrender our will to God's will, we can no longer carry on living in ways that diminish or humiliate others; we can no longer carry on living as if the things we might possess are of more value than human life and dignity. When we surrender our will to God's will, it changes how we speak; instead of denigrating or shouting others down, we lift up what is life-giving, what is positive, what is recognizably the action of a loving God. And in doing so, we make it clear that our lives are centered on holding up the

truth of God's grace toward us, and responding to one another with the same kind of love that God has shown us.

God has given us God's Holy Spirit to dwell within us; and we strive to live in such a way that we do not cause Her sorrow or grief with our actions.

We put away from us bitterness; we put away from us the kind of anger that finds its root in our ego, our selfishness, even as we work for justice and righteousness by harnessing the kind of anger that is inspired by God's love working within us. We put away shouting down, and ill-will; we put away any impulse to harm or to retaliate. Instead we practice kindness.

We become tenderhearted; that word, in the Greek, means having goodness from the gut - allowing our compassion to grow to such strength that our empathy for others encompasses both body and spirit, a living spring welling up from deep within us. Becoming new means growing to be more like Jesus day by day: forgiving; compassionate; selfless; zealous for justice; fully present to the least, the broken, the seeking, and the suffering; and above all, loving without measure.

God, working within us, can do infinitely more than we could ever ask or imagine. Part of the message of Ephesians is how much God believes in

us. God actually believes that with God's Spirit dwelling within us we can be renewed beyond all those failures in love that Ephesians lists: the bitterness, the self-centered anger, the hurtful speech, the harmful responses to our own frailties and to others'. As we become more and more aware of the new creation God sees in us, we can more deeply surrender our will to God's will, being so filled with God's Spirit that the Adversary can find little room in our lives. This is our co-creation with God, the work of a lifetime that goes beyond death. And this is our prayer: Grant us, O God, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; and so live in newness, and renew the world. Amen.