

06 March 2022—The 1st Sunday of Lent: Romans 10:8b-13

The power of words is a gift from God. God wants us to use our words to testify to the power of Christ to save all from sin. The power of words was in the beginning. In Genesis God creates with words: *God said, 'Let there be...'*, and so it is. John begins his Gospel testifying, *the Word was with God and was God* (1:1), and describes God's coming to us as, *...the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...(1:14)*. In today's New Testament reading Paul proclaims, *The word is near you...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved* (8b,9).

If you confess with your lips: For the early Church the words, 'confess' and 'confession' carried a legal connotation. It was not hard to identify Christians during persecutions; they simply asked, "Are you a Christian?"

In our day, confessing is something one does not do voluntarily. Criminals confess; notorious sinners do, or we think should, go to confession. The words confess and confession are so negative that some think the Sacrament of Confession is only for the most heinous sinners, not for minor league sinners like you and me!

To confess is simply to tell the truth; this is the original meaning and needs to mean again. Our mission is to tell the truth about the presence and goodness of Jesus Christ in our lives. Such 'telling true' is not just for those who preach and teach. *If you confess with your lips that Jesus Christ is Lord....* The *you* is plural; the Southern translation would be: 'if all-y'all confess...Jesus is Lord'. Confession of Christ is a way of life, in all circumstances, times, and places for all Jesus-followers.

The Word of Christ we confess is a participation in the creative word of God, which was in the beginning, reaching its perfect telling in the Word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ. Because God's love through Christ is infinite, the sharing of the word of Christ is boundless. We do not have to use certain words to share Christ, nor wait for a favorable time when conditions are right. God first spoke the word when 'darkness was on the face of the deep'. If we wait for the right time, the right conditions, we may remain mute, and therefore powerless, all our lives. In what situation, time, and place cannot the word of Christ be spoken? What words of hope and encouragement, comfort and strength, healing and reconciliation, are not the Word made flesh, when our words are offered in service to others and to the glory of Christ? This is the word for which the world waits. We know words can hurt, savage, and destroy. This is never the word of Christ. We must confess, we must tell the truth about Jesus Christ.

Paul provides our fundamental confession: *...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord...* (9a). This is the earliest Christian creed. When our mothers and fathers in faith confessed, 'Jesus is Lord', they did not mean Jesus was a great person, of noble blood, or a swell guy. This confession was in explicit, unmistakable opposition to the cult of the divine emperor. Roman-Pagan worshippers would offer incense before a statue of the emperor and say, Caesar is Lord; that is, Caesar is God. There was not an aspect of life untouched by the emperor; Caesar had power to enslave and free, claimed divine power of life and death. Christians, believing in one Lord, Jesus Christ, refused to worship the emperor, and so were executed for treason and 'atheism'. The emperor's torturers could kill the body, but Jesus was more power than all emperors, more powerful than death.

We confess: Jesus is Lord! There is no life untouchable or irredeemable by Jesus Christ. Regardless of all the sin and brokenness in the world, and in the human heart, Jesus can and will bring healing and wholeness; forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. Despite our slavery, self-inflicted blindness, our incoherent jabbering, the Word of Christ can and will bring light into the darkness on the face of our deep. Jesus is light to end all darkness forever.

This is our confession: Jesus is Lord. May the Word made flesh be heard in your life. Let the Word dwell in you, full of God's grace and truth. May your life be a confession, a telling the truth about Jesus Christ in your flesh.

To the Only Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be glory and praise; who is in eternal one-ness with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.