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Fear and anxiety are human constructs, human obstacles when we lack what is necessary to bring forth the good in ourselves and the good in others. The darkness of fear and anxiety overtakes the much-needed remedy, which is trust. The lack of trust also brings disappointment and failure, and these rise to the surface in today’s St Paul’s Epistle and in St Mark’s Gospel. Lack of success in human endeavor is painful and hard to endure. Rejection, a very difficult thing to handle, strikes at our sense of self-esteem.

When it comes to competition, someone else is chosen, not I. When it’s about selection, I am bypassed and someone else is singled out. In friendship, someone else is preferred to me. In all this, there is a deep sense of hurt. This came to Jesus from various quarters. As far as His townspeople were concerned, Jesus was just to ordinary to be important. Even Jesus’ relatives thought that He was “out of it.” The Jewish leaders rejected Him. Barabbas, a common criminal, was preferred to Him. We may never be hounded to death as Jesus was, but we will certainly suffer a sense of rejection. So did He.

In life’s experiences, Satan’s angel does his best to get us down. And so, we pray, asking God to remove these humiliations. And when we place our trust in God, we hear His tenderness, *“My grace is enough, it’s all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness and limitation.”*

But in real life we sometimes have to cope on several fronts at the same time. St Paul gives an instance of dealing with one’s own limitations. St Mark, an instance of dealing with other people’s limitations. In real life, we’re constantly juggling both of these issues at once. With all the “thorns in the side” that we experience, the “thorn” in St Paul’s flesh remains a mystery. It may have kept him from being spiritually uppity. We just don’t know whether it was some physical ailment or some moral lapse. More instructive is the fact that St Paul ends up boasting about his limitation. Assuming that he wasn’t just kidding himself, we don’t know how he got that way.

So, let us learn from St Paul. He carried the reality of his limitations into prayer. He did not try to hide them from God. To a human fault, we try to disassociate from what beats us down or embarrasses us. Paul was like us. He looked at his weakness, the “thorn in his flesh” and prayed, *“Three times I begged the Lord that this thorn might leave me.”* The thorn was not taken away. Grace was given, and was sufficient.

By being so upfront in prayer about his own limitations, St Paul learned to be enlightened by a benevolent God. God’s love demanded him to be a human perfection after all, one in which achievement is always less than it could be, where proper style is wanting in some respects, where integrity is always a little off center. When St Paul says that his vision told him, *“In weakness power reaches perfection,”* he is referring to no one else but Jesus, whose human limitations were no obstacle to the Father’s immense love for Him. Even though our weaknesses will remain, they will not destroy us because they will provide us an opportunity for Christ’s power to become manifest. *“When I am powerless, it is then that I am strong.”*

This lesson in human perfection is a difficult one for us to learn. The 12-Step AA program helps. It’s a spirituality program. It forces us to have to face in ourselves the frailties that detract from our ideal self-image. It is truly comforting to know that God loves us, warts and all. Seeing how well God deals with limitations in us, that we begin to understand how to deal with limitations in those around us.

Today’s Gospel speaks of one specific limitation in all of us that must be dealt with—our lack of trust. Paul faced rejection because he was a flawed person. Jesus is rejected because He’s not flawed enough. Where are the warts? They reasoned He’s too good. Lack of trust leads to invent limitations in others that they do not have. The hometown folks fall victim to an old sin—envy. The crowds were jealous that someone from their midst seemed to have a rare gift that was beyond them. They couldn’t get past the mental obstacle that says that Jesus can’t possibly be that special. Then it’s obvious that He is.

In the same way, we can only see Christ in others when we begin to trust others, when we drop the blinders and start looking for Him. When has “the wrong person” turned out to be Jesus, or a democrat, or a republican, or a Muslim in your life?

Jesus showed up in the wrong places for a Savior to be: in a manger, in Eastern Europe, on a cross. Reflect on the “wrong” places in your regions where Jesus is waiting to be revealed.