

Do you ever do something that you wish, upon second thought that you wouldn't have done?

There was an elderly Florida lady who finished up her shopping, and upon returning to her car, found four males in the act of leaving with her vehicle. She dropped her shopping bags and drew her handgun, proceeding to scream at the top of her voice, "I have a gun, and I know how to use it! Get out of the car!"

The four men didn't wait for a second invitation. They got out and ran like mad.

The lady, somewhat shaken, then proceeded to load her shopping bags into the back of the car and got into driver's seat. She was so shaken that she could not get her key into the ignition. She tried and tried, and then it dawned on her why.

A few minutes later, she found her own car parked four or five spaces farther down. She loaded her bags into the car and drove to the Police station.

The sergeant to whom she told the story couldn't stop laughing. He pointed to the other end of the counter, where four pale men were reporting a car jacking by a mad, elderly woman described as white, less than five feet tall, glasses, curly white hair, and carrying a large handgun. No charges were filled.

Isn't that great?! I loved it when I heard it. That poor woman, I bet she really wishes she wouldn't have done what she did. Those poor men, I bet they were scared to death.

I sometimes wonder when temptation and trouble comes our way, what do we do? What are the natural ways we react? Do we do like those men? Do we take off and run away? Although I have to admit, if I have a mad person shaking a gun at me, I suspect I might run

pretty fast too. Do we do like that elderly lady do we jump to conclusions, and pull out our version of a verbal handgun?

What about you? When trouble comes, what is your natural inclination? How do you react?

In our scripture for today, Paul is reminding us that the world has taught us one way to act. For us, our culture tells us life should be about us. That we should watch out for ourselves, first. It leads us into behaviors that indicate if we have been wronged, we are well within our means to get angry and get even.

When troubles come our way, we are most tempted to act out of our natural inclinations. Those things we learned as children. For some of us, it may mean that we learn to avoid trouble. For others it may mean we run from trouble. For still others in this room, it may mean that we thrive on trouble and therefore look for it. For others, it may mean that we jump to conclusions and begin to speak sharply to others before we really know the whole situation. That is why I am asking, when trouble comes, what is your natural inclination?

In our scripture for today, Paul invites us to live a different way, to live, not motivated by selfish interests, but to be motivated by the truth and by living for others. Paul invites us to live, not motivated by revenge, but to be motivated in building up others. Paul invites us to live putting aside bitterness, slander, and malice and to put on kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness. We are called to be imitators of God, allowing Christ to live through us.

Paul reminds us that our lives are not about us. They are about being made in the image of God. When trouble seems to come near us and threaten to overwhelm us, Paul invites us to take a step back, and focus on God. Not on our fears. Not on our worries. Not on the troubles. Not on what or who have hurt us. But to focus on God.

Paul does this by reminding us to remember who we are. We are children of God, called to become like Christ.

Yet in the process of becoming like Christ, it is important to remember to **give God time to work in us and through us**. Maybe you have seen or heard that old saying, "Please Be patient, God is not finished with me yet."

It takes time, to let God work in us. It takes time for us to let God shape us. It takes time and practice to develop the personal habits that lead to growth in faith and growth in maturity. What are attitudes that help us grow in faith and maturity?

1. Remember to trust that God is at work in your life, even when you don't feel it.
2. Keep a notebook or a journal of lessons you are learning.
3. Don't get discouraged that things aren't happening according to your time frame.
4. Remember to be patient with yourself and with God.

You see, becoming mature in Christ is a process. Becoming mature in Christ takes time. Becoming mature in Christ is a gift that happens when we work diligently at it. What is stopping you from growing in faith and becoming like Christ?

And while you are on the journey to growing in faith and becoming like Christ, remember it only happens through God's grace.

I was reminded of that by this joke. A man dies and goes to heaven. Of course, St. Peter meets him at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter says, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I will give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in."

"Okay," the man says, "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart." "That's wonderful," says St. Peter, "that's worth three points!"

"Three points?" he says. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service."

"Terrific!" says St. Peter. "That's certainly worth a point."

"One point?!" "I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans." "Fantastic, that's good for two more points," he says.

"Two points!?" Exasperated, the man cries. "At this rate the only way I'll get into heaven is by the grace of God!!!"

"Bingo, 100 points! Come on in!"

You see friends; it is all about God's grace. God's grace offered to you. God's grace offered to me. May God give us the courage to be patient with one another. May God give us the grace to accept one another. May God give us the love to gently challenge one another. May God give us the hope to be compassionate with one another.

May we learn to become like Christ on our journey of faith.

Amen