

# Promise and Greeting: Grace, Mercy and Peace

Scripture Readings: John 20:19; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 (text); 1 Peter 1:1-2; Psalm 129:8  
Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • May 11, 2014 • Pasig and Trinity Covenant Reformed Church

**B**eloved Congregation of Christ: When we meet friends at the office, school or church, we greet them, “Hi” or “Hello” or “Kumusta” In our former home church, the pastor usually opened the service with “Good morning!” and if it was Super Bowl Sunday, there was an additional “Today is Super Bowl Sunday!”

Our text this morning is typical of Paul's opening greetings in his letters. These greetings are very different from our greetings. He introduces himself first with his name and who he is (an apostle). Then he addresses the recipients and who they are, and finally he gives the greeting itself. We begin our letters or emails very differently. In contrast to this ancient form, we open with, “Dear \_\_\_\_\_, Kumusta ka na? Mainit dito ngayon sa Pilipinas.” Then, we close with, “Yours truly,” “Sincerely,” or if it's our beloved, “Nagmamahal,” then our own name.

I mentioned last week in the introduction to our sermon series that our worship is patterned after Old and New Testament worship services, particularly the worship at Mount Sinai (Exo 19-24) and the Book of Revelation. The structure of our worship liturgy is also the pattern of Paul's letters, Romans, for example:

Romans	Worship Liturgy
Greeting (Rom 1:1-7)	Entering into Worship
God's holiness and man's sin (Chs 1-3)	Reading of the Law, Confession of Sin, Assurance of Pardon
Salvation in Christ (Chs 4-11)	Scripture Readings, Sermon
Man's thankfulness and service to God (Chs 12-15)	Offerings and Songs of Praise and Consecration
Closing greetings (Ch 16)	Benediction and Doxology

The second in a series on the parts of our worship service is the Invocation and Salutation after the Call to Worship. The Salutation is also called God's Greeting. So Christ's Word for us today is on the theme, “**Promise and Greeting: Grace, Mercy and Peace**” under three headings: First, **The One Who Greets**. Second, **The Recipients of the Greeting**. And third, **The Content of the Greeting**.

## The One Who Greets

Paul introduces himself as the writer, an apostle “*called by the will of God.*” Why introduce himself when all the churches already know him? The church in Corinth, was a divided church, with many different loyalties to Paul, Apollos, Peter, and even Christ (1 Co 1:12). Those who were followers of the other apostles even questioned his apostleship (1 Co 9:1-2). Later, he says he founded the church, and he saw the resurrected Christ (1 Co 15:8). And Sosthenes might be the same person in Acts 18:17, ruler of the synagogue in Corinth, who was beaten by the Jews.

So in his greeting, Paul authenticates his apostleship in three ways: (1) a divine call; (2) the will of God; (3) “sent” by Christ.

Like the other 12 apostles before him who were especially called by Christ ((Mat 10:1–7; Ac 1:24–26; Gal 1:1), Paul was called by the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus ((Acts 9; 22; 26; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8–9; Gal. 1:13–17). From that time, his vocation and work was to be one of Christ’s apostles. This divine calling is based on God’s prior will—his apostleship was not by his own decision, but by God’s will alone. This is why in some of his other letters (2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Timothy), his greeting includes this divine will. When Christ appeared to him on the Damascus road, he gave his marching orders to Paul, sending him to the Gentiles (Ac 9:15; 1 Co 1:17). An “apostle” is one who is “sent” on a mission, a “messenger.”

But the One who greets the churches is ultimately God himself, *“from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (verse 3). As an apostle, Paul speaks for God. So when we gather for worship, we stand before God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. We come before God the Judge of the universe and Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant (Heb 12:23–24). Therefore, in worship, we do not come flippantly before God, but with both joy and reverence.

This is why at the beginning of the service, we invoke the name of the God whom we worship: the Creator of heaven and earth in Psalm 124:8. This is usually called *Votum* in Latin, which means a “promise” or “vow” by the congregation to God in both prayer and praise. It is a response to God’s choice of us as his beloved people.

We do not worship any other God. All other religions and cults worship a different God. But we worship the God in Three Persons—Creator, Savior, Providence—as taught in the Bible. He is the God who sanctifies his people, and will glorify them in the end. No other religion in the world teaches this.

And this God is also your help. You find help in this God, not as help found in this world. Whatever trials and persecutions you bear, do not turn to the gods of this world for help. Do not turn to canonized saints or to other believers. Call upon this God and turn to him for help, the maker of heaven and earth, the one who is in control of all! Turn to YHWH, the God who makes covenant with you his people to save, sanctify and glorify you because he has loved you from eternity. You know that in your pilgrimage in this world, he will preserve you, until at last he brings you to his glorious dwelling-place.

Who speaks this Invocation? Through the minister, the whole congregation speaks this to God. Since the worship service is a dialogical covenant renewal with God, he first calls us to worship. We then respond with our promise in the invocation to worship him alone. God then greets us with his divine greeting. So it is right when at times, we will speak this as congregation, as we trust and exalt the sovereign help of YHWH to us.

Psalm 121:1–2, which was our opening song, is another psalm that says YHWH is our help. The pilgrim going up to Jerusalem will lift up his eyes to the hills—since the Temple is in a high place in Mount Zion— and wonders, *“From where does my help come?”* His help in all of his life comes from YHWH. And so it is with your whole life. Your help comes from the Almighty and

Sovereign Lord, “*who made heaven and earth.*” His power is eternal and infinite, and is the source of our help. Therefore, no mere creature, whether angels or men, can prevent him from helping you.

## The Recipients of the Greeting

*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 1:1-3).

In all of Paul's letters, the opening verses include the recipients of his letters. Obviously, he was writing to the different churches he has founded or visited. But his description of these churches varies. The Romans are “loved by God” (Rom 1:7), and the Ephesians are “faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph 1:1). But the two most common descriptions are the recipients are the “church” or “churches,” and they are “saints.”

In our text, first, they are “*the church of God that is in Corinth.*” They are the *ekklesia*, “the called-out ones,” separated from the world. They are “the church of God,” and as such, they belong to God (1 Cor 3:9), God's own “*treasured possession*,” “*a people for his own possession*” (Exo 19:5; 1 Pt 2:9-10). The recipients are the whole united church, not a faction in the church in Corinth.

Second, they are “*sanctified in Christ Jesus.*” The word “sanctified” is from a Greek verb that means “to make holy.” So those who are “sanctified” are “holy ones.” Something “holy” is an ordinary thing that was set apart and consecrated for God's holy service. The bread and wine we use in the Lord's Supper are ordinary food from the store, but when they are consecrated to God, they become a “Holy Communion.” In the Old Testament, God set Israel apart “*out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth*,” making them “holy” (Ex 19:5-6). So is the church as “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*” (1 Pt 2:9).

Third, the recipients were “*called to be saints.*,” just as Paul was “*called... to be an apostle.*” Paul reminds the Corinthians that because they are in Christ Jesus, God has set them apart as his holy people. And because they are God's holy people, God commands them, “*Be holy, for I am holy*” (Lv 19:2; 1 Pt 1:16). This is a big problem in Corinth, for they did not reflect God's holiness in their lives.

Furthermore, we see from all of Paul's greetings that all believers are “saints.” They are never dead people who were declared “saints” by the church. All those—and only those—who have repented of their sins and believed and trusted in Christ alone for their salvation are called “saints.” It would be weird if Paul addressed only a select, canonized group of people as “saints.”

We also see that God's holy people are called saints in the one true church. Old Testament Israel was called “*the church in the wilderness*” (Ac 7:38). Conversely, the New Testament church is called “*the Israel of God*” (Gl 6:16) and Abraham's children and heirs of the promise (Gl 3:29).

Fourth, the church in Corinth belong to the universal church, “*with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.*” They are not the only ones who are saints in Christ, because saints are found in every place and in every age from creation to the end of the world, “*everywhere in every church*” (1 Cor. 4:17). This is why the church is called “the catholic church.” Christ is the Lord, the Ruler, of the lives of all saints everywhere.

God greets us his saints when we come to worship him. But how does God greet us?

## The Content of the Greeting

The traditional Greek greeting is the Greek word which means “Rejoice!” or “Greetings!” But in his letters, Paul changed it to “Grace to you.” Then he added “*Shalom*” the traditional Jewish greeting, which is commonly translated, “Peace.”

So in Psalm 129:8, the traditional greeting is: “*The blessing of the LORD be upon you! We bless you in the name of the LORD!*” In the Aaronic benediction, *grace* and *peace* are part of this blessing from God, “*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace*” (Num 6:24-26).

Grace is God's unmerited favor towards his undeserving people. Peace is the complete well-being of the person—heart, mind and soul. This is whole of God's redemptive plan: he bestows grace, and in receiving God's grace, the believer experiences the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. Since a saint is justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ, Paul says that the result of this grace is peace, “*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rm 5:1).

The risen Jesus greeted the disciples, “*Peace be with you.*” (Jn 20:19) This is the ultimate greeting from God. Those who receive God's grace have peace in two ways: first, peace with God, since they were formerly enemies; and second, the peace of God in their hearts.

But is Paul's greeting merely a greeting and a wish for grace and peace from God? No, God is not merely wishing that grace, mercy and peace be with his people. He *declares* that you his people are sure recipients these blessings in Christ. This is found in several places:

Numbers 6:27 after the blessing: “So shall they put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.” God engraves his name upon his people whom he blesses.

Luke 10:5, 6: “*And when you enter into any house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’*” Jesus says his disciples must declare that the peace of God has come into homes that receive Christ's gospel.

2 John 3: “*Grace, mercy and peace will be with us...*” This greeting will really happen to the saints.

**D**ear friends in Christ: But how can God give grace and mercy to a people who are sinners condemned to death? It is only in Christ. Since Christ died for your sins, God can now accept you as pleasing and righteous before him. Because of Christ's sacrifice for your sins, all those who repent of their sin and believe in Christ as Savior and Lord are counted righteous. His perfect righteousness is counted as yours by faith. None of your own good works are counted for your redemption from sin, because without faith, they are as filthy rags before a holy God.

It is by God's grace and mercy that you are not consumed by God's wrath every time you sin. It is by God's grace and mercy that he provides for all your needs. It is by God's grace and mercy that he sent the Holy Spirit to indwell you so that you may persevere in faith until the end.

Finally, it is by God's grace and mercy that he will glorify you perfectly in heaven when you persevere. And in that place, you will find your eternal peace and rest that only the Lord your Creator, Redeemer and Provider can give.