

“For it is when I am weak that I am strong.”

2 Cor 12:10

Few of us enjoy being in a position of weakness, of having no control over our lives. Indeed, one of the main thrusts of our society is to get people to take control of their lives: to see the options, and to choose what will happen next and which path they should follow. To be able to choose is to be in a position of power. And we do not like not being able to choose.

Ever since the time of Adam, human beings have always wanted to assert themselves over the circumstances in which they find themselves and over other people. When our sense of being in control is frustrated – when we cannot control what’s going on, when we feel powerless – we tend to get angry.

At the core of feelings of anger is the antagonism we feel towards something or someone whom we consider has done us harm or an injustice, or who threatens to do us harm or an injustice. The anger is made all the worse if we can do nothing to right that wrong.

But underneath anger there is always another emotion. Beneath anger there is always a layer of fear. We fear being harmed. Harm may come in many different forms: physical pain, emotional or psychological hurt; a sense of loss or of being deprived of something we hold dear; the suggestion that we are being ignored or being thought of as having no value. Whenever we are threatened – and especially by a wrong that we cannot right – we start to fear, and that fear leads to feelings of antagonism towards whatever or whoever is threatening us, and we get angry.

We hate to be powerless.

Now contrast this with what St Paul says in today’s Second Reading in the context of a painful thorn in the flesh:

I have pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me, but He has said, 'My grace is enough for you: my power is at its best in weakness.'

We do not know whether this pain was physical, emotional, or psychological. We know only that it threatened St Paul's peace of mind and led him to fear that he wasn't doing his job as well as should be doing it. But what is truly significant is God's response: *'My grace is enough for you: my power is at its best in weakness.'*

How can power be at its best in weakness?

What God is trying to teach us, through the words of St Paul, is that when we stop struggling to be in control of everything – when we are willing to let go of our need to be in charge – then God's power can take over instead. So long as we are trying to be in control then our actions and attitudes block the free flow of grace into our hearts, and God's work is frustrated: we are getting in the way of God's work.

As soon as we begin to let go – as soon as we begin to clear the debris blocking God's path to our hearts – then He can enter our hearts more freely and take control of our lives. When we render ourselves weak and vulnerable, we make way for God's power to take over.

That's a scary thought, isn't it? Letting go, and letting God take control instead. What if He doesn't do what we want Him to do? What if He takes our lives in a different direction from what we had planned? What if things don't work out the way we want them to work out? He might lead us to a place where we are less well-known, or less loved, or less popular, or less influential, or less financially secure, or less certain about the future.

But that's the point. When we stop trying to be in control of our own lives, and surrender that control to Almighty God, we face the very real possibility that He will take us at our word and lead us when we would rather not go, as Our Lord warned St Peter elsewhere (Jn 21:18).

Dare we do just that? Dare we let go, and let God take control instead?

This is not to say that we have to become utterly passive and indifferent in all things, as if we had no role to play at all. No. What it does mean is that we become pro-active in finding a way, in prayer, to be at peace within ourselves – with the peace that comes from the presence in our hearts of the Prince of Peace – such that we do not lose our balance, our equilibrium, when things go wrong. If we allow Our Lord Jesus Christ to enter our hearts and take up His dwelling place there, then we can let *His presence* govern how we react to life's adversities instead of our *fears and anger* governing how we react.

If we can do this, then God's strength will be able to shine through our weakness, and our continual and miserable attempts to be in control of everything can give way to the power of Someone much more suited to the task of governing all things. After all, if He created all things, might He not be the best Person to govern all things? through His providence? through His gradual working out of how things are meant to be?

Dare we do this? Dare we trust the God who says, 'My grace is enough for you'?

