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“As you sent me into the world, so I send them into the world” (John 12:19).

Acts 20:28-38; John 17:11b-19

In his second letter to the church at Corinth (2 Cor 11:16-33), Paul recounts his many sufferings for the sake of the Gospel. The list is long and brutal. He has been flogged, beaten with rods, stoned, imprisoned, shipwrecked, gone hungry, labored to exhaustion, faced every kind of danger on the roads, from the weather, from bandits, his rivals and enemies. Yet he counts his greatest suffering his anxiety over the churches. In today's passage from Acts, Paul predicts that in his absence, charlatans will attack the community like wolves within the flock, distorting the Gospel and advancing their own agendas for personal gain.

Paul has tried to strengthen them by being a good model for discipline and fidelity to the truth. He faces an uncertain future as he continues his missionary journey, knowing he has done his best, run the race and kept the faith. His story prepares us for Pentecost. Human effort, even from a steadfast and brilliant Apostle like Paul, has never been enough to establish and sustain the mystery of the church. Only the Holy Spirit can shape the culture and inspire all the influences that converge to proclaim core Christian ideals and values within world civilization.

The story continues in us. We can find both the problems Paul faced and the ideals he remained faithful to. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that he has *consecrated* them for the mission he is handing on to them. Consecration implies a

personal call to holiness and the power to accomplish whatever is asked of us. Jesus begins his prayer for them, and for us, by lifting his eyes to heaven. This same gesture is part of the consecration of the bread and wine at Eucharist. Ordinary things, the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands, are lifted up as the Spirit is called down upon them to make them holy. No longer ordinary bread and wine, they become the body and blood of Christ, the Real Presence of God on the altar and in those who consume them.

So, God consecrates our ordinary lives, our best efforts, but also our weaknesses, frustrations and failures. Holiness does not remove us from the world or its problems. Jesus promises to protect and guide his disciples, but then prays to his Father, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the Evil One." The Our Father ends with this promise, that with the strength of our daily bread and the practice of forgiveness, we will not be led into temptation or handed over to evil. Holiness will prevail. We are daily consecrated in truth by reading and praying the Scriptures. The Spirit confides in us, and the Word makes a home in our hearts, prompting our thoughts and stirring our motives to live holy lives. This is the Good News.

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