**2017 10 22 *“THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK”***

***“But when He Who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles..”***

Many of us who are agonizing over loved ones who appear to be living a life far from faith in God can take great comfort in St. Paul’s epistle for this Sunday. St. Paul had been trying to destroy the church, even consenting and directing the murder of St. Stephen the Deacon. He did this because he had a misguided and deluded zeal for what he thought was his true religion. Even though he had been ***“set apart before I was born”***- by God’s providence he was allowed to remain in a false and empty religion for many years. He was not called with the other Apostles. He was allowed to wreak havoc on the Lord’s Church even though he had already been set apart by the same Lord! How many people who saw him persecuting the church would have ever believed that he would become the greatest follower of Christ who has ever lived? Why did not God spare him from all of the faithless and terrible actions that he so vigorously pursued?

 Beloved in Christ Jesus, none of us can know the mind of God or His Divine Providence. We also cannot judge the free will of any person. St. Paul was His “chosen vessel” even though he for years lived a life of delusion and falsehood. Many people in our society, including some of our loved ones, are also living such a life- even if for other reasons. The Lord knows each one of us perfectly. He knows what we are and what we will become. He desires, more than anything, that each one of us be His chosen vessel. If God desires this, how can we ever judge or give up on anyone that seems to be far away from a Godly life? In one moment, they can be converted deep in their hearts. In one moment they can change their life completely, and be far better Christians than we ever were.

 So, in the meantime what should we do? The answer is clear in today’s epistle. St. Paul tells us that at a certain point, God called Him ***“through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.”*** Note that Jesus was not revealed **“to”** St. Paul but rather **“in”** him. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was revealed deep within his heart. He knew Him intimately. He loved Him instantly, as his heart burned within him. If Jesus is revealed in each of us in this way, we can indeed ***“preach Him among the gentiles”***- that is those who are far from Christ. To truly “preach Christ” we must bring Christ to them not as an idea or teaching but as a living reality inside of us. If Christ lives in us, others will sense this grace. If Christ lives in us, our love for them can and will begin to change them- even if we do not perceive it.

 Therefore beloved in Christ Jesus, let us trust God in His Divine Providence, with our loved ones. As St. Paul was left in delusion until the right time, so some of our loved ones may also be far from Him. Know that our Lord will wait for the right possible moment, and desires above all, to reveal Himself to them, that they might be saved. Most important, our Lord reveals Himself to others through being “in” us. This is our part- to love them- with the love of Christ in us. It is only the love of Christ which can change any of us. Amen.