

## I CAN DO ALL THINGS IN HIM WHO STRENGTHENS ME

What a powerful statement. St. Paul tells the people he knows how to live in abundance and how to live in need. He knows how it feels to be well fed and how it feels to go hungry. This plurality of vision, this paradox of opportunities allows St. Paul to challenge us to move past where we are to a deepening of vision. It does not matter if we are hungry or well-fed, the power of God is not found in either. It does not matter if we live in abundance or live in need, the power of God is not found in either. The power of God comes into our lives wherever we are when we humbly surrender to the realization that we can do anything and all things in Christ. Outside of Christ, we can really do nothing. It is the vision of the vine and the branches. We cannot survive if we are detached from the source of our strength. St. Paul knew this as he traveled. He knew some would listen and some would walk away, but the power of God that was within him came from relying solely on Jesus to be the power. When we do the same, we lose sight of results, we lose the temptation to self-centeredness. To understand who Jesus is and can be in our lives is the fullness of the journey of faith.

So often I must confront myself. So often I must let there be less of me and more of God in what I do and say. The Lord longs to embrace us and invite us. The Gospel once again reminds us that the King longs to invite and keeps inviting even when some make excuses. It is easy to make excuses. It is easy to look at COVID fatigue and just shut down. But our strength is in the Lord who made heaven and earth. When I think about how Easter was celebrated this year and at that time the breaking news was that we would be closed, it pained me. In those weeks of celebrating Eucharist quietly and privately in the chapel in the rectory, my relationship with Jesus was changed. At that time we did not have a reopening plan, we did not know how we would proceed. Here we are months later and the doors are open. We have safety protocols for everyone's benefit, we have the celebration up for everyone to watch in their homes and we have a connection in the parking lot with those in need who can't return to public worship. I think of how new volunteers have come forth and responded so we can proceed. PADS is getting fed, the food pantry is feeding the poor. St. Vincent de Paul goes the extra mile and now faith formation for all is beginning steps to enable parents to live the faith with their children and teens. All of this is a far place from where we were. All of this is done with the strength of God. The respect of the community and the vision of the Reopening Team has channeled its collective wisdom to do the best we can. None of this is to overcome our true strength. Our true strength is in the name of the Lord. I am impressed at what God is doing. At the last parking lot transmitted and live-streamed celebration of the Eucharist, I witnessed joy in the reception of the Eucharist. I am so thankful to see this first hand. Tears flowed from eyes, the desire of the actual moment of reception became a moment when time stopped and heaven and earth came together. Taking the precious Body of Christ into our very selves became an eternal moment. It is humbling to see the strength of God in all of you. Obstacles of Save-a-Seat, not being able to sit where you would like, sanitizing stations and floor markings that are mapped out like we are in a locker room or gym floor does not overcome the sheer joy of receiving Jesus. When I see it, and believe me I do, I know we are strong. I know we are going to make it, and I know Jesus is our Lord, our strength.

Thanks for showing me His strength alive in you. I am humbled by your faith.



Father John Ouper