

## A NOTE FROM FATHER EICKHOFF

Today's Second Reading is taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. It is a short passage so I can easily copy it out below:

*"In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will." (Romans 8:26–27)*

We might ask ourselves this question: what does St. Paul mean in this passage? In the early Church (the first five or six centuries after Christ) there were two main ways of looking at this passage. The most popular way, as expressed by a large number of theologians, was to point out that we human beings don't often know what is best for us and so we need someone who truly does know what we most need to speak on our behalf to God. We today can surely verify the truth of this statement for human nature has not changed in the intervening centuries. How often do we find ourselves saying or doing something that is against our best interest? Whether that is the big spender who is pleading for more money but truly needs to learn the value of moderation or the perpetually angry man who demands instant obedience from everyone around him but truly needs to learn self-mastery. We often ask God for those things that are not truly to our best benefit. Yet, God does not condemn us to our foolishness. Instead, the Spirit of God speaks on our behalf. Asking the Father to listen not to what we say out of human weakness, but instead to those things we would ask for if we were wiser. God does this so that once we become wise we will be able to truly speak to God for what we really need.

The second way of looking at this passage is to recognize that we human beings sometimes lack the understanding to fully express what we are feeling or thinking. How often do you find yourself struggling to find the words to explain to someone else what you are asking for? Some early theologians thought that in cases like this the Spirit of God would speak for us by asking of God for those things we know we need but lack the words to explain. Honestly, I think that both explanations are correct. Sometimes we don't know what we truly need from God and so the Spirit asks of God for those things that are needed but unknown; and sometimes we know what we need but we find it difficult to put into words what that need is. I think that it is fortunate for us that God chooses to cover for us in both situations.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Stephen Eickhoff  
Pastor