Sexagesima 2014

“Je préfère donc bien volontiers me glorifier de mes faiblesses,

afin que la puissance du Christ habite en moi” (2Cor 12, 9).

The Collect of the Liturgy today reminds us in simple words of the spirit of Septuagesima: “O Dieu, qui voyez qu’aucune de nos actions ne nous inspire confiance…” Although much is required of us during the penitential seasons, we must be on guard against falling into a kind of practical Pelagiansim, thinking and acting as if we were able to reach the state of perfection by our own efforts. As St. Paul reminded the Corinthians, “Ce n’est pas que nous soyons par nous-mêmes capables de concevoir quelque chose comme venant de nous-mêmes; mais notre aptitude vient de Dieu” (2Cor 3, 5).

While we need to be reminded of and encouraged in our *active* works of penance—prayer, fasting, almsgiving—we also need to be reminded of our *passive* role in the spiritual combat. Indeed, the adjective “passif” comes from the Latin verb “patior,” which means “to suffer, to allow, to undergo, to endure.” St. Paul boasts in the Epistle today—not about what *he* was able to accomplish in the *world* through his own *strength*, but rather about what *God* was able to accomplish in *him* through his own *weakness*. “Ma grâce te suffit, car c’est dans la faiblesse que ma puissance se montre tout entière” (2Cor 12:9).

We cannot, to be sure, make a virtue of our weakness—rather, our experience of weakness is necessary in order for us to experience the saving power of Christ. When we fast, our bodies naturally grow weak. That is in fact the point of fasting—we experience in ourselves our radical lack of strength, our radical need to be fed—not only with our “daily bread,” but more importantly, our “supersubstantial Bread.” Let us even now consider an appropriate regimine of fasting for Lent, that together with St. Paul, we may “glorifier de [notres] faiblesses, afin que la puissance du Christ habite en [nous]” (2Cor 12, 9).