

**2012 Red Mass Homily
Diocese of Green Bay**

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September 20, 2012

S.S.P.: There but for the Grace of God...

(Sing:) Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch
like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.

There is an old and familiar line that goes: There but for the grace of
God go I. We often use this line when we see someone who has
experienced a tragedy or something bad in their life and we realize, but by
the grace of God that could have been me.

This saying is attributed to John Bradford. Bradford's quote was
prompted when he saw a group of criminals being led to their executions.
Little did he know how true his quote, and the context in which he said it,
would become for him. John Bradford was an English preacher born in
1510 who at the age of 45 was executed by burning at the stake. His crime
was preaching the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and exposing England as a
nation that had forsaken God. At that moment in his life, on July 15, 1555,

the grace of God was sufficient for John Bradford as he gave up his earthly life to enter into eternal life. John Bradford reminds all of us that we can only go from day to day, moment to moment, by the grace of our God.

That certainly is true for the Apostle Paul in today's reading from Corinthians. Paul looks back upon his life as a man named Saul whose sole intent was to persecute anyone who claimed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. And then one day, Paul is knocked to the ground and made blind. In that moment, by the grace of God, Paul opened his heart and eventually his eyes to see how wrong he was to persecute the followers of Jesus and in that moment of grace he is transformed from prejudiced persecutor to a passionate preacher calling others now to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Looking back, Paul can only exclaim, there but by the grace of God.

What about that sinful woman in the gospel reading from Luke? Looking back on her sinful life, she opens her heart to Jesus and in that moment of grace is touched deeply by this Jesus who is preaching a merciful love for all. Falling before him she begins to wash and anoint his feet as a sign of gratitude and hospitality. She was an embarrassment to all, especially Simon who as a host had neglected to offer Jesus these basic acts of hospitality. The scriptures never reveal to us the response of Simon to

that moment of grace in his house. Did he find himself saying, there but by the grace of God go I?

Finally, many years later John Bradford could have found himself uttering his famous and familiar line as he might well have watched the terrible torture and death of the 103 Koreans that are remembered on this day in the church liturgical calendar. Today, the Church remembers these men and women who, with the help of God's grace, gave their minds, bodies and hearts to Jesus and the promise of everlasting life.

In the end, as we reflect upon the lives of John Bradford, St. Paul, the woman with the alabaster jar of oil and the 103 Koreans who are honored as martyrs, we might find ourselves quoting this famous line, but with a slight twist to its wording: "There with the help of God's grace, I pray go I."

As we too experience persecution in our own lives for what we believe and proclaim, as we acknowledge our own sinful ways, as we seek a conversion of our own souls that will open our heart and eyes to see more clearly and dearly Jesus Christ as our own Lord and Savior, we realize that in the end we can only go from day to day, moment to moment,

by the grace of our God. Our deepest prayer every day is simply: “There with the help of God’s grace, I pray go I.”

In keeping with our vocational call in the legal profession, we seek to know the truth that will prevail, pursue liberty and justice for all, embrace a law of love that puts us into a right relationship with God and one another, and embody a civil discourse that leads to peace, let our deepest prayer every day be simply: “There with the help of God’s grace, I pray go I.”

(Sing:) Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.