

QUINQUAGESIMA 2015
SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
1 COR. 13.1



Clement...Bishop of Rome...sat in his chair pondering what to write...to "those Corinthians". It was now 30 years since Paul's death..."those Corinthians" were as quarrelsome and mean-spirited as ever.

The antics of those Corinthians had become something of a legend. Their destructive behavior had become fodder for coffee hour gossip...and that was making matters worse...the Corinthian Problem was becoming a greater problem for the entire Church.

Clement understood what Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthians he was under the pressure of his concern for all the churches under his care. He sensed Paul's frustration at the Corinthian's stubborn refusal to set their petty differences aside and start acting like a parish community instead of a house divided. He also knew what motivated Paul and should be motivating each of us...LOVE!

Inspired by Paul's letter about Faith, Hope and Love...Clement wrote to those Corinthians...

... "Let the one truly possessed by the love of Christ keep his commandments. Who can express the binding power of divine love? Who can find words for the splendor of its beauty? Beyond all description are the heights to which it lifts us. Love unites us to God; "it cancels innumerable sins," has no limits to its endurance, bears everything patiently. Love is neither servile nor arrogant. It does not provoke schisms or form cliques, but always acts in harmony with others. By it all God's chosen ones have been sanctified; without it, it is impossible to please him."...

...the operative word...LOVE!

The Corinthian parish was being torn apart. Some parishioners hijacked the parish and fired the priests. There is no evidence the priests had done anything wrong. Clement called the removal of the priests high-handed and unjustifiable. He reminded the people Paul had entrusted the care of the parish to their priests. He urged them to reconcile out of love for each other...to pay attention to what Paul said about Faith, Hope and Love.

Faith, Hope, and Love...more than words we talk about in church. We say we have Faith...we believe what the Scriptures teach us about Jesus is true. We say we have Hope...in that which we have not yet experienced...life in heaven with Jesus. We talk about Love...more than an emotion or a personal attachment. Faith, Hope and Love are wonderful gifts from God...more than words...they are actions that should be second nature to us and how we live.

Paul's letter about Faith, Hope and Love is often read at a Nuptial Mass. The Exhortation read at the beginning of Holy Matrimony in the *Book of Common Prayer* reminds us the joining together of the Man and Woman points to the mystical union between Christ and his Church. Husband and wife are supposed to love each other and want what is best for each other...just as Jesus loves us and wants what is best for us. That means we should always act for the good of others.

What about those Corinthians? What caused things to go so terribly wrong in the Church in Corinth? Self-righteous pride, jealousy, childish behavior! Some parishioners wanted to be the center of attention. They wanted to have things their own way. They wanted to turn the parish into their own personal religious and political playground. They did not care who got hurt in the process.

Clement tried to get those Corinthians back on track. He told them to remember what Paul had written to them. He told them to grow up and to stop acting like spoiled brats...out of control children...with little concern for others. He told them to focus all of their attention on Faith, Hope and Love...always remembering everything we do must be motivated by unconditional LOVE!

The Corinthian Story...as we talked about last week...is the whole Church's story...it is our story. Paul and Clement wrote to a parish bent on self-destruction...they did so with love and compassion. What we learn from reading their letters is human behavior hasn't changed in the past 2000 years. That's precisely the point.

Unlike the famous TV ad "What happens in Las Vegas, stays in Las Vegas"...what happened in Corinth didn't stay in Corinth. Their bad behavior got Paul's attention...some listened to Paul...some did not. Their bad behavior got Clement's attention...some listened to Clement...some did not. Sinful behavior in one parish can spread to the whole Church...people get hurt.

What we are called to do is practice...LOVE...the kind of love Paul reminds is not jealous or conceited or proud...the kind of love that is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable...the kind of love that is truthful...the kind of love that doesn't hold grudges...the kind of unconditional love Jesus teaches...the kind of love that never gives up.

The Corinthian Story is not about condemning "those Corinthians" for their bad behavior or to give us something juicy to talk about at coffee hour. Neither is very productive. It's about us facing up to our own tendencies to act like spoiled brats...and asking God to help us grow up...and to act out of LOVE...just as God loves us!

