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SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
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"Because you think you are so smart...you tolerate fools and their destructive behavior...
...Think again, friends!"

Tough words...tough love...from our friend Saint Paul to some people we have come to know well..."Those Corinthians."

"Tough love"...an expression used to describe harsh words directed with the intent of helping in the long run.

Genuine tough love must have an element of actual affection. Parents may withhold money from a drug-addicted child until they confront the problem and seek professional help. The goal is not punishment...it's to force help...to save one from self-destruction...possible death.

Paul had a vested interest in the Corinthian Church...he founded it. He saw his work hijacked by self-serving people within the church...attacking his character...teaching false doctrine and engaging in outrageous behavior...all being tolerated by people who knew better.

Paul never minces words..."Stop tolerating fools and self-destruction." Character assassination, false teaching and immoral behavior in the Church can have only one result...Spiritual Death...the death of the Parish! The Church...our Faith as Bishop McClean reminded in his sermon at last Wednesday's Evensong...is about growing Spiritually and living our lives as God intended.

Any analysis about "Those Corinthians" must begin with the clear understanding we include ourselves as the recipients of Paul's tough love. There is no room in the Parish for partisanship, hostile confrontation, viscous gossiping, self-serving pride, misdirected anger, hatred or false teaching. Tough words...tough love...can and should be used to keep such behavior in check. The intent must never be punishment...rather preservation of our relationship.

Paul wanted for "Those Corinthians" the same thing we want for Saint Joseph Parish...to remain Spiritually healthy and full of life. We experienced evidence of both at

last Wednesday's Noonday Mass and again at Evensong. Noteworthy was the presence of Father Thomas Crowder, Rector of Saint Matthew's Parish in Newport News, Virginia; and Bishop Anthony Rasch, Rector of Saint Mary the Virgin Parish in Chatsworth, California. We experienced Agape...Love...at the potluck supper concluding the great day.

Paul was a realist. He recognized just as did Jesus some like to cause problems...to be the center of attention. Fools and destructive behavior...even within the Church...will always be present. The challenge is to disallow destructive behavior...to encourage all to correct destructive behavior. However that is done...it must be done out of love and compassion...not out of prideful superiority. Sometimes we will succeed and sometimes we will not.

Jesus was the top realist. The parable of the farmer who went out to plant grain is a story about God's Kingdom...the Church's role in spreading the Good News. Some people get the message and respond...others get the message and reject it out of hand...others refuse to hear the message at all. Most of us didn't grow up on a farm. But the reality is with a good harvest some grain will be lost. There are successes and there are failures.

Paul went about planting Church. He saw successes and failures...among "Those Corinthians"...and with other churches. The Church is a mixed bag...just like the real world. We pray people will hear the message and the Church will grow...and we must never be discouraged...we must never abandon prayer...we must never give up...even when confronted with failure.

The Corinthian story and the parable of the farmer who went out to plant grain are ultimately stories about us. Tolerating fools and destructive behavior is simply not smart. We are called to be wise stewards and smart farmers...planting God's word and watching our Parish grow.

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