

**SEXAGESIMA 2018**  
**SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**2 COR. 11.19 St. LUKE 8.4**



Our friend Saint Paul had a way with words. He mastered the art of constructive criticism and healthy sarcasm. He put both to good use in his letters to some other friends of ours...“those Corinthians”.

Paul founded the parish in Corinth and had a vested interest in its spiritual welfare and growth. But it had become Paul’s problem child. He had already returned to Corinth twice to straighten things out. He let them know he was not happy about having to make a third trip to deal with the divisive partisanship that threatened to destroy the parish.

What got Paul’s attention was the willingness of the parish to tolerate the most outrageous behavior by some members of the parish who thought they were better than everyone else...considered themselves more gifted than others...and were alienating others by their ridiculous behavior.

The priests Paul left in charge of the Corinthian parish...either couldn’t or wouldn’t confront those who were behaving badly...which only promoted a toxic environment in the parish.

Paul saw his work hijacked by self-serving people within the parish...who were attacking his character...teaching false doctrine...and openly engaging in immoral sexual behavior...all of which was being gladly tolerated.

Character assassination, false teaching and immoral sexual behavior in the Church can have only one result...spiritual death...and the destruction of the Church. Paul tells “those Corinthians” to stop acting like fools and start acting like people who love and respect each other!

Several years ago a member of Saint Joseph Parish quipped during a Sunday Discussion Group...“About those Corinthians...did they ever write back?” Evidently they did...often. The big question...did they ever get the message...did they ever listen to Saint Paul? And what are we supposed to get out of all of this?

Around 100 AD, Clement, Bishop of Rome, received a letter from some concerned parishioners in Corinth. Clement knew Paul personally and was aware of the prior antics of “those Corinthians”. Their latest stunt...they fired their priests...so they could have things their way...or so they thought.

Clement wrote back to the parish council and told them Paul left the parish in the care of the priests who were their shepherds...they had no business firing them...they were to immediately restore them so they could continue taking care of the parish. What happened next...we don’t know!

It would be easy for us to say, “That was then, this is now, what do ‘those Corinthians’ have to do with us?” Paul’s words are harsh...he calls the Corinthian parish a ship of fools. He does so out of tough love for them and for the whole Church...and that includes us!

Paul was a realist...he knew some people just like to cause problems...to be the center of attention...even within the Church. Perhaps they are jealous or resent others. Our job is to discourage such behavior. What we say and what we do must be motivated by love and compassion...not a sense of self-righteous superiority. Sometimes we will succeed in our task...and sometimes we will fail.

Jesus was a realist too. The parable of the farmer who went out to plant grain is a story about God’s Kingdom...and 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 listen for a while and then move on. There will be successes and there will be failures.

The Church is a mixed bag of people...just like the real world...the church is composed of real people...not super humans. We want people to hear and respond to the message about God’s love...we celebrate our successes...we don’t get discouraged by our failures.

“Those Corinthians” and the parable of the farmer who went out to plant grain are ultimately stories about us. Tolerating foolish 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 and the Church-at-large grow.

