

## SEXAGESIMA 2019

### SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

#### FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

#### 2 COR. 11.19-31 St. LUKE 8.4 -15



Our friend Saint Paul is on a roll again...and the objects of his tough-love, no-nonsense approach to getting results...some other friends of ours..."those Corinthians!"

"You think you are so smart," says Paul. "You gladly tolerate the foolish and destructive behavior of others. You let other people order you around and take advantage of you and trap you and look down on you. You are so wise to tolerate such foolish people!"

Paul is ripping into the decadent, out-of-control, parishioners of the Church in Corinth who were turning away from his own authoritative teaching and falling for false teachers. Paul's sarcastic boasting about his own trials and tribulations had the desired affect: it embarrassed the Corinthians.

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

The real purpose of Paul's sarcasm was to get the Corinthians to take a good, hard, look at what was happening to their parish. He wanted them to stop their infighting and divisive behavior. He wanted them to stop boasting about their own accomplishments and instead boast (meaning praise) Jesus Christ.

In an often mentioned animated Discussion Group many years ago a much-loved parishioner quipped, "About those Corinthians...did they ever write back?" Much laughter followed and it took several minutes for the group to regain its composure. Evidently they did...many times. This was the second letter Paul wrote to "those Corinthians" and they wrote to others for help as well.

In about 100 AD...Saint Clement of Rome wrote to the Corinthian Church who were at it again. They had fired their priests without cause. Clement told them they had no

business taking such action against the priests...who had been given Apostolic Authority over them by Paul himself. Clement ordered them to reinstate the priests.

Saint Joseph Parish has been free of internal strife for many years and for that we must thank God for peace in our little valley. But if we are to learn anything from Paul's letters to "those Corinthians"...we must begin to see something of ourselves in them.

Paul was a realist. He recognized there are some people who like to cause problems...to become the center of attention. Foolish behavior...within and outside the Church...will always be present. The challenge for all of us is to not let such behavior get out of control. It is especially important we not allow the standards secular society defines as acceptable that are clearly against God's will and commandments to define the Church.

Jesus, of course, is the top realist. 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 about Jesus Christ. Some people will get the message and respond with enthusiasm; others hear the message but begin to look elsewhere; others reject the Good News completely. We must remember the Church is a mixed bag of people. When we plant the seeds of the faith...there will be successes and there will be failures.

Paul went about planting Church. He saw successes and failures...among "those Corinthians"...and within other churches. 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 apparent 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...getting others to join us in planting...and watching our Parish grow.

And in everything we do...we must be patient and persevere.

