

Sexagesima 2021  
Sermon • Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*2 Corinthians 11.19-31 Luke 8.4-15*



Paul has had enough of “those Corinthians”. He founded the Church in Corinth. He had a vested interest in seeing the Parish thrive. He had already made two pastoral visits to the Parish to help them sort things out. He left his friend, Timothy, Bishop-in-Charge of the Parish. Now “those Corinthians” were at it again.

Timothy wrote a letter to Paul that probably began something like this...“Help!” The Corinthian Christians were ignoring everything Paul taught them in his last visit. They weren’t paying attention to Timothy either. They were welcoming itinerant preachers who criticized Paul and called him a “fool”. These itinerant preachers created personality cults around themselves and had duped many in the Parish. Parishioners were taking sides...one against another.

Faced with a third visit...Paul has some harsh words for “those Corinthians”. He tells them they are tolerating “fools”...frauds masquerading as legitimate Apostles. He says the leaders in the Corinthian Parish are so smart they are gladly tolerating the bad behavior of the itinerant preachers who have “fooled” them. Worse yet...they are boasting about their own accomplishments.

Paul then gets on one of his favorite topics...himself...saying he is now acting like a “fool”. He talks about how many times he has been put in prison for Christ; how many times he has been shipwrecked, how many times he has been lashed; how many times he has been betrayed by friends; how many times he has gone without food, or clothing, or a place to sleep for the night. And just so we’re all clear on the subject...Paul says...he has worked harder than anyone else and besides all of this...he is under the pressure of his concern for all the churches.

Paul’s sarcasm has a purpose. He is trying to get the Corinthians to pay attention to him and stop following those he calls “false apostles”. He gives one of his strongest warnings telling “those Corinthians” on his next visit those who are continuing to sin will not escape punishment...and they will have

all the proof they need Christ speaks through him. Paul closes his letter by encouraging the Corinthian Christians to agree with each other and remain firm in their love for each other in Christ.

How do we think “those Corinthians” responded to Paul’s harsh words? Paul apparently was able to straighten things out enough during his third visit to Corinth...at least for a while. Peace in the Corinthian Parish didn’t last. Saint Clement of Rome wrote an equally strong letter late in the First Century defending the Parish priests and addressing dissent in the Parish.

Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians is an example of the practical application of the Gospel of the Parable of the Sower. It’s also an example of Paul’s tough love approach to the churches. We need to pay attention to what Paul’s Letter and Jesus’ Parable teach us...they can help us avoid the mistakes some of “those Corinthians” made. We have to be careful not to vilify the entire Corinthian Parish...Paul’s words are meant for us as well.

Jesus does more than tell a short story about a Sower...he explains the meaning. We are the ones planting the seed? The seed is the Good News about Jesus, and we are supposed to be telling the truth about Jesus. We are supposed to talk and act like members of the Body of Christ. We are to be persistent in our work. We should not become discouraged because the work we do is hard and requires a commitment. In the end...we will see good results.

While we can take a certain amount of pride in our accomplishments...we must always recognize God empowers us through his Holy Spirit to do his work. We can’t impress God through self-aggrandizing boasting, since he knows what’s in our hearts. And we need to ask for God to give us the wisdom to know when we are being duped...and to resist the temptation to take pleasure in gossip and lies that threaten the spiritual life of the Parish.

Paul tells us to pay attention to what he says...to agree with one another and to live in peace...and God’s love and peace will be with us.

