

Sexagesima 2022  
Sermon-Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*2 Cor. 11.19-31 St. Luke 8.4-15*



Our friend, Saint Paul, doesn't mince words. What exactly does he mean, then, when he tells the Corinthians they are so smart, they gladly tolerate fools?

First some background information. Paul founded the Church in Corinth. He had a vested interest in its success. He reminds them he never took any money from them during the time he was preaching the Good News about Jesus. Other churches had provided him with everything he needed. He didn't want to be a bother to the Corinthians.

There were some leaders in the Corinthian Church that styled themselves "special" apostles with secret knowledge about Jesus. They accused Paul of being disingenuous in his motives and showing false humility. They told people to stop listening to Paul and listen only to them.

These "special" apostles attracted quite a few followers. Those parishioners who wouldn't follow them were subjected to name-calling and bullying. Paul is using some Godly-inspired sarcasm when he tells them they think they are smart and wise in allowing themselves to be bullied. They gladly tolerate fools.

The word fool appears 110 times in the Bible. In every case it refers to someone who is actively working against God. The "special" apostles in the Corinthian Church threatened to undermine all of Paul's work. He found himself in the uncomfortable position of having to defend his own Apostleship...which he reminds the people was given to him by Jesus.

Character assassination has no place in Church. False teaching and partisanship in the Church can result in spiritual death...the death of the Parish! Paul doesn't want this to happen in Corinth any more than any one of else would want it to happen here.

Paul decided to take action and come and visit the Corinthians. There would be a "Come to Jesus" meeting. He would deal with the "special" apostles...and he didn't care what they thought or said about him. God knew he was not being disingenuous or lying.

Paul was a realist about human behavior. He knew some people, even within the Church, like to be the center of attention and cause problems. Our mission is not to drive those people out of the Church. Our mission is to encourage them to change their negative self-centered behavior into positive Jesus-centered behavior. Sometimes that requires the kind of tough-love and maybe even some Saint Paul inspired sarcasm. And Paul knew there would be successes and failures in his work.

Jesus was the preeminent authority on human behavior. What we learned in last week's Parable of the Vineyard from Matthew's Gospel can help us understand this week's Parable of the Sower. The disciples ask Jesus to explain the meaning of today's Parable. Jesus tells his disciples the meaning should be clear to anyone whose heart is open and receptive to hearing the Good News.

The farmer who went out to sow grain is a story about the Church's role in spreading the Good News. The field is the world. Some people get the message and respond with great enthusiasm. Others hear the message for a while. Others hear the message and reject it out of hand. Most of us didn't grow up on a farm. In the real world of farming...some crops make it...some don't. There are successes and there are failures.

Saint Paul went about planting many churches. He witnessed successes and failures. And because he understood human nature...he knew there would be challenges along the way. He also knew there could be no tolerance for bullies who refused to change. That would be true foolishness and not very smart.

Bishop Scarlett often talks about Mission and Evangelism. Mission begins in the heart predisposed to love of others and the desire to spread the Good News (evangelize). We should pray that our work bears fruit...that it is successful.

Now about those Corinthians...did they listen to Paul? Apparently they did, at least for a while. Things got better. We should also listen to what he has to say to us.

