

Sexagesima 2025
Sermon-Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
2 Cor. 11.19-30 St. Luke 8.4-15



We might think from the Epistle, our friend, Saint Paul, has had enough of those Corinthians. We would be right. He founded the Church in Corinth and wanted to see it prosper. He preached the Good News about Jesus Christ and the Church thrived. He left priests to take care of the sheep. But as soon as Jewish-Christian missionaries arrived with claims to be superior to Paul because they adhered strictly to Jewish law, and boasting of their own accomplishments, he had to respond.

In his commentary on today's Epistle, Father Massey Shepherd writes: *"These men were bitter enemies of Saint Paul and did everything they could to undermine his work as well as his principle that in Christ there was no difference between Jew and Gentile."*

Paul took his missionary work seriously. Like the boxer of last week's Epistle...also to those Corinthians...Paul doesn't hold back his punches. This is what he has to say to those Corinthians: *"You gladly tolerate fools! You tolerate anyone who orders you around or takes advantage of you or traps you or slaps you in the face."* Did they get the message? Do we?

Now it was time for Paul to do some boasting about his own accomplishments...which he does with a great deal of sarcasm and justifiable anger and quite frankly...anguish...for what the Corinthians were doing to themselves! And so he writes, *"You want to hear some boasting. Well let me tell you about myself. I'm a Hebrew; I'm an Israelite; I'm a descendant of Abraham; I'm Christ's servant and better than all the others. Besides that I've been shipwrecked, whipped, put in prison, stoned, and nearly drowned. So how's that for boasting"?*

The point Paul was trying to make is for a Christian to boast in this way is foolish and to tolerate such behavior is also foolish. Father Massey Shepherd has something to say about this: *"It has been said that Saint Paul would probably have 'relegated to obscurity' this passage, an outburst in the heat of passion at the behavior of his beloved converts."* Paul may have been embarrassed at having to resort to such tactics to get the Corinthians attention, but thank God his words have survived to guide us and help us stay focused on Christ!

Paul was the expert in showing tough love. Genuine tough love must always include affection toward the person we are trying to help. Christian love comes from the heart and always acts for the best interest of others. Paul's tough love approach to the Corinthians was intended to get them to change their behavior and not listen to false teachers who were only looking for ways to make themselves feel superior to everyone else.

We must understand Paul's tough love Epistle is also directed at us. Partisanship, hostile confrontation, viscous gossiping, self-serving pride, misdirected anger, hatred or false teaching has no place in the life of the Parish. Tough words...tough love...can and should be used to keep such behavior in check. Christian love is always about preserving our relationship with each other as the Body of Christ...his Church. But Paul was also a realist. He knew some people just like to "play the fool".

Jesus was the ultimate realist. The Gospel is another "Kingdom of Heaven" story. Unlike most of the parables, Jesus explains the meaning of the story. We are the Church and we are busy planting seeds...which is the Good News about Jesus Christ. Some people are happy to hear the message for a while; but when times get tough they walk away. Some people hear the message and reject it out of hand. Others hear the Good News and it changes their lives. They grow and prosper and like the good seed produce good fruit and a healthy harvest.

Paul went about planting churches. He saw successes and failures in Corinth and elsewhere. We learned in last week's parable of the Wheat and Weeds, the world is a mixed bag...so is the Church. 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 Epistle and Gospel are ultimately stories about us. Gladly tolerating fools can never produce a good harvest. We are called to be wise stewards of our spiritual gifts and share them with all who are eager to hear the Good News...we are to stay busy planting God's word and pray our Parish will remain healthy and strong.

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