

Homily for 2nd Sunday in Ordinary time 2017

Introduction to Paul's first letter the to the Corinthians

Dearly beloved, we have come to the second Sunday in ordinary time. From now until we get into lent from 1st March, our second reading will be taken progressively from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. It is undeniable that St. Paul's letters are among the few difficult books in the bible. I would wish to make an effort to limit all Sunday reflections to the book.

Reading from Acts 18:1–17, it is clear that Paul founded the church in Corinth, then he spent approximately three years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8, 19:10, 20:31). The letter was written during this time in Ephesus, which is usually dated as being in the range of AD 53–57

Why Paul might have written this letter

Paul then received reports from people in Chloe's household about disturbances in Corinth ([1 Corinthians 1:11](#)); and he may have received a delegation from Corinth ([1 Cor 16:7](#)) who brought him questions from the congregation ([1 Cor 7:1](#)).

Brief History about Corinth

Corinth was an important city at the time. It was on a very narrow section of land (called an 'isthmus') in the southern part of Greece.

1. It was the capital city of the region called Achaia.
2. It had two harbors. Today a canal joins the two harbors. In Paul's time, people pulled small boats across from one harbor to the other one.
3. As it was a busy center for trade, Corinth was a good place for the gospel to spread. Merchants and travellers would hear the message and take it with them. There were many different people in Corinth. There were Romans because it was a Roman colony. There were Greeks, Jews, people from Asia and from further east. There were rich people and many slaves.
4. There was a temple to Aphrodite, the Greek female god of love. There were thousands of prostitutes in the city. Many of them belonged to this temple. Corinth became well-known for bad sexual behavior. To live 'like a Corinthian' meant to become a drunk often or to visit prostitutes.
5. The second entertainment to the Olympics Games was the Isthmian Games which took place near Corinth.

Look at the format

Now lets take some few moments to look at the passage before us today, which is equally an introduction to the whole letter. 1Cor 1:1-3

... Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, ...

Common to other Pauline writings, he wrote in a style common in his days. The writer first identifies himself and the recipient of the letter. Quite different from today where the writer is known only at the end of the letter.

In these opening words, St. Paul emphasizes the source of his authority. This was necessary because many at the time doubted his credentials as an apostle. Many were suspicious of him and considered him as one of the false prophets of the day. (1 Cor 9:1-23) There were some occasions that after he left a community, others will go in and rubbish all he had said. It was therefore necessary for him to put himself on par with the 12 so as to assume some credibility for his teaching to the community. So often times he is forced to use that title. (Acts 1:21-22 – Who qualifies to be an Apostle) Paul's dramatic experience on his way to Damascus put him in this category but unknown to many.

... and Sosthenes our brother

Scholars believe that this is the same person we read from Acts 18:12-17. When Paul first came to Corinth, the *ruler of the synagogue* was a man named Crispus. Crispus *believed in the Lord with all his household (Acts 18:8)*, and was saved. So he was fired from - or quit - his job as *ruler of the synagogue*! His replacement was a man named *Sosthenes*. This man and his conversion was well known to the Corinthians. This was to give more credibility to this letter.

... to the church of God that is in Corinth,

The Greek word for 'church' is 'ecclesia'. It means the people whom God 'called out' to be his own people. This reference by St. Paul gives and indicates the true identity of a church. That makes the Catholic Church a true church founded on the Apostles. It does not depend on any other to determine its standards and doctrines or teachings. It is the one and the same everywhere in the world because it belongs to God. No human being can hold claim to the church. The Pope, bishops, priest do not own the church. They are rather servants of the church. The church, therefore in this sense of St. Paul, is not the building or an individual but rather all of us called by God as his people or family. We can only call ourselves a church when every member feels himself /herself belonging to a family and not isolated. Do you feel like belong to a family any time you are here?

... to you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy,

One unique characteristic of St. Paul's writing is his obsession with the phrase "in Christ". Because "in Christ", the Christian assumes a position that is naturally not possible. "In Christ" we are sanctified, "in Christ" we are made holy, "in Christ" we are justified, "in Christ" we are saved. Anything good we can claim has its basis on the faith we have "in Christ". You are therefore nothing outside Christ, however, you are everything in Christ. Permit me to put it this way. There are times that your behavior doesn't match who you are. There are times that presidents do not act as one. Sometimes teachers do not act as teachers. There are times that pastors, including myself, do not act as one. There are times when you equally do not act as baptized Christians. Yes, there can be punishments and serious consequences but in most cases, these individuals never cease to be who they are.

Regardless of their sinfulness and evil deeds for which he writes to them, he still calls them to holiness. Understanding what it means to be “in Christ” makes a big difference. At the beginning of a year like this, the church wants you to think of what it means to be “in Christ”.

Dearly beloved what makes these letters to the church in Corinth so important is the fact that they set the basis for church morality and practical daily teachings for Christian living in the early church. I will therefore encourage you to develop much interest in studying this letter. This background will be the basis for our subsequent reflections in the Sundays ahead.

Refs.

<http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1corinthians.pdf>

<http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/1-corinthians-lbw.htm>

<http://www.ibiblio.org/freebiblecommentary/pdf/EN/VOL06.pdf>