

# Homily For 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Reflection on St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 1:26-31

Dearly Beloved, we continue our reflection of the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. We have already established the uniqueness of a person's status in Christ. The fact is that being able to see who we truly are in Christ makes a big difference. Paul emphasized that there should not be any reason for division in the church. He called on various factions to come together and be united in Christ who alone was crucified for them.

Our reading today is based on 1:26-31. Already in verse 18, St. Paul started a theme contrasting the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world or human wisdom, and at the center of God's wisdom is the message of the cross. In verse 18, *"For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God"*.

We should acknowledge the context in which Paul was arguing. From History we know the influence of Alexander the Great on that part of the world. The Greek world was large; among the main cities were Athens, Corinth and Sparta just to mention but a few. Before and after the time of Jesus, all these places were colonies of the Romans; however, the Greek culture and art were still significant over that of the Romans. The Greeks have produced a lot of great thinkers and philosophers like Thales, Anaximander, Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle. Many on this list were natives of Athens which was just about sixty miles from Corinth. What filled the minds of these early philosophers had been *"Who are we? Why are we here? How can we be happy? Does the universe have a purpose?"*

One can now understand and appreciate why there were varied philosophies in Corinth especially with its proximity to Athens, which was a spewing ground for philosophers. Apparently, when these people were called to the faith as Christians, they dragged their perspectives and opinions about the various things in the world into the church. This created little groups who rallied around unimportant viewpoints on these questions about man, life and existence. Paul now comes hard on this problem, which was equally a cause of *division and polarization in the church. Everyone was claiming to be a believer, but adhering to his/her former philosophy. Paul writes from 1:18 to 2:5 to try to destroy in their minds this particular issue.*

To Paul, there can be no clear, distinct and outstanding response to these basic questions of life than what the gospel presents, thus our faith in Christ makes these questions so easy to answer:

*Who are we?*

*Why are we here?*

*How can we be happy?*

*Does the universe have a purpose?*

Believe me, in the wisdom of God, the average child in CCD should be able to answer these questions satisfactorily.

Quite unfortunate that, though in different forms, people continue to hold varied philosophies in the Church that are contrary to the sacred scripture or the sacred traditions of the church – different philosophies about abortion, contraceptives, marriage and some other sacraments, about success, about family, etc.

He concludes in the paragraph, verse 25 thus; “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength”.

Paul in verse 26 now turned from the content of the gospel to the Corinthian believers, to strengthen his argument that the gospel he preached contradicted human expectations. God had chosen "nobodies" rather than the "beautiful people" of Corinth. They themselves were evidence that God's "foolishness" confounds the "wise." Verse 26 *“Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth”*. So he says, “Consider your own call”. Contrary to what is considered great in the world, Paul pushes his arguments. He does not however say that all of them were “**no count**” in the standard of the world. Yes, there were some with nobility and wealth.

“... But God didn't choose very many of these, verse 27 & 28, **God chose the foolish** of the world to shame the wise, and **God chose the weak** of the world to shame the strong, and **God chose the lowly** and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something.”

"Foolish" is the very antithesis of wisdom. "Weak" is the very opposite of power. "Low" is the very antithesis of that which is noble. The world looks at three things to determine greatness. Number one - wisdom, education, brains. Number two - power and influence, popularity, fame. Number three - high rank, your family and name - nobility.

Look at the text and see the number and emphasis on choice. You are a Christian only because you answered by faith to the call of God. None of us presented ourselves. But unlike many others who are called but still refuse to respond, we cooperated with the grace of God and responded in faith. Here God removes all human boasting. *John 6:44 – “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day”*. You are therefore a matter of choice and election. It is therefore not an accident you are here to be a child of God. *Eph. 1:4 - just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love*.

You see, here is the paradox, God wants to demonstrate that He does not need human wisdom to do anything he wants to do. In order to do that, He grants His salvation to humble simple people and they stand as a living testimony to the world that God doesn't need human wisdom. James 5:2 says, "Listen brethren, has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith...." The poor, the uneducated, simple people for the most part have always in history constituted the makeup of the church. We see that in the history of God's people: Who was David, who was Sampson, look at the background of the prophets; Elisha, Amos etc. Consider John the Baptist, our mother Mary, the 12 apostles. Look at many of the saints: John Vianney, Dominic Salvio, etc.

Why does God keep things this way? The answer is in the next Verse 29, "*so that no human being might boast before God.*" In all his/her actions, the human being remains an agent of God's goodness. The Christian therefore does not *become* but rather *is made* in Christ.

Assuming you are homeless and not a penny to buy any food, sitting down not knowing what to do, a man comes and says, "follow me". All you need to do is rise and walk into a car that is provided. He sends you to a very nice apartment. He has servants who feed you 4 times a day. You go out the next day to the area where you were picked up and see others who are in your former situation. The question is, what have you to boast about? If anything at all, you may boast only of the generosity, love and mercy of that man who just called you and transformed your life.

What Paul is simply saying to them is "look". The purpose in salvation was that God may be glorified. And so, in order for God to get the most glory, He made sure that you had the least to do with your salvation. So you can say, I got saved because of God's wisdom. That's right. Good things will continue to elude you. True peace and joy will continue to escape you until you realize you must put all your faith in the wisdom of God.

As he continued in verse 30, "*It is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.*"

Have you any idea what that means? If you do, then agree with the last verse 31: "*so that, as it is written, 'Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord.'*"