

Readings

Ex 20:1-17 or Ex 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17

Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11

1 Cor 1:22-25

Jn 2:13-25

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If you were to read the entire First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians you would see that Paul is not happy with what's going on in the Church in Corinth.

There are divisions in the community as people align themselves with the preacher who may have evangelized them. The celebration of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, is scandalous as the people who arrive first, often the wealthier members of the community, eat their fill, not leaving much food for those who arrive later. The moral life of some members of the community is not a good witness either to newer Christians or the wider community. There is competition among some members of the community who think their particular gift is more important. And some members are even beginning to doubt their belief in the Resurrection.

Doesn't the situation of the young church in Corinth sound very much like some of the challenges we are experiencing today: divisions in the community – traditionalists /progressives; fewer people attending Mass; differing opinions on what is a moral life?

What is Paul to do to address this situation? Should he reprimand them strongly or write stricter laws for the community? How might his response, which we hear in the Second Reading today, speak to the present reality of our church?

Before Paul offers his response to the particular problems, he calls the people to remember the heart of their faith: “We proclaim Christ crucified.” This is the core of our faith, the source of our unity. We are followers of Jesus. Though we may focus on his teaching or his miracles, the crux of our faith is Christ crucified. It is that belief that holds the church, in all its diversity, together. It may seem foolish to proclaim “Christ crucified.” It was difficult, too. As Paul writes: “It was a stumbling block for Jews and foolishness for Greeks.” Yet that is how God works. On the cross Jesus reveals God’s love for all people no matter who they are. Jesus proclaims God’s forgiveness to all. He shows us how we are to live our lives in service and sacrifice.

Putting that belief into practice was the guide for their actions as individuals and as a community. So it is in our lives. Proclaiming our belief in Christ crucified eliminates any division or faction that may develop in our church and society. It ends the competition that can develop when a person or group thinks their gifts, talents, or doctrines are more valuable. Recalling the words of Pope Francis, it reminds us that the church is “not a political organization that has left or right wings,” as is happening in our country. It is a as “a vehicle” to bring the mercy of Christ to the world. To proclaim “Christ crucified” shows us how we are to live in this world, a world that at times does not share our values.

We proclaim our belief in Christ crucified every time we gather for the Eucharist. These days of Lent are for us a time to reaffirm that belief in Christ crucified. On Ash Wednesday, ashes in the form of a cross were imposed on our foreheads as we heard the words: “Repent and believe in the Gospel.” We journey each week to Good Friday, our commemoration of the Crucifixion. Often during Lent we focus on renewing our lives as individuals. It is also a time

for the church, our local communities and the church universal, to be renewed to be a sign of unity in this divided world and an instrument of God's goodness and peace for all people.