

Homily for January 19, 2020
2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A

Don't Corinthianize, but Christianize your Life!

Each year the Church begins the period known as Ordinary time with second readings from St. Paul's First Letter to the Church at Corinth. Today I want to focus my homily solely on our 2nd reading from 1st Corinthians chapter 1, particularly the first two verses of the Letter. But before I look at these verses I want to tell you something about the City of Corinth and the Church at Corinth.

First something about the city.

Corinth was and is a port and was therefore very wealthy and a place of very lax morality. A couple of ancient authors said the following about Corinth.

Aelius of Aristides, a Greek orator and author who lived between 117–181 AD wrote:

“Corinth chains all men with pleasure” so that “all men are equally inflamed by it... It is clearly the city of Aphrodite”¹

If you know anything about Greek mythology, you'll know Aphrodite is the goddess of love. And so to call the city of Corinth the city of Aphrodite is a way of talking about the sexual immorality that was rampant in that city.

In fact, the city was so well known for its immorality that Aristophanes—the very famous Greek playwright, author of many comedies, who lived around the years 446 – 386 BC coined a verb, to Corinthianize” literally to “to act like a Corinthian.” This meant to live a life free to do whatever you felt right.

And here is Paul establishing the Church in this oh so worldly city.

We know from Acts chapter 18 that Paul founded the Corinthian Church on the third of his four missionary journeys. This third journey covers the years 53-58 AD. During that time he spent 18 months in Corinth. From what we read in Acts 18 we know that the first members of the Corinthian Church were a married couple named Aquila and Priscilla. Another Corinthian who became of follower of Jesus was Sosthenes, whose is mentioned in the first verse of our passage for today. Sosthenes was an official in the Corinthian synagogue who was viciously attacked by a Corinthian mob and beaten by deciding to leave the Synagogue and join the Corinthian Church. The Church had Greek converts as well. Luke tells us in Acts 18:8:

***and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized.*²**

¹ Aelius Aristides, Orations, 46.25.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ac 18:8). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

I am sure Paul anticipated that upon leaving Corinth he would need to write to them a letter filled with pastoral counsel about how they were to live as followers of Jesus Christ in a city like Corinth. This he did five years later. His overall theme is the one I identified by the title of today's homily:

Don't Corinthianize, but Christianize your Life!

Let's now look at verse 1 and 2:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes

Notice how Paul refers to himself. He is an apostle, a word that means "one who is sent." Paul's self-conception is that he was somebody sent by God to Corinth to bring the Good News of salvation to them. It wasn't just an accident that he ended up there. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ. And notice who greets the Corinthians with Paul, Sosthenes, the Synagogue official in Corinth who had been beaten up five years earlier. (See Acts 18:17).

Here is the first thing we learn from this letter. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is always relational, whereby people know the call of God on their lives, like Paul and Sosthenes. Now there are of course those called to apostolic ministry, like our bishops, and those in ordained ministry and the religious life. But notice Paul's next move in this letter. Having referred to his call he then writes:

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,

This is a verse full of meaning. Notice that Paul refers to the Corinthians as the "Church of God". Now in Greek the word for Church is *Ekklēsia* and is made up of two words: The verb "Kaleo" means "to call", and the prefix "ekk" means "out of". Therefore the word *Ekklesia* does not refer to the building but to the assembly of people who have been "called out of the world". Although they still live in Corinth, by calling them the Church of God, Paul is stating something of great importance, the City of Corinth is no longer to define how they live. Rather as the Church in Corinth you are those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus. What does this mean? To be sanctified is to understand they were being changed and transformed to discover they were no longer to live however they pleased. They are no longer to Corinthianize their lives but to Christianize their lives. Through their baptism they were now in Christ and because they were now members of his mystical body this was to govern how they lived.

Then notice what Paul says: "you Corinthians are called to be saints". Remember how in the previous verse Paul had said he was called to be an Apostle. Now to the Corinthians he is declaring "you are called to be Saints". Now think about this with me. As contemporary Catholics we use the expression "saint," to refer to canonized saints who the Church has publicly proclaimed as exhibiting holiness and who have died and who are now alive with God in Heaven. That's how we use the word "saint." And it is very appropriate.

However, this is not how Paul uses the expression "the saints." For Paul, the term "saints" is his favorite way of referring to believers on Earth who are living right now, who have been baptized

into Christ. That's all it takes for Paul. You are called to be a saint by virtue of your Baptism and faith in Jesus Christ. When you look at all Paul's letters he never uses the term Christian, not once, to refer to those who believe in Jesus. But over 30 times he calls them Saints. So for Paul, all Christians are saints insofar as we have been set apart through Baptism and made members of the mystical Body of Christ, the Church of God. Now listen to the last part of verse 2:

together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours

Let me point out to you the play on words. Paul is called to be an apostle, the Corinthians are called to be saints, and now Paul says the Corinthians are to call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even in translation it works! The point is that the Church in every place is made up of those who in worship call on Jesus Christ as the one setting the agenda for our lives because he is our Lord and ruler.

Now here is the application. We too are to heed the teaching of St. Paul:

Don't Corinthianize, but Christianize your Life!

This is why yesterday the Bishops of Alberta are following the example of Paul. They too are in the apostolic line of succession. So just as Paul addresses in this letter critical moral issues facing the Church in Corinth, the Bishops of Alberta have issued a letter this weekend raising concerns about the extension of access to MAID (Medical Assistance in Dying) stemming from a decision made by the Quebec Superior Court.

If you receive our email bulletin the Letter from the Bishops is attached. It is also inserted into the print version. If you don't receive our bulletin the link to the letter is available on the St Peter's FaceBook and Website pages. There is also a questionnaire the Government of Canada has made available so we can share our views on MAID and the provision that will expand the criteria of access. Again go to the Website of FaceBook pages to find the link.

As 1st Corinthians teaches, to be the Church is to have an ethical system that is based on very different

criteria from the world. The Bishops explain those differences confronting us with the contemporary moral issue of MAID that makes our experience very similar to the Church at Corinth. We are to live informed by Jesus Christ as to how to approach suffering and death.

May we take the time to act on this important issue by reading the letter, filling out the questionnaire and writing to our MP, as those called to be saints in our city and country in 2020. Later in the week there will be a template later that you can cut and paste into a word document and email your MP if you don't want to compose your own.

Just as Paul did in Corinth so too the Bishops of Alberta are saying to us in regards to MAID:

Don't Corinthianize, but Christianize your Life!