

The readings and sermon for Sunday May 10, 2020. God's peace and blessings to you!

GOSPEL READING MARK 9:34-35

P: The Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark the 9th Chapter.

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

The Gospel is read.

³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

P: The Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

FIRST READING ACTS 18:1-4

¹After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together — by trade they were tentmakers. ⁴Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.

SECOND READING 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-18

¹⁰Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ¹¹For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people

that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. ¹²What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

¹⁸For 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.

Word of God, word of Life. C: Thanks be to God.

SERMON

Today's Acts and 1st Corinthians texts are examples of Paul being a good leader. In Acts we hear of how Paul sought out Jewish exiles from Rome in the city of Corinth. There he befriends a married couple named Aquila and Priscilla of Pontus (modern day northern Turkey, southern coast of the Black Sea). Paul's in with them is their mutual vocation of tentmaking. The text leads us to believe that they were not followers of the Way of Jesus, but were Jews living abroad in Rome. Paul, well aware of what it feels to be persecuted and marginalized seeks Aquila and Priscilla with what we can imagine are words of comfort and hope in the name of Jesus Christ. Paul goes to those in need forming a bond around their common language of the tent-making business. And as in previous cities Paul would get to arguing and reasoning in the synagogue with Jews and Greeks alike about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul would stay in Corinth for 1.5 years. Roughly the same length of time later (1.5 yrs), in the fall/winter of 53/54, from the city of Ephesus, Paul writes the letter we know as 1st Corinthians to the congregation in Corinth. Today's reading is taken from the very beginning of the letter wherein we hear of how

Paul as a masterful leader and pastoral presence handles the focus of faith gone awry. In a nutshell, Paul implores of them to keep their focus on the cross.

In both scenarios Paul is working the Way of Jesus by establishing, repairing and directing relationships in the name of Jesus.

Like John the Baptist before him Paul is deferring his importance. He is will not stand for his baptismal work while in Corinth to be held in higher regard than anyone who has baptized others in the name of Jesus. This is about The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Not Paul, nor Cephas, or anyone else. Furthermore, Paul's weak recollection of who he did baptize when in Corinth might have us consider just how significant baptism was to Paul's theology. Paul writes, *"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. 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."* Paul downplays baptism as the be all and end all of the faith. The act of baptism is not what saves, it is the life lived in response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ while here on earth that glorifies the cross and saves the soul. And to further drive home the importance of how he shared the gospel, he says, and not with *eloquent wisdom*. Paul strove to make the death and resurrection the focus of The Way, of the Christian life, not him, nor any other leader.

The premise that a man's death was the source of eternal life likely sounded foolish when first heard by someone. The notion that this apparent weakness meant strength would appear foolish. This Way of Jesus sounded more like a depressing failure rather than anything else. Paul was good at speaking of the benefits of knowing Jesus Christ, and like I have said in the last few weeks, his story must have been powerful and convincing. And because of that he has to say, *it is not about me, and it is not all about the act of baptism.*

The life lived in Christ is beyond the cult of personality that can surround a person, and is more than an external rite of faith passage. If you desire better, than live the better

life. If you desire keys to the kingdom, the glory of the resurrection...then live with a heart, mind and soul that oriented towards the cross. This is the crux of Paul's argument.

This was and is a radically counterintuitive way of approaching life isn't it? Trusting that a long-awaited Messiah came to earth in flesh as the Son of God to die a shameful death. Hard sell. Kind of like mom, telling you to swallow the horrible tasting cough medicine when you were a kid. *I know it tastes horrible honey, but trust me it will do you good.* Or in the case of baptism, the individual is baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and sealed with the cross of Christ forever.

However, if there is not a loving, correcting, praying and guiding community of faith that surrounds the individual, then as Paul would say, it is being emptied of its promises, devalued. The life lived. The life shared and the continual pointing to the cross as the anchor and unifying source of life, healing and forgiveness is the key to faithful understanding.

Both *aha I get it!* and the slow gradual coming to know Jesus as your Lord and savior are dependent on a life-long process of living in the word of God, living among God's faithful, proclaiming Christ through word and deed, caring for others and the world God made, and working for justice and peace. All these practices point us towards one another in the name of Jesus Christ. "Understanding" the cross and the resurrection is an individual's investment in God's economy of grace, repentance and forgiveness through the trials, errors and joys of human life.

I recently had a conversation with my mom. In sharing what is happening in our lives she said to me, *"Well Steven, we all have our cross to bear.* Got me to thinking of her upbringing as a foster child, a mother of 3, a military wife, cancer survivor and divorcee. A lot makes up who my mom is. And a lot of who she is had made its way into my life by way of association and DNA.

In seminary we put a label on this stuff that comprises who we are. It's called FOOI (Family of Origin Issues). In order to self-differentiate our worldview, culture and personal make-up from others. Being aware of our FOOI helps us to be present,

sympathetic and compassionate without further adding anxiety and stress. For example, it allows the rehabilitated drug addict to be present with the addict in treatment.

As I was talking with my mom I got to thinking of how my upbringing in a stressful house and my wife's upbringing in a single mother home came together in marriage. And now we have kids who are formulating their worldview and outlook on life based on how they have been raised under our roof and rules, but most important of all faith. Add their FOOI to the World's FOOI and we get a lot of pooey. Ha! Ha!

Seriously though, this world creaks and groans in pain...

A young man hunted down in the street while jogging.

An evasive global disease.

Pervasive distrust everywhere.

Hunger.

Anger.

Jesus taught it and Paul set the pace for the gospel. Meeting people where they are at...as exiles. Speaking the language of compassion and understanding over self-preserving disregard. The love of the cross gives us language to faithfully seek and understand our common broken humanity in light of all the world's FOOI.

The cross unites so that we might not be exiles from one another...in our churches church, in our workplaces, in our homes, in God's world.

The power of the cross for us is not some secret knowledge waiting on us to figure out and thus be stamped with God's approval. Quite contrary, the power of the cross is that you have already been saved. What is waiting on you, is someone else. May you heed the direction of the Holy Spirit's guidance to go, grow and participate in bringing the power of the cross and the hope of the resurrection to a broken and fractured world. Amen.