

“Called to Be Saints”: 1 Corinthians (2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A)

1 Corinthians 1:1-3—The Beginning of the Letter

Paul, called by the will of God to be *an apostle* of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, To the Church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, *called to be saints* together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:1-3)

Introduction to 1 Corinthians

1. Authorship: the “apostle Paul” (1 Cor 1:1; 16:21)
2. Date: ca. A.D. 56; during Paul’s two-year stay in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:1-10)
3. Audience: Church of God “at Corinth”
 - a. Port-City, capital of Achaia (in Greece); renowned for immorality

“[Corinth] chains all men with pleasure” so that “all men are equally inflamed by it... [I]t is clearly the city of Aphrodite” (Aelius Aristides, *Orations*, 46.25).¹

“To act like a Corinthian” (Greek *korinthianzesthai*) = to practice fornication. (Aristophanes)²
 - b. Paul started a local church, but did not stay long (Acts 18:1-18)
 - c. Mixed: rich, poor, slaves, men, women, Jews, Gentiles (1 Cor 1:26; 7:21, 18-20; 8:7; 11:22; 12:2)
4. Purpose: address multiple problems:
 - a. Divisions and “schisms” (1 Cor 1-2)
 - b. Sexual immorality (1 Cor 5-6)
 - c. Lawsuits between believers (1 Cor 6)
 - d. Marriage, Celibacy, Divorce, Remarriage (1 Cor 7)
 - e. Idolatry: Food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8-10)
 - f. Liturgical disorder: confusion about men and womens’ roles (1 Cor 11)
 - g. Charismatic gifts: tongues (1 Cor 12-14)
 - h. Confusion about bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15)
5. Lectionary: Ordinary Time always begins with 1 Corinthians

<i>Year A</i>	<i>Year B</i>	<i>Year C</i>
1 Cor 1-4 (2 nd -8 th Sundays)	1 Cor 6-11 (2 nd -5 th Sundays)	1 Cor 12-15 (2 nd -8 th Sundays)

¹ Quoted in Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 125.

² Murpho-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 56.

Called to Be Saints

1. Apostle: “delegate, envoy, messenger” (1 Cor 1:11; cf. *apostellō*)
2. Saints: “called to be saints” (Greek *hagioi*) (= “holy ones”) (1:11)
 - a. “Christians” = *never* used by Paul in all his letters
 - b. “Saints” = used 30+ times in Paul’s letters!! (e.g., Rom 1:7; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1)
 - c. “Believer” = used a handful of times (1 Cor 14:22; Eph 1:19; 1 Thess 1:7)

The Living Tradition

“All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.” *All are called to holiness*: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” [Matt 5:48] (CCC 2013, citing Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* no. 40)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. How would you define a “saint”? What are the implications of the fact that Paul’s favorite way of referring to Christians is not as “believers” but as “saints”?

For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. Gerald Bray, ed. *1-2 Corinthians* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1999).
3. George T. Montague, SM, *First Corinthians* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).