

The Third Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year A)

<i>First Reading</i>	Isaiah 8:23-9:3
<i>Response</i>	The Lord is my light and my salvation
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 27:7, 8, 9, 10
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people.
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 4:12-23 or Matthew 4:12-17

The third Sunday in Ordinary Time continues our journey through Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. And one of the first things that you're going to notice if you look at the reading carefully for today, is that it doesn't immediately follow from last Sunday's reading. You'll see that the Church skips several verses here. So for the second Sunday in Ordinary Time, we read the first three verses of 1 Corinthians. Now we skip down to verse 10, and we read verses 10-13 and then skip to verse 17.

So before I get into the text, I'm using that as an example to point out to you that unlike with the Gospels, where we read almost the entirety of Matthew and Mark and Luke—although even there, there are some exceptions—with Paul's letters, the Church is not reading them continuously, it's what's called semi-continuously. In other words, it's moving through the letter in order, but it's still very selective. It's going to be taking key sections from those letters. So as I'm walking through the letter with you, just keep in mind that the lectionary's often not going to give you all the verses. So one of the things I'm going to be trying to do is put those verses in context whenever necessary to understand what they mean.

So today, the second reading is 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 and verse 17. And this is what it says:

I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chlo'e's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apol'los," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

And then it skips here down to verse 17:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.¹

So, what's going on here? Well, there are a few points to make. First, 1) the main issue Paul's addressing first is the issue of dissensions within the Church at Corinth. The Greek word here for "dissensions" is literally *schismata*. If you hear that word, you're going to hear an English cognate word—the word "schism" that we get from that, or a schismatic. So a schismatic church is a church that has broken away from the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. A schism, literally in Greek, just means a division. So the Greek verb *schizó*...it's the word used "to tear." So if you tore your garment, it would be *schizó*. Or a person who's a schizophrenic has a torn personality. Their personality is torn in two.

So here Paul is saying that there can be no schisms within the Church at Corinth. And the reason he has to say that is because there are schisms already emerging within the Church. Remember, this is a very young Church. Paul himself—as we saw in an earlier video—was the founder of the Church. He was there for about a year and a half planting the Church. But then he had to leave and depart to go to Ephesus because of opposition from the local synagogue leadership that he was facing (and other reasons). So he's writing now in absentia basically, so he's away

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

from the Corinthians. And he's addressing the problem of divisions that are broken out after he left.

And so you can see there, Paul presupposes—this is so crucial—that the Church would be unified...that there would be no schisms, there'd be no divisions. And in fact, you'll notice he even tells what kind of unity he has in mind:

...that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10c)

The Greek word here for mind—*gnōmē*—means “thinking.” So notice...does he just expect the Corinthians to have unity of feeling or a kind of fraternity with one another? Hey, you can believe this, you can believe that. You can think this, you can think that. No, he actually presupposes that they would have a unity of mind. So there's implied here that there are some doctrinal dissensions. There are some doctrinal divisions. There's doctrinal schism amongst the growing Corinthian Church. And Paul assumes, no, the Church would have one mind. That we would be of one mind about the teachings involved.

A third element here is that it's not just dissensions that are broke out and divisions over doctrine. There is also some factionalism going on in the Church at Corinth. And I smile here, because it's just...it's interesting to imagine—it's easy to imagine the early Church doing this, because it was planted by Paul. But if you remember from our earlier video, in Acts 18, after Paul left the Church at Corinth, another famous preacher and teacher showed up whose name was Apol'los.

Now Apol'los, as Acts 18 tells us, was an eloquent preacher. He was an eloquent teacher, and he came from Alexandria, which was basically...I was going to say New York, but New York isn't an intellectual capital. Sorry for any New Yorkers out there. It would be more like the Oxford or Cambridge of the ancient world. It would be cities that were known for their intellectual mark that they had made on Greco Roman society. So Alexandria wasn't just a big city; it was the intellectual capital of the ancient world. It's going to be the city that produces Origen of Alexandria, Clement of Alexandria. It had the world's greatest library. Mmm, sounds good. I'd love to go—the Great Alexandrian Library. In Jewish tradition, it

went all the way back to Ptolemy of Egypt, one of the kings of Egypt who wanted to collect every book that he could possibly collect in the world and was the one who facilitated the translation of the Septuagint of the Hebrew Bible into Greek.

So Alexandria is like the intellectual capital of the world. Meanwhile, Paul is from Tarsus. It's like some podunk city out in the bywater. I mean, it's not really podunk. It's not really that small, it's not like Nazareth, which is just like a little village. But you can imagine here there's a little bit of competition between Paul, the apostle, and Apol'los. Apol'los is this eloquent teacher from Egypt, from Alexandria, but he is Johnny Come Lately. He comes to the Church after Paul. And so what happens is that some people are starting to take sides. Some of the original believers are siding with Paul. Others are saying, "Well, I belong to Apol'los." And still others are saying, "I belong to Cephas."

Ah, now look who comes onto the scene. Cephas is the Aramaic word meaning "rock," and it's also the Aramaic name for (of course) Simon Peter. Now we usually refer to him by his Greek name, Simon—which is Simeon. But Peter is the Greek word for "rock." Cephas is the Aramaic word for "rock." Peter's the Greek word for "rock." So when some people say, "I belong to Cephas," they're saying, "Well, I'm with Peter." And then finally, of course there's always that last group that tries to trump everybody and says, "Well, I just...I belong to Christ. He's above all those other guys."

So it's fascinating here when you look at the factionalism of the early Church. There are a couple things that flow out of this verse: 1) The temptation of Christians to identify themselves with a particular leader. It's very interesting that this is already happening in the first century, because you'll see, for example, if you fast forward to the 16th century and to the divisions that took place at the time of the Protestant Reformation, it's not an accident that as different groups break off from the Catholic Church, they come to be known as—or name themselves after—their founders. So the classic example of this would be the Lutherans and the Calvinists who are named after the German Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, who broke away, and then the Swiss reformer John Calvin, who never received Holy Orders, but himself was Catholic as well.

And so these were schisms, these were divisions within the Church. And the followers of that approach got named after those men. “I’m with Calvin.” “I’m with Luther.” You can hear people almost saying the same kinds of things in a later situation, in a much later situation in division within the Church at the time of the Reformation. So there are certain factions that will just want to go back to the source, which is Christ Himself.

So that’s already all going on here in Corinth. What catches my attention, though, as a Catholic is some people saying, “I belong to Cephas.” Now what’s interesting about that is we don’t have any evidence that Peter, Simon Peter, ever personally evangelized the Church at Corinth. So why would some of the people at Corinth say, “Well, I belong to Cephas”?

One plausible explanation is that Cephas, Peter, is already recognized as the leader of the twelve and the leader of the apostles in the wake of the resurrection. So there’s already a sense of the fact that although Peter himself didn’t personally evangelize anyone at Corinth like Apol’los and Paul did, people can claim him as the one to whom they belong in this factional growth within the Church. So just a little clue there about the Petrine primacy—the idea that Peter was the chief of the apostles.

And you can kind of see Paul going up the ladder...Paul, Apol’los, Peter, and then Christ there. St. John Chrysostom says Paul does that because he puts himself first because he’s humble. It’s a kind of an act of humility. Anyway, that’s just speculation. But the point here is that Paul sees the Church as unified, and he’s completely opposed to this idea of factions. And he makes very clear that the idea of saying, “I belong to Paul” is completely erroneous, because he says:

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? (1 Corinthians 1:13a-b)

Obviously the answer to both those questions is an implicit no. So Christ is not divided. He has One Body, the Church. And you can’t belong to Paul, because Paul wasn’t crucified for you. You see a little implicit idea there of what I mentioned earlier—Paul’s notion of being in Christ. When we are baptized, for Paul, we die

with Christ and we rise with Him. We become united to Him, so that we can say we belong to His Body. We are a member of His Body.

That's not what happens to Paul when someone's baptized. No one is baptized into Paul, such that they belong to Paul. This is why there can't be any factions and schisms and divisions and denominations within the Church, because it's one mystical Body of Christ. We all belong in Christ, to Christ, in Paul's theology of the Church...which scholars call his ecclesiology. *Ecclesia* is just the Greek word for "church." We're going to see over and over again—Paul has a very robust ecclesiology, a theology of what it means to be the Church...and then of course the theology that flows out of that for what it means to be a Christian.

And for Paul, what it means to be a Christian is that you belong to one church, and that you are all united in the same judgement and in the same mind. Now you might be thinking...it might be in the back of your mind, "Now wait a second. Isn't that what Catholics today say? 'I belong to Cephas.'" But not so. If you look at the context, notice...what are the people in Corinth saying? "I belong to Cephas—not Paul." "I belong to Cephas—not Apol'los." In other words, it's setting up a Peter faction.

But that's now what the Church does, because the Catholic Church...I say that I'm under the authority of Peter and all twelve apostles. We don't pick a particular apostle and align ourselves with them. We put ourselves in communion with and under the head of all the apostles, Peter *and* the twelve. That's not what's happening in Corinth. What's happening in Corinth is people are saying, "I'm with Peter—not Paul" or "I'm with Paul—not Peter." And it's the right in what you affirm but wrong in what you deny that's always the mark of schism.

Now the next point of the passage here...the lectionary skips down to verse 17. In this case, it's a little misleading the way it does this because it sounds like Paul is trashing Baptism here. So he says, after saying where you baptize in the name of Paul, he says:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1 Corinthians 1:17)

Alright, so what's he talking about there? I've had several students be troubled by this and ask me, "Well, Dr. Pitre, I thought Baptism...it's instituted by Jesus. He says it's necessary for salvation. That's the whole point of the Great Commission—go into all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28). Why does Paul say, 'He did not send me to baptize'?"

Well, this is one of those times where writers like Paul will use hyperbole to make a point—an exaggeration to make a point. And you'd actually be able to see this easier if the verses that were left out were there. So let's read that in context. If we just back up a few verses to verse 13, in the lectionary it says:

...were you baptized in the name of Paul?

And then it skips these verses where Paul says:

I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Ga'ius; lest any one should say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Steph'anas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any one else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel... (1 Corinthians 1:14-17a)

So notice in context there, the reason he's relativizing Baptism is not because there is anything wrong with Baptism. Paul himself engaged in Baptism. Notice he baptized whole households, which would include not just the father and the mother, but children and servants as well. Another little clue about the Baptism of children—probably including infants—in the letter from Paul.

But what he says here is, I'm thankful I didn't baptize any of you except these few people, so that no one would say that they were baptized in my name. In other words, the fact that Paul baptized them was fostering the factionalism among the Church. So it seems in context that some people are saying, when they say "I

belong to Paul,” what they mean is “I was baptized by Paul.” Or “I belong to Apol’los”...they might mean “I was baptized by Apol’los.” And so Paul is saying, “That’s not how this works. If you’re baptized, you’re baptized into Christ, so I’m glad I didn’t baptize anyone except a few of you.” And I love that he says here, “I don’t remember who else I baptized.” He can’t keep it straight. I like that he’s kind of forgetful. As a professor, that’s somewhat encouraging.

And in context what Paul means is, “Christ did not send me to baptize so much as to preach the Gospel. So my primary mission is to preach the Good News to the Gentiles. My primary mission is to bring the Gospel of salvation to...especially to pagans, to those who do not know Him.” And there’s a little bit of an implication here that Paul’s making a dig against Apol’los. Because remember, Apol’los is described in Acts as being very eloquent, highfalutin, uses big words. He’s from Alexandria, he’s got letters behind his name...so he uses these hundred dollar words. Paul doesn’t do that. Well, I mean...he says he’s simple, but try reading the letter to the Romans. But this isn’t Romans, it’s Corinthians. But notice what he says:

...[I came] to preach the Gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1 Corinthians 1:17)

So Paul’s goal is to preach the cross. That’s what he’s all about with the Corinthians. And if you want an analog for this, the best example I can think of is in Acts 6. If you recall and you look at Acts 6, Acts 6 is when there’s a division that breaks out between the Hellenists and the Hebrews among the widows. Some of them are being neglected in the alms that are being given to the poor. And so what happens is the apostles—in Acts 6:2—the twelve apostles summon the disciples and say:

It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

So they end up picking seven men of good repute to engage in the ministry of *diakonia*, service — this is related to the foundation of the diaconate, the service of charity to the poor. Not because charity to the poor isn’t important. Jesus says Himself, if you want to be perfect, give alms. But it’s a division of labor, and it’s

about priority. The apostles' primary commission is to evangelize, is to preach the Gospel. And they delegate the ministry of charity to those seven men who are chosen as deacons.

So the same thing here's true for Paul. What he's saying is, "My primary mission is not to baptize people so they can go around saying, 'I was baptized by Paul.' My primary mission is to preach the Gospel to the nations. I am the apostle to the Gentiles"—in the same way that the twelve there are going to go out to the whole world to bring the Gospel.

Alright, so that's what's going on here in the Church at Corinth, and that's what's going on here in the second reading for today. I just would like to bring this to an end with a couple of reflections from the living tradition and from the teaching of the Church, with a particular focus on the question of divisions within the Church and the issue of unity in the Church.

So the first quote is from St. John Chrysostom. So John Chrysostom is one of my favorite early Church fathers. He wrote commentaries and homilies—really, they're homilies—on all of the letters of Paul, including Hebrews. And I'll be drawing from him a lot over the course of our three-year study of the letters of Paul as we journey through Paul's letters. And in his commentary, his *Homilies* on the letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, Chrysostom is an early witness. He's fourth century AD. He's the bishop of Constantinople, and—late fourth century—and he is very clear that although he lives in the east...that sometimes people think there's an eastern Church and a western Church. In the fourth century, that's not how it was. Chrysostom sees the Church as one Body, and he gets that idea from St. Paul in 1 Corinthians. So this is what Chrysostom has to say about Paul. Quote...this is his comment on the first chapter of Corinthians:

[A]lthough the letter be written to the Corinthians only, yet he makes mention of all the faithful that are in all the earth; showing that the Church throughout the world must be one, however separate in diverse places; and much more, that in Corinth. And though the place separate, the Lord binds them together, being common to all... "I say not then, (so he speaks,) that with Corinthians only, you being Corinthians ought to be of one mind, but

with all that are in the whole world, inasmuch as you have a common Master.²

That's from Chrysostom's *Homilies* on Corinthians, Homily 1, paragraph 2. So notice what Chrysostom's saying there. When Paul speaks about the Church of God at Corinth, he also mentions all of the faithful throughout the world. Because the presumption is that the Church at Corinth isn't an autonomous entity all by itself, but that it is united not just with the churches in Greece or the churches in Greece and Asia Minor, but throughout the whole world. So you see here, Chrysostom annunciating the principle of what we would call the Catholic Church. He doesn't use that term here, but he has an idea that the unity of the Church isn't just a local unity—it's a universal unity.

And I bring this up because...for two reasons. First, in our own day and time, if you grew up in the late 20th or early 21st century, especially in the west, our primary experience of the Church is of division. We're just used to the fact that there are hundreds—if not thousands—of different denominations and churches with different names named after different people. So we tend to get a little comfortable with the reality of schism and divisions. And we can see that that's not Paul's vision of the Church in the first century, and it's not Chrysostom's vision for the Church in the fourth century either. The Church begins as a unity.

Now with that said, I would end just by two points. First, unity does not mean there's no diversity, however. So for example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out in paragraph 1201 and 1202 that in the various regions through which the Church spreads, there is diversity. And you can see this above all in the diversity of liturgical rites. So the majority of Catholics in the world belong to the Roman rite. Sometimes it's called the Latin rite, but there's actually a couple of different Latin rites. But there are other forms of the liturgy—other rites within the Church that are all Catholic. You have the Byzantine Rite, you have the Alexandrian or Coptic Rite, the Syriac Rite, the Armenian Rite, the Maronite Rite, the Chaldean Rite—that's linked...Chaldean is the old name for Babylon. And then the Ambrosian Rite is a smaller rite as well.

² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 1.2; trans. *NPNF1* 12.3

So the various rites are various expressions of the one liturgy of the one Catholic Church in different languages and peoples and different groups. And they actually tend to be associated with different apostles as well, although that would take us too far afield to see some of the historical origins of that. The point being is, unity and diversity are not opposed to one another. What you have in the Catholic Church is diversity of rites, diversity of forms, but they are united in the same mind and the same judgement.

In other words, all these different rites—Maronite Catholics, Byzantine Catholics, Chaldean Catholics, Syriac Catholics, Armenian—they all share the one faith of the Catholic Church. So that's an example of diversity without schism. However, what happens in the history of the Church when you get to the eleventh century with the Great Schism between the west and the east, and then you get to the sixteenth century with the schisms that take place at the time of the Protestant Reformation, is that you have actual not diversity, but division within the Church. You have the unity of the Church being torn so that different groups are no longer in full communion with one another.

And I would end here with a quote from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which is really just a quote from Vatican II. How do we as Catholics look at those divisions? What do we make of the divisions within the Church that last to this day? And I'll just end by quoting the Church's *Decree on Ecumenism*. This is from the Second Vatican Council, quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, regarding people who belong to those ecclesial bodies that are the results of the schisms that have taken place over the last thousand years or so. This is what the Church teaches:

“...it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the People of God.”

In fact, “in this one and only Church of God from its very beginnings there arose certain rifts, which the Apostle strongly censures as damnable.

Alright, pause there. Whenever you see the *Catechism* or Church Father talk about “the Apostle,” they’re not talking about Peter or Andrew or James or John. The epithet, “the Apostle”, is always a reference to the apostle Paul, and that’s in the Catholic tradition. I’m bringing it up...sometimes people think, “Oh, well, you know, Catholics have Peter, and the Protestants have Paul, and the Orthodox have Andrew.” No, no, no, no, no. For Catholics, “the Apostle” is Paul the apostle, and that’s how it’s referring to him here. So when Vatican II says that, it’s actually a reference to 1 Corinthians 1, the passage we read for today—that “the Apostle” censures divisions within the Church as damnable, as this is something that is not acceptable. There are a couple other passages too it’s alluding to. In any case, it says this:

But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church—for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame.” ...“However, one cannot charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities [that resulted from such separation] and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers.... All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church.”³

That’s Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*. It’s a document on ecumenism, paragraph 3—section 3—and it’s being cited in the *Catechism*, paragraph 816-818.

So I don’t know about you, but for me, that’s a very helpful thing. Because the Church once again has a very balanced and nuanced position. On the one hand, it’s clear that Church does not charge the sin of schism to every single individual who was born and brought up into those communities, baptized into the faith of Christ.

³ Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3.5, 1, cited in CCC 816-18

So our separated brothers and sisters—Protestant Christians, certainly Orthodox Christians who have apostolic succession—are Christians and our brothers and sisters in Christ. That’s the way we should think about them and speak about them.

At the same time, the Church recognizes though that these schisms are not part of the divine plan, in the sense that they bring division to the Church. Going back to Paul himself, the Church is one, holy, universal Church that goes back to Christ through the apostles. So in our time of division, we want to continue to pray that the Church would be reunited. We pray for the reunion of all Christians, and that St. Paul’s vision for a unified and united Church would one day come to pass.