

Preaching Christ Crucified (3rd Sunday of Lent, Year B)

1 Corinthians 1:22-25—The Scandal of the Cross

²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but *we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles*, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* (1 Corinthians 1:22-25)

1. Signs: “signs” (Greek) = miracles and wonders (1:22)
2. Wisdom: “wisdom” (Greek) = philosophical insight (1:22)
3. Crucifixion: the scandal of the cross, “the tree of shame” (Cicero, *Pro Rabiro* 16)

²² “And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³ his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, *for a hanged man is accursed by God; you shall not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance.* (Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

[T]he executioner, the veiling of the head and the very word “cross” should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, and his ears. *For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things... [but] indeed the very mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.* (Cicero, *Oration against Verres* 16; trans. M. Hengel; elsewhere Cicero calls the cross “the tree of shame”)¹

4. Stumbling Block: “stumbling block” (Greek *skandalon*)
5. Foolishness: “folly” or “moronic” (Greek *mōria*) (1:23)
6. Christ = the “power” and “wisdom” of God (1:23)

The Living Tradition

John Chrysostom: Vast is the import of the things here spoken! For he means to say how by contraries God has overcome, and how the Gospel is not of man... *The gospel produces the exact opposite of what people want and expect, but it is that very fact which persuades them to accept it in the end.* The apostles won their case, not simply without a sign, but by something which appeared to go against all the known signs. *The cross seems to be a cause of offense, but far from simply offending, it attracts and calls believers to itself.* (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 4.5; trans. Gerald Bray; cf. *NPNF1*, 12:18)

¹ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress, 1977), 44.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (3rd Sunday of Lent, Year B)

1. Why does Paul say that he preaches “Christ and him crucified”? How does the power and message of the cross transcend the demand for “signs” and “wisdom”?

For Further Reading

1. Gerald Bray, ed. *1-2 Corinthians* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1999).