

12th Sunday of Pentecost

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In today's Epistle reading the Apostle Paul addresses the new Christian community established at Corinth.

We know this community well for we spoke of it just a number of Sunday's ago. Remember this community in Corinth was plagued with the spirit of divisiveness, the party spirit, the spirit of disunity. They formed themselves into little cliques or factions. There were some members saying they were followers of Apollos, while others said they followed Cephas, and some were even so bold as to say they were of Christ as if the others were not.

And St. Paul rebuked them for this divisiveness, telling them all to have the same mind, telling them all to speak the same things, and telling them all to be united in their following of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now today the Apostle Paul again delivers another message to the Corinthians, reminding them to stand fast in the Gospel which he first preached to them. And this Gospel, St. Paul says, is nothing other than what he himself received, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day."

For St. Paul and for all the early Christians the Gospel, or Good News, of Jesus Christ was nothing other than the assurance of the Resurrection – the confirmation that sin, death, and the devil had been defeated, and that eternal life with God was now possible, that the Kingdom of Heaven was now open for all willing to enter into it. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, this is the Good News of our salvation. And this is the Gospel, the Good News, which the Apostles carried with them to all the ends of the earth.

Yet if this is the essential Christian message, if this is the core of the Apostles preaching, why does St. Paul feel the need to remind the Corinthians of this? Didn't they know this all already? Why is he writing to them about such an elementary subject?

Well, St. Paul was reminding the Corinthians of the central message of the Gospel for two primary reasons.

First, because the Corinthians were starting to forget the importance of the Resurrection in their lives. They were beginning to forget that true life is not found on this perishing earth but rather with God in the eternal Kingdom to come. And they were forgetting that this life was merely a journey to that Kingdom of God – that they were merely pilgrims on this earth whose destination was the Father's heavenly mansions.

You see when we forget the importance of the Resurrection and the Kingdom to come, we begin to live our lives in a more earthly way. We begin to turn our focus to those things which we have left behind. We begin to strive for the things of the earth.

And then we begin to be overcome by those three main passions which constantly work to destroy us – the desire for pleasure, the lust for power, or the craving for material wealth. And then we find ourselves fighting and arguing with one another, getting angry and bearing grudges, all because we have forgotten our high calling as Christians to live as people dead to the world but resurrected in Christ.

This is what the Corinthians were falling into. And this is what was creating divisiveness in their community. The Corinthians were arguing and bickering with one another about what faction to belong to when their minds should have been on the Kingdom of God. They were minding earthly things instead of looking to heaven. And so, St. Paul reminds them of the Resurrection, the Age to come, and the one true unifying factor the Kingdom of God.

But St. Paul also reiterates this Good News of the Resurrection for another reason, a second reason. That is he reminds the Corinthians that by becoming privy to the greatest news ever revealed to man – that Jesus Christ has overcome death and opened His Kingdom – they bear an extra responsibility. And that responsibility is to become the Lord's Apostles, to be those who share this knowledge of the Resurrection with the world by the way they live and by the words they speak.

And how does St. Paul do this? He does it by giving a list of those who have become witnesses to the Lord's Resurrection, by recounting all those who have received the Good News before them. St. Paul says how the Lord appeared to His followers, to Cephas (who is more commonly known as the Apostle Peter), to the Twelve, to over 500 brethren at once, to St. James the first bishop of Jerusalem, then to all the Apostles, and then last of all to him, for he is the least of the Apostles because he persecuted the Church.

In recounting this historical line of witnesses to the Lord's Resurrection, St. Paul puts the Corinthians in their rightful place as a community of believers which has received the gift of knowing that death has been conquered and that life has been granted. In so doing, St. Paul is reminding the Christians at Corinth of their Apostolic duty to share this Good News with those outside the community of believers. He is calling them to labor for the spreading of the Faith, to make the jump from disciples to apostles.

Now we've spoken about this jump from discipleship to apostleship before. Disciples are those who listen to the Lord's teaching, those who are learning what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ – disciples are beginners in the spiritual life. Whereas Apostles are those who have heard the teaching, they've received the Good News of salvation, and they've put this faith into practice. Apostles have not only heard the Gospel but they've also committed themselves to living it – to practicing everything which the Lord Himself had commanded and fulfilled, and by so doing they draw people to Christ.

You see, what St. Paul was telling this new community in Corinth was that as disciples of the Lord they had two choices, there were two paths they could follow. They could either turn back to the ways of the world, they could seek pleasures, they could strive for power, and they could go after earthly riches – and this would result in the sinful divisiveness of the fallen world which was threatening their community. Or they could live in the light of the Resurrection and look to the Kingdom to come, and by living in such a way they would not only be united amongst themselves but they could also join the ranks of the Apostles – those whose faith was empowered by the grace of God for the spreading of the Gospel.

Now in today's Gospel account, we met a man who was a disciple of Christ, a man who also had this same choice before him. But this man chose wrongly, he chose not join that community who no longer lived for the things of this world because their focus was on the things of the Kingdom of heaven.

And the man in today's Gospel made the wrong choice because he could not part with his wealth, he could not bring himself to walk away from his earthly goods so that he could follow Christ. And he could not do this because he gave little or no thought to eternity, he didn't think about how short this life actually is, and how fleeting its pleasures when compared with the joy, peace, and happiness of eternity with God. And because of this the man went away sorrowful.

This man went away sorrowful, turning back to his worldly riches. While the disciples of the Lord, those who left all to follow Christ, not only gained the true riches, the heavenly riches, but were also transformed into Apostles and ambassadors of the Kingdom to come.

This is because for those who have glimpsed eternity, for those who have seen the Resurrected Christ, for those who have tasted the joy of the eternal kingdom, the world and all its fleeting riches just doesn't have the same appeal. The bonds which tied the man in today's Gospel down to the earth have been loosened by the knowledge that there is more to live than what lies on this side of the grave – there is a Resurrection and there is an Age to Come, and these things are better than gaining the whole world.

Brothers and sisters, we are those people who have tasted eternal life, who have seen the Kingdom of God come with power in the Person of Jesus Christ. We know that a man's life consists not in what or how much he possesses but rather in how closely he follows Jesus Christ. We know that our life here is temporary and that we are pilgrims heading to the Lord's kingdom. All of this is the content of our Faith, and we know it very well.

As disciples of the Lord we know that there are two paths before us. We can choose to turn back to the pursuit of pleasure, power, and riches, or we can leave these things behind and make our ascent to the Kingdom to come. The one path leads to disunity and competition for those things which are fading away, those things which are perishing with this world, while the other path leads to unity and brotherly love in the Kingdom which lasts for all eternity.

We have lived our lives here as disciples long enough, as people who have heard the teachings of the Lord. Let us resolve to become Apostles, to become people whose faith is confirmed and shared by our words and deeds.

For in so doing, we will not only avoid going away unhappy as the man in today's Gospel but we will also rejoice, and rejoice for all of eternity with the community of believers who have become Apostles, sharing the Good News that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and has granted us eternal life. To Him be the glory, together with His Heavenly Father, and Most-holy Good and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!