

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I Samuel 17:32-51; Psalm 9:9-20; Mark 4:35-41; II Corinthians 6:1-13

I Samuel 17:32-51¹ is the conclusion of the story of the conflict between David and Goliath. The story begins with the Philistine army arrayed against the Israelite army, ready to do battle. Suddenly, out from the Philistine camp strides a giant of a man who stands before Israel and bellows, “Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us” (17:8-9). Goliath is proposing that the battle be decided upon single combat rather than upon warring armies – an ancient and hallowed tradition.

Why would Philistia make such a proposition to Israel? Goliath was a giant. According to the measurements provided in this account (vss. 4-7), he was six cubits tall (or 9 feet, 9 inches), wore 150 pounds of armor and carried a 19-pound spear. The Dead Sea Scrolls account of this battle and Josephus in his *Antiquities*² both state that Goliath was four cubits (or 6½ feet tall). Whether 9.9 or 6.6 feet tall, Goliath was a giant of a man to the Israelites of his day, whose men likely were no more than five feet in height.

But King Saul of Israel was also a giant of a man. He is described as being so tall that his shoulders were above the head of the next-tallest Israelite (I Sam. 9:2). That would make Saul about seven feet tall – only two feet smaller than Goliath if the biblical account of the giant’s height is correct, and equal in height if the Dead Sea Scrolls and Josephus are right. The point is that when the Philistines had Goliath present his challenge for one-on-one combat to Israel, they knew that the king of Israel was also a giant of comparable size and could answer that challenge with at least some degree of equality. Thus, Goliath’s challenge is an attempt to draw Saul into single combat with the Philistine giant!

But the author of I Samuel tells us that Saul was as intimidated and frightened by the giant as was every other Israelite (17:11)! He had no more stomach to fight this menacing powerhouse than did any other Israelite. In fact, Saul was so frightened by the giant, that he offered an immense reward in money and status to any Israelite who would take Goliath on – as long as it needn’t be he.

Why was Saul so intimidated by Goliath when they seemed at near-equal height and strength? The reason for Saul’s fear is revealed in a telling conversation between Saul and David. When David tells Saul that he would be glad to accept the giant’s challenge, Saul replies to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his boyhood” (17:33). In other words, Saul is being extremely pessimistic;

¹ The full David and Goliath story is found in I Samuel 17:1-54. The Old Testament lectionary reading for the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time is only verses 32-51, which is the portion of the story dealing with the actual battle between David and Goliath. If you want to publicly read the story of this conflict, but don’t want to read all 54 verses, the following selection of verses will give your hearers the gist of the story without having to hear it in its entirety: I Sam. 17:1, 4-11, 19-23 and 32-51.

² Josephus, *Antiquities*, 6.9.1.

he is looking at the realities of the situation, and is allowing those realities to cause him to embrace the worst possible scenario; he lacks faith in God because he is consumed with fear.

David, on the other hand, is the exact opposite. He replies to Saul's pessimistic assessment of the situation, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth. The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine" (17:35, 37). In other words, rather than being consumed with fear and pessimism, David was confident that he could be used as a vehicle of God's action. He trusted in God, and was therefore capable of looking at the situation and asking, "Why not?" He saw the cup as being half-full rather than half-empty!

The story of David and Goliath is a story of faith and fear. Fear is the stance with which Saul and the Israelite army face the threat of Goliath and the Philistine army. They are intimidated into inaction. But faith is the motivating power embraced by David, because he trusts in God both to deliver him from the threat of death at Goliath's hand and to enable him to conquer Goliath (17:45-47). He recognizes that Goliath poses a severe threat in his height, his strength, and his armor's protection. But David recognizes that he also has an advantage – cunning, mobility and surprise. It is a more equal contest than it appears either to Goliath or to Saul. So David's acceptance of Goliath's challenge demonstrates his deep trust in God to deliver him, and accepting his own demonstrable skills in using a slingshot!

It is also important to note that David's trust in God's deliverance is not expressed in passivity. His is not a pietistic faith. Rather, his trust is lived out in action. David is highly proactive in facing the Goliath threat, for he volunteers himself to meet Goliath on the field of battle, argues persuasively with the king that he should be the one to fight the giant, and even refuses the king's armor. Rather, opting for his cunning and mobility, and the element of surprise, David creates his own battle plan and not only outfights Goliath, but even more importantly, outthinks and out-imagines him. David's faith is acted out in action, but it is action that is permeated by a trust that God will bring him victory. "For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand" (17:47).

There is a striking parallel to the story of David and Goliath and the story of Jesus' calming of the sea (the Gospel lesson for today). Jesus' calming of the sea marks the beginning of a major transition in the Gospel of Mark. Previous to that event, the stories in Mark deal with Jesus' confrontation of the Jewish systems that express his commitment to their reform. Following the calming of the sea and Jesus' journey to Gentile territory where he finds that the Roman "Powers" essentially ignore him, leaving him free to do his ministry as opposed to the constant harassment that he receives from the Jewish religious/political establishment, Jesus makes a significant shift in his ministry. He moves from trying to reform the Jewish establishment to inaugurating the living out of the kingdom of God. That is, for the remainder of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus seeks to build a community that can live out the shalom lifestyle of justice, equity, and relationality before the world. He is no longer trying to reform the old ("putting new wine into old wineskins"), but is creating the new shalom community ("new wine for fresh wineskins" Mk. 2:22).

Likewise, the Goliath story is a watershed event. Before the incident with Goliath, Philistia dominated Palestine, Israel was on the run before Philistia's might, and by choosing Saul as their abortive king, the Hebrews were seeking to build the power that would allow them to compete with Philistia. After the defeat and death of Goliath, however, it is as if the drive to dominate is driven out of Philistia. With the major defeat of the Philistines that accompanied the death of Goliath (17:51-54), that nation is never the same threat to Israel. They are still successful in several pitched battles (including the one in which King Saul was killed – I Sam. 31). But their will to dominate had been broken. From the moment of the defeat of Goliath, Philistia's power begins to wane. And with it, Saul's power also begins to wane, while a new star is rising – that of David's, as over the ensuing years, it becomes clear that he is the man with whom Israel's future will lie!

Psalm 9:9-20 is a part of a larger work: the entirety of Psalms 9 and 10. These two psalms are really meant to be read as one (in fact, both the Septuagint and the Vulgate Bibles combine these two psalms into one – Psalm 9). The device that makes it clear that these are one psalm is that the two present psalms form an acrostic; every second verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet!

The themes of the two psalms complement each other. Psalm 9 explores the reality that self-reliance is not that upon which life is successfully built; instead one must depend upon God. Psalm 10 explores the opposite – that self-sufficient convictions and actions lead to abandonment by God and inevitable destruction. Both psalms insist that this principle is as true for nations as it is for individuals. Thus, Psalm 9 is a fitting psalm to be used in conjunction with the story of David and Goliath – for Goliath was the epitome of a person so convinced of his own superiority and capacity to control life that he could not see the mischief that lay in the stone-pouch of a little shepherd boy who knew that his strength and cunning was a gift from his God!

Psalm 9 deals with God's power and justice, and does so with magnificent lines. Not a very well known psalm, it nonetheless contains some of the most beautiful poetry occurring in the Psalms. Consider these lines:

“The Lord sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He judges the world with righteousness; he judges the people with equity. The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you” (vss. 7-10).

Because the pagan nations (and Israel, if it isn't careful) are only impressed with their own capacity and ability, they cannot easily perceive the destruction that is coming upon them. “The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that they hid has their own foot been caught. The wicked are snared in the work of their own hands” (vss. 15, 16). This is the inevitable fate of those people, leaders and even their political, economic and religious systems that depend upon themselves! For nations and systems caught up in building their own power, satisfying their own greed and centering life upon themselves are people, systems and nations that commit the one sin that God cannot forgive. “The needy shall not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the poor perish forever” (vs. 18). Systems and people caught up in the building of

their own self-reliance and power are systems and people who forget the poor and are therefore forgotten by God.

Thus, the Psalmist concludes, “Rise up, O Lord! Do not let mortals prevail; let the nations be judged before you. Put them in fear, O Lord; let the nations know that they are only human” (vss. 19-20)!

Mark 4:35-41 is the story of Jesus’ calming of the Sea of Galilee. It is one of two remarkable stories in Mark about the disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee in fierce storms (4:35-41; 6:45-53). Because they are such dramatic stories, they draw attention to an intriguing series of cycles that Mark has subtly woven into his story of Jesus’ ministry. The cycles are as follows:

Jesus is seeking to minister in Israelite territory with his disciples. He begins his ministry in Israel through an exorcism in which he casts out of a synagogue the demonic spirit of that synagogue, thus inaugurating a battle with the spiritual forces (“principalities and powers”) behind the religious-political systems of Judaism (1:21-28). The people, seeing this miracle, exclaim, “What is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him” (1:27).

Fame comes immediately to Jesus as a result of this inaugural exorcism. Building on this public esteem (or scandal, according to which side you were on), Jesus then moves into a very public ministry of confronting the religious, political and economic authorities of Israel and calling them to be accountable to the intent of Mosaic Law to “do justice, to act mercifully, and to walk humbly with their God” (Micah 6:8). He also undertakes significant ministry to the people as a sign of what God intended the Israelite systems to be about - teaching the people, healing them, doing miracles and caring for them (1:29 – 4:34).

Experiencing accelerating opposition on the part of Israel’s systems and their leaders, Jesus and his disciples set sail across the Sea of Galilee from Jewish to Gentile territory. On that trip, they face an extremely powerful and chaotic storm that threatens to sink their boat. Jesus steps to the rescue by calming the waters, and the sailing party safely arrives in Gentile territory.

Immediately upon setting foot upon this Gentile land, Jesus is confronted with a demonic spirit in the person of a madman (5:1-20). This extremely powerful demonic spirit announces himself as “Legion”, the name for the primary unit of the Roman army – a fighting unit of about 6,000 soldiers (generally considered invincible). Jesus confronts that demon, exorcises it from the man (who now sits next to Jesus “clothed and in his right mind”) and into a “legion” of swine that run over the cliffs and drown at sea. This, then, is Jesus’ inaugural exorcism in Gentile territory. Just as he had inaugurated his Jewish ministry with an exorcism that demonstrated his power over the Jewish religious and political systems and their “spirituality”, so Jesus had now demonstrated his power in Gentile territory over Rome and their military “spirituality” in his healing of the demoniac.

“The people came to see what it was that had happened”, Mark reports. “Then (once they had seen the now-healed demoniac and heard what had happened to the swine) they began to beg

Jesus to leave their neighborhood” (5:14b, 17). So, rather than carry out a ministry among these Gentiles, Jesus obliges them, and sails back to Jewish territory. But this time, he and his disciples sail over a calm sea. This completes the first cycle.

The second cycle begins once Jesus reaches the Israelite shore. Here, Jesus conducts a number of significant and highly symbolic healings. He raises a dead girl to life (5:21-24, 35-42), and it is significant that this dead youth is the child of a “ruler of the synagogue” – that is, a member of the very religious and political establishment that is opposing Jesus. He heals a peasant woman who has been suffering from a continuing hemorrhage for twelve years that has made her ritually unclean (5:25-34). He sends his disciples out to carry on his mission, which they do successfully (6:6b-13). He faces the violence of the systems, symbolized in King Herod Antipas’ execution of John the Baptist (6:14-29), and rejection by his own townspeople (6:1-6a).

Jesus concludes this phase of his ministry by feeding 5,000 men (presumably there were women and children in addition) through a miracle of increasing loaves and fish (6:30-44), but also recognized that his disciples did not comprehend the spiritual significance of God’s capacity to increase their ministry lying behind the increase in loaves and fishes (6:51-52).

The disciples then take sail again from Israelite territory, crossing the Sea of Galilee to a destination on the Gentile side of that lake. And once again, they run into a major storm – but this time, without Jesus in the boat. They are overcome with fear. But this time, Jesus comes walking to them on the water, calms the sea once again, joins them in the boat and they sail to Gentile territory (6:45-52).

Now the ministry Jesus had conducted in Jewish Galilee is replicated in Gentile territory. He undertakes a ministry of healing and teaching the Gentiles (6:53-56). He undertakes symbolic healings, in which a Gentile woman asks for healing for her daughter from demonic possession and receives it from Jesus with the indication that salvation is for the Gentiles also (7:24-30). And Jesus heals a deaf and dumb Gentile man so that Mark comments, “his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly” (7:35) – obviously meaning that not only was this man physically healed, but that those who had been “opened” by Jesus among the Gentiles would become witnesses to the grace of God throughout the Gentile world. Intriguingly, the only opposition Jesus receives during his ministry with the Gentiles does not come from either the people or from the Gentile political, economic or religious establishment. It comes from Jewish Pharisees and priests who make the arduous trip over to Gentile territory to confront Jesus there (7:1-23).

Jesus’ ministry among the Gentiles then concludes with the miraculous feeding of 4,000 people (8:1-10). There is sufficiency for all, because Mark is careful to point out that there are seven baskets full of bread left over after the people “were filled” (8:8). But also, just as before (6:51-52), the disciples didn’t understand the implications behind this miraculous feeding or what it meant for their ministry (8:14-21).

Following these parallel actions, teachings, healings and feeding, Jesus and his disciples return to the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee (8:10) for the conclusion of his ministry that will carry him

to Jerusalem, to betrayal and crucifixion, and to his miraculous resurrection. And once again, the return is on a calm sea!

The parallelism in this double cycle is remarkable! Consider it. Jesus' ministry is inaugurated among the Jews by an exorcism that confronts the Jewish systems. It is followed by a popular ministry of healing and teaching the people and confronting the Jewish systems. Then Jesus crosses a violent sea and calms it to arrive in Gentile territory. There he inaugurates a ministry among the Gentiles by an exorcism that confronts the Roman systems. He returns over a calm sea. In Israel, he conducts symbolic healings, feeds 5,000 in the wilderness and faces the lack of comprehension by his disciples. He crosses a violent sea a second time and calms it in order to arrive in Gentile territory. There, he undertakes a popular ministry of healing and teaching the people and confronting the systems, conducts symbolic healings, feeds 4,000 in the wilderness and faces the lack of comprehension by his disciples. He then returns over a calm sea. Coincidence? I don't think so!

What is Mark seeking to communicate through this remarkable series of parallel stories? I think the key to understanding Mark's intent lies in the four crossings of the Sea of Galilee. The first crossing from Israel to Gentile territory is violent, with Jesus calming the waters. The return is peaceful. The second crossing from Israel to Gentile territory is also violent, with Jesus again calming the waters. The second return is peaceful.

I believe that what this parallelism is presenting to us is Mark's intent in the writing of this gospel. The Church – the people of God called into being by Jesus – is on mission in whatever situation God has placed it. During the time when Mark wrote his gospel account, the church was primarily centered on reaching the Jewish world with a gospel that Christians believed would set Jews free of the tyranny of their religious-political systems that had now brought warfare upon them against Rome. True, Paul had earlier made incursions into the Gentile world with the gospel. But that effort was still tangential to the primary thrust of the Christianity that sought to be a reforming element within Judaism.

What Mark is proclaiming in his gospel is that, with rebellious Israel now facing almost certain defeat and likely annihilation at the hands of an angry Rome, it is time for Christians to “launch out into the deep” and cross *en masse* into Gentile territory, there to begin work to bring about the transformation both of the Gentile people and of the Gentile political, economic and religious systems with the gospel. Such a proposition may evoke a “storm” in Christians and may seem to threaten the very life of the church by swamping and sinking it. But, in reality, it is a challenge of enormous potential. For if the church reaches into the Gentile world with the ministry of Jesus, it will find a rather-startling reception there. It will be in the Gentile world, Mark is suggesting, that the church will not only find a receptive populace for conversion, but will be able to impact the political, economic and religious systems to act more justly, equitably and relationally than is possible in Israel.

It is in the Gentile world that Christianity has its greatest potential to inaugurate the living out of the kingdom of God, Mark is telling his readers. So, if the Christians will confront the “storms” they feel in such a risky step of faith, they will discover that they will experience a “peaceful

sea” upon which they can return, for they will be responding to God’s call to their next mission advance!

That this is a correct interpretation of these highly symbolic storm stories is given credence by a sub-theme that works powerfully in both stories. We will look at that sub-theme, however, only in the storm story that makes up our Gospel lesson for today (4:35-41).

Mark takes great pains in this story to tell the reader, “A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But Jesus was in the stern (of the boat), asleep on a cushion” (4:37-38a). That’s amazing detail for a story as tightly constructed as this one. Why would Mark want us to know that, even in the midst of a great storm that was pouring water into the boat, Jesus was asleep on a soft pillow, oblivious to the storm around him (and presumably, soaking him)? He wasn’t even aware that he was getting wet – much less, likely to sink!

In the Hebrew Bible, sleep is often used as an image of trust in God (e.g., Psalms 3:5; 4:8). What Mark wants to communicate to the reader is the utter trust Jesus had in God. He knew that he was at one and loved by God (cf. John 15:1-27). And therefore, he could be at peace in even the most threatening and frightening situation. He totally trusted in God for his deliverance.

Not so the disciples. Their cry to him that awakens Jesus is “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” That is a cry of fear, and even of panic (cf. Pss. 35:23; 44:23-24; 107:28-29). What Jesus was calling the disciples to do was to step out (or perhaps in this context, “sail forth”) on faith in God. What they were, in reality, practicing was the crippling emotion of fear. The response of the follower of Jesus to the situations that confront one is an indicator of whether she or he is centered in trusting God or in feeling overwhelmed by the situation.

Jesus awakens, appraises the situation and commands the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the text tells us, “The wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. And Jesus said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” (vss. 39-40)”

The English translation of Jesus’ command to the sea is a weak translation. What is actually written in the original Greek is “Be muzzled!” Jesus is not here advising, wishing or suggesting peace. He is very forcefully commanding – “Put a lid on it!” or “Put a cork in it!” Wind, muzzle yourself! It is a very powerful command in the Greek.

In other words, he who has authority in his teachings (1:22), who has power over the demons (1:27), who is Lord of the Sabbath (2:28), who has the power to forgive sins (2:10) is he who has total authority over nature! He who can bind the “strong man” (3:23-27) of human sin, who can bind the “strong man” of the Jewish and Roman political, economic and religious systems can bind the “strong man” of nature, as well! That is why we who follow him need not fear, even when facing the most outrageous challenge in seeking the transformation of the entire Gentile world! Thus, Jesus’ incredulous question to the disciples, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

The story then concludes, “And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”” (vs. 41) “Filled with great awe” is literally, in the Greek, “feared a great fear”. The problem with translating the statement as “filled with great awe” is to suggest that the disciples were left wondering and filled with a dreadful veneration at what Jesus had just done. Some of those emotions might have been part of what the disciples were feeling. But I suspect that they were more filled with “a great fear” than they were “a great awe”. Given the sharp retort Jesus had spoken to them in the previous verse (“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”), the likelihood is that their emotions are less that of reverence and far more still overwhelmed by fear. The disciples were stunned and overwhelmed by what they had just seen with their own eyes, and they didn’t know what to make of it. They were in a state of shock – but still their dominant emotion was one of fear, not of trust in Jesus. There was still much exorcising that Jesus had to do before the disciples would be ready to carry the life- and systems-transforming gospel to the Gentile world!

II Corinthians 6:1-13 includes St. Paul’s famous line, “See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation” (6:2b). That line tends to confuse people in their interpretation of this passage, seeing it as a call for unbelievers to embrace Jesus as savior and Lord (in fact, that verse is frequently used as a call to conversion). That, however, is not what Paul is talking about here.

One must keep in mind Paul’s purpose in writing his two letters to the Corinthian Church. This church is caught in significant division around four parties – the Apollos Party, the Petrine Party, the Pauline Party and the Christ Party (I Cor. 1:10-17). This has led both to a divided church, intent on proving each other wrong and, consequently, a church that has lost sight of its primary mission: to be the Body of Christ in Corinth working for the transformation of both the people and the institutions of Corinth with the love of Christ. Both of Paul’s letters are focused upon getting the Christians of Corinth to abandon their party spirit, to embrace each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and to focus together on reaching the city of Corinth for Christ and His Kingdom.

What Paul is seeking to accomplish in today’s Epistle lesson is to not to issue a plea for pagans to embrace Christ, but for the Christians of the Corinthian Church to embrace each other. He is not calling on pagans to be converted, but for Christians to become more fully saved³. And “now” is the time to begin getting serious about being conformed to the image of Christ in your treatment of each other. “Be what you claim to be,” Paul in essence is saying. “Truly be a ‘Christ-one’ to each other and to the world of Corinth!” That this is Paul’s intent is clearly seen in the opening verse of this chapter, when he says to these Christians of Corinth, “(I) urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain” – that is, act out what you say you believe.

³ Paul perceived salvation as a process, not simply as a one-time event. Thus, he differentiated between conversion and salvation. Conversion (such as happened to him on the road to Damascus) is the immediate decision by an unbeliever to receive Christ as savior and Lord; Paul’s experience was that this often happened quite suddenly and in a moment of crisis or decision. But salvation was a life-long process of being slowly conformed into a “Christ-one” within a community of “Christ-ones”. Thus, one was at one time saved (that is, converted); one is being saved, and one will one day be fully saved (upon one’s joining of Christ in heaven). Cf. Rom. 4:16; 8:24; 10:9; 13:11; II Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1; Eph. 1:7; 2:5, 8, 12-13; 6:12; Col. 1:4; I Thess. 5:8 II Tim. 1:9; 4:18

Otherwise, you are only appearing to be accepting the salvific work of God (“grace”) in your life!

But why should these Corinthian Christians, of whatever party they might embrace, pay any attention to what Paul says? Why should they take seriously the words of Paul? It is at this point that Paul presents three lists of what it has meant to him to be “a servant of God” to the Corinthian Christians and therefore their “father” in their faith. These three lists present Paul’s claims as to why the Corinthian Christians should take seriously what he has to say.

First, he has endured incredible hardship for their sake and for the gospel’s sake – far greater hardship than any of them have experienced (vv. 4-5). And Paul lists those hardships; they are:

- ? Great endurance
- ? Afflictions
- ? Hardships
- ? Calamities;
- ? Beatings;
- ? Imprisonments;
- ? Riots;
- ? Labors;
- ? Sleepless nights;
- ? Hunger.

Second, God has been at work in Paul’s life over his decades of embracing Christ that has matured him in Christ and has contributed to his spiritual discernment (vv. 6-7). Those virtues of a faithful apostolic life are as follows:

- ? Purity;
- ? Knowledge and discernment;
- ? Patience;
- ? Kindness;
- ? Holiness of spirit (or “the Holy Spirit”; see below);
- ? Genuine love;
- ? Truthful speech;
- ? The power of God;
- ? The “weapons” of righteousness.

Third, by ministering around the Roman (pagan) world, in leading people to Christ and growing them in Christian faith, in planting many churches, and in equipping those churches to engage their cities both evangelistically and in social reform, Paul has experienced the inherent contradictions in living into ministry to others. That building of an experienced-based wisdom needs to be taken seriously by the Corinthian Church. Paul therefore lists the inherent contradictions he has faced in ministry, and from which they can benefit (vv. 8-10). They are:

- ? Being honored and dishonored;
- ? Accumulating both ill repute and good repute;
- ? Being treated as imposters, and yet being true to the gospel;
- ? As being unknown and yet being well known;

- ? As dying to self and yet living for Christ;
- ? As punished and persecuted, and yet not killed;
- ? As sorrowful and yet always rejoicing;
- ? As economically poor, yet making others rich with the “good news”;
- ? As having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

It is such hardships, it is the building of such virtues, and it is the acceptance of such contradictions of doing ministry that Paul and his party have endured so that “you Corinthians” could be won to Christ and the church built up to truly represent Christ rather than one caught up in protecting a competitive party spirit. The main point of this passage is that the Corinthian Christians need to repent of their party spirit and that right now is the ideal time to do so (Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8 to bolster his argument). The passage ends with a most poignant appeal to the Corinthian Church to open their hearts to Christ by opening their hearts to each other – for He has opened His heart to them (vv. 11-13).

Thus, like the Old Testament, Psalter and Gospel lessons for the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time, this Epistle lesson also works with the themes of trust and fear. If the Corinthians continue to fear one another and question each other’s motives, then they will be destined for continued and even deeper division. But if the Corinthian Christians dare to begin to trust each other, they will find that they will trust Paul and his motives more, and even more importantly, they will find their relationship of trust with Christ growing, as well. Thus, by embracing a life of trust and faith, they will be reborn into the church God would have them be.

One final note. In the list of virtues, some translations (e.g., NRSV) state one of the virtues as “holiness of spirit”, while other translations (e.g., ESV) translate vs. 6 as “the Holy Spirit”. This seems confusing. But its confusion lies in the ambiguity of the Greek. What Paul wrote in Greek can be equally and legitimately translated “holiness of spirit” or “the Holy Spirit”. So what did the apostle mean?

What the context tells us is Paul’s intent is that the manifestation and existence of a virtue such as love or holiness or patience is evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in that person’s life and ministry. It is the Spirit that brings power to Paul’s preaching (which then, in turn, convicts people of their sin – cf. John 16:8-11) and that provides for Paul the spiritual gifts that he needs to carry out his ministry (cf. I Cor. 12:7-11). Thus, by presenting his argument this way, Paul is saying that any power or virtue in himself or any spiritual gift that is manifested in his ministry is not there because he has developed them. They are there because God has chosen to bless him with those gifts in order to enable him to be of use to God as God intends. Thus, his “holiness of spirit” as well as his “zeal”, his “persuasive capacity” and his “patience” are all gifts to him from the Holy Spirit in order that he might be used more effectively by God. Thus, either translation is accurate – for it is all gift from God!