

The Year of St. Paul

The First Letter to the Corin-



First Letter to the Corinthians---Part 4

In the twelfth chapter, Saint Paul discusses the variety of spiritual gifts and the variety of forms of service within the Christian community. In particular, Paul mentions “the expression of wisdom,” “the expression of knowledge,” faith, the gift of healing, the gift of miracles (described as “mighty deeds”), the gift of prophecy, the gift of the discernment of spirits, the gift of a variety of tongues, and the gift of interpreting tongues. However, Paul is quick to point out that all of these gifts are distributed to various people by the one Spirit. One of these gifts listed by Paul is a gift that all Christians have received---faith. These assorted gifts and forms of service have their origin---not in human effort---but in the graciousness of God.

Paul then continues with an analogy, comparing to the Christian community to the human body. He makes clear that every member of the Christian community has a specific role in the Church, just as every part of the human body has a specific role in the body’s overall health and functioning.

Paul stresses that every Christian is a member of the Body of Christ, the Church, and that every Christian has been baptized in the one and the same Body of Christ and in the one and the same Spirit. Paul thus concludes that Christians, collectively, make up the Body of Christ and that each individual Christian is a genuine part of that Body.

In the thirteenth chapter, Paul presents an especially attractive description of love: “Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” Then, after an interlude dealing with things that will pass away, Paul

concludes his description of love with, “So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

In the fourteenth chapter, Paul urges the Corinthians to pursue love.

This encouragement from Paul to live a life of love is a logical conclusion to his description of love in the preceding chapter.

Paul then urges the Corinthians to strive for spiritual gifts, such as, the gifts that he points out in the thirteenth chapter. While it is understandable that no one person receives all the various gifts, Paul is urging the Corinthians to seek these gifts for the purpose of using them for the benefit of the Christian community in general. Incidentally, it can be presumed that the “striving” for these gifts amounts to asking for them from God in prayer.

In regard to gatherings of Christians, Paul writes that women should keep silent, that women are not permitted to speak in the churches, and that women should ask their husbands at home if they have any questions. Paul’s reason for writing this is his understanding that “it is improper for a woman to speak in the church.” The term “improper” indicates that this was not a part of the Christian belief. Instead, the culture at that time did not tolerate letting women speak in public places, including public places where people gathered for prayer.

In the fifteenth chapter, Paul reminds the Corinthians that, during his previous visit to their city, the most important part of the gospel that he preached to them focused on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Paul emphasizes that this gospel that he preached was nothing other than the gospel which he

GOD FIRST

Year Three, Part 17

November 23, 2008

himself had first received.

At its core, the gospel proclaimed by Paul was this:

(1) that Christ died for our sins, (2) that He was buried, (3) that He was raised from the dead, and (4) that He appeared afterwards to a number of people, including Paul himself.

Paul describes himself as the “least of the Apostles” and not even “fit to be called an “Apostle” because he had previously persecuted member of the Christian community. Stephen is one of the Christians whose death by stoning was supervised by Paul. However, Paul gratefully acknowledges that he is, in fact, an Apostle by the grace of God and that God’s grace had enabled him to toil harder than all of the other Apostles.

Paul then proceeds to explain to the Corinthians how altogether pivotal and irreplaceable is their faith in the resurrection of Jesus. He begins his argument with the erroneous view held by some of the Christians in Corinth who thought that, at the end of the world, there will be no resurrection of the bodies of human beings from the dead. Paul points out that if there is not going to be any resurrection of the dead at the end of the world, then it must be concluded that Jesus Himself was not raised from the dead. Furthermore, if that were the case, then Paul’s preaching about Jesus would be worthless---”empty.” Also, worthless would be the faith of the Corinthians who believed that Jesus had saved them from their sins. In addition, such an erroneous view would also lead to the erroneous conclusion that people who have died have completely perished.

Paul then contrasts the role of Jesus with that of Adam. He states that, just as death became inevitable for every human being as a result of the sin of one human being---Adam, in contrast, resurrection from

the dead became possible for every human being as a result of the power of one human being---Jesus, who is also God.

The end of the world is addressed by Paul as occurring at the sound of a trumpet. At that moment, people who have already died will be raised from the dead with a body that is henceforth imperishable.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to be grateful for Christ, who is the Victor over both sin and death.

In the sixteenth chapter, Paul advises the Corinthians to set aside each Sunday whatever money they can afford as weekly donations for the benefit of the Christians struggling in Jerusalem. He also urges them to be on guard in defense of their Christian faith and to be courageous and loving in their practice of the faith. He then concludes his letter with a blessing: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.”



Points for Reflection:

What gift would you like to pray that God might grant to you for the benefit of other members of the Church? (cf. Chapters 12 and 14)

What role in the Church would you like to have? (cf. Chapter 12)

What part of Paul’s description of love appeals to you in a special way? (cf. Chapter 13)

What thoughts do you have concerning the way in which Saint Paul links the resurrection of the body at the end of the world to the resurrection of Jesus? (cf. Chapter 15)

What are your thoughts concerning the role of Christians in making donations to the Church? (cf. Chapter 16)