

The Year of St. Paul

The Second Letter to the Corin-



Lessons From Corinth

Are there problems in the Catholic Church today? You bet. We could enumerate a long list of them starting with the millions of Catholics who don't have an adult understanding of their faith, don't attend Mass or surrender the teachings of the Church to the lures of secularism, materialism and politics. Many Catholics don't understand or refuse to acknowledge that the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death cannot be reduced to the whim of individual 'choice.' These and other points of contention have lead to strife and dissention.

To be sure, these are challenging times. Yet, we must avoid the temptation to look at present circumstances as something wholly new within the Church. To engage the difficulties of the present we must have an understanding of the past so that we

Outline of Second Corinthians

- (I) Introduction: Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-11)
- (II) Part I: Paul's Defense Before the Corinthians (1:12-7:16)
 - His Sincerity in Deferring His Visit (1:12-2:11)
 - His Ministry (2:12-7:16)
 - The Recent Journey to Macedonia (2:12-17)
 - Testimonial (3:1-3)
 - Comparison of the Old and New Covenants (3:4-18)
 - His Sufferings and Motives (4:1-5:21)
 - Paul Shows His Love and Exhorts the Corinthians to Love (6:1-7:1)
 - His Delight at the News From Titus (7:2-16)
- (III) Part II: Collection for the Church in Jerusalem (8:1-9:13)
 - Give Generously as Do the Macedonians (8:1-15)
 - Recommendations of His Representatives (8:16-9:5)
 - The Rewards of Generosity (9:6-15)
- (IV) Part III: Paul Confronts His Adversaries (10:1- 13:10)
 - Paul Is Not Weak; He Glories in God (10:1-18)
 - Paul Praises Himself to Defend His Apostolate (11:1-12:13)
 - Announcement of His Coming Visit (12;14-13:10)
 - Conclusion: Appeals, Salutations, Blessings (13:11-13)

*Outline from "The Jerome Biblical Commentary"
Prentice-Hall 1968*

may persevere with confidence in God's providence and have faith in the promise of Christ that the gates of hell shall never prevail against His Church. (Matthew 16:18) The Holy Spirit is forever with and active in the Church and we can see this evidence of God's grace at work in many aspects of the life and people of our own

parish. It's not by accident or luck that the Catholic Church is still here after 2,000 years.

So, where do we start to understand these past challenges? The best place to start is in Scripture where we find confirmation of the fact that difficulties within the Church have been present from the very beginning. There is no more clear evidence of this than the Church at Corinth which contained all the drama and characteristics of a first century soap opera. Yet in his 2nd Letter to the Corinthians we see a very human and often emotional St. Paul persevering in his faith and in his love for both Christ and the Corinthians who have hurt and disappointed him in many ways.

St. Paul founded the Church at Corinth and deeply cared for them as a father towards his children. Yet, their contentious and rebellious ways seemed at times to anger him or drive him almost to despair. In fact, although we have two preserved letters of St. Paul to the Corinthians, there seems to have been at least one lost letter commonly called "The Letter of Tears" which St. Paul possibly references in 2 Corinthians 2:4. And should one think that St. Paul's letters resolved all the problems at Corinth, less than 40 years after St. Paul's efforts, Pope St. Clement of Rome had to write a long, beautiful and frank letter to the Corinthians when fierce dissensions had broken out within the Corinth church resulting in their deposing their clergy. Pope St. Clement told them this was unacceptable and his letter seemed to resolve the situation. For a long time afterwards the Corinthians cherished the letter he wrote to them and

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even considered it part of Scripture. You can read Pope St. Clement's letter to the Corinthians at this web site. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1010.htm>

Corinth In The First Century

Perhaps a good way to visualize Corinth is to recall the bar scene from the movie Star Wars. The bar was a way station which attracted varied creatures with different temperaments from worlds spanning the universe. Corinth was similar. Being the major seaport in Greece and a port of call on the ancient east-west sea route it attracted people from many different civilizations and moral backgrounds. Corinth was famous, or infamous, for rather loose living which at least partly explains the difficulty St. Paul had in establishing Christian morality and order within the church there.

St. Paul's Time In Corinth

On his second missionary journey around 51 AD St. Paul landed in Corinth and eventually established the church there. (Acts 18:1-18) He met and lived with Aquila and Priscilla, both Jewish Christians, and worked with them as tentmakers. St. Paul preached the gospel to the Jewish community in Corinth and gained converts from among both Jews and Gentiles. He also ran into trouble with some Jews who brought charges against him unsuccessfully. St. Paul remained in Corinth for a year and a half.

Date and Reason For Letter

The second letter written to the Corinthians was composed by St. Paul most likely during the autumn of 57 AD while staying in Macedonia. St. Paul had received reports from others regarding the immorality, dissention and increasing hostility towards St. Paul personally. Given these circumstances, in 2 Corinthians St. Paul's emotions and hurt are very close to the surface which makes this letter perhaps

Wheel taken from "Reading the Acts, Epistles and Revelation by Kingsley E. Dalpadado, OMI, St. Paul Editions

more personally revealing than his other writings.

Things To Consider

As Catholics we often think of the saints and ask for their prayers. But, do we too often think of them as plaster statues rather than real human beings with joys and struggles, victories and failures? In what ways can St. Paul's personally revealing 2nd letter to the Corinthians help you to understand that the saints may have had more in common with you than you may have realized?

The Corinthians greatly disappointed St. Paul and were even attacking his character. Yet, St. Paul persevered in his love and care for them. How can you persevere in love with those who have disappointed you or speak falsely of you?