

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 15, 2023

My dear friends in Christ, today I want you think back for a second to the time you were in high school. For some of us that was a long time ago, and for others, that was much more recent (or still yet to come). School has changed a lot over the years, be it in Ghana or here in the States, but one thing hasn't. Students are assigned books to read pretty much every year, modern fiction, non-fiction, classics - all sorts of stuff. I was actually one of those kids who actually tried to read the books I was assigned to read. I enjoyed reading some of them then and I still do.

But the truth is that I wouldn't read every word. No, I always omitted one particular thing (especially if it was lengthy and boring). And what was that? The introduction. I always skipped over it. In my mind I thought all the good stuff was what came after. The introduction seemed pointless and waste of time to me. It wasn't until much later that I came to realize not just the importance of most introductions, but also that it wasn't just fluff. There is often some really good stuff in them.

There is usually something similar going on in St. Paul's letters. And today is no exception. We just heard the beginning to his First Letter to the Corinthians, and as St. Paul often does, he includes a more lengthy greeting, a kind of introduction to what is to come. And while we today in modern times would simply start with a "Hi" or a "Dear" or a "To Whom It May Concern", St. Paul chooses otherwise - he chooses not to simply say "To the Church in Corinth", but rather to say much more. And to the community at Corinth he says something of great importance right in his first few lines. He writes,

**“. . . to you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus,
called to be holy, . . .”**

And for St. Paul, this isn't simply lofty, religious language. It's a matter of identity. St. Paul is making sure that they don't ever forget who they are or what they are called to be. And he doesn't wait for later in the letter to

bring it up. Rather, he sets the stage right from the beginning. Who are the people of Corinth? People called to be holy.

Holiness is one of those words we throw around a lot when we start talking religion. Or at least religious leaders throw the word around a lot. And there are probably all different sorts of ideas as to what holiness actually is. It's kind of like the word "love". We know it when we see it or experience it or are longing for it. But it can be hard to put into words. The thing is, defining it might not be as important as wanting it, for defining it is, in the end, just words, but wanting it might be the only thing standing in the way of our becoming it - becoming holy, as our God is holy.

Maybe we don't want to be holy because we think it's boring, or rather, holy people are boring people. Maybe we don't want to be holy because we think we'll never fit in if we're holy, that we'll always be on the outside, either ignored or ridiculed. Maybe we don't want to be holy because we think it means we can never have fun, never enjoy life. Maybe we don't want to be holy because it's simply too hard, demands too much, costs more than we are willing to give. Or maybe we don't want to be holy because we don't think we can be.

Holiness is for other people not me. And so many of us maybe don't really want to embrace that calling, embrace the holiness St. Paul called the people of Corinth to strive for. And so too often we never keep growing in holiness, never move closer to being the beautiful people God created us to be. We just remain stagnant, remain the same, keep the status quo.

We just heard St. John's account of Jesus' encounter with John the Baptist. This is often considered to be the moment when Jesus embraced his calling in a more visible way, a kind of doorway from the private Jesus to the public one - a stepping onto a path that would ultimately lead him to Jerusalem and lead to the salvation of the world. Yet, this wasn't a moment when Jesus became someone he hadn't been before or someone

he wasn't. Rather, it was a shining forth of the deepest reality of who he was. And John could see it. And others would come to see it too.

Can people see our calling?

You see, when we hear about the Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove from heaven, we should never presume that that Spirit was somehow different from the one we believe has come to us, and who continues to dwell within us. It is the same Spirit. Our God is not distant. He is imminent. He is close to us. He is with us. He is the God who created us in his own image and likeness. He is the God who became one of us and lifted up creation for all time. And he is the God whose Spirit remains our advocate and guide, infusing us with God's very life, God's very grace.

And so holiness at its core is a making visible of the God within, a radiating of God's love and mercy and compassion to a world who desperately needs to see it, needs to feel it, needs to experience it. The more others can see God within us, the more sure we can be that we are on the right path, that we are growing in holiness - growing closer to being men and women "fully alive", people who are exactly who God created us to be. And there's nothing boring about that. There's nothing not fun about that. There's nothing somber or aloof about that. And there's certainly nothing impossible about that.

**“. . . to you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus,
called to be holy, . . .”**

May Paul's words echo in our hearts. And may the Spirit of God not be hidden within us, but be obvious to everyone around us.