

Sexagesima 2024

Sermon-Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

2 Cor. 11.19-30 St. Luke 8.4-15



*"You people are so smart and wise, you gladly tolerate fools"...*tough words from the man who knew how to dispense tough love, with what NY Times writer and commentator, David Brooks, called "withering sarcasm".

We sometimes hear someone say they do "**not** suffer fools gladly"...the emphasis on the negative. What they are saying is they don't tolerate being around people they think are stupid or have stupid ideas. We might have called someone a fool or been called a fool ourselves.

Our friend, Paul, never minced words. But he uses the word "fool" in a very different way than we do in common speak today. In the New Testament, the word translated in the KJV as "fool" comes from the Greek word *moros* from which we get the word "moron". Paul uses the word "fool" to refer to the "false teachers" in the Church in Corinth...those who are actively working against God and Church leaders.

We read in the Epistle how some people within the Church in Corinth were making fun of Paul and his teachings. They were boasting of their own accomplishments. The leaders of the Church let these "false teachers" berate Paul and themselves. They laughed along with these "false teachers". In doing so, they made themselves look like fools too.

Paul had a vested interest in the Corinthian Church...he founded it. He saw his work being ridiculed by self-serving people within the church, attacking his character...teaching false doctrine and engaging in outrageous behavior...all being tolerated by "wise" people who knew better.

Character assassination, false teaching and immoral behavior in the Church leads to spiritual death. Paul tells the leaders they cannot expect to win the spiritual battle against the "false teachers" by resorting to boasting about their own accomplishments. Paul then takes his sarcasm to another level and "boasts" about his own accomplishments.

Paul, of course, really isn't boasting about himself. He says if we must boast, we must boast about our weakness and how much we depend on the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus." Paul concludes his letter by saying he speaks with authority and he is not a liar. Everything Paul says is because of his love for the churches under his care.

We need to pay attention to our friend, Paul. Partisanship, hostile confrontation, viscous gossiping, self-serving pride, misdirected anger, hatred or false teaching has no place in Church. We work hard at Saint Joseph Parish for the same thing Paul worked for all his life...to make certain the Church remains healthy and full of life.

Paul recognized just as did Jesus did some people like to cause problems and be the center of attention. The challenge within the Church is to avoid destructive behavior and to try to correct is when we see it. However that is done...it must be done out of love and compassion...not out of prideful superiority.

Paul's mission was to plant churches and watch them grow. He experienced successes and failures in the work he did for Christ. The Church is a mixed bag of the real world. We pray people will hear the message and the Church will grow...and we must never be discouraged...we must never abandon prayer...we must never give up hope...even when confronted with failure.

Jesus knew how people would respond to the Good News about salvation. The parable of the farmer who went out to plant grain is a story about God's Kingdom...the Church's role in spreading the Good News. Some people get the message and happily respond...others get distracted by other things...others reject it outright. There will be successes and failures in the work we do. The message is we have to keep planting and pray for a rich harvest of souls.

Tolerating fools and foolish behavior is not smart. But in Matthew's Gospel Jesus warns us not to be too hasty to call someone a "fool". Only God truly knows what's in their heart. We are called to be wise stewards and smart farmers...planting God's word and watching it grow.

