

## **1 Corinthians 1. 10-18**

Sunday 22nd. January 2017

Fr Michael

### **“Divisions in Corinth”**

“Now I must appeal to you, my brothers and sisters, through the name of King Jesus our Lord, that you should all be in agreement, and that there should be no division among you.”

So said Paul to the Christians in Corinth. And we all sigh and say if only it could be so! But we human beings are just not like that; you might say, we are all created to be individual, different, each with differing talents and gifts, we cannot be of one mind because we are all made distinct from one another. Yes, we are all going to have differing opinions, likes and dislikes, in politics, in artistic taste, in football teams, in food and also in religious preference.

But that is not what Paul was attempting to address in his letter to this fledgling Christian community. Corinth was an interesting city, it had been destroyed by the Romans almost 200 years before this time and then rebuilt by Julius Caesar 100 years later. The city prided itself on being Roman while being on the Greek mainland. The buildings were Roman in style and the planning of the city was elegant and its culture Roman having special links to the capital, to Rome itself. It hosted visiting philosophers and intellectuals and was therefore a cut above the average neighbouring town or city. People would turn out in great numbers to hear the latest thinking of the day or to hear a debate between those with important wisdom to impart. They in their turn would hotly debate the arguments and reached differing conclusions on the latest teaching. I am sure you can imagine the kind of society that this created. I wouldn't necessarily say that they thought they were better than others, but I am sure you can imagine the mind set that such a community might well be prone to having.

These teachers and philosophers were keen to have followers or ‘disciples’ who would promote their way of thinking and hence that mind set became part of the young church of Corinth and its way of debating faith in Jesus Christ. They had been fortunate in having three great teachers of the faith dwell with them for a while, Paul, Apollos and Cephas; or in other words Peter himself, our patron saint. Paul had been the first to tell them of the gospel of Jesus Christ; such a passionate man, man who had been ‘born again!’, but not long afterwards Apollos arrived and he was a great orator and very learned in the scriptures. Apollos could teach and explain the faith very powerfully and this some of the Christians took too. “I like his style,” one might say, “I would love to be like him.” These were the role models of the

day in Christian terms - perhaps Alpha's Bear Grylls for the first century! Or perhaps a first century Rowan Williams for those who like a deep argument with something to get your teeth into.

And then there was Peter, with his 'no nonsense' approach, someone who had spent three years with Jesus from his calling, (that we heard of in our gospel reading), right through trials, denials and the death of Jesus to his witnessing the resurrection and being forgiven. His first hand experience must have been incredible to hear, and to just sit near him and feel 'sort of' close to the Messiah, irresistible for those who value spirituality over theological debate.

So there were groups in Corinth who preferred one style of teaching over another and the inference is that they were beginning to squabble and be divisive. Factions are not good for a church and to make matters worse there was a group saying - "we are the real Messiah people," - only they knew what Jesus thought and would do! The church has always had divisions, as we can see, right from the first days and Paul was trying to hold it all together and this letter is very much about him saying that it is Jesus that matters and everyone from the youngest new convert right to a senior apostle is part of the body of Christ. It is the body of Christ that should concern us and as we gather we become that body again each time we meet. All the separate parts come together - all our different likes and dislikes come together as one - found in the body of Christ on earth - the church. We cannot play off one faction against another squabbling over who is right, we can only be. Be Christ's body here on earth, being his hands to care and heal, being his feet to take the gospel out into the world 'fishing for people,' and being his voice to spread the love which is at the centre of the gospel message, that God is love and those who abide in him abide in love.

We can only pray that the people who are currently walking in darkness will see a great light, that a child has been born for us, a son given to us - Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace - Jesus of Nazareth the child born in a stable yet 'King of all the world.' That's who we follow, our first love and God willing, our last love. Amen.