

Okay, we have this familiar Temple reading. Let me say from the start, Jesus would not come at our gift shop or chase away the Girl Scouts for selling cookies at church! What I would like you to do is think of a professional ballpark and the Temple. Once you are inside, everything outside is negated. You order a beer and the guy tells you, "\$8.00". "Whatttt?" Or a burger and fries, \$15 dollars. "Whattt?"

This is similar to what was taking place in the Temple. These poor folks would bring in their sacrifices, only to be told that they were imperfect and that they would have to purchase those from the Temple – at inflated prices.

People would bring what little money they had, and it would be exchanged with the temple money at huge differences of profits. This really upsets Jesus, seeing the poor and the weak being taken advantage of and so he goes after those responsible for this.

John places this story at the start of his gospel, showing us that Jesus is here to speak out for the weak, the little people.

I would like to look at our second reading and expand a bit more from what you heard read today. Paul takes Jesus' cause for the poor and the weak and expands upon it. What Paul does is flips things upside down. What one might have at one time is considered foolish, God is wiser. What may have been understood as weak, now is considered as strong through God's eyes.

A little background: In the year 50, Paul decided to start a church, and he did it in a city that was a large business city—called Corinth. After getting the church up and running for a couple of years, he moved on to start other churches. But he eventually got a bad report on what was happening in the first church he'd started, a church into which he'd poured so much of himself. He heard that the people there were having a church fight, splitting in four factions that had arisen in this church:

The first faction said, "We're following Paul." That makes sense. But Paul admitted he wasn't that great of a preacher, so some people kind of dismissed him. After Paul left Corinth, a popular and charismatic figure came on the scene. His name was Apollos. He had a brilliant mind, he was a great public speaker, and he was a scholar's scholar. Then to top that, there was a group that said, "You know what? We're following Peter. That being the Jewish faction, the letter of the law folks. And then some claiming Jesus, or more likely the Jesus they formed him to be.

There are factions, cliques, and groups. There is "us" versus "them." Paul writes a letter, the letter we know as 1 Corinthians. He uses the first half of the letter just to deal with this conflict in the church, because it's bothering him so much.

How does Paul solve this problem of factions? You'd think that he would say, "Excuse me. Remember me? I'm the apostle who started you. So maybe you could all get back under the Paul group."

But he doesn't say that. Instead, he attacks the very fact that there are subgroups at all. The notion that you could live in a church, he says, and have this us/them faction thing going on shows that you have completely missed the way God works.

Hence, Paul basically tries to tell them how God really works. And since we can act a lot like the Corinthians, we'd do well to listen in. The first thing that Paul says about how God works may catch some off guard.

***If you read further in Corinthians, Paul says that God hides his power in those the world considers to be weak people.**

That is not the way we often think, because we want to be carried away, perhaps entertained and with this issue becomes that Church is about us and not the sacrificial worship of God. I wonder about this in some of those mega churches.

Basically, God want's people to learn a little humility. (Less us means more of God.) We can get caught up in the people with talent and public appeal, and sometimes we form followings and cliques around them. Obviously, this is far from what God desires.

In that mind frame, Paul reminds his church leaders of their humble origin: "Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."

+Some of you may have experienced this as kids. The gym coach picks two jocks and tells them to pick members for their team. It is painful, as they go over the most talented and those others are overlooked and picked last. Pretty sad.

However, when God chooses and builds a strong church, he does it with the people that we wouldn't choose. In the ancient world that was the slaves, the women, and the Gentiles. Today it's the outsiders, the voiceless, the refugees and the like.

Why would God do that? Because such people tend to understand how much they need God in their lives just to get by day by day. Because God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things ... and the despised things—so that no one can boast, "I did it my way! It is me, me!"

Think of 5-foot-tall Mother Teresa facing the most powerful men of the world, putting them in their place as they backed away, unafraid to testify in their face for the most needy of the world, the unborn.

+VA Home: I celebrate Mass at the Virginia Home with those who are all in wheelchairs, many of which can no longer use their arms and some who can no longer speak. I experience the power of God in them, as they are totally dependent on others to live, showing me that we should have that same understanding with God and our lives. We need God in everything we do.

+Saint Lawrence, a deacon of Rome, was told to gather all the wealth of the church and turn it over to the roman authorities. Well, he later came before the roman prefect, with the poor, the outcaste and the sick announcing, "Here are the treasures of the church."

+John Paul: I think of John Paul II when he was very old and diseased, which rendered him unable to speak. He represented the voiceless, the elderly, but standing in the balcony, you could feel the power of God as he stood there. That's what it means to say that when we are weak, we are strong.

Hopefully we can see that God hides his power in the weak that we might learn to focus on God. When you realize that, you move from competition to collaboration. You move from pride to humility. You move from comparisons to unity, because you realize that God can use anyone.

Jesus had everything. He had power and divine privilege and divine prerogative, and he gave it all up. He emptied himself and came down until he was beaten, despised, and killed. He was the last kid in the class.

And he did all this to strip away and wreck forever the basis for our comparisons and our competition and our cliques, so that when Jesus formed this new community around himself, it was built on something totally different.

The church is built on weakness, on humility, upon such a community in which all are one and equal. And in that, God's true power is revealed.