

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Epistle, Year A

SEEKING GOD'S WISDOM

1 Corinthians 2:1-12 [13-16]

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Analysis by Michael Hoy

1When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. 2For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. 6Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8None of the rulers of this age understand this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" – 10these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is only God's except the Spirit of God. 12Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. [13And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. 14Those who are

unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. 16"For who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.]

DIAGNOSIS: False Wisdom and Bad Intelligence

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Seeking Wisdom in All the Wrong Places

There are plenty of sages out there. You could find them in abundance in a city like Corinth. And people were tuning in and listening to what it is they were selling. Some of the messages of these sages permeated the church, and not everything these sages were selling was the gospel (who wants something so pure and simple as that?). Our cities and places today are not without that kind of human sophistry that can captivate our eyes and ears. And obviously, we haven't tired too much of buying what it is they are selling, even if it is not really good for us. Paul lifts up how this human wisdom it is also readily being sold by "the rulers of this age" (v. 6). Hmm. And that kind of consumerism is as popular now as it was in Corinth.

Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Foolishness

We have not only let this poison slip in through our eyes and ears (v. 9), but it finds a way to poison our brains and hearts and soul. We may not even realize it. It is that "foolishness", a failure to "understand" or "discern" anymore what is good for us (v. 14), that becomes our faith. And the heart continues to cling to that which it thinks of as godly, and can never get enough of, even as our whole being is weighed down by its burden.

Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Doomed to Perish

Where does it all end? There is an ending. It ends with perishing. And that may be our own personal perishing (in death, which shows its ugly face up all along the buying-and-selling journey); and it may also be our perishing as a whole (for which we are getting increasingly planetary evidence). But it will end. And we can count on God to make sure of it, whether we buy that or not.

PROGNOSIS: True Wisdom and Good News

Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The Power/Wisdom of the Cross

The cross of Christ, however, gives us a no-less-real but alternate ending to this madness of doom. Here, Jesus the Christ makes our ending his own, not simply as one among countless millions, but in order to put an end to the ending—of us! Death will not have the last word for our being! This cross is the “power of God” and “wisdom of God” (v. 5; cf. 1:24) to overcome the final verdict of the end.

Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Faith Resting on This

Even in the nickel-words of St. Paul who knew he was never as eloquent as others (v. 1), faith comes to rest on this promise (v. 5). This faith grasps the power that God gives, through the Spirit of God, who continues to nurture us and feeds us back to health through the faithful proclamation of the gospel and sacraments. Through faith we find our souls restored. We get to have the “mind of Christ” (v. 16) given to us as a gift that helps us “discern” and “understand” where before that was never possible. What ends here is the cycle of being burned out pursuing human wisdom, as we lay our burdens down at Christ’s cross.

Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Living Wisdom for

All in the Wrong Places

What we get to do is share the promise with others. The sages of Christ, who may seem “foolish” to the world (1:20-25), have something not to sell but to give away—as a free gift, even as it was given to them. To be sure, there are plenty of people in all the wrong places and cities and dwellings who have been looking for wisdom; but what they get in Christ and ourselves as living wisdom of his promise is a gift for which they, with us, may cherish the best “mystery” (musterion) of all in the witness (marturion) of all in God’s promising, free, freeing, good news (v. 1).