



Isaiah 8:23-9:3

Psalm 27

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

Matthew 4:12-23

Introduction to the 2nd reading

1. For five weeks (until Lent) Mother Church has us with the first 2 chapters of this letter to the Corinthians.
2. Corinth itself had a minimum of 80,000 people and yet the Christian population at most had 60-80 people. Thus, less than .01% of the population.
 - a. It always amazes me that the gospel even made it out of the first century.
 - b. What was it about the life of the Christians that made their witness so attractive?
3. Corinth itself was a hub of activity, located on a major sea and land route that offered commerce, trade, money, bartering and certainly a plethora of religious cults, from that of the Greek gods (Apollo and Aphrodite), a Roman imperial cult, Judaism, pagan philosophy and much more.
4. Paul is forming a people who must learn to live from a different center or foundation than that of the Corinthian culture. In a city obsessed with self-creation, Paul begins by saying: you did not make yourself, you were made, named and claimed by God.
5. Last week he began with the introduction of;
 - a. **church**-as gathering or assembly (not as a building, an institution, a leader or even a religious ritual);
 - b. **sanctified** -this has everything to do with the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world
 - c. **saints**- those who live the life for God's purposes
6. Today, we hear his first practical directive. Paul has a zero tolerance for any spirit of division, divisiveness or polarization. The gathering this day needs to hear this message

Homily: Not a Podium, but a Cross

In just a short time, the Winter Olympics will capture the attention of the world. Hosted in Italy, nearly 3,000 athletes from close to 100 nations will gather to compete at the highest level. Each has trained for years—disciplined, focused, and sacrificial—with one goal in mind: to stand on the platform, receive a medal, and be recognized as the best.

Since 1894, the Olympic motto has summed up that pursuit:

Citius, Altius, Fortius—higher, faster, stronger.

Records are broken. Limits are pushed. The podium is climbed.

But for us as followers of Jesus, the platform we aim for is not a podium.

(gesture to the crucifix)

It is the Cross.

That is why, for centuries, Catholic churches have placed the crucifix front and center.

It is our point of reference. Our definition of victory. Our gold medal.

The world forms champions by climbing—higher, faster, stronger.

Christ forms saints by descending—lower, slower, weaker.

Let's return again to Corinth.

Corinth had about 80,000 people—and fewer than 80 followers of Jesus. Less than one percent. No power. No prestige. No influence. And yet, their witness was so compelling that the Gospel spread throughout the ancient world.

What was it about their lives?

LOWER

The followers of Jesus were known for their generosity.

They looked around and noticed the poor, the widows, and those in need—and they responded. Not because they were required to, but because they chose to. The Roman government could impose laws and collect taxes, but it could not command people to share.

Yet this is precisely what the early Christians became known for: a courageous, free generosity—even toward those who were not their own. Their care for the vulnerable became a powerful witness.

They lived lower—not beneath others, but **with** others.

So the question for us is simple:

Do we live from a spirit of generosity, attentive to the needs around us?

SLOWER

What also set them apart was their understanding of time.

They knew life itself was gift. They did not ask to be born. They did not earn another day. Everything was received. And when someone gives you a gift, the proper response is gratitude.

So they lived their lives as a thank-offering to the Lord.

They also guarded the Lord's Day.

While the culture around them was consumed with work, performance, possessions, and the desire for more, Christians stopped. They gathered. They worshiped. They ordered their lives around God, not productivity.

Sunday quietly proclaimed:

I am more than what I produce.

My life belongs to God.

That same movement happens here. When you come forward to receive Communion, you open your heart so that Christ may live in and through His Church.

WEAKER

Finally, there was their relationship to suffering.

The early Christians experienced hardship, struggle, and chaos just like everyone else—but their response was different. They united their sufferings with the Cross of Christ. They endured their share of hardship for the sake of the Gospel.

And something remarkable happened.

The more they suffered—even persecution—the more compelling their witness became. They knew there was more to life than this life. They faced suffering and even death with confidence in the mercy of God.

So true was this witness that the Church would later say:

the blood of the martyrs became the seed of faith.

Yes, the Olympics are upon us, and we will be captivated by human excellence and achievement.

But here, in this place, we are drawn to a different kind of glory.

Not a podium—but an altar.

Not medals—but mercy.

Not higher, faster, stronger—but lower, slower, weaker.

Because here, Christ does not ask us to prove ourselves.

He asks us to receive Him.

And as we come forward today, may this Eucharist shape our lives—
that we may live generously, worship faithfully, and endure hopefully,
until the world recognizes in us
the quiet, unmistakable fragrance of freedom.