

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 19, 2025

Welcome back to the Ordinary Time, the longest of the Church Seasons! This is our base line and our normal season, the other seasons celebrate something like Christmas and Easter or anticipate something like Lent or Advent. But the good old Ordinary Time is when we cover most of the day-to-day stories of Jesus' life: preaching, using parables, doing "mighty works," with the day-to-day struggles and successes.

We begin this week with a wedding in Cana where Jesus reveals his Divine power by transforming water into wine. But my focus today is on St. Paul's letter to the Christians at Corinth.

St. Paul in the second reading reminds the members of the Corinthian Christian community and us, that each of us is endowed by the Holy Spirit with distinctive gifts. The Holy Spirit gives each of us particular gifts special to us for the benefit of others. Since the Holy Spirit is the very Life of God, the outpouring of the Spirit and His charisms upon us who believe in Jesus is a participation in the Life of God.

I'm sure many of you enjoy candy. I know I do but for one or two reasons, I've stopped taking it. Chocolate probably tops on the lists of many people. There's just something pretty wonderful about it. But as a child (and to some extent, as an adult) I've always preferred candy that comes in many flavors. I used the word "many" when "a few" is probably more accurate.

Those of us of a certain age can remember when many of these types of products only came in a handful of flavors. Whether it was popsicles or hard candy or jelly beans or Chuckles or whatever, certain flavors predominated; cherry, lemon, lime, grape and orange, just to name the most common. It was kind of hard to find other flavors and other options. They might have existed somewhere but most candy on the shelf today are stuck to these few common flavors.

My dear friends, what about faith? What about faithfulness? What about holiness? Do they only come in a few flavors?

"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but

the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.”

Do we really believe that? The reason I ask is because, on the surface, it seems not so much. And I'm not talking about how Catholics view the rest of the world. I'm talking about how Catholics view other Catholics, how we view those sitting on our left and on our right in a physical sense (as in these very pews), but even in an ideological sense, in the way we might view certain issues or in the way we might emphasize different aspects of discipleship.

Do we think that all faithfulness looks exactly the same? Do we believe that Catholics are all expected (dare I say, commanded?) to be carbon-copies of each other? Do we believe there is only one way to be holy, that it only comes in one flavor, one color, one expression?

My dear friends, it takes deep faith to embrace what St. Paul is getting at, that God's work is accomplished through our differences, not our similarities, God's work is accomplished through our countless gifts, not just a few, accomplished through unique and often complex individuals coming together for a greater purpose, a

greater good, coming together to help bring about the world God envisions and hopes for, and died to make it possible.

But it can't happen if we over-romanticize the old days, the days when Catholicism only seemed to come in one flavor, when Catholics seemed to never have a reason to disagree, or wonder about things, or wrestle with how best to follow Jesus. For good or bad, those days are largely gone, and are probably not coming back and one could argue, probably SHOULD not come back.

You see, if we are truly going to be leaven in the world, if we are truly going to help transform the world into something of great beauty and meaning and love, it's going to take all of us, all of us using our unique gifts and abilities and insights and perspectives and ideas to help bring it about.

But the truth is that it can't happen if each one of us thinks we have cornered the market on holiness, if we think that our individual way is the best way or the only way. For example, it can't happen if we think that all that matters is what we believe, not what we do. And it can't happen if we think that all that matters is what we do, not

what we believe. It can't happen if we think holiness means we have to vote a certain way, or pray a certain way, or talk about the Church in a certain way, or even talk about God in a certain way. Each of us has something beautiful to offer, something given to us by God and part of being a Church is being able to recognize the gifts of one another and embrace them, not simply try to tolerate them.

I guess you could say that the best way to live out our faith, the best way to be disciples of Jesus is to let him transform each of us into something wonderful, let him take what looks ordinary, like water and bring about the finest wine.

But please don't forget, even though we may all be growing in the same vineyard, and all be nourished at the exact same table, those things are true, we are blessed with grapes unique to each of us. That means the wine each of us has to offer the world and each other is one-of-a-kind too. And it's ALL of our varieties together that keep the celebration going, that keep God's love and mercy and compassion alive and well throughout the world. Who knows? Maybe there's something in you or

in me the world has never yet experienced. Let's find it out together.