

## INI

1 Corinthians 1,18-25  
Trinity 5 — 5 July 2015

**Greeting:** To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle of Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, which was read earlier:

For the Word of the Cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greek search for wisdom; <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles foolishness, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

**So far the reading. Let us pray:** Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Introduction:** Yesterday was the Fourth of July. That meant parades, flags, and fireworks. We like to celebrate our independence. But we like lights, noise, and spectacles. After all, our national anthem speaks about "bombs bursting in air."

We may also like speeches or to read about what it means to be an American. But a recent poll shows that 40 per cent of those under the age of twenty-eight do not know the country from which we won our independence! Maybe I could have a quick quiz. How many think we won our independence from, say, Mexico? Or, France? What about Great Britain? Of course, it's Great Britain. I'm sure every one got it right.

But if we like to celebrate, that poll indicates that a lot of people do not know what it is they are celebrating, or at best, they only have some

kind of fuzzy idea of what it is they are celebrating. That's kind of scary, and scary for a whole host of reasons.

But what of Christians? What is it we are supposed to proclaim? Is there a right way to proclaim what we believe, but is there also a wrong way?

Paul points us to the correct proclamation. Indeed, Paul's proclamation goes against the standards of the world, which would see his proclamation as either weakness or foolishness. This leads me to today's sermon theme: "**Christ Crucified Proclaims God's Power And Wisdom.**" I'll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Worldly Power And Wisdom;**
- 2) God's Power And Wisdom;** and,
- 3) God's Power And Wisdom For Us.**

**1) Worldly Power And Wisdom.** Standards of worldly power and wisdom have not changed much over the millennia. Worldly power and worldly wisdom are like fireworks — power which explodes forcefully and wisdom to dazzle and awe others.

In the ancient world, the Greeks revolutionized warfare with the introduction of the phalanx. If you read Homer, you see individuals fighting for individual glory. The phalanx, however, was a group of men from the same city fighting in close formation as a single unit and applying superior force against an enemy. The Romans perfected the idea with the legion and enlistments that ran to twenty-five years. The Romans might have lost a battle or two, but they won their wars. They were organized, systematic, and brutal. After all, when it came to discipline, what other language gives us a word such as "decimate" — that is, kill every tenth person? Romans fought to win and they did not worry about what we would call "collateral damage."

The ancient world also had no problem executing criminals. In this regard, Roman justice was usually swift. Roman citizens were beheaded. The Romans used crucifixion for criminals who were not

citizens because it was considered to be awful and degrading. In fact, outside of the Gospel account, there are very few examples in Latin literature depicting crucifixion, simply because it was so awful. When the Romans put down the slave revolt which had been led by Spartacus in BC 6, they crucified over 6,000 slaves over a ten mile stretch leading to the very gates of Rome. The crucified were left there to rot and as bird food – to be an object lesson for all concerned.

Throughout the ancient world, crucifixion was considered to be a humiliating and shameful death — the penalty for slaves, criminals, and insurrectionists. In the ancient world, the cross would be the equivalent to our electric chair or gas chamber. The Romans would have laughed at the so-called painlessness of lethal injection – pain, suffering, and public humiliation were the point of crucifixion.

But the ancient world also prized intellectual power as well. One need only think of such Greeks as Plato or Aristotle and the many schools of philosophy to realize that the Greeks prized intellectual power. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus said, “All Greeks are eager of learning.” Perhaps a bit of an exaggeration, but not by much. It was true. Of ancient Corinth, it was said you could meet a philosopher on every corner.

But Paul said, the Jews seek signs of power and the Greeks seek wisdom.

The Jews were a practical people. They looked at God in terms of His revealed power, and especially when He freed them from slavery in Egypt and brought them into a land of promise. God humbled the Egyptians through the Ten Plagues and then drowned Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea. God established the kingdom of David and Solomon as they extended Israel through military conquest. The Messiah, for whom they were waiting, was considered to be a Messiah who would wield earthly power and re-establish an earthly, political kingdom.

But if the Jews had One God, the true God, the Greeks had many gods and goddesses. They had a god for everything — as did the

Romans. When Paul when to Athens, Paul even commented that they had a statute to the “unknown god” — kind of insurance in case they had missed someone.

But ultimately, the gods and goddesses of the Greeks and Romans were human beings writ large — fickle, temperamental, uncertain, jealous.

When Paul talked about the unknown god made known in God’s own Son, Jesus, as He Who had been crucified and rose from the dead, the Greeks laughed. A crucified God? Nonsense. A resurrected God? Even more foolishness.

When Jesus was being crucified, the religious leaders mocked Him. “If you are the Son of God, come down from your Cross and save us and yourself.” Ha! Ha! Ha! No power there, seemingly.

A crucified God did not measure up to the standards of either the Jews nor the Greeks or even the Romans.

But Christ crucified, showed:

**2) God’s Power And Wisdom.** God can certainly display power of the kind which we associate with fireworks. Just think of the first words in Genesis: “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” His creative Word brought all that is into existence, both visible and invisible. That’s pretty spectacular! That’s power! And His organizing the entire universe speaks of wisdom.

But what outward power and wisdom was shown on that first Good Friday, when the Son of God hung on the Cross, slowly dying?

Outwardly, it was as the prophet Isaiah said of Jesus,

He was despised and forsaken of men,  
A Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief;  
And like One from Whom men hide their face.

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isaiah 53,3)

But there was hidden power shown by God on that first Good Friday. That hidden power was God's wrath against sin. But that wrath was directed not against the people who deserved it, but against the One Who did not deserve it, that is, Jesus.

God had laid the world's sins on the shoulders of His Son. Jesus bore the punishment that should have fallen on those who were crucifying Him. He bore the punishment that should have fallen on the disciples who deserted Him in His hour of need. He bore the punishment that should have fallen on us!

He had been handed over to the Roman authorities and stripped, whipped, and then crucified. As He hung on the Cross in agony, and as the skies darkened for three hours, He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27,42). Was that the cry of might or wisdom? To the ears of the world, that was the cry of weakness and abandonment, and the world saw no power or wisdom at it gazed upon the Cross. As He died the earth shook and the veil of the temple was torn in two (Matthew 27,51).

There were signs of power, but those signs were the wrath of God against sin. The fireworks of might were directed against Jesus.

God showed His initial hidden power to save the world from its sins when the Holy Spirit came to the virgin Mary in Nazareth. God's hidden power was shown when Jesus was born in an empty stable in Bethlehem — born as a helpless baby just like any other baby. Babies are not powerful — in fact, they are weak and dependant on their parents for years and years.

Throughout His life, Jesus' enemies were always asking Him to show them some sign of power. Jesus, however, told them:

An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet, for just a

Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the sea-monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and nights in the belly of the earth. (Matthew 12,39-40)

But while Jonah had been in the belly of the great fish because he had rebelled against God; Jesus was in the earth, in the tomb, because He had been obedient to God. Jesus was obedient to God's plan to rescue mankind from the deceiving power and false wisdom of sin, death, and the devil.

This plan was fulfilled on the Cross.

It demonstrated the weakness of death.

It was a plan that no human philosophy could imagine or think of.

It was a plan that was hidden in God's foreknowledge and revealed at the right time.

It was a plan that succeeded when Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, because in the resurrection God showed that Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf was successful.

He really had lived His life without sin. He really had lived as our substitute. He really had paid the price for what we had done wrong. He really had exchanged our life for His.

In that exchange, Jesus gives:

**3) God's Power And Wisdom For Us.** To each believer, to you and I, is given the power of the Word of the Cross.

This is the Word of Forgiveness, that,

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

That Word of Forgiveness puts worldly power and wisdom into its

proper perspective.

The wisdom of the world always puts itself into judgment over and against God. It says that God must be understood on its terms and then it will only come to God on its terms. God's Word of the Cross, however, says that is an impossibility.

The Word of the Cross says that we cannot come to God, but He comes to us. It is as Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose You" (John 15,16).

Worldly power and wisdom says that God must demonstrate His might and power in order to be believed. The Word from the Cross says that only in Jesus' weakness and finally death could a sinner finally be forgiven and be reconciled with God.

Worldly wisdom says that if God is really God, then He would show His power and eliminate injustice, cause wars to cease, and cure every illness. The Word of the Cross points out that the root of evil lies with the sin that dwells within everyone, but the cause of sin has been defeated on the Cross.

The Word of the Cross is proclaimed in each and every Baptism. God's Word, when combined with water, deliver the hidden power and wisdom of God, the forgiveness of sins.

The Word of the Cross is proclaimed each and every time Jesus bids us to celebrate Holy Communion, for with the Body and Blood of the Savior Himself, Jesus gives us the Word of Forgiveness, the hidden power and wisdom of God.

The Word of the Cross is not a self-help program.

The Word of the Cross is not a philosophy that competes with a hundred others to give meaning to life.

The Word of the Cross is God's judgment against sin, but also

God's power and wisdom to save and reconcile the sinner unto Himself.

The Word of the Cross is God's offer of life to a world trapped in sin, enslaved by death, and captivated by the power of the devil.

**Conclusion:** On July Fourth perhaps we saw fireworks. We may even have heard speeches and reflected on what it means to have achieved our independence. That is well and good. We should give thanks to God we live in a country in which religious freedom is protected and we have the peace to proclaim Christ and Him crucified.

But we should also realize that we have but one message to proclaim as Christians.

That message is spurned and laughed at by the world, because it does not conform to its measures of power and wisdom. Each and every day our flesh, the world, and the devil would try to trick us into believing that worldly wisdom and worldly might are the only things that count.

But Paul correctly assessed the situation. Each and every day the power and wisdom of this world are perishing, perishing on account of sin and death — and so are those who place their trust in them.

The Word of the Cross, however, lasts. It lasts for all eternity because it gives the promise of forgiveness to both Jew and Greek, to you and me. Thanks be to God for His great love to us in Christ, and Him crucified. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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