

*I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift. May I speak...*

Our Epistle comes from the very beginning of St Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. It is part of his greeting to them.

If we carry on reading the letter beyond our passage, we find that St Paul finds goes on to find fault with the Corinthians' view of wisdom, but before he comes to their faults, he encourages them: *I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift.*

This is a very gentle and charitable beginning to a letter which is about to move on to criticise the Corinthians' view of wisdom. Their fault is that they have begun to be contentious: they have become divided. They boast about coming under the wisdom and teaching of individual leaders within their church: Apollos, Peter, Paul. And St Paul is writing to them to teach them what true wisdom is: God has sent him to preach the gospel *not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made to none effect*. He says that he determines not to know anything among them *save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*. And this cross is foolishness to those who profess knowledge and wisdom!

We often fall into two camps in our view of what wisdom is: some of us are proud of our knowledge, proud of our cleverness, proud perhaps of how good we are. And we think that this will be winsome. (Fr Wenzel preached a bit on this two Sundays ago.)

And there are those of us who despise our own knowledge and our ability to preach Christ, and are perhaps afraid to open our mouths for fear of not impressing people.

I myself fall into both camps. Sometimes I think I've been jolly clever, and at other times I am really very down on myself and my ability to form my thoughts into words, and I think so often that I am too much of a sinner to be a fit vessel for the Holy Spirit to speak through. Perhaps a lot of us are like this, sometimes overly impressed by ourselves, and at other times overly critical of ourselves.

We in both these camps can be encouraged by St Paul: true wisdom is the cross. And the cross has saved those of us who are proud. St Paul tell the very people he is about to find fault with that they are *enriched by him, in utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift.*

The gift he speaks of is in the Greek, χάρισμα, sometimes translated as a *free gift* or as *spiritual gifts*. These people who have erred in their view of what wisdom is, who have become proud, do have the spirit of God in them. They have been enriched by God in utterance and in all knowledge.

But their problem, and I am sure mine, is that they have forgotten that these things come only of God's grace given to them by Jesus Christ. So we must return always to the cross.

And for those of us who are afraid that we have no wisdom, we too are wrong: because if we have taken up our cross, and if we have chosen to follow Christ in the way of that cross, we have all wisdom. Christ himself is wisdom. Our unclean lips have been touched by the burning coal of Christ. So we must return always to the cross.

In our gospel, in Chapter of St Matthew's gospel, we are told by our Lord what the great commandment is:

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

This is wisdom, and it is a summary of the wisdom of the whole of the Law and the Prophets. The wisdom of the Old Testament is in fact Christ, who can be found throughout it. The son of David, it turns out is in fact David's own Lord, and the Lord of all, who sits at the right hand of the father and who tramples his enemy under his feet, that old serpent. Up there, on the rood you'll see that very image, Christ trampling the serpent in the very moment of his crucifixion.

And so we are led always by the Law and the Prophets, and by the writers of the New Testament who have had the Christ hidden in the Old Testament revealed fully to them, back to the way of the cross: which is the giving of ourselves to God and to our neighbour.

-Extremely hard. Every day I fail to walk in this way. But I pray that I would return, as St Paul exhorts me, each day, to the cross, to the loving arms of my saviour, stretched out on the wood of the cross. We can only receive the grace of God, and be enriched by him in *utterance*, and in *all knowledge*, and be given his spiritual gifts, if we return to the arms of Christ, and have our arms matched to his outstretched arms.

God's grace will not magically work in us, if we do not respond to that grace in obedience to him: we cannot learn to love like him, to love God and our neighbour, unless we approach his cross in penitence, not with cleverness and with knowledge, but with a true desire to turn to him, and to join our arms to his outstretched arms, to empty ourselves as he empties himself. So as we approach the altar this evening, let us throw ourselves on his mercy, on his wisdom, and when we are sent out from the altar, let us go out in his wisdom alone.

*I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*