

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

The Cost of Discipleship Twenty-second Week in Ordinary Time Saturday,
September 6, 2014 8:15 AM **1 Cor 4:6b-15; Lk 6:1-5** (We are each a member of a
body. We belong to each other.)

Today we are reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, and he is talking about **the cost of discipleship**. In the section that preceded this one, **he brings up the issue of a community that is riven by preferences**: like and dislike: I belong to Apollo; you belong to Paul, that type of thing; breaking into groups; cliquishness we could call it. **He attributes this to the fact that, or his interpretation that, they are living in what he calls the "flesh."**

Now the word **"flesh"** is often used in Scripture to mean mortality, but that's not what it means here in this letter. It's rather **to live in a perception of our being bodies**. When we think of ourselves as bodies, we are all distinct and we are all separate. **But his view is** we are not bodies; we are one body. And that's what he means by living in the Spirit. We discern ourselves, we think of ourselves, we identify ourselves as merely a member of a body. **We are each a member of a body. We belong to each other.** We are all part of the same body. He means that more than literally, that really and truly, ontologically and metaphysically, we are in a way that we are not really just bodies, that that view of life based on our senses is really a deception. So he calls then this **the "flesh," a deceptive way of looking at oneself** rooted in the senses, our experience of ourselves as physical beings, which is partially true, but is not the whole truth, which then extends to identifying ourselves with our possessions and our friends and our feelings and what we like, and then not our enemies and not what we dislike, and so on. So it's really a very profound analysis of human life and what it means to be a disciple.

To be a disciple means to live in the Spirit. To be a disciple means to live as a member of something higher than oneself. To live as a disciple means to put one's energies and one's life at the service of something greater. This of course is what he calls the work of the gospel. This is something greater. The gospel is something greater. **The gospel is the news, the good news, of Jesus Christ, which should revolutionize the way you look at yourself.**

Has this happened in the life of the Church? Too often it has not. Too often people who are believers and have firm conviction regard themselves as individual bodies. That's what they are about. And they give great value to their likes and dislikes and their feelings

and how they get along with others or don't. And of course it's almost always somebody else's fault when they don't get along, naturally. There is nothing wrong with their feelings; there's nothing wrong with their behavior. It's everybody else. And so this continues.

He talks about how **some people are "inflated with pride."** Well, naturally if you regard yourself as an independent entity, that's already pride at work since you are not an independent entity but a member of a higher body, the body of Christ. That would be living in humility. But **when you regard yourself as the center, that's pride**—the center of your own being, the center of your own life, "in favor of one person over against another." That of course is only possible in the flesh when we are just bodies, when we are over against each other, in contrast to each other. And he is pointing out that this is a very sad situation. **"What do you possess that you have not received?"** Now so people think of their possessions as so important, part of who they are. "But what," he says, "do you possess that you have not received?" So why is it part of you? "But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it? You are already satisfied; you have already grown rich." He is speaking of course of people who have been successful in life, social life, community life, you might say economic life. "You have become kings." Is that not the real goal of the world to make everybody a king, to have it your way? That's the message you get all the time from the world. How many people buy into it, perhaps unconsciously? It's contrary to the gospel. He is trying to say, look, **if you want to be a disciple, you have to be intentional.** You have to realize how **the world's messages are at cross currents to the gospel. Do believers really notice this, or do they try to finesse?**

Then he goes on to his life. His life has been a life of suffering. And he is not really complaining. But he is talking about, well, this is what it's like as a true follower of Christ. "We apostles," he says, "are like people sentenced to death. We have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and men alike. We are fools on Christ's account." Now that's something we could really meditate on. **Are we willing to be spectacles and fools for Christ's sake? That's one of the costs of discipleship.**