

Class No. 9 Outline
Lent IV
I Corinthians 12:12-15:11 (MP2)
Week of March 31, 2019

- I. Opening Prayer
 - a. BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.* (Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent. BCP, p. 92.)
- II. Correction re: Invoking the Gifts of the Spirit at Confirmation – Not Just a Roman Catholic Thing!
 - a. In law school, my Civil Procedure professor was fond of saying, “Don’t think great thoughts, read the statute.” Let’s read the Prayer Book instead:
 - b. During Confirmation, just before laying hands on the Confirmands, the Bishop specifically asks that the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost be strengthened and increased in them. BCP, p. 297.
- III. Flash Card (Memory Item) of the Week: **How Often Should We Pray?**
 - a. Pray without ceasing. I Thessalonians 5:17.
- IV. Recommended Reading/Viewing – See below
- V. Mysteries of St. Paul – *See Appendix, p. 8*
- VI. Overview of this Week’s Readings – I Corinthians 12:12-15:11 (MP2)
 - a. Monday (12:12-31a) – Now Ye are the Body of Christ
 - b. Tuesday (12:31b-13:13) – *Agapē*: A More Excellent Way
 - c. Wednesday (14:1-12) – Desire That Ye May Prophesy
 - d. Thursday (14:13-25) – Be Not Children in Understanding
 - e. Friday (14:26-40) – Let All Things Be Done Decently and in Order
 - f. Saturday (15:1-11) – The Gospel Which I Preached Unto You
- VII. Discussion of Previous Weeks’ Readings (I Cor. 9:15-12:11)
- VIII. Closing Prayer
 - a. O GOD, who, through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Saint Paul, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world; Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may show forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (Collect for the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. BCP, p. 229.)

Recommended Reading/Viewing:

- Gary Habermas: The Resurrection Evidence that Changed Current Scholarship (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5znVUFHqO4Q>)
- Brant Pitre: Jesus and the Restoration of the Twelve Tribes of Israel https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeZG2nX8coY&index=4&t=145s&list=PLQ9-50qJL_Dbm6po9yu-ae01MjQBNyyoD
- Brant Pitre: Jesus Heals the Deaf and Dumb Man https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1COXHcj_-R8

Additional Resources

- St. Luke’s web page (www.episcopalnet.org) – Daily Offices, Ordo Kalendar, Tracts for Our Times, archived sermons, adult education classes...*and more!*
- St. Luke’s Facebook Page -- Upcoming events, daily Saints, interesting articles...*and more!* (<https://www.facebook.com/Saint-Lukes-Church-Sedona-AZ-1441369559466896/>)
- Ordination Photos – public link: <https://1drv.ms/f/s!Ai0rMMhjF0UUjc9Fpg78nGjBz9C14w>
- Alexander Scourby’s readings of the King James Bible on YouTube.
 - I Corinthians: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLfxgoEwb1A>
 - This week’s lessons are at 40:30 through 52:42

Refer to the class materials for March 3 for the Introduction to I Corinthians. Link:

<http://www.episcopalnet.org/PDF/Class%2005%20-%20Galatians%206%20-%20Ash%20Wed%20-%20I%20Cor%201-2.pdf>

Monday – I Corinthians 12:12-31a. *Now Ye are the Body of Christ*

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. **13** For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For the body is not one member, but many. **15** If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? **16** And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? **17** If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? **18** But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. **19** And if they were all one member, where were the body? **20** But now are they many members, yet but one body.

21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. **22** Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: **23** And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. **24** For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: **25** That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. **26** And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. **28** And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. **29** Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? **30** Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? **31** But covet earnestly the best gifts.

v. 23: *uncomely*: unpresentable; *comeliness*: modesty

v. 24: *that which lacked*: the inferior part

v. 28: *helps*: helpers; *governments*: administrators

+++++

Exegesis: Today’s lesson is a continuation of last Saturday’s lesson (12:1-11), in which Paul addresses the Corinthians’ questions about spiritual gifts. His vivid use of the human body as a metaphor for the Church conveys a simple but theologically powerful message: every single Christian has been a gift from God (v. 18), and every single gift is important to the healthy functioning of the body of Christ (vv. 21-26). Verse 31a is a teaser for tomorrow’s unspeakably beautiful and powerful hymn to love (*agapē*).

Exposition: In verse 28, Paul lists various gifts of the Holy Ghost in hierarchical order, and it is no accident that speaking in tongues is listed last. Yet, that is the gift that the Corinthians seemed to covet most highly. Many times, in previous chapters, Paul has warned the Corinthians about being “puffed up,” and the ability to speak in tongues certainly presented a formidable opportunity to be puffed up with pride. Who *wouldn’t* want to be blessed with such an outward and visible sign of the in-dwelling Spirit? Who *wouldn’t* be tempted to feel just a little proud – even if mostly awed – by such a gift? Yet, Paul firmly places this gift at the bottom of the totem pole, even below “helpers” and “administrators.” Not many people are sorely tempted to be puffed up about being good office managers, record-keepers or schedulers! Yet, Paul sees these functions as gifts from the Holy Spirit which are every bit as honorable as any of the “flashier” or more “prestigious” gifts, because Paul recognizes that those gifts are assigned by God as it hath pleased him (v. 18). Our responsibility, then, is to recognize and use our assigned gift(s) as gratefully, humbly and effectively as we possibly can.

Questions for Reflection: What member of the Body of Christ am I (v. 20)? Do I work with the other members of the body, or argue with them? Which gifts do I covet earnestly (v. 31)?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

31 And yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. **2** And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. **3** And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, **5** Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; **6** Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; **7** Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. **9** For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. **10** But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. **12** For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity

v. 1: *charity*: the Greek word is *agapē* and is generally rendered in modern translations as *love*. See also, Exegesis below.

v. 4: *vaunteth not itself*: is not boastful

+++++

Exegesis: Having established that every gift which God gives to his children is vitally important, Paul now elaborates on the gift that far supersedes any other gift, usually translated in English as *love* but in Greek *agapē*. Just as the ability to confess that “Jesus is Lord” is a gift given to every believer (12:3), the gift of *agapē* love is available to every believer and should be sought, nurtured and valued far more highly than any other gift. Anders Nygren, a Lutheran theologian best known for his two-volume treatise on *Eros* and *Agape* love, said: “Agape love is unmotivated in the sense that it is not contingent on any value or worth in the object of love. It is spontaneous and heedless, for it does not determine beforehand whether love will be effective or appropriate in any particular case.”¹ Those words deserve to be read over and over again until they truly sink in.

Exposition: When it comes to having anything profound or original to say about this monumentally important chapter in Paul’s epistles, I join the lament of the scholar who said:

[This] commentator cannot finish writing on this chapter without the sense that clumsy hands have touched a thing of exquisite beauty and holiness. Here what is true of all Scripture is true in especial measure, that no comment can be adequate to so great a theme. Yet no commentator can excuse himself from the duty of trying to make plain what these matchless words have come to signify for him. And no Christian can excuse himself from the duty of trying to show in his life what these words have come to mean for him.

(L. Morris, *I Corinthians*, p. 190 (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 1983)). While the Bible is replete with examples of God’s *agapē* love for his children, for me the best Scriptural illustration of such love (particularly as described by Anders Nygren above) is found in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. (Luke 15:11-32) Even after the son ill-treated and shamed his father by demanding and subsequently squandering his inheritance, the father was clearly hoping for the son’s return. When he saw the son at a distance, he ran to him and fell on his neck and kissed him – without even letting the son recite his rehearsed speech of remorse.

I cannot count – much less recall – how many times I have failed to demonstrate such unconditional love when the opportunity presented itself!

Questions for Reflection: How close am I to living the kind of life this passage talks about - the more excellent way (12:31b)? What must I do in order to come more closely into that grace-filled life?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

¹ <https://www.thoughtco.com/agape-love-in-the-bible-700675>

1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. **2** For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. **3** But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. **4** He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying. **6** Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?

7 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? **8** For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? **9** So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. **10** There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. **11** Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. **12** Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

v. 1: *Follow after charity*; Make love your aim *but rather*: especially

v. 2: *howbeit*; but

v. 5: *but rather*; but even more

v. 7: *And even without life giving sound*: If even lifeless instruments

v. 10: *signification*; meaning

+++++

Exegesis: *Agapē* love should be the central aim of every Christian, but it is good to desire other spiritual gifts, particularly prophecy (v.1). We usually think of prophecy as the ability to foretell the future, but for Paul “prophecy” was “intelligible preaching that builds up the church in faith...explains mysteries, and imparts knowledge.” (*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 919 (Abingdon 1962)). Long before the time of Christ, the gift of prophecy seems to have disappeared from Israel. (Ps. 74:9; I Macc. 4:46; 9:27; 14:41). It made a limited return just before and after Jesus’ birth, when Zachariah, the husband of Mary’s cousin Elizabeth, uttered a prophecy that we regularly recite during Morning Prayer: the Benedictus. (Luke 1:67, BCP, p. 14) Similarly, Anna “the prophetess” spoke “to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” when the infant Jesus was presented in the temple (Luke 2:36-38). John the Baptist and Jesus were certainly regarded as prophets. But, as far as the early Church is concerned, the gift of prophecy returned in dramatic fashion on the day of Pentecost when the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon “all flesh,” including sons, daughters, young men, old men, menservants and maidservants, in fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2:28-29. (Acts 2:17). Particularly in the early days of the Church, prophecy and sound teaching were critical to the spread and the survival of the Gospel, so the ability to speak in tongues took a back seat to those more valuable gifts.

Exposition: Even in New Testament times, the gift of prophecy did involve, in some instances, the ability to foretell the future. In Acts 11:28, Luke tells us that the prophet, Agabus, predicted a famine which did, in fact, take place during the reign of the Emperor Claudius. Agabus makes a second appearance in Acts 21. Paul, on his way to Jerusalem, stays for a few days at the home of Phillip the evangelist, one of the first seven deacons of the early church (Acts 6:5). Phillip had four virgin daughters who also prophesied (Acts 21:9). Talk about a household bursting at the seams with the Holy Spirit! While staying with Phillip, Paul is warned by Agabus in dramatic fashion that he (Paul) will be handed over to the Gentiles once he reaches Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11), a prophesy which also came true. Agabus clearly met the Old Testament test for prophets: “[W]hen a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him.” (Deuteronomy 18:22)

Questions for Reflection: How can I help in the edifying of the church? (V. 12). Which do I desire most – spiritual or temporal gifts?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. **14** For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. **15** What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. **16** Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? **17** For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

18 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: **19** Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. **21** In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. **22** Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? **24** But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: **25** And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

v. 20: *howbeit in malice be ye children*: be babes in evil

v. 24: *he is convinced of all, he is judged of all*; he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all

v. 25: *report*; declare

+++++

Exegesis: Paul makes it clear in verse 13 that the gift of speaking in tongues is not, and should not, be an end itself. Anyone who speaks in tongues should also pray for the gift of interpretation of tongues. The gifts of the Spirit are not necessarily fixed or static. Higher gifts are always desirable, particularly the highest gift of *agapē* love. Speaking in tongues, without interpretation, deprives the hearer of the opportunity to appropriately say “Amen” – by which a person agrees with and makes another’s prayer his own (v. 16). Moreover, the hearer is not taught anything useful. Speaking in tongues without interpretation could make unbelievers conclude that the speaker is mad (v. 23). Prophecy, on the other hand, has the potential to convict unbelievers and to move them to glorify God (vv. 24-25).

Not surprisingly, Paul speaks in tongues more than anyone else (v. 18), but, presumably, he also has the gift of interpretation. He is appropriately grateful for his ability to speak in tongues (“I thank my God”), but he would forfeit that gift, if necessary, to speak “five words” with understanding (v. 19). Fortunately, Paul was able to do both.

Children are often attracted to objects that sparkle and glitter, and Paul warns the Corinthians not to be like that in pursuing the gift of tongues (v. 20). Much better for them to be like children when it comes to showing (or not showing) malice. Paul complained early in his epistle that, even after the passage of considerable time since his first visit, the Corinthians still needed to be fed with “milk” – like babes – instead of solid food (3:1-3). Today’s lesson underscores that it is time for them to grow beyond childish faith and knowledge.

Exposition: The themes expressed in today’s lesson clearly had a hold on Paul’s mind, as they appear many years later in his epistle to the Ephesians – which most scholars believe is one of the Captivity Epistles written by Paul during his imprisonment in Rome in the early- to mid-60s A.D.:

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:16.

Questions for Reflection: Do my words and actions edify or confuse others? What is the difference between being a child or a man in understanding (v. 20)? Which am I?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. **27** If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. **28** But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. **29** Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. **30** If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. **31** For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. **32** And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. **33** For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. **35** And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? **37** If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. **38** But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. **40** Let all things be done decently and in order.

v. 27: *and that by course*; and each in turn

v. 35: *came the word of God out from you?* Did the word of God originate with you?

v. 38: *But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant*; If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

+++++

Exegesis: Today’s lesson is particularly valuable to historians of the early church because it provides one of the earliest accounts of what worship services were like in the first century A.D., although there was certainly some variation among churches. The word “revelation” in verse 26 likely means the same thing as “prophecy.” Verses 27-33 call to mind the proverbial grade school teacher admonishing the class: One at a time!” Certainly, if everything described in verses 26-31 occurred in a single service, you would *know* you had been to church!

It is difficult to harmonize verses 34-35 with 11:5, which speaks of women prophesying in church – but only with their head covered. In those days, a woman appearing in public without a head covering was assumed to be a loose woman, a scandal. As we have seen in other passages, Paul was always sensitive to the cultural contexts in which he found himself, being careful to give no offense as long as he could maintain his Christian integrity. The explanation given for these verses by Bible scholar William Barclay is speculative but plausible: “In all likelihood what was uppermost in [Paul’s] mind was the lax moral state of Corinth and the feeling that nothing, absolutely nothing, must be done which would bring upon the infant Church the faintest suspicion of immodesty.”²

Paul concludes his lengthy teaching on spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14) with the stern admonition that he is speaking with authority. His words are not his opinion; they are “the commandments of the Lord.” (vv. 36-37). Anyone who speaks otherwise is not to be recognized (v. 38).

Exposition: One of the enduring beauties of the Prayer Book is that it creates a framework for doing everything – whether Office, Litany or Liturgy – “decently and order” (v. 40) in accordance with Paul’s admonition. As we will see in Module 2 of this year’s Adult Education program, the vast majority of the Prayer Book is taken directly from Scripture, and nearly all of the rest derives from Offices, Devotions and Liturgies that had already proven their devotional and liturgical value through centuries of use in Western Christendom before the first Prayer Book was issued in 1549.

Questions for Reflection: When I gather with the faithful, what do I bring with me that contributes to another person’s edification (v. 26)? Are all things done decently and in order in my parish (v. 40)? Does my presence help that to occur?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

² <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/dsb/1-corinthians-14.html>

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; **2** By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; **4** And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: **5** And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: **6** After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. **7** After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. **9** For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. **10** But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. **11** Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

v. 8: *born out of due time*; untimely born

v. 9: *meet*; fit

+++++

Exegesis: Bible scholars (even agnostics and atheists – *yes*, they do exist) are nearly unanimous that today’s lesson, particularly verses 3-4, contains the earliest known, written credal statement of the Gospel. More important, scholarly consensus is that Paul received this Gospel around 35 A.D. during his conversion on the road to Damascus, likely no more than two or three years after Jesus’ crucifixion. Also, there are good reasons to believe this “creed” was reduced to writing as soon as six months after the resurrection! Surprisingly, these scholarly developments are fairly recent, largely due to the work of Gary Habermas, whose appealing and easily understandable presentations I have previously recommended and are widely available on YouTube. (*See* link in the Recommended Reading/Listening section of today’s class outline.)

Further, Paul tells the Corinthians that they don’t have to accept the Gospel on his word alone. There were many other living eyewitnesses who actually saw the risen Jesus and who could be consulted (vv. 5-7). Paul’s list is not exhaustive. For example, Jesus was also seen by “Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them” on Easter morning (Luke 24:10). Luke does not tell us who these “other women” were. Later the same day, Jesus appeared to Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus, who did not recognize him until Jesus blessed bread, broke it, and gave it to them. (Luke 24:13-35). Some scholars believe that Paul’s reference to five hundred “brethren” in verse 6 means only the male eyewitnesses; if so, there may have been far more eyewitnesses if women and children are included. Except for Jesus’ appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus, these appearances effectively ended after the Ascension, forty days after the resurrection (Acts 1:9).

Paul’s genuine humility shines through in verses 8-11. He knows in his very bones that he can claim no credit for his calling as an apostle. Although he “laboured more abundantly” than the other apostles (v. 10), he does not claim greater success – although we know of no other apostle who had such a wide-ranging impact in those days.

Paul underscores in verse 11 that his Gospel is the same as that which was being preached by the other apostles. Indeed, you may recall that in Galatians he recounted how he went to Jerusalem fourteen to seventeen years after his conversion to confirm with Peter, James and John that they were all preaching the same Gospel. (Galatians 2:1-10) I Corinthians was written several years after that confirmatory episode.

Exposition: The Christian faith has nothing to fear from modern science and scholarship, which are proving to be critically useful tools in confirming the validity of our faith. Critical advances by scholars such as Gary Habermas and Brant Pitre are serving as compelling counter-balances to the skeptics who held sway 30 to 40 years ago. Advances in technology are tending to confirm the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium of Oviedo, believed to be the shroud and the head covering used in Jesus’ burial. (That’s a topic for another class entirely!) While faith will always be necessary until Jesus returns, it is a faith that is firmly grounded upon verifiable facts.

Question for Reflection: Paul calls himself the least of the apostles because he persecuted the Church, and yet God used him in an extraordinarily powerful way. Do I believe I, too, can be used by God for the furtherance of His kingdom? In what ways have I persecuted – or inhibited – the Church?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

Mysteries of St. Paul

Question: How did Paul gain Roman citizenship?

Answer: We don't know. Paul refers to his Roman citizenship – including being a citizen by birth – three times in Acts: 16:37-38; 22:25-29; and 25:12. And, Roman authorities never questioned that claim, granting his request to appeal his case to Caesar. Scholars have debated a variety of explanations, none of which have gained prominence as the most likely.

Question: How did Paul, a native of Tarsus, come to be a student of Gamaliel – perhaps the preeminent Rabbi of the day – in Jerusalem?

Answer: We don't know. We do know that Gamaliel taught between 22-55 A.D. If Paul began his studies with Gamaliel at the typical age of 16, that means Paul could not have been born before 6 A.D. If Jesus was crucified in 30 A.D., then Paul would have been 24 at the time. That comports with the reference to him as a “young man” when he stood by approvingly when Stephen was stoned. (Acts 7:58) But, even that much is speculation because we don't know how old Paul was when he began his studies. Gamaliel, you may recall, is the one who likely saved the apostles from execution because of the advice he gave to the Council (Sanhedrin) to wait and see if anything actually became of The Way. (Acts 5:27-42)

Question: Was Paul ever married or engaged?

Answer: We don't know. Clearly, Paul was not married during the time of his ministry. Some scholars speculate that, as a Pharisee, he would have married at a relatively young age but that he was later widowed. We have no evidence of that, however. On the other hand, Paul does imply that he had the gift of celibacy in I Corinthians 7:1-7.

Question: How did Paul gain sufficient influence with the High Priest to obtain letters authorizing him to hunt down Christians and return them to Jerusalem for imprisonment and/or execution?

Answer: We don't know. We do know that Paul was Gamaliel's student and that Gamaliel was on the Sanhedrin. Perhaps, as a result, the High Priest was familiar with Paul's extreme zeal, and he welcomed Paul's willingness to hunt down and persecute Christians. Again, this is speculation.

Question: What were Paul's appearance and his speech like?

Answer: We don't know with any specificity. Referring to himself, Paul says, “For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.’” (II Corinthians 10:10) Later, he says, “I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge.” (II Corinthians 11:6) These passages do not have the air of false modesty. We do know that Paul suffered horrific beatings and physical deprivations which must have affected his appearance: “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” (Galatians 6:17) While in Galatia he had a physical condition which was “a thorn” to the Galatians, but we don't know if the condition was permanent or recurring. (Galatians 4:13-14) Paul also suffered from a “thorn in the flesh” which persisted despite Paul's praying three times that it be taken away. (II Corinthians 12:7-9) However, we don't know how long this “thorn” persisted or if it affected his speech or appearance.

Question: Did Paul achieve his goal of going to Spain to preach?

Answer: We don't know. In his letter to the Romans, Paul expressed the hope that he would be able to press on from there to Spain. (Romans 15:23-24) Some early Church Fathers wrote of Paul not only reaching Spain but also England. There is no scholarly consensus to that effect, though.

Question: How did Paul die?

Answer: We don't know. Tradition says he was beheaded in Rome in the mid-60s A.D., near the end of the Emperor Nero's reign. While unverifiable, this is plausible because, as a Roman citizen, Paul would have been entitled to be executed by beheading rather than by crucifixion.