

“Jesus is my Lord” 1 Corinthians 12:1-12

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

It is so good to be members of God’s own family. And that is who we are, and therefore we can read what the Holy Spirit speaks to us through His servants, prophets and apostles.

And as we listen to the Word of God, we can see what attitude this gracious God has towards us, His unworthy and ungrateful children. Today we heard the words of the Holy Spirit, written by Paul the apostle. And from his writings we can get a glimpse of how our God sees us. And how can we know it?

It is revealed by how Paul addresses Christians, both in Corinth and other congregations. And you can apply all this to yourself as well. We are people “loved by God”, “called to be saints”, “sanctified by Christ”, “faithful brothers”.

Also in our today’s reading Paul also uses this familial language – “brothers”. It is so heart-warming and encouraging as Paul wasn’t writing to some perfect congregation. He was writing to Corinthians, one of his problem-congregations.

As we glance through the letter to Corinthians some people with weaker nerves could be rather shocked hearing what was happening there. Some of the Christians in Corinth before the Holy Spirit called them used to be as Paul lists – sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers. Nice company!

Not everyone had left these things in past. Paul still deals with sexual immorality, for someone was sleeping with his fathers’ wife. And don’t forget about all the divisions, and the people who used to get drunk celebrating the Holy Communion. Some were boasting as being superior Christians and having such gifts of the Spirit that ordinary Christians didn’t possess, speaking in tongues notably being one of those gifts. And the list goes on.

And the Holy Spirit gently speaking through Paul still calls them “brothers”, “those called to be saints”. It is encouraging to be reminded that our God isn’t looking for moral and perfect people, He has come to invite real sinners, and thanks be to God that we know that this is who we are!

In our today’s reading Paul brings up something really important. Something that brings clarity and also great encouragement to all God’s children. Paul speaks about spiritual matters, as he wants us to be clear about them.

He speaks about being led by idols and also about trusting in true God. **“You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols...”**

What Paul is saying is that before we are called by Jesus, we are led by idols, and not just led, but led astray. Someone may object that today people are not led by idols as they used to back then in the 1st century.

Think twice! We shouldn’t simplify the whole idol-thing. Remember how Luther explained what is god in the Large Catechism? “That from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress.”

“From which we are to expect all good ...” What were people expecting that those gods, or idols will help them to obtain? The same things that people have been looking for since we got kicked out from the garden of Eden.

We all long for significance, for appreciation, for security, for meaning, for happiness, for peace, for joy. And those ancient people believed that those gods, or idols could help them to obtain these things.

Tell me, how are people different today? Aren’t we looking for the same things? Today in Australia we don’t have that many statues of idols, but even they are now being erected all over Australia, e.g. statues of Buddha. What we have abundantly is ideologies, which are nothing else but teachings of idols.

That’s what the word means. And they try to appeal to the same longings. We have ideologies that promise that we will be happy and joyful and satisfied if only we could do whatever we want... ignoring the fact that we all exist in the web of human relationships, and everything we do have impact to others. And it may appear as a tempting thought that no one would restrict me, that I could be free to do whatever I want, no responsibilities...

Others promise paradise on Earth if only we could erase all the injustices, if we could make men and women the same and would accept all sorts of sexual behaviours as equally good alternatives and would allow people to choose for themselves who they are, even their sex.

Yet others convincingly tell us that joy and happiness and also significance and security will be given to us if only we have more money and keep buying more stuff, all the latest gadgets, and so on. How many people go shopping not because they need anything, but because they are thirsty for good emotions, for joy and happiness! And we surely could continue this list...

Our society is no less led astray by idols than people in Corinth were. And we as Christians are not immune to them either. Do we really expect all good things for the Triune God, do we run to Him in every trouble?

Do we really love Him more than we love ourselves? Do we want to please Him more than we want to do what pleases us, and often also others? Do we fear to offend or disobey our God more than we fear to upset other people or to look not good enough in their eyes because of our Christian convictions?

Do we trust God above all things and gladly use what He has given to us for the sake of the Gospel and in service to others, or do we too try to accumulate as much as possible... for we have worked so hard, and it will make us safe?

I don't know about you, but I am struggling with these. The truth is that even today, and even among Christians mute idols are quite alive and doing well and continue to lead many astray.

And then Paul writes something great: **“I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.”**

The last week I spent serving Latvian community in so called Summer Highschool. I had many very interesting conversations. In one of them one of the kindest people you could imagine told several interesting things.

One that he was a Christian. Another, that he really didn't believe that Jesus was God, for how could that be, for it doesn't make any sense. But he was really passionate about serving others as much as possible.

What do you think? Maybe it sounds familiar? I think there are in Barossa many kind and lovely people, who can and do say something similar. They are do-gooders and the whole community benefits from their presence and service.

Are they Christians? This isn't a hard question. But it seems that sometimes we are struggling to answer it. We may turn for an advice to the ancients. They often were more perceptive and cleverer than we are.

One example. Roman empire. Beginning of the 2nd century. Pliny the Youngest was a Roman governor in Bithynia. He oversaw persecutions of Christians. And he used this very simple method which Paul mentions here as well.

Pliny had heard that true Christians would never deny Jesus, they would never curse Him. So when he tried to find out who was a Christian and who wasn't he used this simple test. He demanded them to curse Jesus, and to confess that their highest allegiance belongs to Roman emperor, saying that that he was the Lord.

What happened? Those who had the Holy Spirit refused to do it. Those who didn't have, did it. Everything was clear. Pliny may not have been a good theologian, but he was a clever man and understood the very heart of the matter.

As Paul put it. If you have the Holy Spirit, you will not reject and shy away from Jesus. For this is the work of the Holy Spirit to lead us to Jesus. And on

the other hand, no one can say that Jesus is the Lord except if they already have received the Holy Spirit.

Works of service and kind attitude doesn't make anyone a Christian. It doesn't matter if people want to call themselves Christians. The Holy Spirit alone, the presence of the Holy Spirit with us alone makes anyone a Christian. This is why we need regularly to receive the Spirit through the Word and the Sacrament.

Some may object that surely people can say the words "Jesus is the Lord". Sure. What Paul means is that no one can believe, trust and confess that Jesus is God Yahweh, the Lord of lords and the King of kings, unless the Holy Spirit has created faith in their hearts.

And remember, true faith is never only in words, it comes with changed lives. When we trust that Jesus is our Lord, that He has purchased and redeemed me, lost and condemned a person, with His innocent sufferings and death, then we want to live our lives making it our highest priority to please Him, to listen to Him, to learn His will for our lives and to strive to live accordingly.

Along the way fighting with our idols, repenting from our false allegiances and priorities, and allowing the Holy Spirit to reshape us in the image of Christ. This is what being Christian means. That is a challenging and joyful journey.

And blessed we are that we are here. Blessed we are when we confess that "we believe in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord". Blessed we are for we couldn't do it on our own. It is the Holy Spirit speaking in us.

There are so much more that Paul speaks about, that we could meditate upon and rejoice. Paul speaks about many gifts of the Holy Spirit, but we need to understand that the greatest is our faith and ability to trust and confess that "Jesus Christ is my Lord".

There are many other gifts of the Spirit, and they all are given by the same Spirit of God. And what is also important, and Paul says it, all gifts of the Holy Spirit are given for common good. They are not given to elevate ourselves.

They are not given to show that some are superior Christians, some are not, that some churches are the Spirit filled, and some are not. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to build us up in Christ as one body.

As Paul said: **"All these [gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."** So it is with us.

And may our Lord Jesus Christ bless us that by His grace we are a healthy and joyful body. Amen.