

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
St. John the Baptist Catholic Church
January 15, 2012

Starting today, we will be reading from First Corinthians for 5 Sundays, and then from Second Corinthians. St. Paul wrote these two letters to the Christian community at Corinth. Corinth was one of the most important cities in ancient Greece – a trade city. Most of the trade between Rome and Asia would pass through Corinth. Ships would dock there, because sailing around the southern tip of Greece was very hazardous. So, ships would stop at Corinth for the portage to the opposite port. Corinth was like the bridge between the two seas.

Corinth had two deities that were its patrons: Poseidon, the god of the sea, and Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual love. There was a temple to Aphrodite in Corinth, that boasted over a thousand prostitutes, both female and male, who were available to both the people of the city and to the many visitors who passed through Corinth. Taxes were low because of the income from the temple prostitutes, provided the major source of the city's income!

All sorts of people converged in Corinth: merchants and sailors, athletes participating in the Isthmian games (even bigger than the Red Bull crashed ice games in St. Paul!), professional gamblers. Homeless slaves roamed the streets. The practice of prostitution, both religious and secular, as well as the general looseness characteristic of a port city with a transient population gave Corinth the reputation as a city of ill repute. In fact, the Greeks had the term, "*to Corinthianize*," which meant to live an immoral life. To call anyone "a Corinthian" meant that the person was immoral.

A small Christian community was established in Corinth, and St. Paul wrote two letters to encourage them, and to teach how to live as Christians. He had to address head on the issues of sexual immorality. Our passage today reads, "*The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.*" Our bodies are members of Christ.

St. Paul uses the very vivid example of hiring a prostitute to teach about virtue. A person "pays a price" for someone's body, and then becomes "one flesh" with that person. He teaches that, instead, the Christian must be united to the Lord Jesus. He says that our bodies too have been purchased – and at a price! We have been purchased by Christ, and thus we are to become one in spirit with Christ. Fully aware that the people reading his letter would be familiar with the Temple of

Aphrodite, he uses the image of the temple, and says that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

The word *pornography* comes from the Greek word *porni*, which means “sex for sale.” Paul says, “*You have been purchased at a price.*” But of course he is referring to Jesus’ paying the price of his very life for our salvation. With Christ, we make up a new body, the Body of Christ, which is the Church. This body is to be revered. And, as members of this body, we are to use our bodies differently. We cannot claim that we belong to Christ if we use our bodies for immorality.

Perhaps we’re not bothered by a Temple of Aphrodite here in New Brighton, but you can be sure that **every single family here** is affected by pornography, so pervasive in our society. You may not think your family is affected, but chances are good that there is husband, a father, a teenage son, or even a mother or sister in your family that is addicted to pornography. This modern day plague damages marriages, and is a growing cause of divorce. It has created psychological problems for our children. The average age of someone today to become exposed to pornography is 11. Internet pornography has become a problem even among clergy of all denominations.

How do we fight this scourge today, that not only damages marriages & relationships, but worse, is a serious sin, jeopardizing a person’s salvation? The same way that St. Paul dealt with it with the Corinthians. He brought them to Jesus. To change their attitudes and behavior, he first of all brought them into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. There’s no other way. We can’t fight this, or any other temptation on our own. It is only through grace – life in Christ, that we can conquer sin.

In today’s gospel, two people are following Jesus, curious what he was all about. Jesus turned around and said to them, “**What are you looking for?**” They answered by asking Jesus a question, “Teacher, where are you staying?” You and I are those two people – we’re all looking for something. What is it? Fame, fortune, pleasure? What it boils down to is, we’re all looking for love. Even the person who turns on his computer to look at images – he’s really looking for love.

And the only way we’re going to find what we really desire is by doing what those two did in the gospel. They said, “Teacher, where are you staying?” And Jesus said, “Come, and you will see.” They went to stay with Jesus, and they found what they were looking for by staying with Jesus. So also for us, whatever we’re looking for – happiness, peace, joy – love – we will only find it when we stay with Jesus.