

## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT, Year C

Gen 15:5-12,17-18; Ps 27:1,7-9,13-14; Phil 3:17-4:1; Lk 9:28-36

### FRIDAY OF THE THIRTY-FIRST WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME

Phil 3:17-4:1; Ps 122:1-5; Lk 16:1-8

#### Introduction

**Liturgical Use.** The text from Philipians is used for the Second Sunday of Lent, Year C; Friday of Week Thirty-One; and the feast of St. Ignatius of Antioch on October 17. Phil 3:20-21 is also recommended for Masses of the Dead.

#### Commentary

Phil 3:17: Be imitators of me, my friends. Take as your guide those who follow the example that we set.

**Paul, the imitator.** Paul's number one goal was to imitate Christ in every way possible.

**Not the only request.** Paul invited people to imitate him on several other occasions (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thes 1:6; 2 Thes 3:7,9).

**Paul's extraordinary request.** It was as if Paul claimed that he was living the Christian life perfectly. He was saying: "When you look at me, you see the gospel in action, fully implemented. I'm in full compliance with God's will. I'm walking the walk. In fact, if you pattern your life on the way I am living mine, you will be holy, you will be doing what God wants, and you are on the sure and certain path to salvation." Usually anyone who talks like this is considered arrogant and prideful, but Paul tried to state his case with honesty and humility.

**The more-reasonable request.** It probably is more honest and realistic to say, "Do as I say, not as I do" (Barclay, W., *Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 67-68). We strive for the ideals, but we fall short. There usually is a gap between our words and deeds. It is easier to talk the talk than to walk the walk. None of us are perfect. With the amount that each person sins, if another person were to take all of their cues from us, that person likely would be misguided in one way or another.

**Self Examination, A Reflection.** What if others imitated every aspect of my life? What if others were to think as I think? Have the same intentions that I have? Speak like I speak? Be as generous as I am? Treat other people like I treat others? Be as friendly and polite as I am? Pray like I pray? Would the person imitating me be in good or bad shape? If we are to give the right kind of example, we must imitate Christ.

Phil 3:18: Unfortunately, many go about in a way which shows them to be enemies of the cross of Christ. I have often said this to you before; this time I say it with tears.

**The Cross.** In this context, the Cross is a symbol for Jesus and his way of life. To be a friend of the Cross is to be a friend of Jesus and to live according to the gospel.

**Paul in Philippi.** Philippi is a city in northeastern Greece. During the First Century AD Philippi was in the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony (Acts 16:12). Paul visited Philippi (Acts 16:11-40, 48-49 AD) on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 16-20, 46-51 AD). It was in Philippi that Paul made his first converts in Europe, Lydia and her household (Acts 16:15). He founded a Christian community there, and the new believers, like Paul himself, were supposed to be friends of the cross.

**The Cross.** *In Cruce salus!* In the Cross is our salvation. The blood that Jesus shed on the Cross forgives sins, washes away iniquities, and restores God's grace. The Cross is so powerful that no matter how big the sin, it can be forgiven. The Cross is fountain that provides an infinite supply of grace and blessings. Not only that, the Cross opens the gates of heaven, never to be closed again, and it offers every believer the promise of final glory in heaven with God for all eternity.

**Paul, a friend of the Cross.** A friend of the Cross is willing to undergo conversion (Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-11; 26:12-18), to turn from sin to grace, from persecuting the Church to being a full and active member of the Church. Such a friend gives impeccable example; endures hardship for the sake of the gospel, things like false accusations, court appearances, floggings, imprisonments, and shipwrecks (2 Cor 11:24-28); makes missionary journeys, preaches, and writes; remains faithful in the face of fierce opposition (2 Cor 12:7); and lays down his life as a martyr (Jn 15:13).

**Enemies of the Cross.** The new converts in Philippi were immature and foolish, and they abused and disrespected the cross by their many sins. They had a warped attitude about the Cross. Their preliminary assumptions were correct: the Cross is a fountain of grace, the blood Jesus shed on the Cross washes away our sins, and Jesus is willing to forgive all sins. But their application was appalling and incorrect: we can sin as much as we want because grace and forgiveness is always available. The result was licentiousness (Gal 5:19), they "took license," they did whatever they wanted with whomever they wanted whenever they wanted. They lived unrestrained, unregulated, undisciplined lives. It was a life of indulgence, corruption, and immorality. Their behavior was shameful, and in abusing the grace and forgiveness of the Cross, they proved to be enemies of the Cross.

**I say it with tears.** Paul wept over the ways some Christians perverted the gospel. It was heart wrenching for him. He poured himself into his missionary work. He loved Jesus, and he loved the people he served. He experienced intense grief and sadness over their poor choices.

**Many enemies, another interpretation.** "The adversaries are preaching something (circumcision) that denies its [the cross's] efficacy, they void Christ's costly self-sacrifice (Gal 2:21)" (*NJBC*, 796). "Whose god is there belly" refers to the Jewish zeal for the dietary laws, and "their shame" is to boast in circumcision, which is to glory in something (the sexual organ) which otherwise one modestly covers (1 Cor 12:23) (*NJBC*, 796). Paul objected to the Jewish viewpoint that adherence to The Law guarantees salvation. It is not The Law, but the Cross of

Christ, by which a person is saved. It is not something that a person does to earn salvation, but a gift freely given by Jesus by which a person is saved.

Phil 3:19: Such as these will end in disaster! Their only god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame. I am talking about those who are set upon the things of this world.

**The Big Three Ways to be Enemies of the Cross:** to have your belly be your god, to glory in shame, and to be preoccupied with the things of this world.

**Their only god is their belly.** The belly refers to eating and drinking to excess: to gluttony, to gorging one's self with food; and to drunkenness, drinking far too much wine over and over again. To be a glutton and a drunkard is to be an enemy of the Cross of Christ.

**Their glory is their shame.** "Shame" is Paul's discreet way to refer to a person's private parts, the sexual organs, which should be covered lest the person experience shame. "To glory in shame" is a literary way to say that some of the new Christian converts in Philippi reveled in their sexual exploits. They gloried in **immorality** (1 Cor 6:13,18; 2 Cor 12:21; Eph 5:3,5; Gal 5:19; Col 3:5; 1 Tim 1:10); **prostitution** (1 Cor 6:9,15-16); **impurity** (unchaste thoughts and actions) (Rom 1:24; 2 Cor 12:21; Eph 5:3,5; Gal 5:19; Col 3:5); **lust** (excessive sexual desire) (Rom 1:24); **obscenity** (Eph 5:4); **obscene language** (Col 3:8); **suggestive talk** (Eph 5:4); **licentiousness** (unrestrained living, disregard for all rules and moral standards) (2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19); **fornication** (sex between unmarried persons) (1 Cor 6:9; Col 3:5); **lewd conduct** (obscene language, immodest dress, suggestive behavior) (Gal 5:19; Col 3:8); **orgies** (sex between multiple individuals) (Gal 5:21); **adultery** (Ex 20:14; Lev 18:20; Dt 5:18; 1 Cor 6:9) (sexual intercourse between a married person and another who is not their spouse); **homosexuality** (sex between two persons of the same gender) (Gen 19:5,7; Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26,27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10); and **bestiality** (sex between a person and an animal) (Lev 18:23). Greek society was sexually permissive and sexually active. Sexual experimentation was expected and encouraged. The sexual behavior of the new Christians was scandalous. To be sexually irresponsible and immoral is to be an enemy of the Cross of Christ.

**Set upon the things of this world.** Paul is referring to mental preoccupation with "earthly things:" our physical life and our health, food and clothes (Mt 6:25), home and material possessions, job and money. Paul is particularly concerned with Gnosticism, the relentless pursuit of knowledge for knowledge sake, and "Christian Gnosticism," a heretical approach to the Christian faith that treats Jesus' teaching like a school of philosophy. All of these things are fleeting and do not last. To spend the majority of time and energy thinking about and pursuing "the things of the world" rather than "the things of heaven" is to be an enemy of the Cross.

Phil 3:20: As you well know, we have our citizenship in heaven. It is from there that we eagerly await the coming of our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Citizenship.** "Christians constitute a colony of heaven, as Philippi was a *colonia* of Rome (Acts 16:12)" (NAB footnote).

**Our citizenship is in heaven.** As baptized Christians, we belong to the Communion of Saints of the Living on earth, and when we die, our citizenship will be with the Communion of Saints in heaven, to be with the saints and angels around God's throne.

**Citizens of heaven are friends of the Cross, A Reflection.** Friends of the Cross eat and drink, but the belly is never in charge. A friend of the Cross does not overeat or overindulge. Instead, friends eat a well-balanced diet, and get all of the proteins, vitamins, and minerals needed to foster good health. Friends of the Cross also can drink alcoholic beverages, but in moderation and responsibly. But Friends of the Cross do not drink to the point of drunkenness, nor do they ever drink and drive, nor do they drink to the point that they are belligerent or sexually irresponsible, nor do they engage in underage drinking. When it comes to food and drink, Friends of the Cross practice self-control; they live virtuously.

Friends of the Cross are sexually responsible; they practice virtue and live within moral boundaries. As Christians, we believe that sex is a gift from God and that it is a beautiful way to express love within the context of marriage. Friends of the Cross abstain from sexual relations outside of marriage, are pure with themselves and others, dress modestly, tell clean jokes, use their computers and the Internet in a responsible manner, and watch wholesome entertainment.

Friends of the Cross are preoccupied with the things of heaven. They think about God many times throughout the day, pray each and every day, attend Mass at least once a week, receive the sacraments, read the Bible, do their best to love family and friends, are on the lookout for ways to be generous and kind, and are willing to lovingly sacrifice for others as Jesus lovingly sacrificed on the Cross.

Let us avoid being like some of the Philippians who took advantage of God's grace and forgiveness by leading unregulated lives and proving to be enemies of the cross. Paul is pleading with us: "Won't you please be a friend of the Cross?" Those who are friends of the Cross will share in the glory of the Cross. *In Cruce salus!* In the Cross is our salvation!

Phil 3:21: He will give a new form to this lowly body of ours and remake it according to the pattern of his glorified body, by his power to subject everything to himself.

Phil 4:1: For these reasons, my brothers, you whom I so love and long for, you who are my joy and my crown, continue, my dear ones, to stand firm in the Lord.