



Towards the end, and this should make us think, Paul reminds them of what is at the heart of his Gospel, that Christ “died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he was raised [from the dead] on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was seen”, by witnesses who knew him. Resurrection is the central pillar of the Christian faith, according to Paul, one that we neglect at our peril.

### HYMN TO LOVE

However, the one passage that everyone knows by heart, partly because it is read at every wedding that you ever attended, is the great hymn to love (12:31 – 13:13). It is a lovely poem, and although it interrupts the flow from the end of chapter 12 to the beginning of chapter 14, it clearly belongs in the Corinthian situation, and is aimed at their pernicious divisions. Now read it through once again, bearing in mind that they were at each other’s throats, down there in Corinth, and see if it does not take on added depth of meaning. Read from this angle, it makes uncomfortable reading. Paul never makes it easy for us; and I hope that you will feel encouraged to read not only 1 Corinthians, but all the rest of his extraordinary collection of letters. You will not regret it, even at the price of a certain loss of comfort. The secret, of course,

is that Paul is head over heels in love with Christ; and, if you look carefully, you will see that this great hymn is a portrait of Jesus that reveals to the Corinthians (and to us) how far we still have to go.

### Mass text

#### ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**I am the salvation of the people, says the Lord. Should they cry to me in any distress, I will hear them, and I will be their Lord for ever.**

#### FIRST READING Isaiah 55:6-9

#### PSALM Psalm 144

#### RESPONSE **The Lord is close to all who call him.**

1. I will bless you day after day and praise your name for ever. The Lord is great, highly to be praised, his greatness cannot be measured. **R.**
2. The Lord is kind and full of compassion, slow to anger, abounding in love. How good is the Lord to all, compassionate to all his creatures. **R.**
3. The Lord is just in all his ways and loving in all his deeds. He is close to all who call him, who call on him from their hearts. **R.**

#### SECOND READING Philippians 1:20-24. 27

#### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Alleluia, alleluia! Open our heart, O Lord, to accept the words of your Son. Alleluia!**

#### GOSPEL Matthew 20:1-16

#### COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**I am the Good Shepherd, says the Lord; I know my sheep, and mine know me.**

#### Next Sunday’s Readings:

Ezekiel 18:25-28  
Philippians 2:1-11  
Matthew 21:28-32

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## READING A PAULINE LETTER

One of the things that I should like you to do is read through all thirteen of the letters attributed to Paul; that is a bit of a demand, so let me start by pointing you at some of the main features of one of his most compelling letters, the first one addressed to the Corinthians. There are a few points to notice.

The first is that Paul is very cross with his Corinthians, because they have an exaggerated view of their own spiritual gifts. And that always leads to trouble.

With that in mind, have a look at the first ten verses. In almost all his letters, he starts with a general greeting and then (except when he is really cross, as in Galatians and 2 Corinthians) a thanksgiving. In this letter, I should like you to count the number of times in these verses that he mentions the name of “Jesus” or “Christ” or “Jesus Christ” or “Christ Jesus”. The point is that the answer to all our divisions is to keep our eyes on God and on Jesus.

When you have done that (and I make it ten in the space of ten verses), look at the number of passives that he uses: such as “called” and “sanctified” and “given” and so on. It is a very subtle point that he is making here, that it is all a matter of God’s gift, not anything that the Corinthians have to boast about.

It is evident (7:1) that the Corinthians have previously written him a letter (and he them – 5:9), and we may guess that they were rather complacently waiting for his response. However, it is not until we are almost halfway through that he condescends to give them an answer, and even then he sounds rather bored, because they are missing the point, which is that their divisions are a scandal.

This comes out when he talks about the Eucharist (11:17-22, for example), when he tells them that because of the social tensions in the group, “when you come together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, because each of you have your own picnic – so that some people are starving, while others get drunk!” The Corinthians will (we hope) have been rather shocked to hear this.

## How to read the Bible



Fr Nicholas King SJ concludes this series by guiding us through one of St Paul’s letters.



20 SEPTEMBER 2020

25TH SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK I