

26 Sunday Year A A reflection

In today's second reading Paul instructs the Christians at Philippi, living as they were in a Roman colony that had the reputation for the ambitious pursuit of personal honour, to reject such an attitude. Rather he writes, "there must be no competition among you but everyone [is] to be self-effacing so that nobody thinks of their own interests first."

Paul continues, pointing out that in conducting themselves as he proposes, their attitude will be the same as Christ's: Though divine, he "emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave," and then in his death, "he was humbler yet, even to accepting death on a cross."

One commentator sees Paul's directive in terms of ranking responsibilities over rights: "Christians should seek to vindicate their rights when this is required to fulfil their responsibilities" otherwise the Christian will be concerned with "voluntarily forgoing their rights and [seeking to] generously fulfil their duties."

We have an example of this in Paul's dealings with the Christians at Corinth. By right they owed him financial support but he did not demand this, surely because he desired that the Corinthians receive the gospel as a gift, primarily from the Lord, but also from him as the Lord's instrument. On the other hand, he did not hesitate to appeal to his rights as a Roman citizen when doing so would promote the Gospel. Thus he insisted on his right to be tried in Rome before the emperor. Paul's attention was on his responsibility to witness as best he could to the Gospel.

In conclusion, we can reflect on Paul's description of love in 1st Corinthians that has been identified both as a portrayal of Jesus and of those who belong to him through faith and the sacraments: "Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful."

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