

“Are you spiritual, or of the flesh?” 1Co 3:1-9

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh.

For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

Today we read from apostle Paul's letter to Corinthians. It is amazing how Paul is dealing with this congregation. Corinth was such a prosperous city at that time. Wealth from both the East and the West streamed through Corinth. Many and many made a fortune thanks to its geographical location.

What happens when people become rich quickly? You know. It is the same at all times. We are disillusioned thinking that we are invincible, that we are experts in all realms, that we can do whatever we desire, that we can test boundaries that hasn't yet be tested.

All of this happened in Corinth. Debauchery, sexual promiscuity, Sodom and Gomorra rebuilt. To describe what was going on in this city, Greeks had to invent a new verb, that would describe their live style – ‘corinthianize’. They lifted debauchery into the next level.

In this city apostle Paul planted one of new congregations and spend more that year building it up. What kind people were gathered into this congregation?

According to Paul own words many of them used to be the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers ...” (1Co 6:9-11)

While Paul was writing this letter to Corinthians someone was sleeping with his father's wife, others were bringing their internal argument to the public courts, others were messing up the divine service by their ambitions and gluttony.

This is what we can learn about the congregation in Corinth from Paul's letters. And you know how apostle Paul addressed these people, all these about whom we just read. “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in

Christ Jesus, called to be saints.” (1Co 1:2) The Church of God, sanctified in Christ... saints... Saints?!

Yes, saints! Not because of what they used to be, not because of what they achieved, but because they were sanctified by Christ. There are no limits for God’s healing power. When He accepts us as His children in Holy Baptism, we are sanctified in Christ. We are made saints... and the Holy Spirit Himself continues to work on our restoration.

They were saints, and you are saints. It doesn’t matter what you used to be, and what you have done. You are saints, as soon as you are baptized, sanctified by Jesus Christ, you are the Church of God.

Today we have the great event, wonderful reason for celebration – the confirmation of Jayden Linke. As Jayden confesses his faith before the Triune God and in presence of fellow saints, it gives us good opportunity to reflect, who we are and how would apostle Paul address us?

We read that Paul was rebuking his congregation. But what he said in today’s reading is applicable to every congregation. “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ... even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh.”

Here Paul distinguishes two kinds of people. Spiritual people and people of the flesh. He also provides criteria how to distinguish between these two kinds. “For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?”

On the one end of the spectrum, spiritual people, on the other, people of the flesh who can be recognized by jealousy and strives among them. Where are we on this spectrum? To which of these two groups do we belong?

We’ll find it out in a minute. But first, let me ask? What do people often think about the Church? What is the Church? There are so many misperceptions. That the Church is a place where those who want to be spiritual persons gather together and perform some kind of spiritual rituals.

If you happen to like these people, and want to be a spiritual person yourself, you may decide to join them, to join a congregation. But as soon as you learn more about someone, person or community, you find that there are imperfections, sometimes quite unpleasant and disturbing ones.

There definitely are other places where one can go and be spiritual apart from the Church. If you are not interested to be a spiritual person, or don’t like those in the Church, you don’t care about it at all.

Others may think that the Church is a place where good and moral people come together. They are better than others in community, that's why they keep together and celebrate their moral goodness. If you think you are a good person already, then why would you need the Church?

If you want to be among those 'better' people you may decide to join. But then soon you discover that they are no better, and you are tempted to call all of them hypocrites. You don't want to be among them.

Whatever you think about the Church, when you get to know people in congregations, you will always find that they are very similar to all the other people. The Church is not an ideal community if you want to measure her according our human standards.

There are always problems in the Church. Someone can be offended by what other member said or did. Then there is a strife and no one is going to give up. Then... some proudly turn their back and leave.

Some can be upset because a congregation has decided to put in a carpet and ... they proudly turn their backs and leave. Others may get jealous that their opinion wasn't accepted... they proudly turn their backs and leave.

For others there could be arguments even among the closest ones. Again, with the same result. I don't want to have anything to do with these ... with these... people. As if we are here primarily to deal with people and not to receive what the Lord Jesus has prepared to bless us!

How foolish is such a reasoning, what cunning a deception by Satan... making one to turn back to Jesus because others in the Church are sinners as well. If I would ask to raise hand those, who have experienced similar things happening, I guess most of you would.

How did Paul called all these situations? People of flesh, infants in Christ, merely humans. To act this way is like saying that I'm not going to a doctor to be healed and to have a life, because there are these... these sick people in a hospital. It is so childish not to see what the Church is, and why we are here, and to act that way.

All of this happens when we indeed act as products of evolution. Cause and effect, irritation and reaction, without deeper understanding what is going on. He said this, she did that, they looked at me not a way I liked, I'm leaving. As children in their thoughts threaten their parents, - if I won't get what I want, I'll die and then you will miss me. Ha! Sounds familiar?

How do spiritual people react? Spiritual people understand who we are and why we are here, and also why we often act so childish. We are wonderful creatures of God, but unfortunately born in sin and throughout our lives broken and wounded again and again. By our sins and by others sinning against us. As the result, of course, we are not anymore what God wants us to be. We are far from it.

But we are also saints, made saints in the Holy Baptist, when Jesus restored us into the Father's family. He, the Son of God, came to us as one of us, so that He could take our misery onto Himself, to take the Father's wrath upon Himself and to deliver us from the power of sin, devil and death.

God Himself sacrificed His life, so that you could live with Him forever. We are saints, as soon as He gives us His Holy Spirit. But we also remain who we are here, in this life, broken sinners. And often our brokenness is ugly and unpleasant.

What is the Church then? A place where better people come together? No, spiritual people understand that this is a place where God comes to restore us. It is a hospital, where He, the divine Doctor, comes to heal us and to teach how to heal others. He helps to see that at the root of stupid actions and aggressive words of our fellow humans, there is a slavery. The slavery to sin.

It is not a good creature of God who wills and does the evil and foolish things, it is a poor slave of sin, who is being fooled and abused by sin and devil. But for each one of us Jesus has laid down His life. He knows how incredibly good we can be when restored according God's image.

He is willing patiently suffer so that only we could be liberated from sin and restored into our goodness. That's why He comes here among us every week. To bless us! That's why He gives us every week His healing Spirit who purifies us and shapes us to be who we are created to be.

Spiritual people know that the Church is not about us coming to meet other nice people. It is about God Creator and Redeemer coming to heal broken sinners. We are imperfect, but He is perfect in His love to us. We are not here to evaluate others, but to bring before Him our wounds, and ask for His wisdom and guidance so that we can go and heal our brothers and sisters.

This is what Paul means by spiritual people. Those who look to this wonderfully created, but terribly broken world with eyes of the Spirit and see it as God sees it. Then we can look at people around us and imagine what beautiful creatures God can make us, and pray for advise that we also could help in this process as well.

So what do spiritual people do with brothers and sisters who behave childishly? The same that we do with children. We don't turn them our backs, we don't consider them our enemies, we don't exclude them from our lives. Never.

I once heard from an old pastor in Latvia, who survived horrors of Soviet concentration camp: "We don't have enemies, only friends." What he meant was as Paul wrote: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Eph. 6:12)

For it is not our friends who resist the Gospel and may even act against us, it is their brokenness and sin. We love them fervently, whatever hard it is, we make first steps to reconciliation, we forgive them and accept them, we pray for opportunities to heal their wounds with the power of the Gospel.

For remember, it is exactly what Jesus continually does for you. For Him there is no price too high to pay if only He can be with you. Seeking for you, waiting, inviting, healing, restoring, loving, teaching and empowering you to be the best you possible.

So what are we – spiritual people or people of flesh? Neither and both. It is not about fixed status. It is about ongoing struggle. About journey with Jesus. One day a time. Sometimes we can be spiritual people and led by the Spirit accomplish amazing things. Next minute we can fall again and act childishly.

Jesus knows it. He knows you. That's why He is always near. That's why He continually sends us the Holy Spirit, that's why He comes here every service to be with us, to heal us, to strengthen us, to encourage us when we fail.

This is His Church. You are His people, His children. You are saints, His chosen ones. You are God's field, God's building as Paul wrote. Planted, watered, blessed and sent - to be a blessing for others. Therefore go in peace and serve the Lord with joy.

Amen.