

Thoughts on the Daily Word

23rd Week of the Year. *Monday 9th September. Readings: 1 Corinthians 5:1-8; Psalm: 5; Gospel: Luke 6:6-11.*

Pope Francis, in his Exhortation, 'Gaudete et Exultate' or 'The call to holiness in today's world', takes aim at the failures that we can all fall into on our search for holiness. Gnosticism and Pelagianism are the perennial problems we face in struggling to live up to our religious ideals. Over the centuries these heresies come in different forms but always lead to a real lack of what the Pope calls, 'mercy'. Paul seems to fall into such a trap at first glance today. He seems to excommunicate someone who was doing what was actually acceptable in the ancient world. He would, however, in the overall context of his letter to the Christians of Corinth, be appearing to challenge both the 'anything goes' understanding of his teaching on the Spirit but also the divisiveness of different groups turning on each other. Jesus faces the same challenge in the Gospel. Actually, it was perfectly possible in Jewish Law to heal the seriously sick on the Sabbath, providing that they were in danger of death. Jesus picks out a man who is limited in his abilities, with one withered hand, but not in danger of death. Jesus challenges what we could call 'nit-picking' in the name of welcoming the outcast into the community. The withered hand was the mark of a sinner, someone unclean perhaps. Paul, like Jesus, puts the needs of the community first, but the kind of community that respects each individual.