Third Sunday in Lent 2 (1 Cor 1:22-25; Jn 2:13-25)

**THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD**

People make mutual agreements and place their trust in one another, such as at a marriage or a religious profession. They do so because they believe that their trust can be justified.

Of course, it can turn out that one's trust in another can be misplaced, or that I fail to meet my commitment to the other. Marriages and religious professions can break down. But even when both parties are faithful to the agreement, their trust is fully verified only a long time afterwards.

It is only when the agreement has borne fruit that we realize fully all the benefits involved in taking the first risk. But at the time we made the agreement, and while we are seeing it through, there is plenty o f room to doubt about the wisdom of getting involved at all.

The same comments can be made about the agreement we make with God in faith, both personally and as a community.

In the first reading, we have God's agreement with Moses and his people summed up in the Ten Commandments. The purpose of these commandments was to lead the people to trust and obey the one true God, and to observe his will in their relationships with one another. They were also meant to encourage the people to keep faith with God. They serve the same purposes for us as well.

For the Jews, the Ten Commandments represented the power and wisdom of God. St Paul, in our second reading, presents Jesus Christ as the power and wisdom of God: “And so, while the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, here are we preaching a crucified Christ” (1Cor 1: 22).

St Paul uses “Jews” and “Greeks” to represent all of us.

Some of us have the Jewish approach to religion, and others have the Greek approach. They are two basically different approaches, each with its own strengths and weaknesses.

The Jewish prophets teach us a genuine approach to God in faith and trust. And God himself had always pointed out the prophets by special signs, so much so that the Jews expected and demanded signs of any new prophet

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Jesus had already told them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah (Matt 12: 38), the sign of rising from death. Again, after he cleared them out of the temple, they demanded, “What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' (Jn 2: 13f), and again he promised them the sign of rising from death.

The Greek philosophers teach us to use our human intelligence to reach the truth about God and all reality. But it takes more than a logical mind; it takes faith and trust, and especially a loving heart, to know God.

Some of us lack the strength of the Jewish approach to religion, and cultivate its weakness. We hanker for the exciting, the spectacular and the miraculous. Only the extraordinary seems to support our faith in God.

Others of us lack the strength of the Greek philosophers’ approach to God, and are crippled by its limitations. We will have nothing but clearly rational certainty, only what the human mind can take as reasonable and evident.

Jesus Christ taught and lived differently from either weakness, and he died in a way that showed the full meaning of his teaching and life. St Paul sees why he could be only a scandal to the miracle‑seekers, and nonsense to the rationalists. “Christ crucified” ‑ that says it all.

He represents a vulgar, unspectacular criminal, shocking and revolting to those who want excitement from religion and dash in their religious leaders. To the self‑sufficient intellectuals, he stands for unbearable human weakness. He doesn't fit into any reasonable philosophy of life devised by brilliant men.

Yet, Jesus Christ crucified is both the power of God and the Wisdom of God for those of us who know him through love, and place all our trust in him. The proof of our faith is in the living of it.

We can be asked to explain ourselves. We feel it is not we who are on trial for our faith, but rather those who demand answers from us are on trial for their lack of it. Our answer to others is the answer that we live in ourselves. It is the answer of Jesus, the experience of resurrection, rising from death.

We have seen Jesus rise from death; not with our bodily eyes, but in the light of our faith in him. We experience rising from death in ourselves, already in many circumstances small and great, but not yet completely. But we believe that our trust in him will be justified, because Christ crucified is the power and wisdom of God.