

The two scenes could not be more different.

The first one is Jesus with his newly-named apostles on the great plain, healing everyone who comes to him.

We need to envision that scene from time to time.

It is the scene of the field hospital that our Pope is calling us back to, the scene of what the Church on earth is in essence.

A place where the broken can find healing, and where sinners can be relieved of their burdens, where God is glorified in all God's people.

We are all sinners, and every human being experiences brokenness.

But in this scene of Jesus healing those who come to him, he is also surrounded by his disciples whom he loves and calls by name, and he empowers them to participate in his ministry of healing.

But the other scene, the one with Paul, cuts close to the bone these days.

Paul is struggling with a Church community, writing them a letter.

And we have heard *so much* of struggles lately, and of letters. And of documents.

Can this letter of Paul become Holy Scripture for us again?

Can we read it again, in this place, in this time, even as we come here for healing as to a field hospital?

And so we ask, as our professor emerita Sandra Schneiders asks: can what we read today, with so many images that sting so badly, can *this* become for us a revelatory text?

Because Paul here is shaming the Corinthians by asking:

why do you use the civil courts to fight with each other?

Is there no one wise enough among you to settle your cases internally?

How different are things today.

Because now, bishops are being called,

And some are volunteering,

to subject the records of their dioceses to civil courts.

They must do this now because, within the Church, there is too much that has been hidden.

There has already been too much defrauding, too much deceit within the Church.

Does this exposure really need to happen?

Do these things really need to be drawn out into the light?

They do, in the name of truth, in the name of honesty, in the name of accountability.

Even Pope Francis has been accused of hiding his knowledge of a bishop's abusive behavior.

More and more it appears to be a politically motivated attack against him.

And yet Francis has not spoken. Is that the right approach?

Neither has Benedict spoken, although he is also involved in the history of all this.

Francis also, just this morning, struck a strangely defensive tone on behalf of bishops.

The same as he did – at first – when the crisis in Chile broke.

He changed his mind, eventually, and then acted decisively on behalf of victims in Chile.
What will it take for him to speak and act now?

There are other members of the church,
journalists, who are our brothers and sisters in Christ,
giving voice to those who are dragging the clergy they do not like through the mud.
It is the worst of partisan politics.
Even when these people are credibly accused of nothing,
they are connected to the wrong people, somehow,
and the stones of guilt by association are cast against them.
Christians are actually using the ocean of suffering and pain that is sexual abuse
as an opportunity to tear down their enemies.
Christians, some of them anyway, are using fear, yet again,
to call for a purge of our gay brothers from the priesthood.
Our brothers, our spiritual fathers,
who have laid down their lives for their friends in chaste, loving service.
They are not the ones who have done these terrible things.
(Am I striking a defensive tone? I honestly do not know.)
To say nothing of our non-ordained LGBTQ brothers and sisters,
who live quiet lives of service and love in the Church.
And those of us who know them, and who *love* them, know it.
Who else will the journalists, the activists, our angry, scared brothers and sisters go after?
Whom else will they try to purge from our midst for crimes they didn't commit?

But maybe *that* is also where we need to hear Paul's voice, again:
"Do you dare to do this to each other, before unbelievers?
Is there no one wise enough among you to judge these matters?"
The answer very well might be yes, maybe there is, somewhere among us.
But then the question is: will we listen to *them*?
We hear plenty of voices from among the bishops themselves,
and from among the journalists both within the Church and outside the Church.
But these voices are shrill, vindictive, partisan, and paranoid.
The voices that we so desperately need to hear do not seem to sound forth from our leaders.

Whatever else he meant at the time,
Paul's voice continues to cry out:
There is no place in the church, or in the kingdom of god,
for us to abuse each other, to lie to each other, and to hide behind procedures.
There is no place for using laws, even canon law, to get advantages over others in the Church.
Paul's voice continues to cry out:
We need to be just to each other,
Before the courts of the laws of our lands.
Before the Holy Trinity.
Because we too have been washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ

and in the Spirit of our God.

And so we need to go to the field hospital.

And here we are, right now.

At least for today.

And that is always good.