



Lent reflection for March 6, 2024

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1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge, but anyone who loves God is known by him.

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists” and that “there is no God but one.” Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge the weak brother or sister for whom Christ died is destroyed. But when you thus sin against brothers and sisters and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never again eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

Today's Reflection is by Cara Webber

"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Paul warns that knowledge can make us proud, self-satisfied, and therefore closed off to others: confident in our correctness, we are focused on ourselves rather than attuned to others. Love turns us outward, to our relationships with other people and with God. In the early chapters of his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul is worried about relationships: between the church members and God of course, but also about their relationships with each other. Which makes sense: our relationships with other people are connected to our relationship with God. They inform each other.

The context of this passage — food sacrificed to idols — might seem quite far from our contemporary anxieties. But Paul's concerns seem more familiar. He tells his readers: hey, just because some of you know that idols are meaningless and so eating food that has been dedicated to another god won't hurt you, not everyone knows that. Don't rely solely on your knowledge. Instead, let your actions be guided by love of others. If you know there are people who struggle with superstitions about idols who might look to you as an example, then don't eat the food offered to an idol because of how those other people might interpret that behavior. I think this is a good reminder. I know there have been times in my life where I have prided myself on my knowledge, my intellect, or my understanding, at the expense of being the most loving I could toward others.

And yet, at least for me, there is another aspect to the contrast Paul sets up between knowledge and love: with the turning toward others that love brings comes vulnerability. The certainty of knowledge can provide a kind of safety: I know this, I know where I am. But once I look toward others and toward God, there is more room for the unknown. I find this is something I struggle with in my faith. Often, I think, my faith is like knowledge: I know that I believe. I know God loves me: that feels safe. But for me the emphasis is on the "know" in that sentence, not on the "love." I guess I find it hard to think about what love means there, and to be open to it. I find myself surprised by this realization, especially because I think being open to other people comes easily to me. So in this Lenten season of reflection, I think I need to ask for help being open to God and his love.



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