

1 Corinthians 12.13b-13.end Luke 7.31-35

The Book of Common Prayer instructs the Minister at a wedding, if there be no Sermon, to read what the Bible teaches husbands and wives as to their duties. Letters of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians, along with those of Peter, himself a married man, contain the appropriate passages. You will note 1 Corinthians is not included, but nowadays 1 Corinthians 13 would be a likely first choice of the parties to be married.

It is no surprise to find this a favourite, for its chapter on Love is a beautiful insertion by Paul in this letter, and a relevant, attractive addition in the wedding service.

Congregations are asked to note that it especially applies to all church members, first and foremost. The Church is not an organisation you choose like you might choose a political party, a sports club or any other group to join. The Church is an *organism*, or, more easily recognised in Paul's letters, it is a body - the Body of Christ. In Baptism we are received "into the congregations of Christ's flock" and express belief in the Holy Spirit, and, as immediately follows "The holy Catholic Church" – a truth we experience more than believe in.

Christians must have a world-wide vision and recognise their responsibility to pray for and support Churches and their members they may never see or know. Their function at a baptism is to be representatives of the Universal Church, into which they welcome the baptised, at St Mark's and St Wystan's, say, but also into a wider family, not confined in any one place.

The danger Paul confronted at Corinth was that within the local congregation, some individuals treated the gifts the Holy Spirit had given them as a private possession; something to boast of as superior to the gifts of other members. Chapter 13 reminds them that gifts are temporary and belong to the whole congregation, with each member a steward of their gift for the benefit of all. Paul tells how the fruits of the Spirit last, whereas gifts will come to an end; and the greatest of the fruits is Love.

Today we celebrate St Ninian, thought to have died on 16<sup>th</sup> September 432. By then the Church was very much more organised than was the situation at Corinth, only 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Priests and Bishops were formally ordered. Ninian, a native of Strathclyde, had studied in Rome, where he received episcopal consecration. He came under the influence of St Martin of Tours and dedicated his church in Galloway to Martin. Ninian returned to preach to the heathen Picts and is a good example of serving in the Universal Church. He might inspire us to express our partnership with those who go abroad from here and others who come to us from abroad. Hence our partnership with the Church in North India, for example.

The scope of Christian love cannot be limited. The Common Worship Marriage Service contains this prayer "May the hospitality of their home bring refreshment and joy to all around them; may their love overflow to neighbours in need and embrace those in distress". This prayer too can be applied to all Christians.

Geoffrey.