

4/28/24

**[Connection]** Good morning Cornerstone! It is good to be with you this morning. Thank you for joining us today. My name is Joe and I am the Pastor here at Cornerstone. If this is your first time worshipping with us, I want to invite you to fill out our connection card. It just lets us get to know you a little more and be able to connect with you more. If Cornerstone is home for you, you can use our app to check in and let us know you are here. There you can also fill out a prayer request so we can be praying for you throughout the week.

**[Title]** Today we are going to be continuing our sermon series called 'Church in Crisis' where we have been studying the book of 1 Corinthians. The church in the city of Corinth was in trouble. Since the apostle Paul had left them, they had difficulty separating themselves from the culture around them. As a result, they have created compromises in their morality and disrupted and corrupted their walk with Christ. In this letter Paul addresses many of their immoral behaviors. He also sets them straight on the path to continue to grow to develop Christ-like character through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Today our scripture is going to be found in 1 Corinthians 3:1-23. If you have your bibles go ahead and turn there, if you would like to follow along with us. If you do not have a paper bible and would like one we have some available for you in the back. You can also follow along with us today on the app with the scripture and our sermon notes available to you there.

But before we dive in the teaching today, lets read a part of our passage this morning together which comes from the book of **1 Corinthians 3:21-23**. So let us stand as you are able, out of reverence for God's word as we proclaim the truth in His Scripture.

**[1] SCRIPTURE 1 Corinthians 3:21-23**

*"So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."*

This is the Word of the Lord  
Thanks be to God

**INTRO**

**[2]** Paul in the Last 3 chapters has focused on this topic of division in the church. The people have separated themselves under these factions about which teacher they follow over the other. Some groups saying they follow Paul while others follow, Apollos or Peter. He addresses and acknowledges their division and even what it might cost them in the very first chapter of this passage.

In the second half of chapter 1 and in chapter 2 it almost appears like Paul takes a break from talking about division and establishes something else, and then returns to it in this passage. However, Paul is actually building his case in chapter one and 2 in order to use the concepts that are discussed, to establish the gravity of their divisiveness. In this chapter Paul is going to pull all of the concepts to talk about why the division is there and what it is root cause, but he is also going to give metaphors for the greater implication of their division and what it says about their spiritual maturity.

He will use concepts about being clearly distinguished from the world, the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, and the transformational work of the gospel that will appear as foolishness to the rest of the world that does not believe.

Paul in the previous chapter talks about the gospel message. He says that when he came to them, the account that is recorded in Acts chapter 18, he says that he did not come with wise words or lofty speech but that he came and preached Christ crucified. He addresses how the only reason that they were able to understand the gospel is through the Holy Spirit revealing the truth to them.

In the first part of our chapter this morning Paul talks about not his message or his effectiveness but he talks about their position when they accepted the gospel, as in they were lost and unaware of the truth. As a rebuke he points out that not much has changed since then. Where they are saved through the gospel because they have accepted it, however their spiritual development has not advanced because of their desire for the word and not the deeper levels of the gospel.

## BODY

### [3] 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

*“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup>I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, <sup>3</sup>for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?”*

When Paul first preached to them, they were not spiritual people. They had not received the Holy Spirit and were lost in their sin. When they did accept the gospel, they were seen as infants in Christ, as they should have been viewed. From that moment Paul spiritually fed them but he kept it in the basics. He knew that because they were so new to this salvation and belief, he fed them with what he refers to as spiritual milk. This image that Paul is creating is like an infant with a bottle in our modern perspective.

They were in a place where they could not know, learn or comprehend deep levels of knowledge about what they believed. It would be overwhelming, and too much for them to process. They were not ready for the solid food. But here’s the thing Paul came to the church probably 4 years before this letter was written. He stayed with them 18 months, then he left. Apollos came to the church after him. Paul later mentions that Apollos, united in purpose with Paul, taught the church to help them grow. Now Paul is writing this letter about 2.5 years after he left, and he still cannot address them as grown enough to have this solid food. They have maintained their spiritual infancy and have not spiritually developed as they should have.

Paul says that the reason for this lack of growth and development is that they have maintained their fleshly desires. They did not separate themselves, not just from the culture but from the Old self. Part of our belief in our salvation is that when we come to believe in Christ the old self is gone, it is dead, and it is crucified with Christ. This putting the flesh to death is not a one and done deal, we are to put the flesh to death regularly. This is not that we have to constantly re-accept our salvation, but it is through our salvation in Christ that we have the ability to put off the old self and become new. In the previous chapter, Paul mentions that it is through the Holy Spirit that we are able to live in denial of our fleshly impulses.

The church in Corinth has not been doing this. It has stunted their growth in Christ. So much so that they are still nourished by this ‘spiritual milk’ and cannot process ‘solid food’. They have not grown to seek and understand the greater depth of God and their salvation because they still entertain the flesh.

The jealousy and strife is evidence of the great influence that the flesh has had over the church. Paul’s words would have been a reality check to the congregation. They are a church that believed themselves

to be extremely spiritual people. They prided themselves on the spiritual awareness, and their experience in following for almost 3 years. They felt that it somehow carried weight and they would consider themselves to be quite mature and Paul is telling them that this is not the case.

Paul says that he was only able to feed them spiritual milk because they have not grown to be able to understand solid food. Now here's the thing that I think is extremely crippling to the church and its approach to discipling and growing people. Christians will often read this verse and justify that the gospel is only spiritual milk. It is only something to be understood and reflected on in the beginning of a spiritual journey. Then once they have accepted and believe in Jesus, they can abandon a focus on the gospel. Thinking there are greater and deeper theological things to learn and understand.

The gospel's initial message produces the fruit of repentance, we see this in the ministry of John the Baptist. The delivering of the gospel message should produce the fruit of repentance in those that hear it and through repentance we find faith and we are saved.

We need to understand this about our spiritual growth, the gospel is not just spiritual milk. It is not for the unbeliever to hear, believe, and then move on. It is not the first food that's only purpose is to get us on the right side of condemnation. The solid food that Paul is talking about is the full and complete understanding of the gospel.

**The gospel message should be an ever-present meditative journey, constantly on the mind of every believer.**

The gospel is the reason that we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. The gospel is the reason that we are to live set apart from the rest of the world. The gospel is the reason that we develop Christ-like character. The gospel message should be an ever-present meditative journey, constantly on the mind of every believer. It should never be abandoned in the pursuit of advanced knowledge, it is both spiritual milk and solid food.

When we abandon the gospel in the hopes of something greater we have missed the point. We are operating in ways and in the mindset of the flesh. This produces the fruit of jealousy and strife. We start to believe that someone possesses a greater understanding of God than we do. We think that they have access to a secret knowledge that we do not. We will argue and quarrel in conflict that is fueled by jealousy and we create divides in the church. Seeking to understand the Gospel more fully and completely would have protected this congregation from division but they did not acknowledge there is more to know in the work of Christ, so they sought out knowledge elsewhere.

**[4] 1 Corinthians 3:4-5**

*“For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.”*

In the division that Paul addresses earlier in chapter 1, the church created these factions of which teachers they followed. He is pointing out their jealousy and strife. These were things that harm unity within the church. They were operating like the sophists in the culture. These sophists were paid teachers of logic and philosophy. They were often associated with skepticism and teachings that were superfluously plausible but when examined deeper were completely incorrect. These sophists would

identify themselves based upon who was their teacher, almost like a badge of honor. They were a great teacher because of who they studied under.

This is exactly what the church was doing. They were elevating themselves based upon the teacher whom they followed, and it caused them to fight among themselves. They would insight jealousy because they would wear this identity of their teacher to elevate themselves over others. Paul points this out as them being 'merely human'. As in they were operating in an unsaved mindset.

Paul is asking these rhetorical questions again to prove his point. What is Apollos, what is Paul? The people in the church already know who they are based upon reputation and deeds, but they are not asking the question of nature. Paul and Apollos are just servants. They are the ones that God sent to preach the gospel. That's it, they are nothing special. They are just servants of God. They are under the Lordship of Christ just as the church is to be. Paul is drawing their attention away from the people that they are so focused on. The people acknowledge the person but fail to be under the ultimate Lordship because they elevated the one that was called not the one in control.

In their servanthood they both didn't even fulfill the same thing. The work that they were called to do was different. So these people in the church rallying behind the creation and not the creator, doesn't realize that there is not really even a comparison between Paul and Apollos.

**[5] 1 Corinthians 3:6-7**

*"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup>So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."*

Paul starts this first metaphor to illustrate the capacity that He and Apollos acted as servants. He uses this agricultural metaphor to explain that different leaders have different roles in the growth of the church. Paul is responsible for founding the church in Corinth<sup>1</sup>. Apollos came after Paul and tended to what Paul planted. Apollos watered what was planted. This is Apollos giving instruction to the church community<sup>2</sup>.

Since they both fulfilled their roles in different capacities, in the same ministry, both are equally important in different ways. Paul then adds this caveat, no matter what is done by the human will and ability, God is responsible for the growth. God is the source of maturity in the faith. He is directing the Corinthian's belief in God, who is the source of life and unity. Paul and Apollos are just his servants.

**[6] 1 Corinthians 3:8-9**

*"He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. <sup>9</sup>For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building."*

The Corinthians are God's cultivated field and Paul and Apollos are humble field hands who labor in conjugation with one another in a common purpose. Even though Paul and Apollos were different they are united as one. Their different activities led to growth in the church, but with God as the source of the growth, Paul is saying that they are not the ones worthy of honor. God's work is always behind the scenes and even when human work is finished God's work continues.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:14

<sup>2</sup> Acts 18:27-28

Paul and Apollos were stellar examples of ministers who were perfectly united in thought and judgement. This is what Paul called them to be in 1:10. This is Paul doing exactly like he did in chapter 2, he is pointing the church's attention away from them as teachers and placing their attention on God.

This metaphor of agriculture is intentional and aligns with many depictions in the Old Testament. Many of the OT prophets describe God as a planter or builder<sup>3</sup>. God's involvement with the church has several parallels with Isaiah 5:1-7. In both passages They point out that God's people are plants or vines. In both passages God is the owner of the field or vineyard and he is the one that tends to the plants. This church is evidence of what Isaiah describes that even though God is directly involved in the tending, His people still sometimes yield bad fruit.

The church in Corinth is supposed to be God's field, they are to be a display for the power of the Holy Spirit, that brings life and growth. They are to be God's building displaying the unity within believers. In a field they are individuals growing in the same vicinity. As a building they are all one for the purposes of God, but they are missing it. This illustration sets the stage for the metaphor that Paul will use in v16-17.

### **[7] 1 Corinthians 3:10-11**

*“According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled<sup>[b]</sup> master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. “*

Paul refers to himself as a skilled master builder, which is the Greek word *architekton*. It is the person that would be in charge of a building project, directing workers in its completion. It is a term that is designed to remind the Corinthians that Paul is still on the topic of ministry and it is constructed according to God's wisdom rather than human wisdom. As an *architekton*, the foundation that Paul built in Corinth was the truth of Jesus Christ, who is essential to the stability of the church community. Others were to come and to build upon it, but this is not just referring to Apollos.

These are in reference to the teachers and the leaders in the church that are to build up the church. If the foundation that these leaders are to be building upon was the gospel, what is supposed to be built upon it is Christ-like character.

Paul also issues this warning to those that attempt to destroy the church. He is saying something of great significance here about the nature of the church. God's temple is sacred. God is the owner of the body, the temple where the Holy Spirit dwells. God is going to destroy those who destroy his temple. This is Paul warning specifically those that are creating this division. He is telling them that these divisions that you are causing are destroying the church and God is not going to let that go unpunished. Those that are responsible for the division are building things that are going to be consumed by God's judgement.

### **[8] 1 Corinthians 3:12-13**

*“Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.”*

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<sup>3</sup> Jer. 18:7-9; Ez. 36:9-10

These 6 materials that Paul mentions are the 6 items that were used in the construction of the temple in Jerusalem<sup>4</sup>. Using these 6 items Paul carries on the metaphor of the church being God's building, saying these are the building materials that are being used to build upon the foundation of the gospel that Paul laid out.

But on 'the Day' what has been built by these leaders will be tested by fire. The Day is referring to Christ's second coming. When God's reign is established<sup>5</sup>, and in his full justice will rescue his followers delivering them and purging the world of evil<sup>6</sup>.

The work of these leaders will be revealed through fire. This is a testing judgement. This judgement does not refer to salvation, but the quality of the work done by those who labor on the foundation of Christ. This fire is to test the work that has been done. Fire is going to consume the combustible and worthless materials (wood, hay, and straw), and will leave the work that is done properly through the Holy Spirit.

Those responsible for the division in the church are those culpable for the consumable materials that the church is built with. The wood, hay and straw of human wisdom will be burned up in the judgement.

### **[9] 1 Corinthians 3:14-15**

*"If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."*

This the premise that the builder will only receive his payment after the work is completed and tested. If you hire someone to build a fence you don't pay him in full before the fence is done. When the project is complete you are not going to pay for a fence that is going to fall down if you look at it the wrong way. If the things that are built by the leaders in the church survives the judgement of fire, they will receive their reward<sup>7</sup>.

On the other hand, if the work is consumed that leader will suffer loss. Meaning they will not receive payment because their work was consumed, they built foolishly and did not follow sound instruction. Instead, they used their own wisdom, which resulted in the weakening of believers, rather than their strengthening (v12). While the teacher survived, with their salvation intact, their teaching or their impact in the church will not.

This is a word of warning for those that are current elders and leaders, and those that aspire to be elders and leaders in the church. We are to pay careful attention to the work and the decisions that are being made to build up the church. They have to be built on the foundation of the gospel, because anything built on a different foundation is not the church. They also have to be built through the wisdom of God not our own understanding.

Paul's metaphor here is both practical and cautionary in nature<sup>8</sup>. The Corinthians church can compare the message of their teachers to the received teaching of Apollos. Everything that is being built up in the

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Chronicles 22:14-16, 29:2; 2 Chronicles 3:6)

<sup>5</sup> Joel 2:1-2, 31-32; 1 Cor 1:8; Phil 1:6; 2 Peter 3:10

<sup>6</sup> 1 Thes 4:16, 5:2

<sup>7</sup> What that reward is, is not specifically mentioned. It could be greater responsibility in the kingdom (Matt 25:21). It could be praise from God (1 Cor 4:5), and it could be the satisfaction of the work withstanding the test of fire.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:12-17, 3:4-9

church should align with scripture. The apostle John talks about this in 1 John 4, when he talks about testing the spirits. When we build in the church, teachings, programs, outreach, or structure, if it is not founded in the gospel or not based upon the principles of scripture then is a consumable work that will not withstand the fire of God's judgement.

Where the warning is practical for the church to have checks and balances to the teachings of leaders, it is also cautionary for the church. It is a warning against overestimating the worth of any individual leader. All of the elders and leaders in this church are not elevated over any other. Some are the Paul's of our church that plant and build the foundation. Others are like Apollos, where they grow and develop the body, but that does not make any of them more or less important. They are not objects of association or divisions. They are servants of Christ, and their work should always point to the one responsible for growth and never back to themselves.

**[10] 1 Corinthians 3:16-17**

*“Do you not know that you<sup>9</sup> are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.”*

Paul continues the metaphor that was set up in verse 9, but it does it with this question, Do you not know that you are God's temple? Their behavior is to say the least immoral, but it is appalling because they should know better! They should know that they are the temple, and because they are the temple they should not be acting this way.

There are many other passages that will refer to the individual being the temple of the Holy Spirit, but Paul is saying that they, the congregation as a whole, is the temple. It is among them that is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Just as the temple in Jerusalem, which held the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat where the presence of God dwells. The Jerusalem temple served to unify the nation of Israel. In the New testament church age, the corporate gathering of believers is the temple designed to unify the church.

The Corinthians are to represent the unified body, where the God dwells among them. Because of this, there can be no divisions within it. Jesus said that a house divided against itself cannot stand<sup>9</sup>. This destruction of the temple, which this church is on the verge of, is the disbanding of the gathering of believers or the deception of the church. This happens when there are disputes among believers or through poor teaching of biblical truth<sup>10</sup>.

God's temple is a sacred and holy place. The warning to those who might destroy it is severe and it is a reality. It is again a specific warning to those that are causing division. Because, their division is it not only instigating the judgment of God against them, but it is jeopardizing God's presence with them.

**[11] 1 Corinthians 3:18-20**

*“Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” <sup>20</sup> and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”*

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 12:22-28

<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor 3:15

Paul is warning against self-deception. He brings back this comparison of wisdom and foolishness that he talks about in 1:18-31. He is urging the Corinthians to become truly wise since the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. Those who find value in the wisdom of the world have been deceived. They are to abandon this wisdom that is tied to this age and take up the wisdom of God which is the foundation of everything they do. It is the foundation of the church, and it is the gospel. It is Christ crucified on behalf of sinful humanity.

Paul establishes the importance of doing so because God's judgement is the only thing that matters. In his judgement, God will shame those who are knowledgeable with human wisdom. Paul quotes the book of Job, and says that God will catch the wise in their craftiness<sup>11</sup>. Their understanding will mean nothing because God's wisdom is so far above their own.

Then he quotes from the book of Psalms and says that their identify is futile, wasteful<sup>12</sup>. There is nothing that they can do to outsmart God, because he knows even their thoughts. Their way of thinking is not hidden from God. The ways of the world and thinking like the world is pointless because when God's judgement come this world is going to pass away<sup>13</sup>.

Again, Paul changes their perception even when it comes to the leadership position that these individuals are taking not just as leaders but the affiliation with church leaders that they are promoting.

### **[12] 1 Corinthians 3:21-23**

*"So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, <sup>23</sup> and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."*

There is no reason for them to boast in these men, because they are fools. They are building things in the church that are going to be consumed by God's judgment. They are founded in the wisdom of the worlds and they are not building upon the foundation of the gospel. The spiritual milk that they were given, they do not see it for the spiritual solid food that it is! So why is this church continuing to boast in these foolish men that they placed as leaders.

They can no longer identify themselves by the ministry they prefer, because it is causing rivalry and strife in the community and jeopardizing their unity, and the presence of God among them. Paul quotes the prophet Jeremiah and saying do not boast in men<sup>14</sup>.

Paul completely flips their understanding and says that the people do not belong to these leaders. In fact, these leaders belong to them, the church. That is why he says that 'all things are yours'. He puts to rest this idea of allegiance to certain leaders. Reminding them that the leaders are a possession of the church but that the church is a possession of Christ. Paul and Apollos are just servants to the church, and are laborers under their master Christ. Boasting has its place, but the only thing that we are to be boasting about it about God.

### **APPLICATION**

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<sup>11</sup> Job 5:13

<sup>12</sup> Psalm 94:11

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:8

<sup>14</sup> Jeremiah 9:24, see also 1 Cor 1:31



**[13]** The only way for them to become wise is to become a fool, which is to embrace the cross. What we have to understand is that the cross is not just an object of faith. We have to embrace the cross as a value system. It is a way of thinking and behaving. The Gospel is the foundation for everything that we do.

When we abandon the ever-present reality of the gospel, we lose sight of the purpose of the church. We allow leaders to fulfill positions that they have no business being in. They come in and they build things that have nothing to do with the gospel. They operate without fear of God's judgement and they deceive the church. They will instigate the wrath of God and jeopardize the presence of God among us. Do we not know that we are the temple of God? We are to be a pillar of unity in the world that constantly is divided against itself.

We bicker and fight amongst each other, over things that really don't matter. We create division over things that are not scriptural. We will argue and fight, fueled by jealousy over what? The church down the road having a better light show? The church across town has a bigger budget? They have more people, they don't hold me accountable for my actions, they don't desire to be involved in every aspect of my life?

These are all things that are fruit of us abandoning the gospel, I thinking that we are going to find a deeper knowledge elsewhere. When we do not seek a deeper knowledge of God in his word, we look for it in things like ourselves or in our experiences or in our social justice. Every aspect of scripture from Genesis to Revelation is pointing to What Jesus did for us on the cross. When we lose sight of our need for the gospel every waking moment of everyday, because we think that it is just milk for the infants and we need something more.

When we get to a place where the sacrifice of Christ is no longer relevant, we start building with wood and straw instead of the inconsumable materials, and God's judgement will make it all worth nothing!

We as the church are to abandon the ways of the world. Remove the wisdom that we think we can find in the world out there and dive headfirst into the wisdom found in here. We are to have the understanding that the mentality that the gospel message is an ever-present meditative journey constantly on the mind of every believer.

The gospel should always be our focus! The message that God in his perfect divinity, took on flesh to die a brutal death for the sake of us. To be the atonement for the sins of the world will take a lifetime to understand! It is both the introduction and the greatest depths of understanding of the love of God. It is the 'spiritual milk' that brings the fruit of repentance. It is the 'spiritual solid food' that brings the fruit of Christ-like character. It is the foundation of everything that we do. It is the foundation that we build everything off of.

When someone offends us, we can provide the grace that has been so abundantly poured out on us in Christ. When we are tempted to rally people behind our leaders to fight against those that are within the body, we can reconceptualize that we are united in God's presence and God's purpose. We acknowledge the one who is in control, the creator and not the creation.

The entire rest of this letter Paul will continue to show the church this is what the gospel does. This is how we are changed when the cross is a value system and not just a symbol of faith. Chapter 4 is the ministry that the apostle modeled not so they can say 'look at me', but so it can be repeated by you.

Chapter 5 and 6 is ways to avoid the sexual immorality that corrupts believers to their core. Chapter 7 is the depiction of marriage as it symbolizes the union between Christ and his church the union that should be model at home and repeated in the church.

I can go on, but we have to get this right first. When we miss the gospel we miss everything that God has done and everything that he is going to continue to do through you! The leaders, the teachers, the lives that will be changed through your witness. The gospel that is going to be preached to thousands that is represented just by the people in this room. This is our place to grow! The place we are equipped for ministry to go out and be like Paul planting the seed. Or like Apollos that waters the crop that has already been planted. We all belong to God, and he is going to use you and he is going to grow his body! Do not jeopardize that through the foolishness of the ways of the world or through the spreading of division among us.

Live for the gospel always and forever!

**PRAYER AND REFLECTION**

**COMMUNION**