

Readings: *Isaiah 65: 1 – 9; Psalm 22: 19 – 28; Galatians 3: 23 – 29; Luke 8: 26 – 39.*

The arrangement of the three-year Lectionary has the (I assume, unintended) result that we don't very often get to hear the early chapters of Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians. Instead – as this year – we plunge straight into the middle.

So it's worth reflecting on the reasons for Paul's writing this letter, which has a very different tone from others – for example the letter to the Colossians, which we begin next month. Here is the way Paul begins the main part of the letter: *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel— not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ (1:6 & 7).*

This is totally different from Paul's usual way of starting with thanks for the way God has blessed the congregation to whom he is writing. So we may conclude that the letter was written because the Galatian Christians had gone seriously wrong.

The major criticism Paul makes is that they have abandoned the faith in the crucified Jesus, which Paul had preached to them: *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? (3:1 & 2).* It seems that the Galatians had been encouraged to turn back to Jewish teachings and practices – in particular circumcision.

This also meant that they had rejected the authority of Paul, denying that he was a proper apostle. Their argument was probably that he wasn't one of the Twelve who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That's why in the very first verse of the letter he writes: *Paul an apostle – not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.* He asserts his claim to be a true apostle because the crucified Christ has revealed himself as the one who has been raised to life by God the Father. And that is the heart of his own faith and the faith which he has preached to the Galatians.

Today's reading draws from this faith the conclusion that all the baptized, male and female, of any race and any class are *one in Christ Jesus...heirs according to the promise of God (3: 28 & 29).*