

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ
Apostolic Church of the Pleroma

*Delivered by Tau Phosphoros
to the Parish of St. Ambelain
on Sunday, January 28, 2018*

YEAR B - FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Greetings and welcome. Today is the fourth Sunday in the season of Epiphany; a season which runs short this year because of the timing of Easter, which of course effects the Lenten season leading up to it. Thus, there are only a couple of more weeks in the season of Epiphany. Our second reading today continues the reading of 1st Corinthians, which is one of my favorites of Paul's letters. The importance of Paul's letters must not be underestimated, for they represent among the very earliest Christian writings. The Church of Paul's day was not one of codified dogma, but of living tradition and perpetual revelation. There were not yet any Gospels - at least not in any kind of finished and widely distributed form, for not once does Paul make any reference to them, or to any apostolic writings, or to any Christian writings at all, canonical or otherwise. Paul has received his teachings primarily through direct gnostic revelation, and secondarily through personal apostolic instruction.

In our passage today from 1st Corinthians, Paul is admonishing those who have received gnosis, and who have been freed of the constraints of the law because of it, against abusing that freedom, or being careless about it. He says plainly, and a little jarringly, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Now, it is not that he is discouraging against the acquisition of gnosis; he has already acknowledged that he is speaking to an audience who "all have knowledge." He is therefore giving a warning, no doubt based upon personal experience, that the one who has gnosis may fall into traps of pride and carelessness; of an inflated sense of self-worth that may be detrimental to one's brethren less enlightened. But in this statement he also gives the sure remedy, which is Love, or Agape. If one always acts first in Love, then the Knowledge will never become a stumbling block.

Paul is specifically discussing the eating of foods sacrificed to idols, but this topic is merely an exemplar for the broader point of mindfulness in one's actions. He readily acknowledges that the idols hold no meaning or value to the Christian. Therefore, the eating of the food sacrificed to such an empty idol is of no consequence. That is to say that if one does not believe in the reality or efficacy of the idols or the gods that they represent, then the food sacrificed to such objects is no more or less than what it was to begin with. It is just food; and its sole value lies in its nutritional content.

But Paul then acknowledges that "there is not Gnosis in all men." In other words, there may be some who look upon those eating food that has been sacrificed to the false gods and believe that those eating are partaking in that sacrifice. Paul's point here is that to give such an impression is to do an incredible disservice to brothers and sisters less informed. Thus, the one who has eaten the food sacrificed to idols has erred; not because of the act itself, but because he has not been mindful of the effects that his actions may have upon others. This is the sort of higher morals required of the Gnostic, which demand not mere adherence to a law, but a perpetual mindfulness.