



The Jubilee Year of Saint Paul June 28, 2008 to June 29, 2009

Pope Benedict invites Catholics the world over to celebrate a special jubilee year in honour of the 2000th anniversary of the birth of St. Paul.

Scholars think Paul was ten years younger than Jesus, so his birth is placed between 7 and 10 AD. The Holy Father's choice is midway between these two. The June 28-29 vigil and solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul serve as anchor points for this special period: from June 28, 2008 to June 29, 2009.

Key moments in Paul's life will figure prominently in the celebrations: his birth in Tarsus (western Turkey); his conversion on the road to Damascus; his visits to, and ministry in, the urban centres of Asia Minor and Greece (Antioch, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Philippi and Thessalonica) and even his shipwreck in Malta.

Still, it is his martyrdom in Rome around the same time as Peter's death in the year 67 that will be highlighted. The basilica church of St. Paul's-outside-the-Walls, with its recently discovered sarcophagus thought to hold St. Paul's remains, will enjoy a special focus.

The Basilica has developed a website (www.annopaolino.org) with a wealth of material in several languages, including English, as well as a logo that summarizes key themes of Paul's life and ministry.

The book represents the Word of God—primarily the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Scriptures that Paul interpreted in a radical way, creating enemies in Judaism and opponents in the fledgling Christian community. But setting the hearts and souls of so many on fire from an encounter with God, represented by the flame (the burning bush, the Holy Spirit, or both?)

Yet, as Paul confided to Timothy, “there is no chaining of the Word of God” (2 Timothy 2:9). This is represented by the chains which Paul often wore in his imprisonments; at the bottom of the emblem they are open, representing the release that comes from hearing and heeding God's Word.

Paul saw the Word of God as a liberating power, represented by the sword indicating the Spirit powerfully at work in Paul's preaching and writing. As he preached and wrote—

epistles that make up one-third of the New Testament—Paul proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus: see the cross at the top left corner of the open book.

The power in the cross, which formerly had been a scandal Paul could not accept, and which he fought against until the Risen Lord met him on the Damascus Road as he set out to destroy the Church of God.

Once he had been seized by Christ, Paul could do nothing other than promote the “Way” of Jesus’ disciples he had striven to undo. For in the momentary flash of his encounter with Christ, Paul had been utterly and totally transformed. Henceforth, all that he had once boasted about (being righteous under the law, zealous for the things of God and clear about how God’s will and purpose were to be interpreted), were now considered to be “rubbish” by comparison with his new desire—to lay hold of the power of Christ’s resurrection (cf. Philippians 3:7-11).

As Pope John Paul noted about the Great Jubilee 2000 “a Jubilee year is always an occasion of special grace, ‘a day blessed by the Lord’ ... it is thus a time of joy”. So, this special year could include a pilgrimage, if not to Rome or the Middle East, to a local church dedicated to St. Paul. Or the chance to return to a church or place which holds a special place in one’s faith journey (the place of Baptism, Confirmation, first Holy Communion, marriage, ordination, religious profession or other special graces).

A pilgrimage takes us out of our routine and allows for the possibility of a change of heart or renewal of spirit. Because this year is devoted to St. Paul, one might decide to meet the man whom St. Augustine said was the one who knew Christ best.

Paul’s writings belong to a world like our own that was living at the crossroads. Paul is a liminal character, combining in his writings Jewish methods of scriptural interpretation and Roman forms of rhetoric. His meaning about Christ and the Christian life can be obscure, off-putting, frustrating and challenging. Properly grasped, it can profoundly change one’s life.

In a monthly series during the Pauline Year, I will explore Paul’s thought and present some of his principal themes. As the Church has been reading the magisterial Epistle to the Romans since June and will continue to do so until September—the middle reading at the Sunday liturgy which is frequently passed over—I will begin with that writing next month.

Why not add Romans to your summer reading—in more than one translation if you can—and begin wrestling with Romans?

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Terrence Prendergast, S.J.", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

Terrence Prendergast, S.J.
Archbishop of Ottawa