

# The Year of St. Paul



We've looked at St. Paul's early life when he was known as Saul, at his conversion and training, and at his being sent twice by the Church on missionary journeys.

We only have the Acts of the Apostles to tell us of the activity of the early Church in the years following the Ascension of our Lord and the receiving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which led to the evangelization work of the apostles and disciples. What else happened, we have no solid record other than what is preached by Peter, James, and Paul, and what is learned in the letter to the Hebrews.

But the Church was obviously growing, and growing rapidly, meaning evangelization was a key component to the Spirit being allowed to touch the hearts and minds of many people.

So as we now look at St. Paul's final missionary journey, and his subsequent battle with the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem, his imprisonment, we see a Church very alive even while under persecution.

## **St. Paul's Third and Final Missionary Journey (Acts 18:18-21:16)**

Did you every take a vacation and just roam from one relative to the next, making short family visits before settling in one place for an extended stay (usually near a beach)?

This is what St. Paul does with this third missionary journey. Most of the areas and cities visited are repeat performances, St. Paul as it were, re-enforcing the message passed on a few years before, and affirming the Church community in faith (what they believe) and in action (how they are living their faith).

St. Paul entered the Cappadocian area previously not visited, before going to Galatia, then the area Phrygia where he worked for almost three years in Ephesus, which while proving very fruitful

was not without its hardships. Only after this does he move on to revisit Churches of Macedonia and Greece, again stopping in Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi and other notable cities. This occurred between 54-58AD.

During this time we see the power of the Lord being manifested through St. Paul

in ways that had been almost reserved (to what we know) to St. Peter in ways of healing, exorcisms and the like. The Power of God — the Spirit — was constantly being shown, and acknowledged. In Troas St. Paul raised a dead man to life.

Scholars tend to believe that it was after leaving Ephesus that St. Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in preparation for his next planned journey there. St. Paul had planned a journey to Rome and ultimately to Spain.

Although warned by the Spirit of coming imprisonment and suffering, St. Paul returned to Jerusalem where embattled debate took place before he was jailed and held in custody until his final trip to Rome in chains.

## **Points To Ponder**

Despite the urging of his companions and members of the local Churches, St. Paul follows the movement of the Spirit in choosing to go to Jerusalem where his nemesis, the Jewish leadership, awaits with false information. While knowing the false accusations, St. Paul was ready to stand with confidence, armed with the righteousness of God — Truth — before his accusers. It leaves us to ponder whether we could do the same under the circumstances or choose the options — not return to Rome, or back off a confrontation.

## GOD FIRST

*Year Three, Part 4*

*August 24, 2008*

The Spirit of God, as Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, would have it, is an integral part of St. Paul's life following his conversion. But we must take into account that it is also something that St. Paul is becoming much more aware of in his activity, as it is manifested in power during this final missionary journey. This "growth" speaks to us concerning how we allow our faith to grow as we mature in our prayer, understanding, and ultimate union with God.

### **Notes**

"On the first day of the week when we gathered for the breaking of the bread..." (Acts 20:7), tells us two very important things which often are points of contention with those who practice other faiths.

1) "*The first day of the week*" gives us a very clear indication that the "Day of the Lord's Resurrection" has replaced the Jewish Sabbath when God rested. The first day — Sunday — is the day is when God provided his greatest sharing for mankind — salvation.

2) "...when we gathered to break bread," is re-enforced later in St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. St. Paul thinks of the Eucharistic celebration as a foretaste of the second coming of Christ. Again, salvation through Jesus Christ is one of St. Paul's primary messages. For the early Church and for us, this would be and is critical to the living of our faith.

St. Paul was returning to Rome with money from the Gentile communities to sustain the believers in Jerusalem, which was enduring a harsh famine throughout the region. When he encourages the Church leaders (Acts 20:28) with these words, "*Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers...*" it is to all the faithful that the early Church was a structured community with a divine commission to preserve the tradition passed on from those who were first eyewitnesses. St. Paul is clear — there is no need to invent something new. God has provided for all

that we need, and his power has been shown by those who trust in his Spirit.

### **Personal Accounting**

1. Vatican Council II made drastic changes in the life of the Church. What did not change was the teaching of the Church concerning God, God-made-man, and God in Spirit now with us. So often we wish to see changes even today. Are they in line with St. Paul's preaching of Jesus Christ or personal preferences without substance?
2. It is recognized that the power of the Holy Spirit was constantly sought in the life of St. Paul and in the early Church. Trust was definitely needed. How do we respond as witnesses to the power of God being shown in life today?
3. When we take our short journeys to ball games or practices or even to the store — all those places where we're most comfortable — do we proclaim Jesus Christ in our lives, and alive in our Church, as St. Paul did during his return visits to early Christian communities?
4. Often our prayer can be caught up in our wanting to see God's power in our lives that we fail to see God's ultimate desire — our lives in his. Why do we gather for the breaking of bread each week? Does our belief in the Eucharist match up with a realization of our salvation experienced in this sharing at the Lord's table?