

Year of St. Paul

In celebration of the Year of St. Paul (29 June 2008 – 29 June 2009), Pope Benedict delivered a series of 20 catecheses at his Wednesday general audiences on the life and teaching of the great Apostle to the Gentiles. Below are some highlights from these extensive and enlightening talks by the Holy Father. Hopefully, they will encourage you to read the full texts available at the Vatican web site (www.vatican.va), as well as at the VEYO web site (www.veyopeterboro.org).

The Apostle Paul, an outstanding and almost inimitable yet stimulating figure, stands before us as an example of total dedication to the Lord and to his Church, as well as of great openness to humanity and its cultures. It is right, therefore, that we reserve a special place for him in not only our veneration but also in our effort to understand what he has to say to us as well, Christians of today (2 July 2008).

[St. Paul's] encounter [with Christ at Damascus] is a real renewal that changed all his parameters. Now he could say that what had been essential and fundamental for him earlier had become "refuse" for him; it was no longer "gain" but loss, because henceforth the only thing that counted for him was life in Christ ... At this moment he did not lose all that was good and true in his life, in his heritage, but he understood wisdom, truth, the depth of the law and of the prophets in a new way and in a new way made them his own.

We are only Christians if we encounter Christ. Of course, he does not show himself to us in this overwhelming, luminous way, as he did to Paul to make him the Apostle to all peoples. But we too can encounter Christ in reading Sacred Scripture, in prayer, in the liturgical life of the Church. We can touch Christ's Heart and feel him touching ours. Only in this personal relationship with Christ, only in this encounter with the Risen One do we truly become Christians. And in this way our reason opens, all Christ's wisdom opens as do all the riches of truth (3 Sept. 2008).

[In examining] Paul's journeys it suffices to note how dedicated he was to proclaiming the Gospel, sparing no energy, confronting a series of grave trials... Moreover, it is he who writes: "I do it all for the sake of the Gospel" (1 Cor 9: 23) ... We see a commitment that can only be explained by a soul truly fascinated by the light of the Gospel, in love with Christ, a soul sustained by profound conviction; it is necessary to bring Christ's light to the world, to proclaim the Gospel to all of us. (27 August 2008).

As can be seen, St Paul gave himself to the Gospel with his entire existence; we could say 24 hours a day! And he exercised his ministry with faithfulness and joy, "that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9: 22). And with regard to the Church, even knowing that he had a relationship of fatherhood with her (cf. 1 Cor 4: 15), if not actually of motherhood (cf. Gal 4: 19), he adopted an attitude of complete service, declaring admirably: "Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy" (2 Cor 1: 24). This remains the mission of all Christ's apostles in all times: to be his fellow workers in true joy (10 Sept. 2008).

St Paul did not think of Jesus in historical terms, as a person of the past. He certainly knew the great tradition of the life, words, death and Resurrection of Jesus, but does not treat all this as something from the past; he presents it as the reality of the living Jesus. For Paul, Jesus' words and actions do not belong to the historical period, to the past. Jesus is alive now, he speaks to us now and lives for us. This is the true way to know Jesus and to understand the tradition about him. We must also learn to know Jesus not from the human point of view, as a person of the past, but as our Lord and Brother, who is with us today and shows us how to live and how to die (8 Oct. 2008).

For St Paul the Cross has a fundamental primacy in the history of humanity; it represents the focal point of his theology because to say "Cross" is to say *salvation as grace* given to every creature. The topic of the Cross of Christ becomes an essential and primary element of the Apostle's preaching... His strength is not in the use of persuasive language but, paradoxically, in the weakness and trepidation of those who entrust themselves solely to the "power of God" (cf. 1 Cor 2: 1-5).

But why did St Paul make precisely this, the word of the Cross, the fundamental core of his teaching? The answer is not difficult: the Cross reveals "the power of God" (cf. 1 Cor 1: 24), which is different from human power; indeed, it reveals his love: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (*ibid.*, v. 25). Centuries after Paul we see that in history it was the Cross that triumphed and not the wisdom that opposed it. The Crucified One is wisdom, for he truly shows who God is, that is, a force of love which went even as far as the Cross to save men and women. God uses ways and means that seem to us at first sight to be merely weakness. ... The Apostle identified so closely with Christ that in spite of being in the midst of so many trials, he too lived in the faith of the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for his sins and for the sins of all (cf. Gal 1: 4; 2: 20). This autobiographical fact concerning the Apostle becomes paradigmatic for all of us (29 Oct. 2008).

"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15: 14-17). With these strong words from the First Letter to the Corinthians, St Paul makes clear the decisive importance he attributes to the Resurrection of Jesus. In this event, in fact, lies the solution to the problem posed by the drama of the Cross. The Cross alone could not explain the Christian faith, indeed it would remain a tragedy, an indication of the absurdity of being. The Paschal Mystery consists in the fact that the Crucified man "was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15: 4), as proto-Christian tradition attests. This is the keystone of Pauline Christology: everything rotates around this gravitational centre. The whole teaching of Paul the Apostle starts *from*, and arrives *at*, the mystery of him whom the Father raised from the dead. The Resurrection is a fundamental fact, almost a prior axiom (cf. 1 Cor 15: 12), on the basis of which Paul can formulate his synthetic proclamation (*kerygma*). He who was crucified and who thus manifested God's immense love for man, is risen again, and is alive among us (5 Nov. 2008).

No one can become Christian on his own. Becoming Christian is a passive process. Only by another can we be made Christians and this "other" who makes us

Christians, who gives us the gift of faith, is in the first instance the community of believers, the Church. From the Church we receive faith, Baptism. Unless we let ourselves be formed by this community we do not become Christians. An autonomous, self-produced Christianity is a contradiction in itself (10 Dec. 2008).

It is important to observe that the word "Church" almost always appears with the additional qualification "of God": she is not a human association, born from ideas or common interests, but a convocation of God. He has convoked her, thus, in all her manifestations she is one. The oneness of God creates the oneness of the Church in all the places in which she is found. Later, in the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul richly elaborated the concept of the Church's oneness, in continuity with the concept of the People of God, Israel, considered by the prophets as "God's bride" called to live in a spousal relationship with him. Paul presents the one Church of God as "Christ's bride" in love, one body and one spirit with Christ himself (15 Oct. 2008)

Let us pray [that] the Lord who caused St Paul to see his light, who made him hear his word and profoundly moved his heart, that we may also see his light, so that our hearts too may be moved by his Word and thus that we too may give the light of the Gospel and the truth of Christ to today's world which thirsts for it (27 August 2008).