

Pastoral Message by Bishop Nicola De Angelis, Bishop of Peterborough, at the Beginning of the Jubilee Year of St Paul

“I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.” II Tim 4:7

1. The Church’s Jubilee Tradition

Dear brothers and sisters, reflecting on these words of the Holy Apostle Paul, our thoughts go out in thanksgiving to God for the gift of St Paul to the Church. We recall his holy life, examples, numerous writings, his powerful preaching, and his martyrdom all of which are summarized in the concluding part of his letter to Timothy, “I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.” This Christian faith, which St Paul kept with so much diligence and suffering, has been given to us in our times as a deposit which we should preserve and hand over to our children. Great indeed is the mystery of our faith, the beauty of the Church’s liturgy, and the undying Tradition of the Church, which is ancient and yet ever new. The Church today, as Pope Benedict XVI preached at the Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls at the declaration of the special Jubilee Year to the Apostle Paul, is in need of authentic witnesses and martyrs of the faith like St Paul. The Church needs apostles who are open to divine grace, who will fall in love with the Lord Jesus Christ, and make the necessary sacrifice to keep the faith and hand it over as a pure gift of love to others.

The Church’s Jubilee tradition is rooted in the Old Testament sabbatical celebrations (2 Chronicle 36:21; Ezekiel 46: 17; Isaiah 61: 1-2; Leviticus 25: 8-17). Jubilee Year is the final year in a cycle of fifty years, consisting of the seven Sabbatical Year periods, or forty nine years plus the fiftieth year. The celebration of the Jubilee Year signifies that God is in control of the times and seasons, that God’s hand controls the cycle of life. It also brings with it the commemoration of freedom from slavery, redemption and liberty for prisoners. It was also a fallow year for the land, which was an early way of being earth-friendly by allowing the land to rest, free from exploitation. During the Jubilee Year, there was forgiveness of debt by creditors, exchanges of gifts, and acts of charity to the poor.

The ancient Hebrew jubilee of redemption, like many Old Testament feasts, was a prefiguration of the final liberation from sin which the Messiah was expected to bring. The Lord speaks about this Jubilee in his first homily in the synagogue: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year (Jubilee Year) acceptable to the Lord” (Lk. 4: 18-19). We Christians are living in the acceptable time of the Lord, which is the time of salvation and grace. The first Christian “Jubilee Year” was declared in AD 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII, and the most recent was the Great Jubilee of AD 2000 proclaimed by Pope John Paul II. The Jubilee Year of the Apostle Paul is the first to be proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI. Like all such celebrations, it is my prayer that our diocese will benefit from this time of divine favor through pastoral and spiritual programs that will lead to renewal of faith, acts of love and mercy, reconciliation of sinners, healing of wounded hearts, greater participation in the Church’s sacramental life, ecumenical initiatives, and commitment to the poor and needy in our midst.

2. Who was St Paul?

The celebration of the Year of St Paul is significant because of the person and place of St Paul in the history of our faith. Who was Paul? Why is he so important in the history and life of the Church? Why should he be the model for contemporary Christians on the meaning of the

Christian life, the need for total trust in God's love and mercy, submission of our mind and heart to God, unflinching love and obedience to the Church, and committing ourselves to the work of evangelizing contemporary culture?

There are many images of St Paul that we find in the New Testament. In the course of this Jubilee Year of St Paul, our diocese, along with our brothers and sisters throughout the Catholic world, will be looking at the various aspects of the life of St Paul and how his life shines forth the power of the Risen Lord. He models the Lord's power to transform ordinary human beings to do extraordinary acts of faith and love for the glory of God and human sanctification. However, I wish to draw from the image of St Paul which he himself presents at the beginning of his Letter to the Romans. In the introduction to this most important letter of St Paul, he shows us how he understood himself, his ministry, and the Gospel which he preached to all nations. He begins by introducing himself this way to the Church in Rome: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God which he announced before hand in the Holy Scriptures, the Gospel concerning his Son who descended from David according to the flesh" (Romans 1: 1-3). Paul introduces himself *as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ*. He uses the Greek word *doulos* which translates more appropriately as 'a slave', a term which Paul will repeatedly use to refer to all Christians in their condition of service (Romans 6: 16; 7: 6; 14: 18; 1 Thess. 1: 9; 1 Cor. 7: 22). In calling himself a servant of the Lord, St Paul shows that his relationship with Christ is total and unconditional. He aligns himself with all the great figures in the history of salvation like Moses, Joshua, David and the prophets who were all referred to as servants of the Lord. He, also, shows that he is following after the example of his God and Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Paul understood that his service was to be an apostle. He did not choose himself for this ministry; his ministry was not a human appointment or a human achievement. It was a divine call and election from the Lord which St Paul received on his way to Damascus. No one confers on himself the title of apostle. Every Christian is called to different ministries by God and to a different vocation. We all have equal dignity as children of God but each has a different role. In our present circumstances, when some people are clamoring for the change in the criteria for choosing priests and bishops, St Paul reminds us that the call to service in the Church is from the Lord; it is not a human right to which any of us could lay claim. But more importantly for Paul, to be an apostle is to be the servant of the truth, which he had seen through his encounter with the risen Lord who commissioned him to preach the Gospel and found churches.

The message that St Paul preached was the Good News, which was in continuity with the mighty deeds of the Lord, and announced "before hand by the prophets." Paul understood that the message he was to preach was from the Lord and not his own message or his own preference. It was also a message for which he had to bear many trials and eventually lay down his life. But St Paul saw his life as the fruit of God's freely given and merciful grace (I Cor. 15: 9-11; Gal. 1:15). He was chosen to proclaim the Good News to the Gentiles and disseminate the message of grace which in Christ reconciles us to God and with one another.

St Paul was a weak vessel; he had a "thorn in the flesh" (II Corinthians 12:7) throughout his ministry that his adversaries said of him: "His bodily presence is weak and his speech of no account" (II Cor 10:10). His successful apostolate was not because of his personal skills, but because of his total dedication to Christ and his Church, a dedication that feared neither risk, nor weaknesses, nor persecution, nor difficulty. "Neither death, nor life," he wrote to the Romans, "nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (8: 38-39). St Paul invites us, also, to total obedience of faith in Christ, which

proceeds from faith's acknowledgement of and surrender to what God has done through Jesus Christ.

3. Paul and Peter: Different Gifts Yet United in One Faith and One Church

In celebrating the Year of Paul, we are also drawn closer to the Church that Paul served so well. In this service, Paul was closely associated with Peter and the two of them are held to be the founders of the Church of Rome. Paul went to consult with Peter, after his conversion, and to receive the blessing and apostolic mandate (Gal 1: 18); again fourteen years later he went to Jerusalem to meet with the pillars of faith, including James and Peter to ensure that his Gospel was in harmony with that of the apostolic college (Gal 2: 1-9). By their martyrdom in Rome, Peter and Paul are in a complimentary relationship forever. Through their different gifts, as we read from the preface for the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, they built the one Church. They died united in their love for Christ and through their blood they watered the ground for the planting of the seed of faith in Rome and, through Rome, to the rest of the world.

4. Concluding Exhortation

In this solemn Jubilee of the 2000th birth of St Paul, I invite the clergy and faithful of the diocese to a deeper spiritual journey, following in the footsteps of Paul the Great Apostle to the Gentiles. This spiritual journey will involve a deeper study of the Scriptures, especially the writings of St Paul. It should inspire a desire to deepen our communion with the Lord in the daily celebration of the Eucharist and the Sunday celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. In this Jubilee year, I encourage the priests and faithful to constant participation in the sacrament of reconciliation so that we can remove all obstacles to divine grace, and unite ourselves in faith, hope and love to one another and to Christ as one pilgrim family on a journey to our Father's house. I also exhort you all to greater devotion to the saints and a special spiritual closeness in prayer and imitation of Mary, the Blessed Mother of Christ. In celebrating the life of St Paul, we place before us the person of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the source and destiny of our Christian journey, whose grace and love brought salvation to Paul and, through Paul, to many Christians across the ages.

As part of my pastoral office, I will devote some time this Jubilee Year in my pastoral visits to parishes to teach on the rich tradition of indulgence, which is available to us during this Holy Year. Indulgence, the spiritual treasure of the Church, discloses fully the riches of God's grace and mercy. The Father offers to us his love and saving grace, especially expressed in the forgiveness of sin (see Canon 992). Pope Urban VIII was the first Pontiff to grant indulgence to Catholics in the Jubilee Year of 1695. Pope Benedict XVI has also stated the conditions for receiving plenary indulgence in this Jubilee Year of St Paul. Within the local churches, all the faithful who fulfill the conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion, prayers for the Supreme Pontiff's intentions) and, in a spirit of total detachment from any inclination to sin, take part, devoutly, in a sacred function or in a pious public exercise in honor of the Apostle to the Gentiles, will receive the plenary indulgence. Here in the Peterborough Diocese, we are blessed with three churches dedicated to St Paul (St Paul's Church in Lakefield, Norwood, and Gravenhurst). In keeping with tradition, and following the requirements of the Apostolic Penitentiary, I designate these three churches and the Cathedral of St. Peter-In-Chains as pilgrimage centers in the Diocese of Peterborough during this Jubilee Year, which the faithful are encouraged to visit. We shall outline in due course some of the spiritual exercises which will be available in these churches in this Holy Year.

May Mary, the Mother of the Church, and Peter, the patron of our diocese, assist all the faithful and clergy of the diocese in this Jubilee Year, so that we will all be renewed by God's grace and

strengthened by the Holy Spirit to keep the faith, and run the good race like Paul, the Great Apostle to the Gentiles.