



## From A Bishop's Journal (767)

### A Year Dedicated to Saint Paul

**A**t the request of Pope Benedict XVI, the period between June 28, 2008 and June 28, 2009 we are invited to celebrate in different ways the two thousand years of Saint Paul. Such an initiative can surprise: Isn't it taking us so far back that we "forget" the present? Far from it! The celebrations marking the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Québec City indicate that we don't go back in time uselessly. Rooted in our past, we can better deal with today's challenges and adjust our aim for the coming years. The fiery Saint Paul can help us be true workers at the New Evangelisation as it was advocated by John Paul II, as we refresh our action plans and bring a second wind to our daily ministry.

### Pastoral Memories

I have not yet had the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the land of Saint Paul, but I can say that I had the pleasure of presiding two eucharistic celebrations with my brother bishops at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, during our 1996 and 2006 *ad limina* visits, and to visit Tre Fontana which is close to the cathedral and where, according to tradition, Saint Paul was decapitated in the year 67, three years after Saint Peter's martyrdom. These visits were times of special grace for me, as they were filled, so to say, with the presence and life witness of one of the greatest evangelisers of all time. As we read in the preface for holy pastors, his example encourages us, his teaching enlightens us, and at our prayer he watches over us. The preface for the feast of Saint Paul specifies other motives for celebration: "You fill our hearts with joy as we honour your great apostles: Peter, our leader in the faith, and Paul, its fearless preach. Peter raised up the Church from the faithful Rock of Israel. Paul brought your call to the nations, and became the teacher of the world. Each in his chosen way gathered into unity the one family of Christ. Both shared a martyr's death and are praised throughout the world." It seems to me that each *ad limina* visit, besides giving me the opportunity to meet the Holy Father and his close collaborators, urges us to live in the spiritual presence of these two Apostles. The statues of these two saints, these "columns of the Church," stand at the entrance of St. Peter's Basilica, as if they were welcoming all the pilgrims from throughout the world who come to meet the Living Christ.

## **Pastoral Year**

I know that the diocesan services and the parishes have already established their action plans for the 2008-2009 pastoral year. There are surely several activities planned for the Year of Paul, like workshops or days of renewal; however, I believe that each of our activities could take on a Paulist flavour! Without making the plan of action top heavy, it seems to me that some reference to the life or teaching of Saint Paul would only revitalize or strengthen our pastoral activity. For instance, for a home-based catechesis or sacramental preparation, some reference to Saint Paul could only prove beneficial. Couldn't the message Jesus gave Paul on the Damascus Road shed new light on the activity we would like to engage in, as we remember that everything we do for the members of the Church, whether for good or ill, we do to Jesus himself? Paul's tenacity, as he undertook his many voyages, the floggings and stonings he was subjected to, the ambushes and other dangers he confronted for Christ and the Gospel... all these could be a wonderful stimulant to all around us who labour under the burden of daily suffering or every apostolic charge. The professions of love and faith that Saint Paul offers us in his writings, could they not kindle in us our own professions of faith that we proclaim together every Sunday? "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... [I]n all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am assured of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rm. 8:35 ff).

## **Turk and Roman**

Born in Tarsus (present-day Turkey) between the years 5 and 15 before Christ, Saul came from a Jewish family who were Roman citizens. Early in his youth he came to Jerusalem and studied at the feet of Gamaliel, the famous doctor of the Law. Paul was then won over by the radical Pharisees. The Acts of the Apostles show us Paul relentlessly pursuing the fledgling Christian community, and he even takes part in Stephan's murder, by approving it. The Acts record Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, and his baptism when he was given the name of Paul. From the moment of his conversion, all his energies and gifts would be at the service of the Christ, for whom he would sacrifice his life. His vast Greek and Hebrew culture helped him, with the grace of God, to present the "Christian mystery" to his Jewish brothers, but especially to all the then-known nations. Thirteen of his epistles have survived: two to the Thessalonians, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, four "letters in captivity:" to the Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians, and a letter of Philemon, and three "pastoral letters:" two to Timothy and one to Titus. For a long time a fourteenth letter was attributed to him, the letter to the Hebrews, but it is rather the work of one of his disciples. During the course of our Year of Saint Paul, it would be a very good project to read or study one of these epistles. The "*lectio divina*" as recommended by Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI, a method that will surely be mentioned at the coming World Synod of Bishops on the Word of God, and which will be opening in Rome shortly (October 5), will help us gain a greater appreciation of this Word that Saint Paul has left us.

## A Prayer for Our Time

Saint Paul penned this prayer for the Ephesians, when he was in prison: “[May] Christ dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of Christ’ (Eph. 3:17-19).

*+ Francois Thibodeau*

+ Francois Thibodeau, C.J.M.  
Bishop of Edmundston

09-24-08