

# Maronite Monks of Adoration

Most Holy Trinity Monastery ❖ Petersham MA 01366-9725

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*“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”*

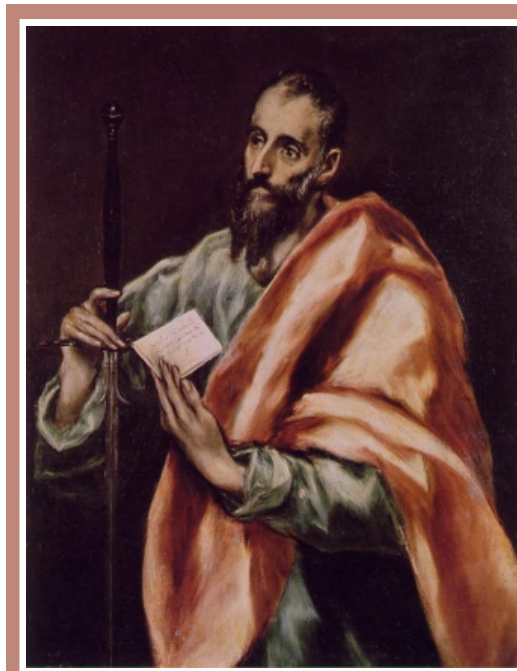
*-Galatians 2:20*

On June 28, 2008 Pope Benedict officially opened the “Year of St. Paul in which he invited the Universal Church to join with “The Apostle of the Gentiles, who dedicated himself to the spreading of the good news to all peoples, and spent himself for the unity and harmony of all Christians.” This Pauline Year would run until June 29, 2009 (The Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul). The proclaiming of the Year of St. Paul fits in very well with the whole tone of this pontificate.

Recall that on being elected to the chair of St. Peter, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger chose the name Benedict. The name that a Pope chooses often signifies both invoking the protection of the saint involved and also the thrust that he wants his pontificate to take. In his case, Pope Benedict has often stressed parallels between the times of St. Benedict of Nursia and our present. St. Benedict lived when the Roman Empire in the west had collapsed, Barbarian tribes had overrun Western Europe and all semblance of government had evaporated. In a word it seemed as though the whole world was picked up and dropped. We today would have a difficult time visualizing this. We’re not talking about a Stock Market crash, the crisis in the financial markets or the spiraling rise in the price of oil, but every institution in society literally going under. So in essence everyone had to start from scratch: a new political order was imposed and the economy literally became

barter. Add to that the need to catechize the Barbarians. St. Benedict and his monks and their *Rule* turned that all around and would be the great shining light during the Dark Ages and lead to the glorious time of Christendom.

In our time a similar scenario confronts us.



St. Paul (1608-1614)

—El Greco

Political instability, economic and financial crisis and rampant corruption in society. By invoking the patronage of St. Benedict on his pontificate, Pope Benedict seeks to have the Church avail herself of the same remedy that St. Benedict used to save Western Christian civilization from going under. And this is where St. Paul comes in. By dedicating a year to the great Apostle of the Gentiles, Pope Benedict wants us to turn to St. Paul that we might renew ourselves completely in Christ so that as St. Paul says, “It is no longer I who

live, but Christ who lives in me.” This is our challenge for the Pauline year. To meet this challenge, let us first look at the man, Saul of Tarsus.

Saul was born during the first decade of the 1st century A.D. in the city of Tarsus located in modern day Turkey. At his birth he acquired Roman citizenship which would play an important role in his adult life. As a young man he traveled to Jerusalem to be a disciple of the famous rabbi Gamaliel. During this time he acquired a ferocious hatred of the new “Way” to which the earliest Christians were referred. He harnessed his tremendous energy and

enthusiasm into destroying what he viewed as a threat to Judaism. Half-way measures didn't suffice for Saul—whatever he did it was all out—and he unleashed the first major persecution against the Church with St. Stephen as its first martyr. The very name of Saul of Tarsus struck fear in the early Church. But Our Lord had other plans. On the road to Damascus He appeared to Saul. “Saul, Saul, why to you persecute me?” Notice that Our Lord says “why do you persecute ‘ME’?” Not the Church nor my followers but ME. Christ and His Church are the same. This event strikingly shows that one cannot say “yes” to Jesus and “no” to the Church. As a result of this, Saul now becomes Paul (his Roman name) and the same drive and energy that he used to destroy the Church, he now uses to build up the Church. Once again, no half-way measures and hence the Gospel of Christ spreads throughout the Roman Empire. To understand why Pope Benedict proclaimed the Pauline Year we need to focus on these words of St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Here you have the essence of Pauline spirituality.

Paul's letters constitute the oldest written documents of the New Testament which predate the Gospels. When Paul preached the Good News, he didn't have the written gospels before him to preach from. In other words, he didn't have a completed Bible. In essence you see in Paul the Tradition of the Church at work because he preached from that Tradition. Since the canon of the Scripture would not be completed until long past his death, “the Bible Alone” could not have been the belief of the Church from its earliest days. With the exception of his Letter to the Romans (Paul didn't found the Church there), each of his letters is addressed to a Christian community that he established giving advice and admonitions on particular issues and problems that they are experiencing. Instead of saying to them “read your Bible, pray to the Holy Spirit and do what you think best,” (remember the Bible is yet not complete), Paul instructs them based on his authority as an

apostle. So Paul's apostolic activity demonstrates that the Church's teaching authority existed even before the Bible itself was complete.

For St. Paul, a Christian is one who puts on the person of Jesus Christ so that the individual Christian literally loses his or her identity because Christ now dwells in them. That famous caption, “What Would Jesus Do?” becomes the driving force of the individual's life. In the Eastern Church this is called “Deification.” We seek to live in a way as if Christ Himself were acting through us. Of course, no one fully succeeds at this. It's the constant striving that counts. Remember that Paul himself had quite a temper (he may be called the patron saint of hotheads – read his letter to the Galatians). But if we fall we get right back up with the grace of Christ. In plain fact for St. Paul, the Gospel was no “private matter” but the essence of life. Here we have an important reason why Pope Benedict proclaimed the Pauline year.

North America struggles with an incipient superficiality which reduces the Gospel to something “private” that must not be seen outside the privacy of one's home, lest you “intrude” on society. We go through daily life not conscious that Christ must live in me to that I strive to live and act as Christ Himself would? During his recent trip to America, Pope Benedict faced this issue squarely saying,

“The subtle influence of secularism can color the way people allow their faith to influence their behavior. Is it consistent to profess our beliefs in church on Sunday, and then during the week to promote business practices or medical procedures contrary to those beliefs? Is it consistent for practicing Catholics to ignore or exploit the poor and the marginalized, to promote sexual behavior contrary to Catholic moral teaching, or to adopt positions that contradict the right to life of every human being from conception to natural death? Any tendency to treat religion as a private matter must be resisted. Only when their faith permeates every aspect of their lives do Christians become truly open to the transforming power of the Gospel.”

In a nutshell you have here a major reason for the Pauline Year. Does our faith permeate every aspect of our lives? Is it our worldview, our bottom line, our very identity, or is it just something cultural (my way of being Italian, Irish, Polish, Lebanese, etc.)? Remember that in eternity, what ethnic nationality we are won't mean a hill of beans: it won't exist. What will matter is whether we have been transformed in Christ.

Always remember the saints. They always had one eye on eternity because they knew where their true home lay. A transformed person doesn't compartmentalize his or her life into neat segments to fit the occasion. The martyrs went to their deaths being faithful to the very things that we compromise on so readily. St. Paul himself would suffer martyrdom by being beheaded. Since he was a Roman citizen he was

given the "privilege" of a quick death. Also, since Roman law forbade the shedding of a citizen's blood within the walls of Rome, Paul was taken outside the walls of the city for his execution. Hence the Church named "St. Paul Outside the Walls."

During this year we are encouraged to especially read his letters that we might catch his spirit. Many good resources exist—particularly the Ignatius Study Bible and the Navarre Bible—which provide good solid orthodox scholarship and spirituality. We close again with words from Pope Benedict:

"From St. Paul we draw a very important lesson: what counts is to place Jesus Christ at the center of our lives, so that our identity is marked essentially by the encounter, by communion with Christ and His Word." ✠