

The Doctrinal Teaching of St Paul

Paul is such a central figure in the Christian revelation in the Bible that it is impossible to do justice to him over two weeks of *Catholic Link* articles. Some of our readers may already have their favourite letter(s) of Paul to which they return from time to time, or their favourite quotes, some of the most popular being “*Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ*” (Romans 8:39) and, “*I can do all things in Christ who gives me strength*” (Philippians 4:13).

To understand Paul, we have to know where he’s coming from. He himself describes this in one of his speeches in Acts 22, and he also refers to it throughout his letters: that he was the biggest persecutor of Christianity who became its most ardent disciple; that he changed from being a hater of the Gospel to its biggest promoter; that he was no longer an enemy of Christians (remember, he led the execution of St Stephen) but their brother. All this happened because of his conversion experience on the road to Damascus.

The words he spoke there in response to the voice from heaven are, in a sense, the basis for all his teaching: “*Who are you, Lord?*” We know the answer is, “*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.*” But the question would remain in Paul’s heart for the rest of his life as he explored, searched for, or prayed about getting to know Christ better – who are you? This is at the very heart of the doctrinal teaching of St Paul: his knowledge of Jesus. But not just an intellectual

knowledge. He even suggests that all he knew before he met Christ was “*so much rubbish, something I reckoned as loss*” (Philippians 3:8). He saw his life as so intimately entwined

with the life of Christ that he could say, “*for me, to live is Christ.*” (Philippians 1:21). Knowledge through love is Paul’s way.

Paul, it seems, was quite a strong, even a volatile, character. He had clear ideas about the message of Jesus. He stood up to Saint Peter about the need for the Church to develop beyond Judaism. Through his letters he developed the Christian message into a coherent theology centred on Christ. He really did see the big picture. But it could easily lead to pride. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul writes beautifully and humbly about the lesson he had to learn; about the “thorn in his side” that remained as a constant reminder

not to get too proud. About how the grace of Christ is so sufficient for him that he could “*boast of his weaknesses in order to feel the protection of Christ’s grace – for when I am weak then I am strong.*”

Life in Christ gave Paul freedom: freedom from sin, from self, from religion as legalism, from even the fear of death. “*If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord. Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord*” (Romans 14:8).

The entire teaching of St Paul; the heart of all his letters; the central passion of his life – is all about Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. “*Who are you Lord? – I am Jesus.*”



Conversion on the Way to Damascus, Caravaggio (c.1600-1)

SUNDAY MASS

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON:

All that you have done to us, O Lord, you have done with true judgement, for we have sinned against you and not obeyed your commandments. But give glory to your name, and deal with us according to the bounty of your mercy.

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 18:25-28.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 25.

RESPONSE:

Remember your compassion, O Lord.

- O Lord, make me know your ways.
Teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth, and teach me;
for you are the God of my salvation.
I have hoped in you all day long. **R**
- Remember your compassion, O Lord,
and your merciful love,
for they are from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth,
nor my transgressions.
In your merciful love remember me,
because of your goodness, O Lord. **R**
- Good and upright is the Lord;
he shows the way to sinners.
He guides the humble in right judgement;
to the humble he teaches his way. **R**

SECOND READING: Philippians 2:1-11.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

Alleluia, alleluia! My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord; and I know them, and they follow me. Alleluia.

GOSPEL: Matthew 21:28-32.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON:

Remember your word to your servant, O Lord, by which you have given me hope. This is my comfort when I am brought low.

THE WEEK AHEAD

Live the Word

Mon 28 Sep (St Wenceslaus, M)

Job 1:6-22; Psalm 17; Luke 9:46-50

Our faith calls us to expect the unexpected, and to never give up. When we cannot see how a situation will turn out, God always has a way of making things happen, changing the human heart, and instilling trust.

Tue 29 Sep ARCHANGELS MICHAEL, GABRIEL & RAPHAEL

Daniel 7:9-10.13-14; Psalm 138; John 1:47-51

May we live this day and the days to come conscious of, and grateful for, the presence of our angelic protectors and guides, in whose company we can find our authentic voice and sing God’s praise.

Wed 30 Sep St Jerome, PrD

Job 9:1-12.14-16; Psalm 88; Luke 9:57-62

The story of Job teaches us that sometimes suffering enters our lives, not as a punishment, but as a test. Will we continue to serve God not only in health and prosperity, but also in sickness, failure and adversity?

Thu 1 Oct St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, VD

Job 19:21-27; Psalm 27; Luke 10:1-12

We do not need to do heroic things to be saintly. St Thérèse lived her “little way” of doing small things with great love. This, she quietly offered, is the path of true sanctity.

Fri 2 Oct Guardian Angels

Exodus 23:20-23; Psalm 91; Matthew 18:1-5.10

Children often have a capacity for overwhelming joy. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is the one who accepts and celebrates the gifts of love that they are given with true joy.

Sat 3 Oct Liturgy of the Day

Job 42:1-3.5.6.12-17; Psalm 119; Luke 10:17-24

God gives a perceptive appreciation of awe and wonder to little children so they can teach adults the natural qualities of simple faith and trust. For Jesus says that the mysteries of life have been revealed to them.

Sun 4 Oct 27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80; Matthew 21:33-43

Just as our bodies need restoration by sleep, nurturance and exercise, so our spirit requires care too. Today’s psalm reminds us to turn toward the very One who can bring about this restoration.

(KEY: SOLEMNITY; FEAST; Memorial; (Optional Memorial) M=Marlyr; Pr= Priest; D= Doctor; V= Virgin)

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