

Saint Paul

"Men, brethren, hear ye the account which I give unto you: I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the truth of the law of the fathers, zealous of the law, as also all you are this day."

It is Jerusalem, 57 A.D. Paul stands on the stairs of the Temple chained to two Roman soldiers. Moments before an angry Jewish mob has tried to beat him to death. But the soldiers rushing in have rescued him, and at his request, permitted him to speak to the people.

"Who persecuted this way unto death, binding and delivering unto prisons both men and women. As the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the ancients: for when also receiving letters to the brethren, I went to Damascus, that I might bring them bound from thence to Jerusalem to be punished. And it came to pass, as I was going, and drawing nigh to Damascus at midday, that suddenly from heaven there shone round about me a great light: And falling to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered: Who art thou, Lord? And he said to me: I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me, saw indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of him that spoke with me And I said: What shall I do Lord?...

"And he said to me: Go, for unto the Gentiles afar off, will I send thee. And they heard him until this word, and then lifted up their voice, saying: Away with such an one from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out and threw off their garments, and cast dust into the air"...(Acts 22:1-10, 21-23).

This exciting scene is from one of the Books of the Bible called the Acts of the Apostles written by St. Luke. This Book tells the story of God's rejection of the Jews and His choice of the Gentiles to be His People. It begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome. It is also called the Book of St. Paul, because it is he, who almost single-handedly, wrested God's Church from the Jews and gave it to the Gentiles.

St. Paul was a Roman citizen and after he was arrested by the Roman soldiers in Jerusalem, he appealed to Caesar. He was sent under guard by ship to Rome for trial. St. Luke was with him and writes:

"And when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and no small storm lay on us, all hope of our being saved was now taken away. And after they had fasted a long time, Paul

standing forth in the midst of them, said: O ye men, I exhort you to be of good cheer. For there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but only of the ship. For an angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve, stood by me this night, Saying: Fear not Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar: and behold, God hath given thee all them that are with thee. But as the shipmen sought to fly out of the ship, having let down the boat into the sea, Paul said to the centurion, and to the soldiers: Except these stay in the ship, you cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat and let her fall off. And then it began to be light, Paul besought them all saying: This day is the fourteenth day that you have waited, and continued fasting, taking nothing. Wherefore I pray you take some meat for you health's sake; for there shall not an hair of the head of any of you perish. And when he had said these things taking bread, he gave thanks to God in the sight of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat" (The Sacrifice of the Mass) (Acts 27:20-35).

This storm-tossed little ship is, in figure, God's Church. It is leaving Jerusalem and going to Rome; leaving the Jews and going to the Gentiles; terribly buffeted and persecuted from without, but within all is peaceful. Mass is being said, Jesus is present. And Paul says unless a man stay in this ship he cannot be saved; unless a man enter and remain in the Catholic Church he cannot attain salvation.

St. Paul was held prisoner in Rome for two years awaiting trial. He was chained to a Roman soldier, but in a private house and was allowed to receive anyone who came to him. Here he wrote many of his Epistles, and St. Luke, who was with him, wrote the Acts of the Apostles.

St. Paul had many visitors in jail. Let us imagine a visit from one of our present day liberal Catholics:

(Scene: Prison. Rome 60 A.D. St. Paul in chains. St. Luke writing. Roman soldier guarding Paul.)

(Enter Liberal)

Liberal: I believe that anyone who believes in God, keeps the ten commandments and is invincibly ignorant of the Catholic Faith can get into heaven.

St. Paul: No one gets any credit for merely believing in God. "The visible things of him, from the creation of the world are clearly seen by the things that are made: his eternal power also: and divinity: so that they are inexcusable" (Rom. 1:30).

Liberal: Well, I do believe a man can get into heaven if he keeps the ten commandments.

St. Paul: "If justice be by the law then Christ died in vain" (Gal. 2:21). Men had the ten commandments before Jesus came; if you could be saved by keeping them, then the terrible death of Our Lord was in vain.

Liberal: Now don't tell me that God is going to send someone to hell who is ignorant of the Faith? It isn't his fault.

St. Paul: "This then I say and testify in the Lord; The Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their hearts" (Eph. 4:17,18). Ignorance of the Faith is a sin which alienates you from God: and anyone who is ignorant of the Faith is ignorant because of his blind heart and bad will.

Liberal: But how about some poor native on a desert island where no missionary has ever reached?

St. Paul: "Whoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him, in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear, without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they be sent...Faith then cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of Christ. But I say: Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound hath gone forth into all earth, and their words unto the ends of the whole world" (Rom. 10:13-18).

Liberal: But there must be some island which a missionary did not reach.

St. Paul: "And if our Gospel be also hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (II Cor. 4:3).

Liberal: (Looking at his watch.) I am sorry but I just remembered that I have an appointment. (Roman soldier opens the door. Exit Liberal.)

In all his Epistles St. Paul does not mention Our Blessed Lady whom he dearly loved. Why is this?

When St. Paul became a Catholic he changed his name from Saul, to Paul which means little. He means by this to call himself "little no good;" " little good for nothing." "For I am the least of all the Apostles who am not worthy to be called an Apostle because I persecuted the Church of God" (I Cor. 15:19).

Saul the Jew became a Catholic and became Paul, the little. So little did he become, that he did not want to write about Our Blessed Mother himself. Instead he asked St. Luke, the companion of his travels, to write about her. St. Luke wrote the Gospel of Our Lady. In it we

find the Annunciation, the Hail Mary, the Visitation, the Magnificat, the Nativity, the Finding of Jesus in the Temple, all Our Lady's beautiful mysteries. The Gospel of St. Luke is the Gospel of St. Paul.

St. Paul was taught the Catholic Faith by Our Lord Himself. "For I give you to understand brethren that the Gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For neither did I receive it of man; nor did I learn it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ...that I might preach Him among the Gentiles" (Gal. 1:11,12). And yet St. Paul went to Jerusalem to submit this revelation to the Church for approval. "Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas...And I went up according to revelation and communicated to them the Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles but apart to them who seem to be something: **lest perhaps I should run or had run in vain**" (Gal. 2:1,2). (The ones who "seem to be something" (Douay), or who "are seen (*Vulgate* - *videantur*) to be something, are the Apostles, the bishops of the Church, but especially St. Peter, the visible head of the Church, clearly seen to be something by the whole world. So much is submission to our Holy Father necessary for salvation that St. Paul, even though he had been taught the Faith by Jesus Himself, submitted this teaching to the Pope and to the Church for approval, "lest perhaps...he had run in vain."

"But when Cephas [Peter] was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that some came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them who were of the circumcision. And to this dissimulation the rest of the Jews consented, so that Barnabas also was led by them into the dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly unto the truth of the Gospel, I said to Cephas before them all: If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as the Jews do, how dost thou compel the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Gal. 2:11-14)

The Judaizing heretics that St. Paul fought against, taught that the Jewish law, for example, kosher food, was necessary for salvation. Now kosher means pure or clean, and kosher food was given to the Jews as a little promise of the one pure food that God would one day give them to eat, His own Body, the Blessed Eucharist.

St. Peter had left a table where Catholics who had come in from the Gentiles were eating ham, and gone over to a table where Catholics who had come in from the Jews were eating kosher food. The Catholics who had come from the Jews were still allowed for a time to eat kosher food, but they had to hold that it was completely unnecessary for salvation, and they couldn't force it on the Gentiles. St. Peter by his action had scandalized the Gentile Catholics, because it could be implied by some that he held the heresy that kosher food was necessary for salvation. St. Paul was quick to publicly rebuke St. Peter, but as a son and subject reprimanding his Holy Father because of the scandal he had given. St. Peter, because he was a true Father, humbly accepted and approved this scolding by his beloved son.

Our Lord gave St. Paul a great consolation in his last days. Into the same prison in Rome, the Mamertine, was thrown his beloved friend and father St. Peter. At the prayer of Saints Peter and Paul, a miraculous fountain sprang up, which is there to this day, allowing them to baptize the two captains of their guard whom they had converted, Saints Processus and Martinian (R.M. July 2) and their 47 companions.

There is in Rome, midway between the Ostian Gate and the great basilica of St. Paul, a little chapel called the Chapel of the Parting. It marks the spot, a fork in the road, where St. Peter and St. Paul parted on the way to their martyrdoms. The inscription on the Church tells us their last words to each other; St. Paul's final act of submission to the Pope, his beloved father, and St. Peter's final words of praise for his beloved son:

St. Paul: (giving Peter his blessing)

"Peace be with thee, Foundation of the Church, Shepherd of the flock of Christ."

St. Peter: (giving Paul his blessing)

"Go in peace, Preacher of glad tidings, guide of the just to salvation."

Thomas Mary Sennott
