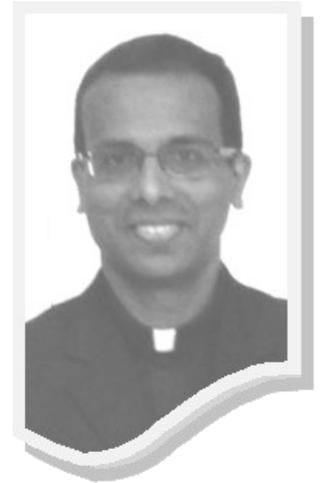




From the Pastor



Rome to Home: St. Paul—Part I

I am very happy to be back home from Rome where I had an unforgettable time. During my stay there, I had the opportunity to travel to Orvieto, the place where the Eucharistic miracle occurred; Siena, where the Basilica of St. Catherine is; Assisi, Padua, and Venice. I could share a lot about my experiences visiting these places.

And in the coming few weeks, I would like to share a bit of my theological learning during my time in Rome. The theological classes during my stay in were mostly on St. Paul and his fearless missionary works.

Paul was a learned Pharisee who had his education and training under the best-known teacher of his day, Gamaliel. The zeal for his faith led him to consider the Christian faith as a perversion of his own Jewish faith and an attempt to destroy the faith he and his ancestors held dear. So he was determined to discredit and destroy those who believed in Jesus, the Nazarene. Armed with the approval of the Jewish authorities, Paul set out on his way to Damascus to find Christians and bring them to Jerusalem to stand trial and be thrown into prison or be killed.

It was on this journey to Damascus that he encountered the risen Christ, and that encounter changed the course of his life and the course of history in an unprecedented way. After his profound conversion, St. Paul went on to become the greatest missionary to preach Christ.

We would not know of Paul's fearless missionary work today except for Luke who recorded it in *The Acts of the Apostles*. While the Gospel of Luke presents the life and teachings of Christ, his second volume, *The Acts of the Apostles*, presents us with an important and irreplaceable account of the history of the early church. Although it is entitled *The Acts of the Apostles*, Luke mostly recounts the acts of Peter

in the first part—up to Chapter 12—and then Paul from Chapter 13. Because Luke is the sole evangelist to write a sequel to his gospel, this tells us something important about how he conceived the Jesus story. While the gospel of Mark originally ended with the account of the discovery of the empty tomb (cf. 16:1-8), and while Matthew and John appended to their gospels the accounts of the appearances of the risen Christ (cf. Matt 28:9-20; John 20:11-21:23), Luke ends his gospel differently.

Hence, Acts is clearly the continuation of the Lucan gospel, because it relates how Jesus' disciples carried out His commission to preach the Good News under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8 we read, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Therefore, in writing the Acts, one of the clear goals of Luke was to show to the readers that the Good News of Jesus Christ had reached "the ends of the earth," which in those days meant Rome by the preaching of Peter and Paul.

Paul and Peter were martyred in Rome. Peter was crucified upside down, and at his tomb we celebrated the Holy Mass. Over his tomb today stands the beautiful basilica. Paul was imprisoned in Rome and then taken outside of the city walls and beheaded.

We visited the magnificent basilica built over his tomb, and celebrated the Holy Mass on the main altar. The chain that bound him is also on display over his tomb. These basilicas are huge reminders to us of the faith in Christ that they found worth giving their lives for. Let us not be shaken in our faith by the sins of our leaders or by our own sins but, rather, do everything we can to strengthen it.

—Fr. Jose Thomas