



THE YEAR OF ST. PAUL

ST. PAUL ON THE ASCENSION

Fourth in a Series

May 24, 2009

May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

(Ephesians 1:18-23)

Christ's Ascension is Ours

We know that Christ ascended to the Father forty days after his resurrection from the dead, and that nine days after that, at the Jewish feast of Pentecost, he sent the Holy Spirit upon his disciples. But the Ascension is not an easy mystery to relate to. What does it have to do with us?

The *Letter to the Ephesians* begins with a prayer that we might understand this mystery—because it is *our* mystery! In the resurrection and ascension of Christ, the letter says, are our “hope,” our “inheritance,” the revelation of the “power” and “might” of God. For in raising Jesus from the dead, and placing him at his right hand, God has rearranged the whole order of things. God gave Christ “as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.” In the Ascension, Jesus vanishes from the sight of his disciples, but God gives him back to them in a new and greater way: he is the head, we are the body. The Ascension of the Lord fills the Church, the mystical body of Christ, with the divine presence. The Church is, in the astonishing words of the Letter to the Ephesians, “the fullness of the one who fills all things.”

As the Preface for today's feast expresses it, Christ “has passed beyond our sight, not to abandon us but to be our hope. Christ is the beginning, the head of the Church; where he has gone, we hope to follow.”

St. Paul... and Friends

St. Paul spent a considerable amount of time in Ephesus (three years, according to the *Acts of the Apostles*) but since the 16th century scripture scholars have doubted that the letter to the Ephesians is the work of the apostle himself. The style is quite different from the other Pauline letters, and the approach to certain themes – the Church, in particular - suggests that



the letter was written by another writer, probably a later follower of St. Paul.

Whether it was authored by St. Paul or only inspired by him, Ephesians speaks powerfully to us today. As scripture scholar Vincent Smiles has observed, the letter “represents the voice of the faithful struggling under new and difficult circumstances to recall and remain faithful to the original inspiration of the gospel.... Ephesians invites a continuing rediscovery of the ancient tradition so that that love can be more vibrant in the church and so that the church can reach out more effectively to the world” (*The New Collegeville Bible Commentary*).

Prayer for the Year of St. Paul

Glorious Saint Paul,
Apostle to the Gentiles,
when the Lord called, you answered,
and you spread the good news of the Gospel
to the very ends of the earth.
Pray for us, that we may serve Christ as you did:
proclaiming the name of Jesus
in good times and bad,
when convenient and when inconvenient.
Pray for us, that we may welcome
all the people we meet
with compassionate hearts and open minds.
Pray for us, that Christ may live in us as he lived in you.
We pray in the name of the One
who is your Lord and ours,
Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.

Novena in Honor of St. Paul

We will conclude this Year of St. Paul with a special novena of prayer, beginning Saturday, June 20 and concluding on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Monday, June 29. All Masses during the novena will conclude with a special procession to the place of prayer in honor of St. Paul in the Cathedral's west aisle.