



THE YEAR OF ST. PAUL

ST. PAUL AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Fifth in a Series

May 31, 2009

We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.

In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will.

(Romans 8:22-27)



The Spirit Understands

The liturgy of Pentecost draws on a huge range of images to describe the Holy Spirit. The Introit takes us back to the dawn of time, to the Spirit of God that hovered over the waters. The reading from the Acts of the Apostles describes the Spirit as a mighty wind, or tongues of flame. In the Gospel reading, the Spirit is the breath of the risen Lord Jesus. And the great sequence of Pentecost, "Veni, Sancte Spiritus," speaks of the Spirit as comforter, guest, refreshment, rest, coolness, warmth, healing, light. At Pentecost, we recall how the Spirit came upon the disciples gathered in Jerusalem, giving them the gift of speaking in new languages; but at the same time the liturgy reminds us that the Spirit cannot be contained in our language or in our imagination.

The passage from the Letter to the Romans show that St. Paul was well aware of this. We are living in an in-between time, he writes – something great is coming, but we are not there yet. Paul uses the image of a woman about to give birth to help us understand this. She is in pain, yet full of hope; and her agony is expressed not in words, but in inarticulate cries. It is the same for all of creation, St. Paul says. The whole cosmos "is groaning in labor pains," and so are we. We "do not know how to pray as we ought" – we do not have the words to express the confusion of pain and hope we feel. But we need not worry, because the Spirit is praying for us, not with words, but with "inexpressible groanings."

In speaking of the Spirit, St. Paul does not speak of a thing but of a person, a loving person who comes to our aid not in our strength, but in our weakness. As

scripture scholar James D. G. Dunn has said, "the Spirit is seen here as typically active not so much in the heights of spiritual rapture as in the depths of human inability to cope."

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.