

5A SML 2020  
1COR 2:1-5

When writing a Sunday homily, one of the Church's guidelines is to preach on that Sunday's readings unless there is a good reason to preach otherwise. Most of the time, I preach about the gospel. But I would be remiss as a priest, remiss as a teacher, if I never preached on the first or the second reading. This weekend, let's look at the second reading.

Within the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, the second reading is always taken from the New Testament, and nine times out of ten, it's written by St. Paul. So before addressing this morning's second reading specifically, some background on St. Paul, or Saul, as he was known prior to his conversion, prior to entering into a relationship with Almighty God.

First: why the name change: from Saul to Paul. It happens in scripture that when a person of biblical prominence entered into relationship with God, their name changed:

- Abram became Abraham
- Sarai became Sarah
- Jacob became Israel
- Simon became Peter
- Saul became Paul.

What we know about Saul:

- Saul lived at the same time Our Blessed Lord lived.
- Saul never once met Our Blessed Lord before Jesus, in the form of a bright light and a loud voice, knocked him to the ground. Some picture Saul being knocked off his horse, but no mention is made in scripture of a horse.
- Saul was a Pharisee, a very strict, law abiding Jew.
- Saul was present for the stoning of St. Stephen (who became the very first martyr) and Saul was the greatest all-time enemy of the Church. Refer to the Acts of the Apostles:

The Jews threw Stephen out of the city and began to stone him. The witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. As they were stoning Stephen, Stephen called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Now Saul was consenting to his execution. Saul was trying to destroy the Church. Entering house after house and dragging out men and women, Saul handed them over for imprisonment.

(AA 7:58-8:3)

Jesus was crucified, died, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven in the year 33 a.d. Within two years after the paschal event, Our Blessed Lord had more than enough of Saul. Refer once again

to the Acts of the Apostles for the account of the conversion of Saul, enemy of the Church, to St. Paul, the greatest champion of the Church:

Now Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, that, if he should find any men and women who belonged to Christianity, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains. On his journey, as Saul was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, **"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"** Saul said, **"Who are you sir?"** The reply came, **"I am Jesus, who you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do."** (AA 9:1-6) He stayed some days with the disciples in Damascus, and he began at once to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. All who heard him were astounded and said, "Is not this the man who in Jerusalem ravaged those who call upon this name, and came here expressly to take them back in chains to the chief priests?" But Paul grew all the stronger and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus proving that Jesus is the Messiah. (9:19-22)

Paul then, moved from a strict Jewish background to an apostle

of Jesus Christ, from the greatest enemy of the Church to her greatest champion, and his sudden, unexpected conversion took place at the height of the persecution.

A good ten years after his conversion, Paul made three extensive journeys throughout southeastern Europe. He visited the major cities to christianize their citizens. After christianizing any given city, if Paul received word of problems occurring in that city, he would write letters to the people to settle the confusion. If there was a problem, if a city did not follow the gospel values he preached, he wrote a letter. And regarding his preaching and his letter writing: any success he had, he attributed to God. Stated simply, Paul gave credit where credit is due – hence today's second reading:

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with eloquence of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of Spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

It would be wise for any of us to follow the lead of St. Paul and give credit where credit is due – for me, to give credit for any good

priestly ministry to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Any words of wisdom that come from this pulpit or in front of a classroom or an adult scripture study is a demonstration of the Holy Spirit and the power of God because I will never wing a homily, I will never teach in front of classroom without a lesson plan, and I will never offer an adult scripture study without preparation . . . because like Paul, I'm just not that clever.

If you look back at church history for the primary reason why there was the Protestant Reformation, the number one reason why Martin Luther separated from the Roman Catholic Church, it was not a misunderstanding regarding indulgences. The primary reason was a disagreement of how grace works. Protestants believe that if they perform a good work, the very thought to perform the good work came from within themselves. Catholics, on the other hand, follow the lead of St. Paul. Any good work done through us begins with God using us as his instruments, inspiring us to do good, and we do good for no other reason than to give God the credit.

Like Paul, Catholic theology gives credit where credit is due.