



What's What

A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.

Paul, Apostle of Christ Jesus—Part I

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Early Life

Scripture offers invaluable primary historical sources for Paul's life: his letters and the Acts of the Apostles. In addition, we have several early traditions about him outside of Scripture.

Paul was probably born between the years A.D. 5 and 10, just a few years after Jesus. (All the dates associated with his life are approximate and debated by scholars.) His parents were strictly observant Jews living in the city of Tarsus, the prosperous capital of Cilicia, a province of the Roman Empire in what is now Turkey.

Paul was not just a resident but a citizen of Tarsus, which suggests that his family was wealthy. He also claimed Roman citizenship by birth, a status that carried considerable prestige.

His Jewish name was "Saul"; "Paul" was a well-known Roman family name. This arrangement was common for Jews in this period, especially outside Palestine, who often had two names, one Greek or Roman and the other Semitic.

The young Paul obviously received a fine education. He could write Greek well and probably knew Hebrew or Aramaic (Jesus' native language) as well. His writing and preaching demonstrated admirable rhetorical skills.

In his adolescence Paul studied the Jewish Scriptures under the famous Jewish rabbi Gamaliel I the Elder of Jerusalem. In time, this avid student came to know the sacred texts well enough to

quote extensively from them by memory, including the deuterocanonical books...

In addition, he knew the useful trade of tent-making, which helped support him during his missionary journeys.

The apostle once declared that he was "a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees" (Acts 23:6). In one of his letters he recalled of his youth: "I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal 1:14, RSV).

It was apparently this religious zealotry that led the young man to persecute Christians, whom he must have viewed as a new and dangerous cult, threatening the Pharisaic traditions he so passionately embraced.

Paul's Conversion

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that soon after Jesus' ascension into heaven and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the Church met with hostility, as had Our Lord himself.

We first encounter Paul in this account as an associate of those who stoned to death St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. After Stephen's death, Paul "was trying to destroy the church; entering house after house and dragging out men and women, he handed them over for imprisonment" (Acts 8:3).

The young man's anger toward Christians was ferocious: "*Breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord,*

[he] went to the high priest and asked for letters to the synagogue in Damascus, that, if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains" (Acts 9:1-2).

But God had other plans for Paul. On the road to Damascus, the Risen Christ himself showed up, in an appearance so powerful that it knocked Paul to the ground and blinded him.

Paul was confronted with the reality that the Man of Nazareth who had been crucified truly was raised from the dead, as His followers claimed. This Man, he came to realize, was in fact the divine Son of God in the flesh, the Christ (or Messiah) long promised to His people. In opposing the Church, Paul had been opposing the God he had wanted to serve.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the Lord told him. Then He gave the trembling man instructions about how he was to begin the radically new life that lay ahead for him.

Paul had become a follower of Christ, called to a new mission to preach the Gospel of his new Lord to the world.

Arriving at Damascus, the new "apostle of Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:1) obeyed the Lord's instructions, was healed miraculously of his blindness and was baptized. Then he received his first instructions about the Christian life from other believers.

As passionate as ever about what he believed, Paul began sharing his new faith right away

in the local synagogues of Damascus, where Jewish people gathered to worship.

A Man on the Move

We can only imagine the uproar that resulted when the young Pharisee began "preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (Gal 1:23). Before long, the Jewish religious leaders opposed to the Christian movement were seeking to kill Paul.

The persecutor had become the persecuted. So he fled to Arabia (or Nabatea) for awhile. Eventually, he returned to Damascus, but he had to flee once more, barely escaping his enemies by being lowered secretly in a basket through the city wall.

This time Paul went back to Jerusalem to get acquainted with the apostles, to be taught by them and to seek their recognition of his own vocation. He stayed awhile with St. Peter and continued preaching. Then, once again facing dangerous opposition, he withdrew into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, his home province.

We don't know for sure the details of this period, sometimes called the "unknown years" of Paul's life. But we do know that, eventually, the apostle ended up in Antioch, the great metropolis of Syria where the numerous local followers of Jesus were first called "Christians." There he began a decade of remarkable and successful missionary journeys throughout that part of the world.

*by Paul Thigpen, Ph.D.
from Our Sunday Visitor
www.osv.com*



Saint of the Day: Sts. Timothy and Titus

On Monday, January 26, the Church remembers Sts Timothy and Titus.

Timothy (d. 97?): What we know from the New Testament of Timothy’s life makes it sound like that of a modern harried bishop. He had the honor of being a fellow apostle with Paul, both sharing the privilege of preaching the gospel and suffering for it.

Timothy had a Greek father and a Jewish mother named Eunice. Being the product of a “mixed” marriage, he was considered illegitimate by the Jews. It was his grandmother, Lois, who first became Christian. Timothy was a convert of Paul around the year 47 and later joined him in his apostolic work. He was with Paul at the founding of the Church in Corinth. During the 15 years he worked with Paul, he became one of his most faithful and trusted friends. He was sent on difficult missions by Paul—often in the face of great disturbance in local Churches which Paul had founded.

Timothy was with Paul in Rome during the latter’s house arrest. At some period Timothy himself was in prison (Hebrews 13:23). Paul installed him as his repre-

sentative at the Church of Ephesus.

Timothy was comparatively young for the work he was doing. (“Let no one have contempt for your youth,” Paul writes in 1 Timothy 4:12a.) Several references seem to indicate that he was timid. And one of Paul’s most frequently quoted lines was addressed to him: “Stop drinking only water, but have a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent illnesses” (1 Timothy 5:23).

Titus (d. 94?): Titus has the distinction of being a close friend and disciple of Paul as well as a fellow missionary. He was Greek, apparently from Antioch. Even though Titus was a Gentile, Paul would not let him be forced to undergo circumcision at Jerusalem. Titus is seen as a peacemaker, administrator, great friend. Paul’s second letter to Corinth affords an insight into the depth of his friendship with Titus, and the great fellowship they had in preaching the gospel: “When I went to Troas...I had no relief in my spirit because I did not find my brother Titus. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.... For

even when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way—external conflicts, internal fears. But God, who encourages the downcast, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus...” (2 Corinthians 2:12a, 13; 7:5-6).

When Paul was having trouble with the community at Corinth, Titus was the bearer of Paul’s severe letter and was successful in smoothing things out. Paul writes he was strengthened not only by the arrival of Titus but also “by the encouragement with which he was encouraged in regard to you, as he told us of your yearning, your lament, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.... And his heart goes out to you all the more, as he remembers the obedience of all of you, when you received him with fear and trembling” (2 Corinthians 7:7a, 15).

The Letter to Titus addresses him as the administrator of the Christian community on the island of Crete, charged with organizing it, correcting abuses and appointing presbyter-bishops..

From <http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay/>



Ten Interesting Facts about St. Paul

1. Paul was from the Roman city of Tarsus, located in what is today southern Turkey. (Acts of the Apostles 21:39)
2. Paul was not physically impressive, nor was he a very good speaker. (1 Corinthians 2:1 and 2 Cor 10:10; 11:6)
3. Paul had a sister and a nephew. (Acts 23:16)
4. Paul was educated in Jerusalem under the famous Jewish teacher Gamaliel. (Acts of the Apostles 22:3)
5. Paul was a Pharisee (Acts 26:5) and a tentmaker. (Acts 18:3)
6. Paul was a Roman citizen from a wealthy family. Acts 2:25–28
7. Paul participated in the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. (Acts of the Apostles 7:58)
8. Paul was the most prominent apostle in the early Church because he was so effective at forming Christian communities.
9. Although Paul wrote the most books of the New Testament, Luke, who only wrote two books, still gets the prize for writing more words than any other writer in the New Testament.
10. Paul’s conversion is among the most well-known.

“What’s What” is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.