

The Spreading of the Church

Our Catholic Heritage

The Men Who Pioneered the Church

By FATHER THOMAS McMANUS

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1,8)

By the time Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome (C. 65 A.D.) the Faith had penetrated to every corner of the Empire. Roman law, Roman peace, Roman roads had provided the seed bed for the primitive Church. Unknown to themselves, the Roman legions had marched for Christ.

The trials of the first missionaries are described by St. Paul:

"Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the 40 lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods. Once I was

stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked. A night and a day I have been adrift at sea. On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure of my anxiety for all the churches." (II Cor. 11,22-28)

We know little more than the names of those mighty men of God who pioneered the Faith — Silas and Barnabas, Clement and Urban, Timothy and Titus, and many others. It is interesting to note the number of

women, mentioned in the letters of St. Paul, who were also prominent in that first springtime of faith; Phoebe of Cenchreae, Prisca, Mary, Julia, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, "Workers in the Lord" at Rome; Evodia and Syntyche at Philippi ("They have labored side by side with me").

As the Church conquered province after province for Christ she became more deeply aware of her identity as the Mystery within history. St. Peter reminded the newly baptized:

"Like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to make spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God . . ." (I Pet. 1,5)

St. Paul reminded a badly divided church at Corinth:

"The cup of blessing which we

bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread we who are many are one body because we partake of the one bread." (I Cor. 10,16-17)

We partake of the Body of Christ to become the Body of Christ. In the Eucharist, the primitive Church recognized its strength and found its power to survive.

"The effect of our communion in the Body and Blood of Christ is that we are transformed into what we consume; and that he in whom we have died and in whom we have risen from the dead lives and is manifested in every movement of our body and spirit." (St. Leo the Great)

St. Paul Scatters the Seeds of the Church

By FATHER THOMAS McMANUS

"He is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9, 15-16)

The most primitive records of our history are the letters of St. Paul, a richly cosmopolitan figure standing at the very foundation of the Church. Paul, or Saul, to use his Hebrew name, was Jewish by nationality and Roman by citizenship. Born in the diaspora, Paul was in touch with the Greek mind and spirit. He belonged to the party of the Pharisees and practiced the trade of tentmaker. He began as a persecutor of the Church:

"Saul was ravaging the Church; and entering house after house he dragged off men and women, and committed them to prison." (Acts 8,3)

There came the day when Paul was, in his own words, "torn from the womb" to be born in Christ:

"As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon, a great light from heaven suddenly shone round about me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me? And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!'" (Acts 22, 6-9)

Paul never looked back. The rest of his life was a veritable odyssey of the Kingdom of God. From Jerusalem to Spain he scattered the good seed that

bore fruit a hundredfold. Urgent in season and out of season, he convinced, rebuked and exhorted, un-failing in patience and teaching.

Paul was the first great theologian of the



ST. PAUL

(Art by Robert F. McGovern)

Church. Time and again he reminded his people of their true identity:

"You are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (I Cor. 12, 27)

"You are strangers and aliens no longer, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." (Eph. 2, 19-20)

He became all things to all men to save all:

"As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way, through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, and hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God. . ." (II Cor. 6, 4-7)

Having fought the good fight, run the race, and kept the faith, Paul was beheaded in Rome during the persecution of the Emperor Nero about the year 65 A.D. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle to the Nations has left us the true valediction of a missionary:

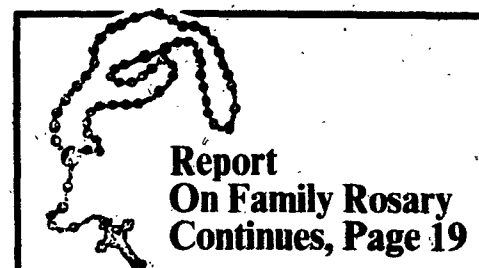
"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building." (I Cor. 3, 6-9)



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