 Reading time: 112 min.

The culminating moment of the Jubilee Year for every believer is the passage through the Holy Door, a highly symbolic gesture that should be experienced with deep meditation. It is not a simple visit to admire the architectural, sculptural, or pictorial beauty of a basilica: the early Christians did not go to places of worship for this reason, also because at that time there was not much to admire. They came instead to pray before the relics of the holy apostles and martyrs, and to obtain indulgence through their powerful intercession.
Visiting the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul without knowing their lives is not a sign of appreciation. For this reason, in this Jubilee Year, we wish to present the faith journeys of these two glorious apostles, as narrated by Saint John Bosco.

Life of Saint Paul the Apostle, Doctor of the Gentiles as told to the people by Father John Bosco

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PREFACE

Saint Peter is the prince of the Apostles, the first Pope, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth. He was established as the head of the Church; but his mission was particularly directed towards the conversion of the Jews. Saint Paul, on the other hand, is the Apostle who was called by God in an extraordinary way to bring the Light of the Gospel to the Gentiles. These two great Saints are named by the Church as the columns and foundations of the Faith, princes of the Apostles, who by their labours, their writings, and their blood taught us the law of the Lord; *Ipsi nos docuerunt legem tuam, Domine*. This is why the life of Saint Peter is followed by the life of Saint Paul.

It is true that this apostle is not to be counted among the series of Popes; but the extraordinary labours he undertook to help Saint Peter propagate the Gospel, his zeal, charity, and the doctrine left to us in the sacred books make him worthy to be placed alongside the life of the first Pope, as a powerful pillar upon which the Church of Jesus Christ rests.

CHAPTER I. Birthplace, Saint Paul’s education, his hatred for Christians

Saint Paul was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. Eight days after his birth he was circumcised, and was given the name Saul, which was later changed to Paul. His father lived in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a province of Asia Minor. Emperor Caesar Augustus granted many favours to this city, including the right of Roman citizenship. Therefore, Saint Paul, being born in Tarsus, was a Roman citizen, a status that brought with it many advantages, as one could enjoy immunity from the specific laws of all countries subject to or allied with the Roman Empire, and in any place a Roman citizen could appeal to the Senate or the Emperor for judgment.

His relatives, being well-off, sent him to Jerusalem to give him an education suitable to their status. His teacher was a doctor named Gamaliel, a man of great virtue, whom we have already mentioned in the life of Saint Peter. In that city he had the fortune to find a good companion from Cyprus, named Barnabas, a young man of great virtue, whose kindness of heart greatly helped to temper the fiery spirit of his fellow student. These two young men remained loyal friends, and we will see them become colleagues in the preaching of the Gospel.

Saul’s father was a Pharisee, meaning he professed the strictest sect among the Jews, which consisted of a great outward appearance of rigour, a principle entirely contrary to the spirit of humility of the Gospel. Saul followed his father’s

teachings, and since his teacher was also a Pharisee he became full of enthusiasm to increase their number and remove any obstacle that opposed such a goal.

It was customary among the Jews to have their children learn a trade while attending to the study of the Bible. They did this in order to preserve them from the dangers that idleness brings; and also to occupy the body and spirit in something that could provide for their livelihood in the harsh circumstances of life. Saul learned the trade of a leather worker and especially to sew tents. He stood out among all those of his age for his zeal towards the law of Moses and the traditions of the Jews. This poorly enlightened zeal made him a blasphemer, persecutor, and fierce enemy of Jesus Christ.

He incited the Jews to condemn Saint Stephen, and he was present at his death. And since his age did not allow him to take part in the execution of the sentence, when Stephen was to be stoned he kept watch over the others' clothes and furiously urged them on to throw stones at him. But Stephen, a true follower of the Saviour, took the revenge that is the saints', that is, he began to pray for those who were stoning him. This prayer was the beginning of Saul's conversion; and Saint Augustine says precisely that the Church would not have had an apostle in Paul if deacon Stephen had not prayed.

At that time, a violent persecution was raised against the Jerusalem Church, and Saul was the one who showed a fierce eagerness to disperse the disciples of Jesus Christ and put them to death. In order to better foment the persecution publicly and privately, he had himself authorised by the high priest. Then he became like a hungry wolf that is not satisfied with tearing and devouring. He entered the houses of Christians, insulted them, beat them, bound them, or had them loaded with chains to be dragged off to prison. He had them beaten with rods; in short, he used every means to force them to blaspheme the holy name of Jesus Christ. The news of Saul's violence spread even to distant lands, so that his very name instilled fear among the faithful.

The persecutors were not content to be cruel against the Christians in person, but, as was always the case with persecutors, they also stripped them of their goods and of what they possessed in common. This led many to live on the alms that the faithful from distant Churches sent them. But there is a God who assists and governs his Church, and when we least expect it he comes to the aid of those who trust in him.

CHAPTER II. Conversion and Baptism of Saul — Year of Christ 34

Saul’s fury could not be satisfied; he breathed nothing but threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Having heard that in Damascus, a city about fifty miles from Jerusalem, many Jews had embraced the faith, he felt a burning desire to go there for a massacre. To freely do what his hatred against Christians suggested, he went to the high priest and the Senate, who authorized him with letters to go to Damascus, place all the Jews who declared themselves Christians in chains, and then bring them to Jerusalem to punish them with a severity capable of deterring those who might be tempted to imitate them.

But the plans of men are in vain when they are contrary to those of Heaven! God, moved by the prayers of Saint Stephen and the other persecuted faithful, wanted to manifest his power and mercy in Saul. Saul, with his commendatory letters, full of zeal, plunging along the road, was near the city of Damascus, and it already seemed to him that he had the Christians in his hands. But that was the place of divine mercy.

In the heat of his blind fury, around noon, a great light, brighter than the sun, surrounded him and all those who accompanied him. Astonished by that heavenly brightness, they all fell to the ground as if dead; at the same time, they heard the sound of a voice, understood only by Saul. “Saul, Saul,” said the voice, “why are you persecuting me?” Then Saul, even more frightened, replied: “Who are you, Lord?” The voice continued,“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Remember that it is too hard to kick against the goad, which you do by resisting one more powerful than you. By persecuting my Church you persecute me; but it will become more flourishing, and you will do harm only to yourself.”

This sweet reproach from the Saviour, accompanied by the inner anointing of his grace, softened the hardness of Saul’s heart and changed him into a completely new man. Therefore, all humbled, he exclaimed: “Lord, what do you want me to do?” As if to say: What is the means to procure your glory? I offer myself to you to do your most holy will.

Jesus Christ ordered Saul to rise and go into the city where a disciple would instruct him about what he should do. God, says Saint Augustine, by entrusting to his ministers the instruction of an apostle called in such an extraordinary manner, teaches us that we must seek his holy will in the teaching of the Pastors whom he has clothed with his authority to be our spiritual guides on earth.

Saul, once he had risen, could see nothing any more, even though he kept his eyes open. Therefore, it was necessary to give him a hand and lead him to Damascus, as if Jesus Christ wanted to lead him in triumph. He took lodging in the

house of a merchant named Judas; he stayed there for three days without seeing, without drinking, and without eating, still unaware of what God wanted from him.

There was a disciple named Ananias in Damascus, highly esteemed by the Jews for his virtue and holiness. Jesus Christ appeared to him and said: “Ananias!” And he replied: “Here I am, Lord.” The Lord added: “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and seek a certain Saul, a native of Tarsus; you will find him praying.” Ananias, having heard the name of Saul, trembled and said: “O Lord, where are you sending me? You know well the great evil he has done to the faithful in Jerusalem; now it is known to all that he has come here with full power to bind all those who believe in your Name.” The Lord replied: “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles, before kings, and before the children of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” While Jesus Christ was speaking to Ananias he sent Saul another vision, in which a man named Ananias appeared to him who came to him, and laying hands on him restored his sight. The Lord did this to assure Saul that Ananias was the one he was sending to manifest his will to him.

Ananias obeyed, went to find Saul, laid hands on him, and said: “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming to Damascus has sent me to you so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Speaking thus, Ananias, holding his hands on Saul’s head, added: “Open your eyes.” At that moment, scales fell from Saul’s eyes like fish scales, and he regained his sight perfectly.

Then Ananias added: “Now arise and receive Baptism, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Saul immediately rose to receive Baptism; then, full of joy, he refreshed his weariness with a bit of food. After spending just a few days with the disciples in Damascus, he began to preach the Gospel in the synagogues, demonstrating with the Sacred Scriptures that Jesus was the Son of God. All who heard him were filled with astonishment, and they kept saying: “Is this not the one who in Jerusalem persecuted those who called on the name of Jesus and has come here specifically to take them as prisoners?”

But Saul had already surpassed all human respect; he desired nothing more than to promote the glory of God and repair the scandal given; therefore, allowing everyone to say what they wanted about him, he confused the Jews and boldly preached Jesus Crucified.

CHAPTER III. Saul’s first journey — He returns to Damascus; traps are set for him — He goes to Jerusalem; he presents himself to the Apostles — Jesus Christ appears to him — Year of Jesus Christ 35-36-37

Saul, seeing the serious opposition he faced from the Jews, deemed it wise to leave Damascus to spend some time with the simple people in the countryside and also to go to Arabia to seek other peoples more inclined to receive the faith.

After three years, believing the storm had passed, he returned to Damascus, where with zeal and strength he began to preach Jesus Christ; but the Jews, unable to resist the words of God that were preached to them through his minister, decided to have him killed. To better succeed in their intent, they reported him to Aretas, the king of Damascus, portraying Saul as a disturber of the public peace. That king, who was too credulous, listened to the slander and ordered that Saul be taken to prison, and to prevent his escape he placed guards at all the city gates. However, news of these could not be prevented from reaching the disciples and Saul himself. But how could they free him? Those good disciples led him to a house that overlooked the city walls and, placing him in a basket, lowered him down from the wall. Thus, while the guards watched at all the gates and a rigorous search was made in every corner of Damascus, Saul, freed from their hands, took the road to Jerusalem safe and sound.

Although Judea was not the field entrusted to his zeal, the reason for this journey was a holy one. He considered it his essential duty to present himself to Peter, who did not yet know him, and thus account for his mission to the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Saul had instilled such great terror of his name among the faithful in Jerusalem that they could not believe in his conversion. He tried to approach one or the other but they were all fearful and fled from him without giving him time to explain himself. It was at that moment that Barnabas proved to be a true friend. As soon as he heard about the miraculous conversion of this fellow disciple, he immediately went to him to console him; then he went to the Apostles, telling them about the miraculous appearance of Jesus Christ to Saul and how, instructed directly by the Lord, he desired nothing more than to proclaim the holy name of God to all the peoples of the earth. At such joyful news the disciples welcomed him with joy, and Saint Peter kept him in his house for several days, where he did not fail to make him known to the most zealous of the faithful; nor did Saul let any opportunity slip by to bear witness to Jesus Christ in those very places where he had blasphemed and caused others to blaspheme.

And since he was fervently confronting the Jews and confusing them in public and in private, they rose up against him, resolved to take his life. Therefore,

the faithful advised him to leave the city. The same thing was made known to him by God through a vision. One day, while Saul was praying in the temple, Jesus Christ appeared to him and said: “Leave immediately from Jerusalem, for this people will not believe what you are about to say about me.” Paul replied: “Lord, they know how I was a persecutor of your holy name; if they know that I have converted, surely they will follow my example and convert as well.” Jesus added: “Not so: they will not believe your words. Go, I have chosen you to bring my Gospel to distant lands among the Gentiles” (*Acts of the Apostles, chap. 22*).

Thus, with Paul’s departure decided, the disciples accompanied him to Caesarea and from there sent him to Tarsus, his homeland, hoping that he would be able to live with less danger among relatives and friends and also begin in that city to make known the name of the Lord.

CHAPTER IV. Prophecies of Agabus — Saul and Barnabas ordained bishops — They go to the island of Cyprus — Conversion of the proconsul Sergius — Punishment of the magician Elymas — John Mark returns to Jerusalem — Year of Jesus Christ 40-43

While Saul was preaching the divine word in Tarsus, Barnabas began to preach it with great fruit in Antioch. Then, seeing the large number of those who came to faith every day, Barnabas deemed it wise to go to Tarsus to invite Saul to come and assist him. They both came to Antioch, and here with preaching and miracles they gained a large number of believers.

In those days, some prophets, that is, some fervent Christians who were enlightened by God and predicted the future, came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, predicted a great famine that would desolate the whole earth, as indeed happened under the reign of Claudius. The faithful, to prevent the evils that this famine would cause, resolved to take up a collection and thus each, according to their means, could send some aid to the brothers in Judea. They did this with excellent results. To have someone respected by everyone, they chose Saul and Barnabas and sent them to bring these alms to the priests in Jerusalem so that they could distribute it according to need. Having completed their mission, Saul and Barnabas returned to Antioch.

Other prophets and teachers were also in this city, among whom was a certain Simon nicknamed the Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod. One day, while they were offering the Holy Mysteries and fasting, the Holy Spirit appeared in an extraordinary manner and said to them: “Set Saul

and Barnabas apart for me for the work of the sacred ministry to which I have called them." Then a fast was ordained with public prayers, and having laid hands on them they consecrated them as bishops. This ordination was a model for those that the Catholic Church usually performs for its ministers: from here originated the fasts of the four seasons, the prayers and other ceremonies that usually take place during a sacred ordination.

Saul was in Antioch when he had a wonderful vision in which he was caught up to the third heaven, that is, he was lifted up by God to contemplate the most sublime things of Heaven that a mortal man can grasp. He himself left it written that he had seen things that cannot be expressed in words, things never seen, never heard, and that the heart of man cannot even imagine. Comforted by this celestial vision, Saul departed with Barnabas and went directly to Seleucia in Syria, so named to distinguish it from another city of the same name located near the Tigris towards Persia. They also had with them a certain John Mark, not Mark the Evangelist. He was the son of the pious widow in whose house Saint Peter had taken refuge when he was miraculously freed from prison by an angel. He was Barnabas's cousin and had been brought from Jerusalem to Antioch on the occasion when they went there to bring alms.

Seleucia had a port on the Mediterranean: from there our gospel workers embarked to go to the island of Cyprus, the homeland of Saint Barnabas. Arriving at Salamis, a significant city and port on that island, they began to announce the Gospel to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, who were simpler and more inclined to receive the faith. The two Apostles, preaching throughout that island, came to Paphos, the capital of the country, where the proconsul, that is, the Roman governor named Sergius Paul, resided. Here Saul's zeal had the opportunity to exercise itself due to a magician named Bar-Jesus or Elymas. This man, whether to gain the favour of the proconsul or to extract money from his conjuring, seduced the people and turned Sergius away from following the pious sentiments of his heart. The proconsul, having heard about the preachers who had come to the land he governed, sent for them to come and make known their doctrine. Saul and Barnabas immediately went to explain the truths of the Gospel to him; but Elymas, seeing his means of gain taken away, fearing perhaps worse, began to obstruct God's plans, contradicting Saul's doctrine and discrediting him before the proconsul to keep him away from the truth. Then Saul, all aflame with zeal and the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him: "Wicked man," he said to him, "you vessel of iniquity and fraud, son of the devil, enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease from perverting the straight ways of the Lord? Now behold, the hand of God is upon you: from this moment you will be blind and for as long as God wills, you will not see the

light of the sun.” Instantly a mist fell upon his eyes, and having lost the ability to see, he went about groping, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

At that terrible event, Sergius recognised the hand of God and moved by Saul’s preaching and that miracle, believed in Jesus Christ and embraced the faith with all his family. Even the magician Elymas, terrified by this sudden blindness, recognised the divine power in Paul’s words and, renouncing magic, converted, did penance, and embraced the faith. On this occasion Saul took the name of Paul, both in memory of the governor’s conversion and to be better received among the Gentiles, since Saul was a Hebrew name, while Paul was a Roman name.

Gathered in Paphos, no small result of their preaching, Paul and Barnabas with other companions embarked for Perga, a city in Pamphylia. There they sent John Mark who until then had been helping them, back home. Barnabas would have gladly kept him; but Paul, seeing a certain timidity and inconsistency in him, thought to send him back to his mother in Jerusalem. We will soon see this disciple repair the weakness just shown and become a fervent preacher.

CHAPTER V. Saint Paul preaches in Pisidian Antioch — Year of Jesus Christ 44

From Perga, Saint Paul went with Saint Barnabas to Antioch in Pisidia, so named to distinguish it from Antioch in Syria, which was the great capital of the East. There the Jews, as in many other cities of Asia, had their synagogue where on Saturdays they gathered to listen to the explanation of the Law of Moses and the Prophets. The two apostles also attended, along with many Jews and Gentiles who already worshipped the true God. According to the custom of the Jews, the teachers of the law read a passage from the Bible and then gave it to Paul with the request to say something edifying to them. Paul, who was waiting for the opportunity to speak, stood up, gestured with his hand for everyone to be silent, and began to speak thus: “Children of Israel, and you all who fear the Lord, since you invite me to speak, I ask you to listen to me with the attention that the dignity of the things I am about to tell you deserves.

“The God who chose our fathers when they were in Egypt and through a series of wonders made them a privileged nation, has particularly honoured the lineage of David by promising that he would raise the Saviour of the world from it. That great promise, confirmed by so many prophecies, has finally been fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. John, whom you certainly believe, the John whose sublime virtues made people believe he was the Messiah, gave the most

authoritative testimony about him, saying that he did not consider himself worthy to untie even the straps of his sandals. You today, brothers, you worthy sons of Abraham, and you all worshippers of the true God, of whatever nation or lineage you may be, are those to whom the word of salvation is particularly addressed. The inhabitants of Jerusalem, deceived by their leaders, did not want to recognise the Redeemer we preach to you. Rather, they put him to death; but Almighty God did not allow, as he had predicted, that the body of his Christ should suffer corruption in the tomb. Therefore, on the third day after his death, he raised him glorious and triumphant.

"Up to this point, you have no blame, for the light of truth had not yet reached you. But tremble from now on if you ever close your eyes; tremble at bringing down upon yourselves the curse thundered by the prophets against anyone who does not want to recognise the great work of the Lord, the fulfilment of which must take place in these days."

Having finished his speech, all the listeners withdrew in silence, meditating on the things they had heard from Saint Paul.

However, different thoughts occupied their minds. The good were filled with joy at the words of salvation announced to them, but a large part of the Jews, still convinced that the Messiah should restore the temporal power of their nation and ashamed to recognise the one whom their leaders had condemned to a shameful death as the Messiah, received Paul's preaching with displeasure. Nevertheless, they showed themselves satisfied and invited the Apostle to return the following Saturday, with a very different spirit: the malicious to prepare to contradict him, and those who feared the Lord, both Israelites and Gentiles, to better instruct themselves and strengthen their faith. On the appointed day, an immense crowd gathered to hear this new doctrine. As soon as Saint Paul began to preach, the teachers from the synagogue rose up against him. They initially presented some difficulties; when they realised they could not resist the strength of the arguments with which Saint Paul proved the truths of the faith, they resorted to shouting, insults, and blasphemies. The two apostles, seeing the word stifled in their mouths, boldly exclaimed in a loud voice: "It was necessary in the first place to announce the divine word to you; but since you stubbornly close your ears and furiously reject it, you render yourselves unworthy of eternal life. We therefore turn to the Gentiles to fulfil the promise made by God through the mouth of his prophet when he said: 'I have destined you to be a light to the Gentiles and for their salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

The Jews then, even more moved by envy and indignation, stirred up a fierce persecution against the Apostles.

They made use of some women who enjoyed a reputation for being pious and honest, and together with them incited the magistrates of the city, and all together, shouting and clamouring, forced the Apostles to leave their borders. Thus compelled, Paul and Barnabas departed from that unfortunate land, and at the moment of their departure, according to the command of Jesus Christ, they shook the dust from their feet as a sign of renouncing forever any relationship with them, as people rejected by God and struck by divine curse.

CHAPTER VI. Saint Paul preaches in other cities — Performs a miracle in Lystra, where he is then stoned and left for dead — Year of Jesus Christ 45

Paul and Barnabas, driven out of Pisidia, went to Lycaonia, another province of Asia Minor, and went to Iconium which was its capital. The holy Apostles, seeking only the glory of God, forgetting the mistreatment they had received in Antioch from the Jews, immediately began preaching the Gospel in the synagogue. Here God blessed their labours, and a multitude of Jews and Gentiles embraced the faith. But those among the Jews who remained unbelieving and persisted in wickedness stirred up another persecution against the Apostles. Some welcomed them as men sent by God, while others proclaimed them impostors. Therefore, having been warned that many of them, protected by the leaders of the synagogue and the magistrates, wanted to stone them, they went to Lystra and then to Derbe, a city not far from Iconium. These cities and the surrounding areas became the field where our zealous workers began to sow the word of the Lord. Among the many miracles that God performed through Saint Paul during this mission, the one we are about to recount was remarkable.

In Lystra, there was a man who had been crippled from birth and had never been able to take a step with his feet. Having heard that Saint Paul was performing astonishing miracles, he felt a lively confidence in his heart that he too could obtain healing through this means, as many others had already done. He was listening to the Apostle’s preaching when Paul, gazing intently at the unfortunate man and perceiving the good dispositions of his soul, said in a loud voice: “Stand up and walk on your feet.” At such a command, the cripple stood up and began to walk swiftly. The multitude that had witnessed this miracle was filled with enthusiasm and wonder. “These men are not human,” they exclaimed from all sides, “but are gods in human form come down from heaven among us.” According to this erroneous assumption, they called Barnabas Jupiter, because he appeared to them more

majestic, and Paul, who spoke with wonderful eloquence, they called Mercury, who among the Gentiles was the interpreter and messenger of Jupiter and the god of eloquence. When the news of the event reached the priest at the temple of Jupiter, who was outside the city, he deemed it his duty to offer a solemn sacrifice to the great guests and invited all the people to take part. Having prepared the victims, the crowns, and everything necessary for the ceremony, they brought everything before the house where Paul and Barnabas were staying, wanting in every way to make a sacrifice to them. The two Apostles, filled with holy zeal, rushed into the crowd and, in a sign of sorrow, tearing their clothes, cried out: “Oh, what are you doing, you miserable people? We are mortal men like you; we urge you with all our spirit to turn from the worship of gods to the worship of the Lord who created heaven and earth, and who, although in the past he tolerated the Gentiles and their follies, has nevertheless provided clear arguments of his being and his infinite goodness through works that make him known as the supreme master of all things.”

At such frank speaking, the people’s spirits calmed, and they abandoned the idea of making the sacrifice. The priests had not yet completely given in and were perplexed about whether they should desist when some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium, sent by the synagogues to disturb the holy endeavours of the Apostles. Those wicked men did so much and said so much that they managed to turn the whole crowd against the two Apostles. Thus, those who had venerated them as gods just a few days earlier now shouted that they were wrongdoers; and since Saint Paul had spoken in particular, the anger was directed entirely at him.

They unleashed such a storm of stones upon him that, believing him to be dead, they dragged him out of the city. See, O reader, what account you must make of the glory of the world! Those who today would elevate you above the stars may tomorrow wish you in the deepest abyss! Blessed are those who place their trust in God.

CHAPTER VII. Paul miraculously healed — Other apostolic labours — Conversion of Saint Thecla

The disciples, along with other faithful, having heard or perhaps seen what had been done to Paul, gathered around his body, mourning him as dead. But they were soon consoled; for whether Paul was truly dead or merely badly beaten, God made him return healthy and vigorous in an instant, to the point that he was able to get up by himself and, surrounded by the disciples, return to the city of Lystra

among the very same people who had just stoned him.

But the next day, having left that city, he went to Derbe, another city in Lycaonia. Here he preached Jesus Christ and made many conversions. Paul and Barnabas visited many cities where they had already preached and, observing the serious dangers to which those who had recently come to the faith were exposed, appointed Bishops and Priests to take care of those churches.

Among the conversions made during this third mission of Paul, the one of Saint Thecla is very famous. While he was preaching in Iconium, this young woman went to listen to him. Previously, she had dedicated herself to the liberal arts and the study of secular philosophy. Her relatives had already promised her to a young nobleman, rich and very powerful. One day, while listening to Saint Paul preach about the value of virginity, she felt herself fall in love with this precious virtue. Upon hearing the great esteem that the Saviour had for it and the great reward reserved in heaven for those who have the good fortune to preserve it, she felt a burning desire to consecrate herself to Jesus Christ and renounce all the advantages of earthly marriage. At her refusal of that marriage, which appeared advantageous in the eyes of the world, her relatives were greatly indignant, and, in agreement with the groom, tried every means, every flattery to make her change her mind. All in vain: when a soul is wounded by the love of God, every human effort fails to divert it from the object it loves. In fact, the relatives, the groom, and the friends, turning love into fury, incited the judges and magistrates of Iconium against the holy virgin, and from threats they moved to actions.

She was thrown into a den of hungry and ferocious beasts; Thecla, armed only with confidence in God, made the sign of the Holy Cross, and those animals laid down their ferocity and respected the bride of Jesus Christ. A fire was lit into which she was thrown; but as soon as she made the sign of the Cross, the flames were extinguished, and she remained unharmed. In short, she was subjected to every kind of torment and was miraculously delivered from all. For these things, she was given the name of protomartyr, that is, the first martyr among women, just as Saint Stephen was the first martyr among men. She lived many more years practising the most heroic virtues and died in peace at a very old age.

CHAPTER VIII. Saint Paul goes to confer with Saint Peter — Attends the Council of Jerusalem — Year of Christ 50

After the labours and sufferings endured by Paul and Barnabas during their third mission, content with the souls they had managed to bring to the fold of Jesus

Christ, they returned to Antioch in Syria. There they recounted to the faithful of that city the wonders performed by God in the conversion of the Gentiles. The Holy Apostle was consoled there with a revelation, in which God commanded him to go to Jerusalem to confer with Saint Peter about the Gospel he had preached. God had commanded this so that Saint Paul would recognise in Saint Peter the Head of the Church, and thus all the faithful would understand how the two leaders of the Apostles preached the same faith, one God, one baptism, one Saviour Jesus Christ.

Paul set out in the company of Barnabas, bringing with him a disciple named Titus who had been won to the faith during this third mission. This is the famous Titus who became a model of virtue, a faithful follower and collaborator of our holy Apostle, and of whom we will also have much to say. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, they presented themselves to the Apostles Peter, James, and John, who were considered the main pillars of the Church. Among other things, it was agreed there that Peter, along with James and John, would apply himself in a special way to lead the Jews to the faith; while Paul and Barnabas would dedicate themselves primarily to the conversion of the Gentiles.

Paul stayed fifteen days in that city, after which he returned with his companions to Antioch. There they found the faithful very agitated over a question arising from the fact that the Jews wanted to compel the Gentiles to submit to circumcision and the other ceremonies of the law of Moses, which was the same as saying that it was necessary to become a good Jew in order to then become a good Christian. The disputes went so far that, unable to quiet them otherwise, it was decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to consult the Head of the Church so that the matter could be resolved by him.

We have already recounted in the life of Saint Peter how God, with a wonderful revelation, had made known to this prince of the Apostles that the Gentiles, coming to the faith, were not obliged to circumcision nor to the other ceremonies of the law of Moses; however, in order that the will of God might be known to all and that every difficulty might be solemnly resolved, Peter gathered a universal council, which became the model for all the councils that would be celebrated in future times. There, Paul and Barnabas presented the state of the question which was defined by Saint Peter and confirmed by the other Apostles in the following manner:

“The Apostles and elders to the brothers converted from paganism who dwell in Antioch and in other parts of Syria and Cilicia. Having heard that some from here have troubled and distressed your consciences with arbitrary ideas, it seemed good to us, gathered here, to choose and send to you Paul and Barnabas, men very dear to us, who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. With

them we send Silas and Judas, who will deliver our letters to you and will confirm the same truths to you verbally. For it has been judged by the Holy Spirit and by us not to impose on you any other law, except those you must observe, namely to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from strangled animals, and from fornication; abstaining from these things you will do well. Stay in peace."

This last matter, namely fornication, did not need to be prohibited as it is entirely contrary to the dictates of reason and prohibited by the sixth commandment of the Decalogue. However, this prohibition was renewed regarding the Gentiles, who in the worship of their false gods thought it was permissible, indeed a pleasing thing to those filthy deities.

When Paul and Barnabas, along with Silas and Judas, arrived in Antioch, they published the letter with the council's decree, which not only quelled the tumult but filled the brothers with joy, each recognizing the voice of God in that of Saint Peter and the council. Silas and Judas greatly contributed to that common joy, as they were prophets, that is, filled with the Holy Spirit and endowed with the gift of divine speech and a particular grace to interpret the divine Scriptures, and they were very effective in confirming the faithful in faith, concord, and good intentions.

Saint Peter, having been informed of the extraordinary progress that the Gospel was making in Antioch, also wanted to visit the faithful to whom he had already preached for many years and among whom he had held the Pontifical See for seven years. While the two leaders of the Apostles were staying in Antioch, it happened that Peter, to please the Jews, practised some ceremonies of the Mosaic law. This caused a certain aversion on the part of the Gentiles, without Saint Peter being aware of it. Saint Paul, having learned of this fact, publicly warned Saint Peter, who received the advice with admirable humility without uttering words of excuse; rather, from then on, he became very friendly with Saint Paul, and in his letters he would not call him by any other name than that of dearest brother. An example worthy of imitation by those who are in any way warned of their faults.

CHAPTER IX. Paul separates from Barnabas — Travels through various cities of Asia — God sends him to Macedonia — In Philippi, he converts Lydia's family — Year of Christ 51

Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel for some time in the city of Antioch, even working to spread it in the nearby countries. Not long after, Paul thought it would be good to visit the Churches to which he had preached. He said to Barnabas, "I think it is good that we return to see the faithful in those cities and

lands where we have preached, to see how things are going in terms of religion among them." Nothing was closer to Barnabas's heart, and therefore he immediately agreed with the Holy Apostle; but he proposed to take with them John Mark, who had followed them on the previous mission and had then left them in Perga. Perhaps he wanted to erase the stain he had made on that occasion, so he wanted to be in their company again. Saint Paul did not judge it that way: "You see," he said to Barnabas, "that this man is not someone to be trusted: surely you remember when we arrived in Perga of Pamphylia how he abandoned us." Barnabas insisted that he could be welcomed, and he presented good reasons. Unable to agree, the two Apostles decided to separate from each other and go their separate ways.

Thus God made use of this difference of opinion for his greater glory; for, separated, they brought the light of the Gospel to more places, which they would not have done if they had both gone together.

Barnabas went with John Mark to the island of Cyprus and visited those Churches where he had preached with Saint Paul on the previous mission. This Apostle worked hard to spread the faith of Jesus Christ and was finally crowned with martyrdom in Cyprus, his homeland. John Mark was steadfast this time, and we will later see him as a faithful companion of Saint Paul, who praised his zeal and charity greatly.

Saint Paul took with him Silas, who had been appointed as a companion to carry the acts of the Jerusalem council to Antioch. He undertook his fourth journey and went to visit various Churches he had founded. He first went to Derbe, then to Lystra, where some time earlier the Holy Apostle had been left for dead. But God wanted to compensate him this time for what he had previously suffered.

He found there a young man he had converted on the other mission, named Timothy. Paul had already known the fine character of this disciple and in his heart had decided to make him a collaborator of the Gospel, that is, to consecrate him as a priest and take him as a companion in his apostolic work. However, before conferring sacred ordination, Paul asked for information from the faithful in Lystra and found that everyone praised this good young man, extolling his virtue, modesty, and spirit of prayer; and not only those from Lystra said this but even those from Iconium and the other nearby cities, and all foresaw in Timothy a zealous priest and a holy bishop.

With these glowing testimonies, Paul had no further difficulty in consecrating him as a priest. Paul then, taking Timothy and Silas with him, continued the visit to the Churches, recommending to all to observe and hold firm to the decisions of the Jerusalem council. Those in Antioch had done so, and so did the preachers of the

Gospel at all times to assure the faithful not to fall into error: namely, to adhere to the decrees, the orders of the councils and of the Roman Pontiff, successor of Saint Peter.

Paul and his companions crossed Galatia and Phrygia to bring the Gospel to Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbade him.

To facilitate the understanding of the things we are about to recount, it is good to note in passing that in a broad sense the word 'Asia' we mean one of the three parts of the world. The whole expanse of Asia, except for the part called *Asia Minor* which is now *Anatolia*, is usually referred to as *Greater Asia*, which is the peninsula between the Mediterranean Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Black Sea. A part of Asia Minor was also called Proconsular Asia, more or less extensive according to the number of provinces entrusted to the government of the Roman proconsul. Here, by Asia, where Saint Paul planned to go, we mean a portion of Proconsular Asia located around Ephesus and bordered by Mount Taurus, the Black Sea, and Phrygia.

Saint Paul then thought of going to Bithynia, which is another province of Asia Minor a bit more towards the Black Sea; but even that was not permitted by God. Therefore, he returned and went to Troas, which is a city and province where there was once a famous city called *Troy*. God had reserved the preaching of the Gospel to those peoples for another time; for now he wanted to send Paul to other countries.

While Saint Paul was in Troas, an angel appeared to him dressed as a man according to the custom of the Macedonians. Standing before him, he began to plead: "*Please! Have mercy on us; cross over to Macedonia and come to our aid.*" From this vision, Saint Paul understood the will of the Lord and without delay prepared to cross the sea to go to Macedonia.

In Troas, a cousin of Saint Paul named Luke joined him, who proved to be a great help in his apostolic labours. He was a physician from Antioch, of great intellect, who wrote Greek with purity and elegance. He was to Paul what Saint Mark was to Saint Peter; and like him, he wrote the Gospel that we read under the name of the *Gospel according to Luke*. The book titled *Acts of the Apostles*, from which we derive almost everything we say about Saint Paul, is also the work of Saint Luke. Since he joined as a companion of our Apostle, there was no longer any danger, toil, or suffering that could shake his steadfastness.

Paul, therefore, according to the angel's advice, along with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, embarked from Troas, sailed the Aegean Sea (which separates Europe from Asia), and with a prosperous voyage arrived at the island of Samothrace, then to Neapolis, not the capital of the Kingdom of Naples but a small town on the border

of Thrace and Macedonia. Without stopping, the Apostle went directly to Philippi, the main city, so named because it was built by a king of that country named Philip. There they stayed for some time.

The Jews had no synagogue in that city, either because they were prohibited or because they were too few in number. They had only a *proseucha*, or place of prayer, which we call an oratory. On the Sabbath, Paul and his companions went out of the city to the riverbank where they found a *proseucha* with some women inside. They immediately began to preach the kingdom of God to that simple audience. A merchant named Lydia was the first to be called by God; thus, she and her family received Baptism.

This pious woman, grateful for the benefits received, begged her teachers and the fathers of her soul: “If you judge me faithful to God, do not deny me a grace after that of Baptism which I acknowledge comes from you. Come to my house, stay as long as you like, and consider it as yours.” Paul did not want to agree; but she insisted so much that he had to accept. This is the fruit that the word of God produces when it is well listened to. It generates faith; but it must be heard and explained by the sacred ministers, as Saint Paul himself said: “*Fides ex auditu, auditus autem per verbum Christi*” (Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ).

CHAPTER X. Saint Paul frees a girl from the devil — He is beaten with rods — He is put in prison — Conversion of the jailer and his family — Year of Christ 51

Saint Paul and his companions went here and there spreading the seed of the word of God throughout the city of Philippi. One day, going to the *proseucha*, they encountered a fortune-teller, whom we would call a *sorceress* or *witch*. She had a devil in her that spoke through her mouth and predicted many extraordinary things; which greatly benefited her masters, as ignorant people went to consult her and had to pay well for the predictions. She then began to follow Saint Paul and his companions, shouting behind them: “These men are servants of the Most High God; they show you the way of salvation.” Saint Paul let her speak without saying anything, until, annoyed and indignant, he turned to the evil spirit that spoke through her and said in a threatening tone: “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of this girl immediately.” Saying and doing was one and the same, for, compelled by the powerful name of Jesus Christ, it had to leave that body, and due to its departure the sorceress was left without magic.

You, O readers, will understand the reason why the devil praised Saint Paul, and why this holy Apostle rejected the praises. The evil spirit wanted Saint Paul to leave it in peace, and thus for people to believe that the doctrine of Saint Paul was the same as the predictions of the possessed woman. The holy Apostle wanted to demonstrate that there was no agreement between Christ and the devil, and by refusing its flattery he showed how great the power of the name of Jesus Christ is over all the spirits of hell.

The girl's masters, having seen that all hope of profit from the devil was gone, were greatly indignant against Saint Paul and, without waiting for any command, took him and his companions and led them to the Palace of Justice. Arriving before the judges, they said: "These men of Jewish race are disturbing our city by introducing a new religion, which is certainly sacrilege." The people, hearing that their religion was offended, became furious and rushed against them from all sides.

The judges were full of indignation and, tearing their clothes, without any trial, without examining whether there was a crime or not, ordered that Paul and Silas be fiercely beaten with rods, and when they were either satisfied or tired of beating them, they ordered that Paul and Silas be taken to prison, imposing on the jailer to guard them with the utmost diligence. This man not only locked them in prison but, for greater security, fastened their feet in stocks. Those holy men, in the horror of the prison, covered in wounds, far from complaining, rejoiced with joy and during the night sang praises to God. The other prisoners were amazed.

It was midnight, and they were still singing and blessing God when suddenly a very strong earthquake was felt. With a horrible crash it shook the building to its foundations. At this shock, the chains fell from the prisoners, their stocks broke, the prison doors opened, and all the detainees found themselves free. The jailer woke up and, running to find out what had happened, found the doors open. Then not doubting that the prisoners had escaped, and therefore perhaps he himself would have to pay with his life, he ran in despair, and drawing a sword, he pointed it at his chest and was about to kill himself. Paul, either by the brightness of the moon or by the light of some lamp, seeing the man in such an act of despair, shouted, "Stop! Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." Reassured by these words, he calmed down a bit and, having a light brought to him, entered the prison and found the prisoners each in their place. Overcome with wonder and moved by the inner light of God's grace, trembling all over he fell at the feet of Paul and Silas, saying, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Everyone can imagine how much joy Paul felt in his heart at such words! He turned to him and replied, "Believe in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and you will be

saved, you and your whole family.”

Without delay the good man took the holy prisoners to his house, washed their wounds with the love and reverence he would have shown his father. Then gathering his family, they were taught the truth of the faith. Listening with humble hearts to the word of God, they quickly learned what was necessary to become Christians. Thus Saint Paul, seeing them filled with faith and the grace of the Holy Spirit, baptized them all. Then they began to thank God for the benefits received. These new believers, seeing Paul and Silas exhausted and weak from the beatings and long fasting, immediately ran to prepare dinner for them, and they were refreshed. The two Apostles found great comfort in the souls they had won for Jesus Christ; therefore, filled with gratitude to God they returned to prison waiting for the arrangements that divine Providence would make known to them regarding their situation.

Meanwhile, the magistrates regretted having had those whom they could not find any fault with beaten and imprisoned, and sent some officers to tell the jailer to release the two prisoners. Overjoyed by this news, the jailer immediately ran to communicate it to the Apostles. “You can surely go in peace” he said. But it seemed to Paul that it things should be done differently. If they had secretly escaped it would have been believed that they were guilty of a serious crime, which would harm the Gospel. Therefore, he called the officers to him and said, “Your magistrates, without having knowledge of this case, without any form of judgment, have publicly beaten us who are Roman citizens; and now they want to send us away secretly. Certainly, it will not be so: let them come themselves and lead us out of prison.” The messengers brought this response to the magistrates. When they understood that they were Roman citizens, they were seized with great fear, because beating a Roman citizen was a capital crime. So they immediately came to the prison and with kind words apologised for what they had done and, leading them out of prison honourably, they begged them to leave the city. The Apostles immediately went to Lydia’s house where they found their companions in distress because of them; and they were greatly consoled to see them set free. After that, they departed from the city of Philippi. Thus the citizens rejected the graces of the Lord for the graces of men.

CHAPTER XI. St Paul preaches in Thessalonica — The Jason affair — He goes to Berea where he is again disturbed by the Jews — Year of Christ

52

Paul, along with his companions, left Philippi, leaving behind the two families of Lydia and the jailer who had been won over to Jesus Christ. Passing through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia, he arrived in Thessalonica, the main city of Macedonia, very famous for its trade and its port on the Aegean Sea. Today it is called Salonika.

There, God had prepared many sufferings and many souls to be won for Christ for the holy Apostle. He began to preach and for three Sabbaths continued to prove with the Holy Scriptures that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that the things that had happened to him had been foretold by the Prophets. Therefore, one had to either renounce the prophecies or believe in the coming of the Messiah. Some believed this preaching and embraced the faith, but others, especially Jews, were obstinate and rose up against St Paul with great hatred. They followed the lead of some wicked men from the rabble, gathered together, and in groups made a commotion throughout the city. And since Silas and Paul had taken lodging with a certain Jason, they stormed his house to drag them out and bring them before the people. The faithful noticed this in time and managed to help them escape. Unable to find them, they took Jason along with some faithful and dragged them before the city magistrates, shouting loudly: “These troublemakers of the human race have come here from Philippi; and Jason has welcomed them into his house; now these men are transgressing the decrees and violating the majesty of Caesar by claiming that there is another King, namely Jesus of Nazareth.” These words inflamed the Thessalonians and stirred up the magistrates to fury. But Jason, having assured them that there would be no riot and that, should they ask for these foreigners, he would present them to them, were satisfied and the disturbance subsided. But Silas and Paul, seeing all efforts in that city useless, followed the advice of their brothers and went to Berea, another city in that province.

In Berea, Paul began to preach in the Jewish synagogue, that is, he put himself in the same danger from which he had just been almost miraculously freed. But this time his courage was richly rewarded. The Bereans listened eagerly to the Word of God. Paul always cited passages from the Bible that concerned Jesus Christ, and the listeners immediately ran to check and verify the texts he quoted; and finding them to correspond exactly, they bowed to the truth and believed in the Gospel. This is what the Saviour with the Jews in Palestine when he invited them to read the Holy Scriptures carefully: *Scrutamini Scripturas, et ipsae testimonium perhibent de me.*

However, the conversions that took place in Berea could not remain hidden

to the extent that news of them did reached those in Thessalonica. The obstinate Jews in this city rushed in large numbers to Berea to spoil the work of God and prevent the conversion of the Gentiles. St Paul was primarily sought as the one who particularly supported the preaching. The brothers, seeing him in danger, had him secretly accompanied out of the city by trusted people and, by safe routes, led him to Athens. However, Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. But Paul, when dismissing those who had accompanied him, earnestly recommended that they tell Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible. The holy Fathers recognise Christians, in the obstinacy of the Jews in Thessalonica, who are not satisfied with not profiting from the benefits of religion, but also seek to alienate others, which they do either by slandering the sacred ministers or by despising the things of religion. The Saviour says to them: “The vineyard will be taken away from you,” that is, my religion, “and will be given to other peoples who will cultivate it better than you and will bring forth fruit in due time.” A terrible threat, but which unfortunately has already come to pass and is coming to pass in many countries where the Christian religion once flourished, but we now see immersed in the thick darkness of error, vice, and disorder. — May God save us from this scourge!

CHAPTER XII. The religious situation of the Athenians — St Paul in the Areopagus — Conversion of St Dionysius — Year of Christ 52

Athens was one of the oldest, richest, and most commercial cities in the world. Science, military valour, philosophers, orators, and poets have always been the masters of humankind there. The Romans themselves had sent to Athens to collect laws that they brought back to Rome as oracles of wisdom. There was also a senate of men considered a mirror of virtue, justice, and prudence; they were called Areopagites, from the Areopagus, the place where they held court. But despite so much knowledge, they were immersed in the shameful ignorance of religious matters. The dominant sects were the Epicureans and the Stoics. The Epicureans denied that God was creator of the world and denied providence, nor did they admit reward or punishment in the afterlife, therefore they placed happiness in earthly pleasures. The Stoics placed the highest good in virtue alone and made man greater than God himself in some things, because they believed they had virtue and wisdom from themselves. All then worshipped multiple gods, and there was no crime that was not favoured by some senseless divinity.

St Paul, unknown and held in contempt because he was a Jew, had to preach Jesus Christ to them, who was also a Jew who died on the cross, and he had to lead

them to worship him as the true God. Therefore only God could make St Paul's words change hearts so steeped in vice and alien to true virtue, and make them embrace and profess the holy Christian religion.

While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy, he felt compassion in his heart for those deceived wretches and, as was his wont, disputed with the Jews and all those who fell out with him sometimes in the synagogues, sometimes in the squares. The Epicureans and the Stoics also came to dispute with him, and, unable to resist the arguments, they began saying: "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others said: "It seems that this man wants to show us some new god." They said this because they heard him mention Jesus Christ and the resurrection. Some others, wanting to act with greater prudence, invited Paul to go to the Areopagus. When he arrived at that magnificent senate they said to him: "Could we know something about this new doctrine of yours? For you bring things to our ears that we never heard before. We desire to know about what you are teaching."

At the news that a foreigner was to speak in the Areopagus, a great crowd of people gathered.

It is worth noting here that it was strictly forbidden among the Athenians to say the slightest word against their countless and foolish deities, and they considered it a capital crime to receive or add any foreign god among them that had not been carefully examined and proposed by the senate. Two philosophers, one named Anaxagoras and the other Socrates, had to lose their lives just for having implied that they could not accept so many ridiculous deities. From these things one can easily understand the danger in which St Paul found himself when preaching the true God to this terrifying assembly and trying to overthrow all their gods.

The holy Apostle, therefore, seeing himself in this august senate and having to speak to the wisest of men, judged it well to adopt a style and a way of reasoning that was much more elegant than he usually did. And since the senators did not accept the subject of the Scriptures, he thought he would speak with the force of reason. Therefore, standing up and getting all to be silent, he began:

"Men of Athens, I see that in all things you are very religious. For as I passed through this city and considered your objects of worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: To the Unknown God. Therefore, I come to announce the God whom you worship without knowing it. He is the God who made the world and all things that exist in it. He is the Lord of heaven and earth, and therefore does not dwell in temples made by men. Nor is he served by human hands as if he needed anything; rather, he is the one who gives life, breath to all, and all things. He caused all others to descend from one man, whose descendants extended to inhabit the whole earth.

He fixed the times and boundaries of their habitation, that they might seek God if ever they could find him, though he is not far from us.

"For in him we live and move and have our being, as even one of your own poets has said (Aratus, a famous poet from Cilicia): '*For we are indeed his descendents*.' Being God's descendents, then, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The God overlooked times of ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Up to this point, his flippant listeners, whose vices and errors had been attacked with much finesse, had maintained good decorum. But at the first announcement of the extraordinary doctrine of the resurrection, the Epicureans rose up and largely left, mocking the doctrine which certainly instilled terror in them. Others, more discreet, told him that he had said enough for the day, and that they would listen to him another time on the same subject. This is how the most eloquent of the Apostles was received by that proud assembly. They delayed taking advantage of the grace of God; we do not read that this grace was ever granted to them by God again.

However, God did not fail to console his servant who gained some privileged souls. Among others was Dionysius, one of the judges of the Areopagus, and a woman named Damaris who is believed to have been his wife. It is said of this Dionysius that at the death of the Saviour, observing the eclipse causing darkness to spread over all the earth, he exclaimed: "Either the world is falling apart, or the author of nature is suffering violence." As soon as he could understand the cause of that event he immediately surrendered to the words of St Paul. It is also said that, having gone to visit the Mother of God, he was so astonished by such beauty and majesty that he fell to the ground to venerate her, asserting that he would have worshipped her as a divinity if faith had not assured him that there is only one God. He then came to St Paul, was consecrated as bishop of Athens, and died crowned with martyrdom.

CHAPTER XIII. St Paul in Corinth — His stay in Aquila's house — Baptism of Crispus and Sosthenes — He writes to the Thessalonians — Return to Antioch — Year of Jesus Christ 53-54

If Athens was the most famous city for science, Corinth was considered the

foremost for commerce. Merchants from all over converged there. It had two ports on the isthmus of the Peloponnese: one called Cenchreae facing the Aegean, the other called Lechaeum overlooking the Adriatic. Disorder and immorality were triumphant there. Despite such obstacles, upon arriving in this city St Paul began to preach publicly and privately.

He took lodging in the house of a Jew named Aquila. He was a fervent Christian who, to escape the persecution published by Emperor Claudius against Christians, had fled from Italy with his wife named Priscilla and had come to Corinth. They practised the same trade that Paul had learned as a young man, namely, making tents for soldiers. To avoid being a burden to his hosts, the holy Apostle also dedicated himself to work and spent all the time he had free from the sacred ministry in the workshop. Every Saturday, however, he went to the synagogue and endeavoured to make the Jews aware that the prophecies concerning the Messiah had been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, Silas and Timothy arrived from Berea. They had departed for Athens where they learned that Paul had already left, and they reached him in Corinth. Upon their arrival, Paul devoted himself with greater courage to preaching to the Jews; but as their obstinacy grew every day, and unable to bear so many blasphemies and such abuse of grace, moved by God Paul announced to them the imminent divine scourges with these words: “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am innocent. Behold, I will turn to the Gentiles, and in the future I will be all for them.”

Among the Jews who blasphemed Jesus Christ, there were perhaps some who worked in Aquila’s workshop; therefore, in order to avoid the company of the wicked, the Apostle left his house and moved to a certain *Titus Justus*, who had recently converted from paganism to the faith. Near Titus lived a certain Crispus, the chief of the synagogue. Instructed by the Apostle, he embraced the faith with all his family.

Paul’s great occupations in Corinth did not make him forget his beloved faithful in Thessalonica. When Timothy arrived from there, he told him great things about the fervour of these Christians, their great charity, the good memory they kept of him, and their ardent desire to see him again. Unable to go in person as he wished, Paul wrote them a letter which is believed to be the first letter written by St Paul.

In this letter he rejoices greatly with the Thessalonians for their faith and charity, then he exhorts them to guard against sensual disorders and every kind of fraud. And since idleness is the source of all vices, he encourages them to dedicate themselves seriously to work, deeming that the one who does not want to work will

not be worthy of eating: “If anyone does not want to work, neither let him eat.” He then concludes by reminding them of the great reward that God has prepared in heaven for the slightest toil endured in this present life for love of Him.

Shortly after this letter, he received further news from the same faithful in Thessalonica. They were greatly troubled by some who were preaching the imminent universal judgment. The Apostle wrote them a second letter, warning them not to be deceived by their fallacious speeches. He notes that a day of universal judgment is certain, but many signs must first appear, among which is the preaching of the Gospel throughout the earth. He exhorted them to hold fast to the traditions that he had communicated to them by letter and by word of mouth. Finally, he commended himself to their prayers and insisted strongly on fleeing the curious and the idle who are considered the plague of religion and society.

While St Paul was comforting the faithful of Thessalonica, such persecutions arose against him that he would have been led to flee from the city if he had not been comforted by God with a vision. Jesus Christ appeared to him and said: “Do not be afraid, I am with you; no one will be able to harm you; in this city there are many who will be converted to the faith through you.” Encouraged by such words, the Apostle stayed in Corinth for eighteen months.

The conversion of Sosthenes was among those that brought great consolation to Paul’s soul. He succeeded Crispus in the position of chief of the synagogue. The conversion of these two main representatives of their sect fiercely irritated the Jews, and in their fury they took the Apostle and brought him before the proconsul, accusing him of teaching a religion contrary to that of the Jews. Gallius, such was the governor’s name, hearing that it was a matter of religion, did not want to get involved as a judge. He limited himself to responding: “If it were a matter of some injustice or public wrongdoing, I would gladly listen to you; but since it concerns issues belonging to religion, you take care of it; I do not intend to judge in these matters.” The proconsul believed that questions and differences regarding religion should be discussed by priests and not by civil authorities, and for this reason, his response was wise.

Indignant at such a dismissal, the Jews turned against Sosthenes, and they even incited the court officials to join them in beating him in front of Gallius, without him prohibiting them. Sosthenes endured the affront with invincible patience and, as soon as he was released, joined Paul and became his faithful companion in his travels.

Seeing himself miraculously freed from such a grave storm, Paul made a vow to God in thanksgiving. The vow was similar to that of the Nazarenes, which particularly consisted of abstaining for a given time from wine and anything else

that could intoxicate, and letting his hair grow, which among the ancients was a sign of mourning and penance. When the time of the vow was to end, a sacrifice had to be made in the temple with various ceremonies prescribed by the law of Moses.

Having fulfilled part of his vow, in the company of Aquila and Priscilla, St Paul embarked for Ephesus, a city in Asia Minor. According to his custom, Paul went to visit the synagogue and disputed several times with the Jews. These disputes were peaceful; indeed, the Jews invited him to stay longer; but Paul wanted to continue his journey to be in Jerusalem and fulfil his vow. However, he promised the faithful that he would return, and as a pledge of his return, he left Aquila and Priscilla with them. From Ephesus, St Paul embarked for Palestine and arrived at Caesarea where, disembarking, he walked on foot toward Jerusalem. He went to visit the faithful of this Church and, having fulfilled the things for which he had undertaken the journey, came to Antioch, where he stayed for some time.

Everything is worthy of admiration in this great Apostle. Here we note only one thing that he warmly recommends to the faithful of Corinth. To give them an important warning on how to remain steadfast in faith he writes: “Brothers, in order not to fall into error, hold fast to the traditions learned from my discourse and from my letter.” With these words St Paul commanded them to show the same reverence for the written word of God and for the word of God handed down by tradition, as taught by the Catholic Church.

CHAPTER XIV. Apollo in Ephesus — The sacrament of Confirmation — St Paul works many miracles — The case of two Jewish exorcists — Year of Christ 55

St Paul stayed for some time in Antioch, but seeing that the faithful were sufficiently provided with sacred pastors, he decided to leave to visit the countries where he had already preached once more. This is the fifth journey of our holy Apostle. He went to Galatia, Pontus, Phrygia, and Bithynia; then, according to the promise made, he returned to Ephesus where Aquila and Priscilla were waiting for him. Everywhere he was welcomed, as he himself writes, as an angel of peace.

Between Paul’s departure and return to Ephesus, a Jew named Apollo came to this city. He was an eloquent man and deeply instructed in Sacred Scripture. He worshipped the Saviour and preached him zealously, but he knew no other baptism than that preached by St John the Baptist. Aquila and Priscilla noticed that he had a very confused idea of the Mysteries of the Faith and, calling him to themselves,

instructed him better in the doctrine, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Desiring to bring the word of salvation to other peoples, St Paul decided to pass into Achaia, that is, Greece. The Ephesians, who for some time admired his virtues and began to love him as a father, wanted to accompany him with a letter in which they praised his zeal and commended him to the Corinthians. Indeed, he did great good to those Christians. When the Apostle arrived in Ephesus, he found several faithful instructed by Apollo and wanting to know the state of these souls, he asked if they had received the Holy Spirit; that is, if they had received the sacrament of Confirmation, which was usually administered at that time after baptism, and in which the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit was conferred. But the good people replied: “We do not even know that there is a Holy Spirit.” The Apostle, astonished at such a response, and having understood that they had only received the baptism of St John the Baptist, commanded that they be baptised again with the baptism of Jesus Christ, that is, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. After that, laying his hands on them, Paul administered the sacrament of Confirmation, and these new faithful received not only the invisible effects of grace but also particular and manifest signs of divine omnipotence which made them speak fluently in tongues they had not understood before, predicting future things and interpreting Sacred Scripture.

St Paul preached for three months in the synagogue, urging the Jews to believe in Jesus Christ. Many believed, but several who were obstinate even blasphemed the holy name of Jesus Christ. Paul, for the honour of the Gospel ridiculed by these wicked individuals and to escape the company of evil people, ceased to preach in the synagogue, broke all communication with them and withdrew to the house of a Gentile Christian named Tyrannus, who was a schoolmaster. St Paul made the school a Church of Jesus Christ. Preaching and explaining the truths of the faith, he attracted Gentiles and Jews from all parts of Asia.

God helped his work by confirming the doctrine preached by his servant with unheard-of miracles. The handkerchiefs, aprons, and bands that had touched Paul’s body were carried here and there and placed on the sick and the possessed, and that was enough for diseases and unclean spirits to immediately flee. This was an unheard of wonder, and God certainly wanted such a fact to be recorded in the Bible to confound those who have so much argued and still argue against the veneration Catholics pay to sacred relics.

Perhaps they want to condemn those first Christians who applied to the sick the handkerchiefs that had touched Paul’s body as superstition? Things that St Paul had never prohibited and that God showed to approve with miracles?

Regarding the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ to perform miracles, a very curious event occurred. Among the Ephesians, there were many who claimed to cast out demons from bodies with certain magical words or by using roots of herbs or perfumes. But their results always failed. Some Jewish exorcists, seeing that even Paul's garments cast out demons, were filled with envy and tried, as St Paul did, to use the name of Jesus Christ to cast the devil out of a man. "I adjure you," they kept saying, "and command you to come out of this body by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." The devil, who knew things better than they did, answered through the possessed: "I know Jesus and I know who Paul is; but you are impostors. What right do you have over me?" Having said this, he rushed upon them, beat them, and struck them so that two of them barely managed to flee, wounded and with their clothes torn to pieces. This astounding event, having spread throughout the city, caused great fear, and no one dared to say the holy name of Jesus Christ except with respect and reverence.

CHAPTER XV. Sacrament of Confession — Perverse books burned — Letter to the Corinthians — Uprising for the goddess Diana — Letter to the Galatians — Year of Christ 56-57

God, who is always merciful, knows how to bring good even from sin itself. The incident of the two exorcists so badly beaten by the possessed man caused great fear among all the Ephesians, and both Jews and Gentiles hurried to renounce the devil and embrace the faith. It was then that many of those who had believed came in great numbers to confess and declare the evil they had committed in their lives to obtain forgiveness: "They came confessing and declaring their deeds." This is a clear testimony of the sacramental confession commanded by the Saviour and practised since apostolic times.

The first fruit of the confession and repentance of the faithful was to distance themselves from the occasions of sin. Therefore, all those who possessed perverse books, that is, contrary to good morals or religion, handed them over to be burned. So many brought them that they made a pile in the square and lit a bonfire in the presence of all the people, considering it better to burn these books in this life to avoid the eternal fire of hell. The value of the books amounted to almost one hundred thousand francs. However, no one sought to sell them, for it would have been to provide others with an occasion to do harm, which is never permitted. While these things were happening Apollo arrived from Corinth to Ephesus with others, announcing that discord had arisen among those faithful. The holy Apostle worked

to remedy this with a letter in which he recommended unity of faith, obedience to their pastors, mutual charity, especially towards the poor. He urged the rich not to host lavish banquets and abandon the poor in misery. He then insisted that each one purify their conscience before approaching the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, saying: “Whoever eats that Body and drinks that Blood unworthily eats their own judgment and condemnation.” It also happened that a young man had committed a grave sin with his stepmother. The saint, to make them understand the horror, commanded that he be separated from the other faithful for some time so that he might come to his senses. This is a true example of excommunication, as the Catholic Church still practises when it excommunicates for serious crimes, that is, declares Christians who are guilty of them separated from others. Paul sent his disciple Titus to deliver this letter to Corinth. The result seems to have been abundant.

He was in Ephesus when a terrible persecution broke out against him by a silversmith named Demetrius. This man made small silver temples in which a statuette of the goddess Diana was placed, a deity venerated in Ephesus and throughout Asia. This brought him trade and great profit, as most of the foreigners who came to the festivals of Diana took these tokens of devotion with them. Demetrius was the main craftsman and thus provided work and sustenance for the families of many workers.

As the number of Christians grew, the number of buyers of the statuettes of Diana decreased. So, one day Demetrius gathered a large number of citizens and demonstrated how Paul would make them all die of hunger, since he had no other means to live. “At least,” he added, “it would only concern our private interest; but the temple of our great goddess, so celebrated throughout the world, is about to be abandoned.” At these words he was interrupted by a thousand different voices shouting in the most furious confusion: “Great is Diana of the Ephesians! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” The whole city was thrown into an uproar; they ran about shouting in search of Paul and, not being able to find him immediately, dragged two of his companions named Gaius and Aristarchus along with them. A Jew named Alexander wanted to speak. But as soon as he could open his mouth, they began to shout even louder from all sides: “Great is Diana of the Ephesians! How great is Diana of the Ephesians!” This cry was repeated for two whole hours.

Paul wanted to step forward in the midst of the tumult to speak, but some brothers, knowing that he would expose himself to certain death, prevented him. God, however, who holds the hearts of men in his hands, restored full calm among the people in an unexpected way. A wise man, a simple secretary and, as it appears, a friend of Paul, managed to calm the fury. As soon as he could speak he

said: “And who does not know that the city of Ephesus has a particular devotion and worship towards the great Diana, daughter of Jupiter? Since this is believed by all, you must not be disturbed nor resort to such a reckless remedy, as if such devotion established by all ages could fall into doubt. As for Gaius and Aristarchus, I will tell you that they are not convicted of any blasphemy against Diana. If Demetrius and his companions have anything against them, let them bring the case before the court. If we continue in these public demonstrations, we will be accused of sedition.” At those words the tumult calmed down and everyone returned to their own occupations.

After this uproar Paul wanted to leave immediately for Macedonia, but he had to postpone his departure due to some disorders that had occurred among the faithful in Galatia. Some false preachers began to discredit Saint Paul and his preaching, claiming that his doctrine was different from that of the other Apostles and that circumcision and the ceremonies of the law of Moses were absolutely necessary.

The holy Apostle wrote a letter in which he demonstrated the conformity of doctrine between himself and the Apostles; he proves that many matters to do with the law of Moses were no longer necessary for salvation; he recommended they be very careful of false preachers and to glory only in Jesus, in whose name he wished peace and blessings.

Having sent the letter to the faithful in Galatia, he departed for Macedonia after having stayed three years in Ephesus, that is, from year fifty-four to year fifty-seven of Jesus Christ. During Saint Paul’s stay in Ephesus, God made him know in spirit that he was calling him to Macedonia, to Greece, to Jerusalem, and to Rome.

CHAPTER XVI. Saint Paul returns to Philippi — Second Letter to the faithful of Corinth — He goes to this city — Letter to the Romans — His prolonged preaching in Troas — He raises a dead man — Year of Christ 58

Before leaving Ephesus, Paul summoned the disciples and, having given them a fatherly exhortation, embraced them tenderly; then he set out on his journey to Macedonia. He wished to stay for some time in Troas where he hoped to meet his disciple Titus; but, not having found him and wishing to quickly know about the state of the Church in Corinth, he left Troas, crossed the Hellespont, which today is called the Dardanelles Strait, and passed into Macedonia where he had to suffer greatly for the faith.

But God prepared for him a great consolation with the arrival of Titus, who reached him in the city of Philippi. This disciple explained to the holy Apostle how his letter had produced beneficial effects among the Christians in Corinth, that the name of Paul was very dear to all, and that everyone was burning with the desire to see him soon.

To give vent to the fatherly feelings of his heart, the Apostle wrote a second letter from Philippi in which he showed all tenderness towards those who remained faithful and reproved some who sought to pervert the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Having then understood that the young man, excommunicated after his first letter, had sincerely converted, and indeed hearing from Titus that the sorrow had almost driven him to despair, the holy Apostle recommended that he be treated with care, absolved him from excommunication, and restored him to communion with the faithful. He recommended many things to be communicated verbally through Titus, who was the bearer of the letter. Other disciples accompanied Titus on this journey, among whom was Saint Luke, who had been bishop of Philippi for some years. Saint Paul consecrated Saint Epaphroditus as bishop for that city, and thus Saint Luke became once again a companion of the holy master in the labours of the apostolate.

From Macedonia Paul went to Corinth, where he arranged what concerned the celebration of the holy mysteries, as he had promised in his first letter, which should be understood as the rites that are commonly observed in all Churches, such as fasting before Holy Communion and other similar things that concern the administration of the Sacraments.

The Apostle spent the winter in this city, working to console his children in Jesus Christ who were not satisfied with listening to him and admiring him as a zealous pastor and a tender father.

From Corinth he also extended his concerns to other peoples and especially to the Romans who had already been converted to the faith by Saint Peter after years of toil and suffering. Aquila, with some of his friends, having learned that the persecution had ceased, had gone back to Rome. Paul learned from them that dissensions had arisen between Gentiles and Jews in that metropolis of the empire. The Gentiles reproached the Jews for not having responded to the benefits received from God, and their ingratitude in nailing the Saviour to the cross; the Jews, for their part, reproached the Gentiles for having followed idolatry and worshipped the most infamous deities. The holy Apostle wrote his famous *Letter to the Romans*, full of sublime arguments which he treated with the sharpness of mind characteristic of a learned and holy man who writes inspired by God. It is not possible to abbreviate it without risking altering its meaning. It is the longest, the most elegant of all the letters, and the one most full of erudition. I urge you, O reader, to read it carefully,

but with the proper interpretations that are customary in the Vulgate. It is the sixth letter of Saint Paul and was written from the city of Corinth in the year 58 of Jesus Christ. But, due to the great respect that has always been shown to the dignity of the Church of Rome, it is counted as the first among the fourteen letters of this holy Apostle. In this letter Saint Paul does not speak of Saint Peter, because he was occupied in the foundation of other Churches. It was carried by a deaconess, or rather a nun, named Phoebe, whom the Apostle highly commends to the brothers in Rome.

Wishing to leave Corinth to head to Jerusalem, Saint Paul learned that the Jews were plotting to lay traps for him along the way; therefore, instead of embarking at the port of Cenchrea for Jerusalem, Paul turned back and continued his journey through Macedonia. He was accompanied by Sopater, son of Pyrrhus of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy of Lystra, Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. They accompanied him as far as Philippi; then, with the exception of Luke, they went on to Troas with orders to wait for him there, while he would remain in this city until after the Passover festivals. After the solemnity had passed, Paul and Luke arrived in Troas after five days of sailing and stayed there for seven days.

It happened that the eve of Paul’s departure was the first day of the week, that is, Sunday, on which the faithful used to gather to listen to the word of God and assist at the divine sacrifices. Among other things, they broke bread, that is, celebrated the Holy Mass in which the faithful participated, receiving the Body of the Lord under the appearance of bread. Even then the Mass was considered the most sacred and solemn act for the sanctification of the festive day.

Paul, who was to leave the next day, prolonged his discourse late into the night, and many lamps had been lit to illuminate the upper room. On Sunday, at night, in the upper room on the third floor of the house, the many lamps lit attracted an immense crowd of people. While everyone was intent on Paul’s reasoning, a young man named Eutychus, either out of a desire to see the Apostle or to listen to him better, had climbed up on a window and sat on the sill. Now, whether it was due to the heat, the late hour, or perhaps fatigue, the fact is that the young man fell asleep; and in his sleep, giving in to the weight of his body, he fell down onto the pavement of the public street. A lament was heard resounding through the assembly; they ran and found the young man lifeless.

Paul immediately went down, and, placing his body over the corpse, blessed him, embraced him, and, with his breath or rather with the living faith in God, restored him to new life. After this miracle was performed, without paying attention to the applause that was given from all sides, he went back up to the upper room

and continued preaching until morning.

The great solicitude of the faithful of Troas to assist at the sacred functions should serve as a stimulus to all Christians to sanctify festive days with works of piety, especially by devoutly hearing the Holy Mass and listening to the word of God even with some inconvenience.

CHAPTER XVII. St Paul preaches at Miletus — His Journey to Caesarea — The Prophecy of Agabus — Year of Christ 58

After that meeting which lasted about twenty-four hours, the tireless Apostle set out with his companions for Mytilene, a noble city on the island of Lesbos. From there, continuing the journey, he arrived after a few days at Miletus, a city in Caria, a province of Asia Minor. The Apostle did not want to stop in Ephesus so as not to be obliged to delay his journey too much by the Christians there who loved him dearly. He was hurrying with the aim of reaching Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus to inform the bishops and priests of the city and the nearby provinces of his arrival, inviting them to come and visit him and also to confer with him about matters of faith, if it should be necessary. They came in great numbers.

When St Paul saw himself surrounded by those venerable preachers of the Gospel, he began to explain to them the tribulations he had suffered day and night from the snares of the Jews. “Now I am going to Jerusalem,” he said, “led by the Holy Spirit, who, in all the places where I pass, makes me aware of the chains and tribulations that await me in that city. But none of this frightens me, nor do I hold my life more precious than my duty. It matters little to me to live or die, provided I finish my race giving glorious testimony to the Gospel that Jesus Christ has entrusted to me. You will no longer see my face, but take heed of yourselves and all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops to govern the Church of God, which he has purchased with his precious blood.” He then went on to warn them that after his departure ravenous wolves and perverse men would arise to corrupt the doctrine of Jesus Christ. After saying these words, they all knelt down and prayed together. No one could hold back their tears, and they all threw themselves around Paul’s neck, showering him with a thousand kisses. They were especially inconsolable for the words that they would no longer see his face. To enjoy a few more moments of his sweet company, they accompanied him to the ship and reluctantly parted from their dear master.

Paul, along with his companions, from Miletus went to the island of Chios,

renowned for a temple of the Gentiles dedicated to Juno and Asclepius. The next day they arrived at Rhodes, an island quite famous especially for its Colossus which was a statue of extraordinary height and size. From there they came to Patara, the capital city of Lycia, renowned for a great temple dedicated to the god Apollo. From here they sailed to Tyre, where the ship was to unload its cargo.

Tyre is the main city of Phoenicia, now called Sur, on the shores of the Mediterranean. As soon as they disembarked, they found some prophets who were proclaiming the evils that awaited the holy Apostle in Jerusalem, and they wanted to dissuade him from the journey. But after seven days, he wanted to depart. Those good Christians, with their wives and children, accompanied him outside the city, where, kneeling on the beach, they prayed with him. Then, exchanging the warmest greetings, Paul and his companions boarded the ship and was accompanied by the gazes of the Sidonians until the distance of the ship took them out of sight. Arriving at Ptolemais, they stayed one day to greet and comfort the Christians in the faith; then continuing their journey, they arrived in Caesarea.

There Paul was joyfully welcomed by the deacon Philip. This holy disciple, after preaching to the Samaritans, to the eunuch of Queen Candace, and in many cities of Palestine, had settled in Caesarea to care for the souls that he had regenerated in Jesus Christ.

At that time the prophet Agabus came to Caesarea and, having gone to visit the holy Apostle, took off his belt and, binding his own feet and hands with it, said: “Here is what the Holy Spirit openly tells me: the man to whom this belt belongs will be bound in this way by the Jews in Jerusalem.”

Agabus’ propehcy moved all those present, as the evils that were prepared for the holy Apostle in Jerusalem were becoming increasingly manifest; therefore, Paul’s own companions, weeping, begged him not to go there. But Paul courageously replied: “Oh! I beg you, do not weep. With your tears, you are only increasing the affliction in my heart. Know that I am ready not only to suffer chains but also to face death for the name of Jesus Christ.”

Then, recognising the will of God in holy Apostle’s firmness, all said with one voice: “Let the will of the Lord be done.” Having said this, they set out for Jerusalem with a certain Mnason, who had been a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ. He had a fixed residence in Jerusalem and was going with them to host them in his house.

CHAPTER XVIII. St Paul Presents Himself to St James — The Jews Lay

Traps for Him — He Speaks to the People — He Rebukes the High Priest — Year of Christ 59

We are now preparing to recount a long series of sufferings and persecutions that the holy Apostle endured during four years of imprisonment. God wanted to prepare his servant for these battles by making him aware of them long before; in fact, foreseen evils cause less fright, and a man is more willing to endure them. When Paul arrived in Jerusalem with his companions, they were welcomed by the Christians of that city with the signs of the greatest goodwill. The next day they went to visit the bishop of the city, who was St James the Less, where the chief priests of the diocese had also gathered. Paul recounted the wonders that God had worked through his ministry among the Gentiles, for which all thanked the Lord from their hearts.

However, they hurried to warn Paul of the danger that loomed over him. “Many Jews,” they said to him, “have converted to the faith, and several of them are very zealous for circumcision and legal ceremonies. Now, knowing that you dispense the Gentiles from these observances, there is a terrible hostility against you. It is therefore necessary that you demonstrate that you are not an enemy of the Jews. Do this: on the occasion when four Jews are to complete a vow in these days, you will take part in the ceremony and will bear the expenses necessary for this solemnity.”

Paul promptly agreed to the wise counsel and took part in that act of piety. He went to the temple, and the ceremony was nearing its end when some Jews from Asia stirred up the crowd against him, shouting: “Help, Israelites, help! This man is the one who goes throughout the world preaching against the people, against the law, and against this very temple. He has not hesitated to violate its sanctity by bringing Gentiles into it.”

Although such accusations were false, the whole city was stirred up, and a great crowd gathered, seized St Paul, dragged him out of the temple to put him to death as a blasphemer. But when the noise of the tumult reached the Roman tribune, he immediately came with the guards. The rioters, seeing the guards, ceased beating Paul and handed him over to the tribune, who, having him bound, ordered that he be taken to the Antonia Fortress, which was a stronghold and a barracks near the temple. Lysias, such was the name of the tribune, wanted to know the reason for that tumult but could learn nothing, for the cries and shouts of the people drowned out every voice. As Paul was climbing the steps of the fortress, it was necessary for the soldiers to carry him in their arms to remove him from the hands of the Jews, who, unable to have him in their power, were shouting: “Kill him,

take him out of the world."

As he was about to enter the tower, he spoke in Greek to the tribune: "May I say a word to you?" The tribune was astonished that he spoke Greek and said to him: "Do you know Greek? Are you not that Egyptian who recently stirred up a rebellion and led four thousand assassins into the desert?" "No, certainly," replied Paul, "I am a Jew, a citizen of Tarsus, a city of Cilicia. But, if you please, allow me to speak to the people." This being granted to him, Paul, from the steps of the tower, raised his hand, weighed down by the chains, signaled to the people to be silent, and began to explain what concerned his homeland, his conversion, and his preaching, and how God had destined him to bring the faith to the Gentiles.

The people had listened to him in profound silence until these last words; but when they heard him speak of the Gentiles, as if stirred by a thousand furies, they burst into frenzied cries, some throwing their garments to the ground in indignation, others scattering dust in the air, and all shouting: "This man is unworthy to live, let him be taken out of the world!"

The tribune, who had understood nothing of St Paul's speech because he had spoken in Hebrew, fearing that the people would come to serious excesses, commanded his men to take Paul from their hands and bring him back to the fortress. However, God wanted to comfort his servant for what he had suffered that day. In the night, he appeared to him and said: "Take courage: after you have borne witness to me in Jerusalem, you will do the same in Rome."

CHAPTER XIX. Forty Jews vow to kill Saint Paul — A nephew discovers the plot — He is transferred to Caesarea — Year of Christ 59

The Jews, seeing their plan fail, spent the following night devising various schemes. Forty of them took the desperate resolution to vow not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. Having arranged this conspiracy, they went to the chief priests and the elders, telling them their intention. "To have that scoundrel in our hands," they added, "we have found a sure way; all that remains is for you to lend us a hand. Let the tribune know, in the name of the Sanhedrin, that you wish to further examine some points of Paul's case and that he should present him to you again tomorrow. He will certainly agree to the request. But be assured that before Paul is brought before you, we will tear him to pieces with our own hands." The elders praised the plan and promised to cooperate.

Either because one of the conspirators did not keep the secret, or because they did not pay attention to closing the door when they devised their plan, it is

certain that they were discovered. A son of Paul's sister learned everything and, running to the tower, managed to pass through the guards, present himself to his uncle, and tell him the entire plot. Paul instructed his nephew well on how to act. Then he called an officer who was on guard and said to him, "I ask you to take this young man to the captain; he has something to communicate to him."

The centurion took him to the captain and said, "That Paul who is in prison has asked me to bring you this young man because he has something to tell you." The captain took the young man by the hand and, taking him aside, asked what he had to report. "The Jews," he replied, "have agreed to ask you tomorrow to have Paul brought to the Sanhedrin, under the pretext of wanting to examine his case more thoroughly. But do not listen to them: know that they are laying a trap for him and that forty of them have vowed a terrible vow not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are now ready to act, waiting only for your consent." "Well done," said the captain, "you have done well to tell me these things. Now you may go, but do not tell anyone that you revealed them to me."

From this desperate resolution, Lysias understood that keeping Paul in Jerusalem any longer was equivalent to leaving him in danger from which he might not be able to save him. Therefore, without delay, he called two centurions and said to them, "Order two hundred foot soldiers and as many armed with spears, along with seventy horsemen, to accompany Paul to Caesarea. Also prepare a mount for him so that he may be taken there safe and sound and present himself to Governor Felix." The tribune sent Paul with a letter to the governor, which said:

"Claudius Lysias to the most excellent Governor Felix, greetings. I send you this man who, having been seized by the Jews, was about to be killed by them. I came with my soldiers and rescued him from their hands, having learned that he is a Roman citizen. Wanting to inform myself of what crime he was accused of, I brought him before the Sanhedrin and found that he was accused of matters concerning their law, but without any guilt deserving of death or imprisonment. But having been informed that a plot of death is laid against him, I have decided to send him to you, inviting at the same time his accusers to present themselves before your tribunal to lay out their accusations against him. Farewell."

In execution of the orders received, that very night the soldiers set out with Paul and took him to Antipatris, a city located halfway between Jerusalem and Caesarea. At that point in the journey, no longer fearing an attack from the Jews, they sent the four hundred soldiers back to Jerusalem, and Paul, accompanied by only seventy horsemen, arrived the following day in Caesarea.

Thus God, in the simplest way, freed his Apostle from a grave danger and made it known that the plans of men always come to nothing when they are

contrary to the divine will.

CHAPTER XX. Paul before the governor — His accusers and his defence — Year of Christ 59

The next day Paul arrived in Caesarea and was presented to the governor with the letter from Captain Lysias. After reading the letter, the governor called Paul aside and, having learned that he was from Tarsus, said to him, “I will listen to you when your accusers arrive.” Meanwhile, he had him kept in the prison at his palace.

The forty conspirators, when they saw their plan fail, were astonished. It can be believed that, disregarding the vow they had made, they began to eat and drink to continue their plot. In agreement with the high priest, the elders, and a certain Tertullus, a famous orator, they set out for Caesarea where they arrived five days after Paul’s arrival. Coming before the governor, Tertullus began to speak against Paul: “We have found this man stirring up riots among all the Jews in the world. He is the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even attempted to profane our temple, and we arrested him. We wanted to judge him according to our law, but Captain Lysias intervened, taking him away by force. He has ordered that his accusers present themselves before you. Now we are here. By examining him, you will be able to ascertain the charges we bring against him.” What Tertullus had asserted was confirmed by the Jews present.

Paul, having been given the opportunity to respond by the governor, began to defend himself: “Since, most excellent Felix, you have been governing this country for many years, you are certainly able to know the things that have happened here. I gladly defend myself before you. As you can ascertain, it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. In this short time, no one can say that they found me in the temple or in the synagogues or in any public or private place discussing with anyone, nor gathering crowds or inciting riots. They cannot prove any of the accusations they bring against me. But I confess to you that I follow the Way which they call a sect, serving the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and is written in the Prophets. I have in God the same hope that they themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust. For this reason, I strive always to have a clear conscience before God and men. After many years, I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was engaged in these rites of purification, without crowd or uprising, some Jews from Asia found me in the temple. They should have appeared before you to accuse me if they had anything against me. Or

let these same men say if they found any fault in me when I appeared before the Sanhedrin, apart from this one statement I made aloud among them: ‘It is for the resurrection of the dead that I am being judged today before you.’”

His accusers were confounded and, looking at one another, could find no words to say. The governor himself, already inclined in favour of the Christians, knew that far from being seditious, they were the most docile and loyal among his subjects. But he did not want to pronounce a sentence and reserved the right to hear him again when Captain Lysias came from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Meanwhile, he ordered that Paul be kept in custody, but granted him a certain degree of freedom and allowing his friends to serve him.

Some time later, the governor, perhaps to please his wife, who was a Jewess, summoned Paul to his presence to hear him speak about religion. The Apostle vividly expounded the truths of the faith, the severity of the judgments that God will reserve for the wicked in the afterlife, so much so that Felix, frightened and disturbed, said, “For now, enough; I will listen to you again when I have the opportunity.” In reality, he called for him several times, but not to learn about the faith, but hoping that Paul would offer him money in exchange for his freedom. Therefore, although he knew Paul’s innocence, he kept him in prison in Caesarea for two years. Thus do those Christians who, for temporary gain or to please men, sell justice and violate the most sacred duties of conscience and religion.

CHAPTER XXI. Paul before Festus — His words to King Agrippa — Year of Christ 60

It had been two years since the holy Apostle was held prisoner when a new governor named Festus succeeded Felix. Three days after taking office, the new governor went to Jerusalem, and immediately the chief priests and the leading Jews presented themselves to him to renew the accusations against the holy Apostle. They asked him as a special favour to have Paul brought to Jerusalem to be judged by the Sanhedrin; but in reality, they intended to assassinate him along the way. Festus, perhaps already warned not to trust them, replied that he would soon return to Caesarea; “Those of you,” he said, “who have something against Paul, come with me, and I will hear their accusations.”

After a few days, Festus returned to Caesarea, and with him were the Jews accusing Paul. The next day, he summoned the holy Apostle before his tribunal, and the Jews brought many serious accusations against him, but they could not prove them. Paul responded to them with a few words, and his accusers fell silent.

However, Festus, wishing to gain the favour of the Jews, asked him if he wanted to go to Jerusalem to be judged by the Sanhedrin in his presence. Realizing that Festus was inclined to hand him over to the Jews, Paul replied: “I stand before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be judged. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you very well know. If therefore I am guilty and have committed anything deserving of death, I do not refuse to die; but if there is nothing true in the accusations these men bring against me, no one has the right to deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.” This appeal of our Apostle was just and in accordance with Roman law, as the governor showed himself willing to hand over an innocent Roman citizen to the Jews who wanted his death at all costs. The holy Fathers reflect that it was not the desire for life, but the good of the Church that prompted him to appeal to Rome, where by divine revelation he knew how much he had to work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Festus, after consulting his council, replied: “You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you shall go.”

Not many days later, King Agrippa, the son of that Agrippa who had put Saint James the Greater to death and imprisoned Saint Peter, came to Caesarea. He had come with his sister Berenice to pay their respects to the new governor of Judea. After staying several days, Festus spoke to them about Paul’s trial. Agrippa expressed a desire to hear him. To please him, Festus had a hall prepared with great pomp and, inviting the tribunes and other magistrates to the hearing, had Paul brought before Agrippa and Berenice. “Behold,” said Festus, “this man against whom the whole multitude of the Jews has appealed to me, protesting with loud cries that he ought not to live any longer. But I found nothing in him that deserves death. However, since he has appealed to the emperor, I must send him to Rome. But since I have nothing certain to write to our sovereign, I have deemed it appropriate to present him before you and especially before you, O King Agrippa, that after examining him, you may tell me what I should write, for it does not seem appropriate to me to send a prisoner without specifying the charges against him.”

Agrippa, addressing Paul, said: “You are permitted to speak in your defence.” Paul began to speak as follows: “I consider myself fortunate, O King Agrippa, to be able to defend myself today before you against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions that pertain to them. I beg you, therefore, to listen to me patiently. All the Jews know my life from my youth, which was spent among my people and in Jerusalem. They know that I lived according to the strictest sect of our religion, that of the Pharisees. And now I stand trial for the hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, which our twelve tribes hope to see fulfilled by serving God night and day. It is for this hope, O

King, that I am accused by the Jews. Why is it considered incredible among you that God raises the dead?

I too thought it my duty to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus I did in Jerusalem: I received authority from the chief priests to imprison many saints, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Often, going from synagogue to synagogue, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and in my furious rage, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

In such circumstances, as I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw on the road a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. All fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” I said: “Who are you, Lord?” And the Lord said: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for the purpose of appointing you a minister and a witness of both the things which you have seen of me and of those things in which I will appear to you. I will deliver you from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision; but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works befitting repentance. For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. But having obtained help from God, to this day I stand here, witnessing both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ would suffer, and as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to the people and to the Gentiles.”

Festus interrupted the Apostle’s discourse and exclaimed with a loud voice: “You are mad, Paul; much learning is driving you mad.” To this, Paul replied: “I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I speak the words of truth and reason. The king, to whom I speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things is hidden from him, for this has not been done in a corner. Do you believe the prophets, O King Agrippa? I know that you do believe.” Agrippa said to Paul: “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” And Paul said: “I would to God that, whether short or long, not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become such as I am, except for these chains.”

Then the king, the governor, Berenice, and those who sat with them rose up,

and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying: “This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.” And Agrippa said to Festus: “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

Thus Paul’s address, which should have converted all those judges, was of no avail, for they closed their hearts to the graces that God wanted to grant them. This is a picture of those Christians who listen to the word of God but do not resolve to put into practice the good inspirations that they sometimes feel arise in their hearts.

CHAPTER XXII. Saint Paul embarks for Rome — He suffers a terrible storm, from which he is saved with his companions — Year of Jesus Christ 60

When Festus decided that Paul would be sent to Rome by sea, he, along with many other prisoners, was entrusted to a centurion named Julius. With him were his two faithful disciples Aristarchus and Luke. They boarded a ship from Adramyttium, a seaport city in Africa. Sailing along the coast of Palestine, they arrived at Sidon the next day. The centurion, who was accompanying them, soon realized that Paul was not an ordinary man, and admiring his virtues, began to treat him with respect. After landing at Sidon, he gave him full freedom to visit friends, stay with them, and receive some refreshment.

From Sidon, they sailed along the coasts of the island of Cyprus, and since the wind was somewhat contrary, they crossed the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, which is part of the Mediterranean, and arrived at Myra, a city of Lycia. Here the centurion, having found a ship from Alexandria going to Italy with a cargo of wheat, transferred his passengers to it. But sailing very slowly, they struggled greatly to reach the island of Crete, now called Candia. They stopped at a place called Fair Havens, near Salmone, a city on that island.

The season being very advanced, Paul, certainly inspired by God, urged the sailors not to risk continuing the voyage at such a dangerous time. But the pilot and the master of the ship, not paying attention to Paul’s words, said that there was nothing to fear. They set sail with the intention of reaching another port on that island called Phoenix, hoping to spend the winter there more safely. But after a short distance, the ship was struck by a strong wind, and being unable to resist it, the sailors were forced to abandon themselves and the ship to the mercy of the waves. Arriving at Cauda, a small island not far from Crete, they realized they were near a sandbank and, fearing to run the ship aground, they struggled to take

another direction. But as the storm grew fiercer and the ship became more agitated, they found themselves in great danger. They threw the cargo overboard, then the ship's gear and armaments to lighten it. However, after several days, with neither sun nor stars appearing and the storm raging more fiercely, all hope of salvation seemed lost. To these troubles was added the fact that, either from seasickness in the storm or from the fear of death, no one thought of eating, which was harmful as the sailors lacked the strength to manage the ship. They regretted not having followed Paul's advice, but it was too late.

Paul, seeing the discouragement among the sailors and passengers, encouraged by his trust in God, comforted them, saying: "Brothers, you should have believed me and not set sail from Crete; thus we would have avoided this loss and this harm. However, take heart; believe me, for I assure you in the name of God that none of us will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. This night an angel of God appeared to me and said: 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must appear before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you the life of all those who sail with you.' Therefore, take heart, brothers, for I believe that it will be just as it was told to me."

Meanwhile, fourteen days had already passed since they had been suffering the storm, and everyone thought they would be swallowed up by the waves at any moment. It was midnight when, in the darkness, the sailors thought they were approaching land. To ascertain this, they took soundings and found the water to be twenty fathoms deep, then fifteen. Fearing they would end up against some rock, they dropped four anchors to hold the ship, waiting for daylight to see where they were.

At that moment, the sailors had the idea of fleeing the ship and trying to save themselves on the land that seemed near. Paul, always guided by divine light, turned to the centurion and the soldiers, saying: "Unless these men stay aboard, you cannot be saved, for God does not wish to be tempted to perform miracles." At these words, all were silent and followed Paul's advice. At dawn, the holy Apostle looked at those who were on the ship and, seeing them all exhausted from their labours and famished from fasting, said to them: "Brothers, it is the fourteenth day that you have been waiting for improvement and have eaten nothing. Now I urge you not to let yourselves die of starvation. I have already assured you, and I assure you again, that not a hair of your head will perish. So take courage." Having said this, Paul took bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and in the presence of all, began to eat. Then all were encouraged and ate together with him; they were a total of 276 people.

But, as the fury of the winds and waves continued, they were forced to throw the wheat they had kept for their use overboard. When day broke, they

thought they saw a bay and worked to drive the ship there to seek safety. But, driven by the force of the winds, the ship ran aground on a sandbank, beginning to break apart. Seeing the water entering through various cracks, the soldiers wanted to take the cruel course of killing all the prisoners, both to lighten the ship and because they feared they would escape after saving themselves by swimming.

But the centurion, who loved Paul and wanted to save him, did not approve of this plan; rather, he ordered that those who could swim should jump overboard to reach the land; the others were told to cling to boards or pieces of the ship; and so they all reached the shore safely.

CHAPTER XXIII. Saint Paul on the island of Malta — He is freed from the bite of a viper — He is welcomed in the house of Publius, whose father he heals — Year of Christ 60

Neither Paul nor his companions knew the land on which they had landed after coming out of the waves. Informed by the first inhabitants they encountered, they learned that the place was called Melita, now Malta, an island in the Mediterranean located between Africa and Sicily. Upon hearing of the large number of shipwrecked people who had come out of the waves like so many fish, the islanders rushed to them, and although they were barbarians, they were moved to see them so tired, exhausted, and trembling from the cold. To warm them, they lit a large fire.

Paul, always attentive to perform acts of charity, went to gather a bundle of dry branches. While he was putting them on the fire, a viper that was among them, numbed by the cold but awakened by the heat, jumped out and attached itself to Paul’s hand. The barbarians, seeing the snake hanging from his hand, thought ill of him and said to one another: “This man must be a murderer or some great scoundrel; he has escaped from the sea, but divine vengeance strikes him on land.” But how much we must guard against judging our neighbour rashly!

Paul, reviving the faith in Jesus Christ, who had assured his Apostles that neither snakes nor poisons would harm them, shook off the snake into the fire and suffered no harm. The good people were waiting for Paul to swell up and fall dead after a few moments, as happened to anyone unfortunate enough to be bitten by those animals. They waited a long time, and seeing that nothing happened to him, they changed their minds and said that Paul was a great god come down from heaven. Perhaps they believed he was Hercules, considered the god and protector of Malta. According to legends, Hercules, still a child, killed a serpent, hence called

ofiothoco, meaning serpent-slayer.

God confirmed this first miracle with another even more astonishing and lasting: indeed, every poisonous power was taken away from the snakes of that island, so that from that time on, there was no longer any fear of the bite of vipers. What more? It is said that the very soil of the island of Malta, taken elsewhere, is a sure remedy against the bites of vipers and snakes.

The governor of the island, a prince named Publius, a very wealthy man, upon hearing of the miraculous way in which those shipwrecked people had been saved from the waters and informed, or having been a witness, of the miracle of the viper, sent to invite Paul and his companions, who had arrived in a number of 276. He welcomed them into his house and honoured them for three days, providing them with lodging and food at his own expense. God did not leave Publius's generosity and courtesy without reward. He had his father in bed, afflicted with fever and severe dysentery that had brought him to the point of death. Paul went to see the sick man and, after speaking words of charity and comfort to him, began to pray. Then, rising up, he approached the bed, laid his hands on the sick man, who was immediately healed. Thus the good old man, free from all illness and fully restored, ran to embrace his son, blessing Paul and the God he preached. Publius, his father, and his family (as Saint John Chrysostom assures) filled with gratitude towards the great Apostle, were instructed in the faith and received baptism at the hands of Paul.

News of the miraculous healing of Publius's father spread, and all those who were sick or had sick people of any disease came or were brought to Paul's feet, and he, blessing them in the name of Jesus Christ, sent them all away healed, blessing God and believing in the Gospel. In a short time, the whole island received baptism, and, having torn down the temples of idols, they erected others dedicated to the worship of the true God.

CHAPTER XXIV. Saint Paul's journey from Malta to Syracuse — He preaches in Reggio — His arrival in Rome — Year of Christ 60

The Maltese were full of enthusiasm for Paul and for the doctrine he preached, so much so that, in addition to embracing the faith en masse, they competed in providing him and his companions with everything they needed for the time they stayed in Malta and for the journey to Rome. Paul stayed in Malta for three months, due to the winter when the sea is not navigable. It is commonly believed that during that time he guided Publius in Christian perfection and that,

before leaving, he ordained him bishop of that island; which certainly was a great consolation for those faithful.

When spring came and the departure for Rome was decided, the centurion Julius arranged for a ship that was going from Alexandria to Italy and that had as its sign two gods called Castor and Pollux, whom the idolaters believed to be the protectors of navigation. To the great regret of the Maltese, they embarked for Sicily, a very nearby island to Italy, and favoured by the wind, they soon arrived in Syracuse, the main city of this island. Here the Gospel had already been preached by Saint Peter, who had ordained Saint Marcian as bishop there. This worthy pastor wanted to host the holy Apostle in his house and had him celebrate the holy mysteries in a cave, to the great joy of himself and those faithful. An ancient church, which still exists today in that city, is dedicated to our holy Apostle, and it is believed to have been built over the very cave where Saint Paul had preached the word of God and celebrated the divine mysteries.

Leaving Syracuse, they sailed along the island of Sicily, passed the port of Messina, and arrived with his companions in Reggio, a city and port of Calabria, very close to Sicily. Here they stayed for one day.

Accredited historians of that country recount many wonderful things performed by Saint Paul during that brief stop; among these, we choose the following fact. The Reggians, who were idolaters, having heard that a ship with the sign of Castor and Pollux, greatly honoured by them, had docked in their port, rushed in large numbers to see it. Paul wanted to take advantage of that gathering to preach Jesus Christ, but they did not want to listen to him. Then he, moved by faith in that Jesus who had performed so many wonders by his hand, took out a candle stub and said: “I beg you to let me speak at least for the time that this little piece of candle will take to burn out.” They accepted the condition with laughter and quieted down.

Paul placed the candle on a stone column set on the shore. Immediately the whole column caught fire and a great flame appeared, which served him as a burning torch. He had ample time to teach them, for those barbarians, astonished by such a miracle, listened to Paul meekly for as long as he wished to speak; and no one dared to disturb him. The faith was accepted, and on the site of the miracle, a magnificent church was erected to the true God. On the main altar, that column was placed, and to preserve the memory of that miracle, a solemnity with a proper office was established. In the Mass a prayer is read that translates as follows: “O God, who at the preaching of the Apostle Paul, miraculously causing a stone column to shine, deigned to instruct the peoples of Reggio with the light of faith, grant us, we pray, to be worthy to have in heaven as intercessor him whom we have had as a

preacher of the Gospel on earth” (Cesar, Acts of the Apostles, vol. 2).

After that day, invited by favorable weather, Paul and his companions embarked for Pozzuoli, a city in Campania nine miles from Naples. Here he was greatly consoled by meeting several who had already embraced the faith, preached to them by Saint Peter a few years earlier.

Those good Christians also experienced great consolation and begged Paul to stay with them for seven days. Paul, having obtained permission from the centurion, stayed that time and, on a feast day, spoke to the large assembly of those faithful.

News of the arrival of the great Apostle in Italy had already reached Rome, and the faithful of that city, eager to meet in person the author of the famous letter from Corinth, came to meet him at the Forum of Appius, now called Fossa Nuova, which is a town about 50 miles from Rome. Continuing on their way, they arrived at the Three Taverns, a place about 30 miles from Rome, where he found many others who had come there to give him a joyful welcome.

Accompanied by that large number of faithful, who were not satisfied with admiring that great minister of Jesus Christ, he arrived in Rome as if led in triumph. Here the Christian faith, as has been said, had already been preached by Saint Peter, who had held the papal seat there for eighteen years.

CHAPTER XXV. Paul speaks to the Jews and preaches to them Jesus Christ — Progress of the Gospel in Rome — Year of Christ 61

Upon arriving in Rome, Paul was delivered to the prefect of the praetorian guard, that is, to the general of the praetorian guards, so called because they had the special care of guarding the person of the emperor. The name of that illustrious Roman was Afranius Burrus, of whom history makes very honorable mention.

The centurion Julius took care to recommend Paul to that prefect, who treated him with singular kindness. The letters from governors Felix and Festus, which certainly must have made known Paul’s innocence, and the good testimony given by centurion Julius, put him in good light and respect with Burrus, who gave him full freedom to live alone wherever he pleased, on the condition that he was watched by a soldier when he left the house. However, Paul always had a chain on his arm when he was at home; if he went out, the chain that bound his arm passed behind to keep him connected with the soldier who accompanied him, so that that soldier was always attached to Paul through the same chain. The holy Apostle rented a house, in which he took lodging with his companions, among whom are

especially named Luke, Aristarchus, and Timothy, that faithful disciple of his from Lystra.

Three days after his arrival, he sent to invite the leading Jews who lived in Rome, asking them to come to him in his lodging. Gathering in good number, he spoke to them thus: “I would not want the state in which you see me and the chains to which I am bound to put you in a bad opinion of me. God knows that I have done nothing against my people, nor against the customs and laws of my homeland. I was chained in Jerusalem and then delivered to the Romans. They examined me and, having found nothing in me that deserved punishment, wanted to send me back free; but the Jews strongly opposed, and I was forced to appeal to Caesar.

“This is the only reason I have been brought to Rome. I do not want to accuse my brothers here, but I wish to let you know the reason for my coming and, at the same time, to speak to you about the Messiah and the resurrection, which is precisely the reason for these chains. On this subject, I desire very much to be able to open my heart to you.”

To these words, the Jews replied: “Indeed, we have not received letters from Judea, nor has anyone come to report anything against you. We are also very eager to know your thoughts, since we know that the sect of Christians is opposed throughout the world.”

Paul gladly accepted the invitation and, assigning them a day, a large number of Jews gathered in his house. He then began to explain the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the divinity of his person, the necessity of faith in him, confirming everything with the words of the Prophets and of Moses. Such was the desire to listen and such the eagerness to preach that Paul’s discourse lasted from morning until evening. Among the Jews who listened to him, many believed and embraced the faith, but several strongly opposed him.

The holy Apostle, seeing such stubbornness on the part of those who should have been the first to believe, said to them these harsh words: “Of this inflexible stubbornness that I see here among you in Rome, as I have found in all parts of the world, the fault is yours. This hardness of yours was already foretold by the prophet Isaiah, when he said: ‘Go to this people and say: You will hear with your ears, but will not understand; you will see with your eyes, but will not comprehend anything; for the heart of this people has grown dull, they have closed their ears and shut their eyes.’

“Be assured,” Paul continued, “that the salvation you do not want, God will not give you; rather, he will bring it to the Gentiles, who will accept it.”

Paul’s words were almost useless for the Jews. They departed from him continuing the disputes and vain discussions about what they had heard, without

opening their hearts to the grace that was being offered to them. Therefore, deeply saddened, Paul turned to the Gentiles, who with humility of heart came to listen to him and in large numbers embraced the faith.

The holy Apostle himself expresses the great consolation for the progress the Gospel was making during his imprisonment, writing to the faithful of Philippi: “When you, brothers, heard that I was being held prisoner in Rome, you felt sorrow, not so much for my person, but for the preaching of the Gospel. Therefore, know that it is quite the opposite. My chains have become the honour of Jesus Christ and have served to make him better known not only to those of the city who came to me to be instructed in the faith, but also in the court and in the palace of the emperor himself. For this, you should rejoice with me and thank God.”

CHAPTER XXVI. St Luke — The Philippians send help to St Paul — Illness and healing of Epaphroditus — Letter to the Philippians — Conversion of Onesimus — Year of Jesus Christ 61

What we have said so far about the actions of St Paul was almost literally taken from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke. This preacher of the Gospel continued to be a faithful companion of St. Paul; he preached the Gospel in Italy, Dalmatia, Macedonia, and ended his life with martyrdom in Patras, a city in Achaia. He was a physician, painter, and sculptor. There are many statues and paintings of the Blessed Virgin venerated in various countries that are attributed to St. Luke. Let us return to St Paul.

Two facts are especially memorable in the life of this holy Apostle while he was imprisoned in Rome: one concerns the faithful of Philippi, the other the conversion of Onesimus.

Among the many peoples to whom the holy Apostle preached the Gospel, none showed him greater signs of affection than the Philippians. They had already provided him with abundant alms when he preached in their city, in Thessalonica, and in Corinth.

When they learned that Paul was imprisoned in Rome, they imagined that he was in need; therefore, they made a considerable collection and, in order to make it more dear and honourable, they sent it by the hand of St. Epaphroditus, their bishop.

This holy prelate, upon arriving in Rome, found Paul not only in need of financial help but also of personal assistance, as he was afflicted by a serious illness caused by imprisonment. Epaphroditus devoted himself to serving him with such

diligence, charity, and fervour that, having become ill himself, he was at the point of death. But God wanted to reward the charity of the saint and ensure that no additional affliction was added to Paul's heart, and restored his health.

The Philippians, upon hearing that Epaphroditus was gravely ill, were plunged into the deepest dismay. Therefore, Paul deemed it good to send him back to Philippi with a letter, in which he explains the reason that led him to send back Epaphroditus, whom he calls his brother, co-worker, colleague, and their apostle. He then urges them to receive him with all joy and to honour every person of similar merit, who, imitating him, is ready to give his life for the service of Christ. He also tells the Philippians that he would soon send Timothy to bring him precise news of that community; he further states that he hoped to be set free and to see them once again.

Epaphroditus was received by the Philippians as an angel sent from the Lord, and Paul's letter filled the hearts of those faithful with the greatest consolation.

The other fact that makes St. Paul's imprisonment famous was the conversion of Onesimus, a servant of Philemon, a wealthy citizen of Colossae, a city in Phrygia. This Philemon had been won to the faith by St. Paul and corresponded so well to the grace of the Lord that he was considered a model of Christians, and his house was called a church because it was always open for acts of piety and for the exercise of charity towards the poor. He had many slaves who served him, and among them was one named Onesimus. This one, having unfortunately given himself to vices, awaited the opportunity to flee, and stealing a large sum of money from his master, escaped to Rome. There, indulging in debauchery and other excesses, he squandered the stolen money and soon found himself in the greatest misery. By chance, he heard about St Paul, whom he may have seen and served in his master's house. The charity and kindness of the holy Apostle inspired him with confidence, and he decided to present himself to him. He went and threw himself at his feet, confessed his error and the unhappy state of his soul, and completely entrusted himself to him. Paul recognized a true prodigal son in that slave. He welcomed him kindly, as he did with everyone, and after making him aware of the seriousness of his fault and the unhappy state of his soul, he dedicated himself to instructing him in the faith. When he saw in him the necessary dispositions to become a good Christian, he baptized him in the same prison. The good Onesimus, after receiving the grace of baptism, remained full of gratitude and affection towards his father and teacher, and began to prove it by serving him loyally in the needs of his imprisonment. Paul wished to keep him with him, but did not want to do so without Philemon's permission. He therefore thought to send Onesimus

himself back to his master. And since he did not dare to present himself to him, Paul wanted to accompany him with a letter, saying to him: “Take this letter and go to your master, and be assured that you will obtain more than you desire.”

CHAPTER XXVII. Letter of St Paul to Philemon — Year of Jesus Christ 62

The letter of St Paul to Philemon is the easiest and shortest of his letters, and since for the beauty of its sentiments it can serve as a model for any Christian, we offer it in full to the benevolent reader. It is as follows:

“Paul, a prisoner for the faith of Jesus Christ, and brother Timothy to our dear Philemon, our co-worker, to Apphia our very dear sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to all the faithful who gather in your house. God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ grant you grace and peace.

“Continuously remembering you in my prayers, O Philemon, I give thanks to my God hearing of your faith and your great charity towards all the faithful. I also thank God upon hearing of the liberality stemming from your faith, so manifest to the eyes of all, for the good works that are practised in your house for the love of Jesus Christ. We, O dearest brother, have been filled with joy and consolation knowing that the faithful have found such relief from your goodness. Therefore, although I may have full freedom in Christ to order you to do what is your duty, yet, in the name of the love I bear you, I would rather appeal to you, even though I am what I am in your regard, that is, even though I am Paul, already old and currently a prisoner for the faith of Jesus Christ.

“The prayer I make for you is for Onesimus, my son, whom I have begotten in my chains, who once was useless to you, but who is now very useful both to you and to me. I am sending him back to you and I ask you to receive him as my own heart. I would have liked to keep him with me, so that he might serve me on your behalf, in my chains for the sake of the Gospel; but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that your good deed might be voluntary and not forced. Perhaps he was separated from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but as a beloved brother. If then he is dear to me, how much more will he be to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

“So if you consider me as a partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it, not to mention that you owe me even your own self. Yes, brother, I expect to receive this joy from you in the Lord. Grant me this consolation in Christ! I write to you, confident in your obedience,

knowing that you will do even more than I ask. I also ask you to prepare a guest room for me, for I hope that through your prayers, God will grant me to return to you.

“Epaphra, who is in prison with me for Christ Jesus, greets you along with Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Epaphra, whom St Paul speaks of here, had been converted to the faith by him when he was preaching in Phrygia. Later becoming an apostle of his homeland, he was made bishop of Colossae. He went to Rome to visit St. Paul and was imprisoned with him. After being released, he returned to govern his Church in Colossae, where he ended his life with the crown of martyrdom.

Mark, who is mentioned here, is John Mark, who after working hard with St. Barnabas in preaching the Gospel, later joined St. Paul, thus repairing the weakness shown when he abandoned St. Paul and St. Barnabas to return home.

When Onesimus arrived in Colossae, he presented himself with the letter to his master who received him with the utmost affection, glad to have back not a slave, but a Christian. He granted him full forgiveness and, since he understood from the letter of the holy Apostle that Onesimus could render some service, he sent him back to him with a thousand greetings and blessings.

This servant proved to be truly faithful to the Christian vocation. St Paul, seeing him adorned with the virtues and the knowledge necessary to be a preacher of the Gospel, ordained him a priest and later consecrated him bishop of Ephesus. He received the crown of martyrdom, and the Catholic Church commemorates him on February 16.

CHAPTER XXVIII. St. Paul writes to the Colossians, the Ephesians, and the Hebrews — Year of Christ 62

The zeal of our Apostle was tireless, and since his chains kept him in Rome, he endeavoured to send his disciples or to write letters wherever he recognized the need. Among other things, he was informed that in Colossae, where Philemon lived, questions had arisen due to some false preachers who wanted to compel all Gentiles coming to the faith to be circumcised and to observe legal ceremonies. Furthermore, they had introduced a superstitious worship of angels. Paul, as the Apostle of the Gentiles, informed of these dangerous novelties, wrote a letter that should be read in its entirety to appreciate its beauty and the sublimity of its sentiments. However, the words concerning tradition deserve to be noted: “The

things," he says, "that are most important to me will be verbally communicated to you by Tychicus and Onesimus, who are sent to you for this purpose." These words demonstrate how the Apostle had matters of great importance unwritten, but which he sent to be communicated verbally in the form of tradition.

One thing that caused no small anxiety to our Apostle was the news from Ephesus. When he was in Miletus and summoned the main pastors, he had told them that, due to the evils he had to endure, he believed they would not see his face again. This left those affectionate faithful in the utmost dismay. The holy Apostle, made aware of the sadness that troubled the Ephesians, wrote a letter to console them.

Among other things, he recommends considering Jesus Christ as the head of the Church and to remain united to him in the person of his Apostles. He strongly advises staying away from certain sins that should not even be named among Christians: "Fornication," he says, "impurity, and greed must not even be named among you" (chapter 5, verse 5).

Then he speaks to the young people with these affectionate words: "Children, I commend you in the Lord, be obedient to your parents, for it is right. Honour your father and mother, says the Lord. If you observe this commandment, you will be happy and live long on the earth."

Then he speaks to the parents: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. You, servants, obey your masters as you would Christ, not as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. You, masters, do the same to them, putting aside threats, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that with him there is no favouritism."

This letter was brought to Ephesus by Tychicus, that faithful disciple who, along with Onesimus, had delivered the letter written to the Colossians.

From Rome, he also wrote his letter to the Hebrews, that is, to the Jews of Palestine who had converted to the faith. His purpose was to console them and to warn them against the seductions of some other Jews. He demonstrates how the sacrifices, prophecies, and the old law have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and that to him alone honuor and glory should be given for all ages. He insists that they remain constantly united to the Saviour in faith, without which no one can please God; but he emphasizes that this faith does not justify without works.

CHAPTER XXIX. Saint Paul is freed — Martyrdom of Saint James the Less — Year of Christ 63

Four years had already passed since the holy Apostle had been held prisoner: two he had spent in Caesarea and two in Rome. Nero had brought him before his tribunal and had recognized his innocence; but, whether out of hatred for the Christian religion or due to the indifference of that cruel emperor, he continued to send Paul back to prison. Finally, he resolved to grant him full freedom. This decision is commonly attributed to the great remorse that the tyrant felt for the heinous acts he had committed. He had even gone so far as to have his mother assassinated. After such misdeeds, he felt the sharpest remorse, for men, no matter how wicked, cannot help but feel the torments of conscience within themselves.

Nero, therefore, to somehow appease his soul, thought to perform some good deeds and, among others, to grant freedom to Paul. Thus, having become master of himself, the great Apostle used his freedom to bring the light of the Gospel with greater fervour to other more distant nations.

Perhaps someone will wonder what the Jews of Jerusalem did when they saw Paul taken from their hands. I will say it briefly. They directed all their fury against Saint James, called the Less, bishop of that city. The governor Festus had died; his successor had not yet taken office. The Jews took advantage of that opportunity to present themselves en masse to the high priest, named Ananus, son of that Annas and brother-in-law of Caiaphas, who had condemned the Saviour.

Determined to have him condemned, they greatly feared the people who loved him like a tender father and reflected in his virtues; he was called the Just by all. History tells us that he prayed with such assiduity that the skin of his knees had become like that of a camel. He drank neither wine nor other intoxicating liquors; he was extremely strict in fasting, frugal in eating, drinking, and dressing. He donated everything superfluous to the poor.

Despite these beautiful qualities, the obstinate ones found a way to give the sentence at least an appearance of justice with a cunning worthy of them. In agreement with the high priest, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Scribes organized a riot and ran to James, saying amidst a thousand shouts: “You must immediately correct this countless people, who believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Since you are called the Just, everyone believes in you; therefore, go up to the top of this temple, so that everyone can see and hear you, and bear witness to the truth.”

They led him to a high balcony outside the temple, and when they saw him up there, they exclaimed feigning: “O just man, tell us what we should believe

about Jesus crucified.” The place could not have been more solemn. Either renounce the faith, or, by uttering a word in favour of Jesus Christ, be immediately put to death. But the zeal of the holy Apostle knew how to take full advantage of that occasion.

“And why,” he exclaimed loudly, “why do you question me about Jesus, Son of Man and at the same time Son of God? In vain do you pretend to doubt my faith in this true Redeemer. I declare before you that he is in heaven, seated at the right hand of Almighty God, from where he will come to judge the whole world.” Many believed in Jesus Christ and, in the simplicity of their hearts, began to exclaim: “Glory to the Son of David.”

The Jews, disappointed in their expectations, furiously shouted: “He has blasphemed! Let him be immediately thrown down and put to death.” They rushed up and pushed him down onto the pavement.

He did not die instantly and, managing to rise again, knelt down and, following the example of the Saviour, invoked divine mercy upon his enemies, saying: “Forgive them, Lord, for they do not know what they do.”

Then the furious enemies, instigated by the pontiff, hurled a rain of stones at him until one, striking him on the head with a club, laid him dead. Many faithful were slaughtered along with this Apostle, always for the same cause, namely out of hatred for Christianity (cf. Eusebius, *Church History*).

CHAPTER XXX. Other journeys of Saint Paul — He writes to Timothy and Titus — His return to Rome — Year of Christ 68

Freed from the chains of prison, Saint Paul set out for those places where he intended to go. He went to Judea to visit the Jews, but he stayed there little, because those obstinate ones were already rekindling the primitive persecution. He went to Colossae, according to the promise made to Philemon. He went to Crete, where he preached the Gospel and where he ordained Titus bishop of that island. He returned to Asia to visit the Churches of Troas, Iconium, Lystra, Miletus, Corinth, Nicopolis, and Philippi. From this city, he wrote a letter to his Timothy, whom he had ordained bishop of Ephesus.

In this letter, the Apostle gives him various rules for the consecration of bishops and priests and for the exercise of many things concerning ecclesiastical discipline. Almost at the same time, he wrote a letter to Titus, bishop of Crete, giving him almost the same advice given to Timothy and inviting him to come soon to see him.

It is commonly believed that he went to preach in Spain and in many other places. He spent five years in missions and apostolic labours. But the specific events of these journeys, the conversions made under his care in various countries, are not known to us. We can only say with Saint Anselm that “the holy Apostle ran from the Red Sea to the Ocean, bringing everywhere the light of truth. He was like the sun that illuminates the whole world from East to West, so that it was more the world and the peoples that were lacking to Paul than Paul lacking to any of the men. This is the measure of his zeal and his charity.”

While Paul was occupied in the labours of the apostolate, he learned that a fierce persecution had broken out in Rome under the empire of Nero. Paul immediately imagined the great need to support the faith in such occasions and took the road to Rome without delay.

Upon arriving in Italy, he found everywhere the edicts of Nero against the faithful published. He heard of the crimes and calumnies attributed to them; everywhere he saw crosses, pyres, and other kinds of tortures prepared for the confessors of the faith, and this doubled in Paul the desire to soon be among those faithful. As soon as he arrived, like one who offers himself to God, he began to preach in the public squares, in the synagogues, both to Gentiles and to Jews. To the latter, who had almost always shown themselves obstinate, he preached the imminent fulfilment of the prophecies of the Saviour, which foretold the destruction of the city and the temple of Jerusalem with the dispersion of that whole nation. He suggested, however, a means to avoid divine scourges: to convert from the heart and to recognize their Saviour in Jesus whom they had crucified.

To the Gentiles, he preached the goodness and mercy of God, who invited them to repentance; therefore, he urged them to abandon sin, to mortify passions, and to embrace the Gospel. To such preaching, confirmed by continuous miracles, the listeners came in crowds to ask for baptism. Thus, the Church, persecuted with iron, fire, and a thousand terrors, appeared more beautiful and flourishing and increased every day the number of its elect.

What more can be said? Saint Paul pushed his zeal and charity so far that he managed to win over a certain Proclus, steward of the imperial palace, and the very wife of the emperor. They embraced the faith with fervour and died as martyrs.

CHAPTER XXXI. Saint Paul is imprisoned again — He writes the second letter to Timothy — His martyrdom — Year of Christ 69-70

Saint Paul had also come to Rome with Saint Peter, who had held the seat

of Christianity there for 25 years. He had also gone elsewhere to preach the faith, and, when he was informed of the persecution raised against Christians, he immediately returned to Rome. The two princes of the Apostles worked together until Nero, irritated by the conversions that had taken place in his court and even more by the disgraceful death of the magician Simon (as told in the life of Saint Peter), ordered that Saint Peter and Saint Paul be sought with the utmost rigour and brought to the Mamertine prison, at the foot of the Capitol hill. Nero intended to have the two Apostles executed immediately, but he was deterred by political affairs and a conspiracy plotted against him. Furthermore, he had decided to glorify his name by cutting the isthmus of Corinth, a strip of land about nine miles wide. This undertaking could not be realized, but it left a year for Paul to win more souls for Jesus Christ.

He managed to convert many prisoners, some guards, and other notable figures, who, out of a desire to be instructed or out of curiosity, went to listen to him, since Saint Paul during his imprisonment could be freely visited and wrote letters where he saw the need. It was from the prison in Rome that he wrote the second letter to Timothy.

In this letter, the Apostle announces his death is near, expresses a strong desire for Timothy to come to him to assist him, as he was almost abandoned by all. This letter can be called the testament of Saint Paul; and, among many things, it also provides one of the greatest proofs in favour of tradition. “What you have heard from me,” he tells him, “be sure to pass on to faithful men who will be able to teach it to others after you.” From these words we learn that in addition to the written doctrine, there are other truths no less useful and certain that must be transmitted orally, in the form of tradition, with an unbroken succession for all future times.

He then gives many useful pieces of advice to Timothy for the discipline of the Church, to recognize various heresies that were spreading among Christians. And, to mitigate the wound that the news of his imminent death would cause him, he encourages him thus: “Do not be saddened for me; rather, if you love me, rejoice in the Lord. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, when, having offered my life as a sacrifice, I will present myself to him. That crown will not be awarded to me only, but to all who, with good works, prepare to receive it at his coming.”

Paul had comfort in his prison from a certain Onesiphorus. This man, having come to Rome and learned that Paul, his former teacher and father in Jesus Christ, was in prison, went to visit him and offered to serve him. The Apostle felt great

consolation for such tender charity and, writing to Timothy, he praises him greatly and prays to God for him.

“May God,” he writes to him, “have mercy on the family of Onesiphorus, who often comforted me and was not ashamed of my chains; on the contrary, having come to Rome, he sought me diligently and found me. May the Lord grant him to find mercy with him on that day. And you know well how many services he rendered to me in Ephesus.”

Meanwhile, Nero returned from Corinth all irritated because the undertaking of the isthmus had failed. He became even more enraged in persecuting Christians; and his first act was to carry out the death sentence against Saint Paul. First, he was beaten with rods, and the column to which he was tied when he underwent that flogging is still shown in Rome. It is true that with it he lost the privilege of Roman citizenship, but he gained the right of a citizen of heaven; therefore, he felt the greatest joy in seeing himself likened to his divine Master. This flogging was the prelude to his later beheading.

Paul was condemned to death because he had insulted the gods; for this sole reason, it was permitted to cut off the head of a Roman citizen. What a beautiful crime! To be considered impious because, instead of worshiping stones and demons, one wishes to worship the only true God and his Son Jesus Christ. God had already revealed to him the day and hour of his death; therefore, he felt a joy that was already entirely heavenly. “I desire,” he exclaimed, “to be freed from this body to be with Christ.” Finally, from a band of henchmen, he was taken from prison and led outside of Rome through the gate called Ostiense, making him walk towards a marsh along the Tiber, they arrived at a place called Acque Salvie, about three miles from Rome.

It is said that a matron, named Plautilla, the wife of a Roman senator, seeing the holy Apostle in a poor state and led to death, began to weep bitterly. Saint Paul consoled her, saying: “Do not weep; I will leave you a memory of me that will be very dear to you. Give me your veil.” She gave it to him. With this veil, the holy man’s eyes were bandaged before being beheaded. And, at the order of the saint, it was returned bloodied to Plautilla by a pious person, who kept it as a relic.

When Paul arrived at the place of execution, he knelt down and, with his face turned to heaven, commended his soul and the Church to God; then he bowed his head and received the stroke of the sword that severed his head from his body. His soul flew to meet that Jesus whom he had longed to see.

The angels welcomed him and introduced him with immense joy to participate in the happiness of heaven. It is certain that the first to whom he had to give thanks was Saint Stephen, to whom, after Jesus, he owed his conversion and

his salvation.

CHAPTER XXXII. Burial of Saint Paul — Wonders performed at his tomb — Basilica dedicated to him

The day Saint Paul was executed outside of Rome, at the Salvia Waters, was the same day Saint Peter received the palm of martyrdom at the foot of Vatican Hill, on June 29, when Saint Paul was 65 years old. Baronius, who is called the father of ecclesiastical history, recounts how Saint Paul's head, as soon as it was severed from his body, gushed milk instead of blood. Two soldiers, upon witnessing such a miracle, converted to Jesus Christ. His head then, falling to the ground, made three jumps, and where it touched the ground, three springs of living water gushed forth. To preserve the memory of this glorious event, a church was erected whose walls enclose these fountains, which are still called the Fountains of Saint Paul (cf. F. Baronius, year 69-70).

Many travellers (cf. Cesari and Tillemont) went to the site to witness this fact and assure us that those three springs they saw and tasted have a flavour like milk. In those early times, the Christians were very diligent in gathering and burying the bodies of those who gave their lives for the faith. Two women, one named Basilissa and the other Anastasia, devised a way and time to recover the body of the holy Apostle and, at night, buried him two miles away from the place where he had suffered martyrdom, a mile from Rome. Nero, through his spies, learned of the work of those pious women, and that was enough for him to have them killed, severing their hands, feet, and then their heads.

Although the Gentiles knew that Paul's body had been buried by the faithful, they could never know the exact location. This was known only to the Christians, who kept it secret as their most precious treasure and honoured it in the greatest possible way. But the esteem that the faithful had for those relics reached such a point that some merchants from the East, coming to Rome, attempted to steal them and take them to their country. They secretly exhumed it in the catacombs, two miles from Rome, waiting for the opportune moment to transport it. But at the moment of carrying out their plan, a horrible storm arose with flashes and terrible lightning, forcing them to abandon the enterprise. Once the matter became known, the Christians of Rome went to retrieve Paul's body and brought it back to its original place along the Ostian Way.

At the time of Constantine the Great, a magnificent basilica was built in honour of and over the tomb of our Apostle. At all times, kings and emperors,

forgetful of their greatness, filled with fear and reverence, went to that tomb to kiss the coffin that holds the bones of the holy Apostle.

The Roman Pontiffs themselves did not approach, nor do they approach, the place of his burial unless filled with reverence, and they have never allowed anyone to take a particle of those venerable bones. Various princes and kings made live requests for them, but no Pope deemed it possible to satisfy them. This great reverence was greatly increased by the continuous miracles that were performed at that tomb. Saint Gregory the Great reports many of them and assures that no one entered that temple to pray without trembling. Those who dared to profane it or attempted to remove even a small particle were punished by God with manifest vengeance.

Gregory XI was the first who, in a public calamity, almost compelled by the prayers and pleas of the people of Rome, took the head of the Saint, lifted it high, showed it to the multitude that wept with tenderness and devotion, and immediately returned it to where he had taken it.

Now, the head of this great Apostle is in the church of St John Lateran; the rest of the body has always been preserved in the basilica of Saint Paul outside the walls, along the Ostian Way, a mile from Rome.

Even his chains became an object of devotion among the Christian faithful. Through contact with those glorious irons, many miracles were performed, and the greatest figures in the world always considered it a precious relic to have a bit of filings from them.

CHAPTER XXXIII. Portrait of Saint Paul — Image of his spirit — Conclusion

In order to better imprint the devotion towards this prince of the Apostles, it is useful to give an idea of his physical appearance and his spirit.

Paul did not have a very handsome appearance, as he himself states. He was of short stature, with a strong and robust build, and he proved this with the long and heavy labours he endured in his career, having never been ill, except for the ailments caused by chains and imprisonment. Only towards the end of his days did he walk a bit bent. He had a fair face, a small head, and almost completely bald, which denoted a sanguine and fiery character. He had a broad forehead, low black eyebrows, a hooked nose, and a long, thick beard. But his eyes were extremely lively and bright, with a sweet expression that tempered the intensity of his gaze. This is the portrait of his physical appearance.

But what about his spirit? We know it from his own writings. He had a sharp and sublime intellect, a noble soul, and a generous heart. Such was his courage and firmness that he drew strength and viguor from the very difficulties and dangers. He was very knowledgeable in the science of the Jewish religion. He was deeply learned in the Sacred Scriptures, and this knowledge, aided by the light of the Holy Spirit and the charity of Jesus Christ, made him the great Apostle who was nicknamed the Doctor of the Gentiles. Saint John Chrysostom, a devoted admirer of our saint, greatly desired to see Saint Paul from the pulpit, for he said that the greatest orators of antiquity would seem languid and cold in comparison to him. There is no need to say more about his virtues, as what we have so far presented is nothing but a tapestry of the heroic virtues that he made shine in every place, at all times, and with every kind of people.

To conclude what has been said about this great saint, it is worth noting a virtue that he made shine above all others: charity towards others and love for God. He challenged all creatures to separate him from the love of his divine Master. “Who will separate me,” he exclaimed, “from the love of Jesus Christ? Perhaps tribulations or distress, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or persecution? No, certainly not. I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor future, nor any creature will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is the character of the true Christian: to be willing to lose everything, to suffer everything, rather than say or do the slightest thing contrary to the love of God.

Saint Paul spent more than thirty years of his life as an enemy of Jesus Christ; but as soon as he was illuminated by his heavenly grace, he gave himself entirely to him, and never separated from him again. He then spent over thirty-six years in the most austere penances, in the hardest labors, to glorify that Jesus whom he had persecuted.

Christian reader, perhaps you who read and I who write have spent part of our lives in offence to the Lord! But let us not lose heart: there is still time for us; God’s mercy awaits us.

But let us not postpone our conversion, for if we wait until tomorrow to set things right for our souls, we run the grave risk of having no more time. Saint Paul laboured thirty-six years in the service of the Lord; now for 1800 years he enjoys the immense glory of heaven and will enjoy it for all ages. The same happiness is prepared for us, provided we give ourselves to God while we have time and persevere in holy service until the end. What is suffered in this world is nothing, but what we will enjoy in the next is eternal. Thus assures us Saint Paul himself.

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