

Reflection for the 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Brothers and sisters: What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 8:35,37

Our Second Reading this Sunday is taken from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans, in the first verse of this reading two questions are asked. Both of these questions have an answer provided in the second verse of the reading. These two questions are really one question in two parts. St. Paul asks the Christians of Rome in his first question, what will separate us from the love of Christ, and then his second question asks what would it take to separate us from Christ. He wonders if anguish, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or the sword would be enough to permanently change in a negative way ones relationship with Christ.

This truly is a great two-part question that St. Paul asks in his letter to the Romans. What is the point that we just give up and decide that the cost is just too great to be a follower of Christ and we choose a different path, or faith journey. We can look back on two thousand years of the Catholic faith and see a faith filled people that have experienced many trials and tribulations. In fact, for the first 300 years of the Catholic faith the Church was persecuted by the Roman Empire. St. Paul was among the early Christian martyrs that died in the first century in Rome.

St. Paul wrote his letter to the Church in Rome before he had even visited Rome. This letter is a letter of introduction to the Church in Rome. This is the only letter that St. Paul writes to a Church and he had not visited or founded. Normally St. Paul would write a letter to a Church after he had been there to encourage them and at times point out some solutions to the challenges that a local Church might be facing. The letter that St. Paul writes to the Church of Rome is different from the other letters for it is a letter that explains who he is and what he thinks about ones relationship to God.

This letter was written in Corinth sometime in the winter of 57-58 AD. St. Paul wrote this letter shortly before he returned to Jerusalem in the Spring of 58 AD. St. Paul's intention was to deliver funds to the Church in Jerusalem that he had taken up from the Gentile Churches he had founded, and then travel to Rome and Spain. When he arrives to Jerusalem, St. Paul is arrested and spends two years in a Roman prison at Caesarea Maritima before he is shipped off to Rome for trial. St. Paul arrives in Rome not as a missionary sharing the good news of Christ, but at a prisoner of Rome. St. Paul stays in Rome for two years from 60-62 AD under house arrest. St. Paul was martyred in Rome in the year 64/67 AD. St. Paul's intention was to visit Rome and then travel to Spain to share the good news in the western most part of the Empire. For Scholars there is a debate weather St. Paul made it to Spain or not.

St. Clement of Rome a co-worker of St. Paul and future Pope wrote in his letter, that dates back to the 70's AD, that St. Paul had traveled to the farthest limits of the West. Most scholars interrupt the statement by St Clement as stating that St. Paul had traveled to Spain. It is possible, for there was time between St. Paul's house arrest and his martyrdom to travel to Spain. In this 2 to 5 year period he had ample time to travel to Spain on a missionary journey. There is no reference in the bible about St. Paul, reaching Spain and there is no letter from St. Paul to the Spanish. Of course why would St. Clement claim that St. Paul traveled to Spain when he had not.

Reflecting on the journey of St. Paul to Rome we can see that by the time St. Paul reaches Rome he is able to from his experience clearly affirm the answer to the questions that he asks and answers in his Letter to the Church of Rome. St. Paul knows from his own experience that with the love of God all things are possible. No matter what trials or tribulations that we face the love of God will get us through it.