

The Homily of Metropolitan Gerasimos
at the
ECUMENICAL SERVICE OF PRAYER
for the
CONCLUSION OF THE YEAR OF ST. PAUL

St. Cecilia Roman Catholic Church Tustin, CA
June 28, 2009

Brothers and Sisters:

One year ago, we gathered to inaugurate the Year of St. Paul, a year to celebrate, to study, and to reflect on the life and ministry of this remarkable saint of the Christian Church. In that year, Christians from both of our traditions have traveled to many of the sites where St. Paul preached the Gospel and established the first churches. We have, hopefully, studied his writings more closely and the many excellent works interpreting them for us - from the Fathers of the Church to modern scholars. We close this year of celebration and focus, better informed about St. Paul's life, witness and theology and

with greater insights into his significance for our Church and for our own lives as Christians. Although we are now closing this ecumenical Year of St. Paul proclaimed by both Pope Benedict and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, St. Paul has opened a door of faith for each one of us and invites us to walk through it, entering into a deeper relationship not only with the saint, but ultimately with the Most High God, His Son, and His Church - in the Holy Spirit.

In the pericope from St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy that we heard this evening, our first thoughts, naturally, go to Timothy. Paul's words of exhortation, were, of course, intended for him. St. Paul had known Timothy for a number of years, first encountering him in Lystra, Asia Minor, a city in south-central Turkey, near Iconium or today's Konya. St. Timothy accompanied St. Paul on his missionary journeys and we hear about him in the Acts of the Apostles and other epistles of Paul. Timothy was a good missionary, working alongside St. Paul as they preached the Gospel and established churches wherever they went. So, in this evening's passage, we can imagine Timothy reading

these words, receiving advice and counsel from his father in the faith, the veteran missionary sharing his wisdom with his younger co-worker.

What do we hear St. Paul telling Timothy? Don't give up; persevere in the face of adversity; be patient with people. St. Paul's next sentence could also describe our own time: "For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." St. Paul recognized that people have the tendency to flock to teachers who will tell them what they *want* to hear. St. Paul knew that people often want an easy message. Or they want someone to tell them what to do, rather than accepting responsibility for their own lives and their own faith. Too often even Christian preachers will fall into that temptation, seeking fame and popularity or power and control - and St. Paul seemingly knew that too. But St. Paul counsels Timothy to speak the truth "whether the time is favorable or unfavorable." In other words, proclaim the message of Jesus Christ whether people are ready

for it, want to hear it, or are even listening to it. Above all, remain faithful to the *Gospel* of Jesus Christ. In this there can be no compromise.

In our world today, the message of the *Gospel* is often seemingly drowned out by the noise generated by many other forces. Even in this time of economic recession, many look for the resurrection of the stock market or place their faith in the ascension of retail sales. This weekend's movie blockbuster release will garner many more headlines and much more attention than the miracles that faith and hope offer. Many still look to "princes or sons of men" for salvation.

Rather than despair over the present situation, I believe St. Paul would have relished this challenge. The marketplace of ideas that is our society today is remarkably similar to the agora of any ancient city, where not only goods were sold, but ideas and philosophies were debated. This is St. Paul's element. St. Paul would have charged in, sharing his faith, hoping to convince all, accepting any who believed - whether Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free man - because in

Christ Jesus these categories could all be transcended so that the kingdom of God could be advanced. St. Paul's message was simple - the Good News of Jesus Christ.

But in tonight's reading we also encounter a St. Paul who has come close to the end of his ministry. We know that St. Paul is on his way to Rome to face his martyrdom and so his words should have a special poignancy, especially when we hear those famous phrases, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." While St. Paul would preach the Gospel until his very last breath, his words place the responsibility for the message of the Gospel and the ministry of the kingdom of God in the hands of another, in the hands of the man who will succeed him in the apostolic calling. St. Paul's words to Timothy reflect the passing of the baton from one runner to the next. The race St. Paul ran was not a sprint; rather it was a relay. St. Paul was the opening leg of a journey that Timothy would continue.

The words of St. Paul to Timothy are words for us. The legacy of

St. Paul given to Timothy has now traveled for countless generations and is in our hands today. The message of Jesus Christ is our inheritance, our *parakatatheke*. Being faithful to that original apostolic preaching, we acknowledge the contributions of saints, holy fathers and mothers, millions of martyrs, and even more millions of men and women who have kept the faith alive in their hearts, living this Good News, each according to their time and place, answering the questions of their age with the Gospel itself. Our tradition is not to replicate the past, but to present the Gospel as a living reality, able to address the challenges of contemporary 21st century men and women. St. Paul has passed the baton to us. Now we are the ones running the race, looking for that crown of righteousness that Christ gives to His servants.



[Scenes from the Ecumenical Prayer Service at St. Cecilia's](#)



Bishop Tod Brown and Metropolitan Gerasimos





Father Steven Tschlis of St. Paul's and Father Albert Baca of St. Cecilia's





The Exchange of the Kiss of Peace between the two Bishops



*Bishop Tod Brown of Orange and Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco
at the conclusion of services.*