

Year of St Paul

Pope Benedict XVI has declared June 2008 – June 2009 a *Year of St Paul* in celebration of the 2000th anniversary of the apostle's birth. It is reckoned that St Paul was born between 7 – 10 A.D. The Holy Father explained that:

‘The Apostle of the Gentiles, who dedicated himself to the spreading of the good news to all peoples, spent himself for the unity and harmony of all Christians. May he guide us and protect us in this bimillenary celebration, helping us to advance in the humble and sincere search for the full unity of all the members of the mystical body of Christ.’

This series of leaflets offers a brief introduction to the letters of St Paul as heard at Sunday Mass. They are intended both for readers and members of the liturgical assembly to help them appreciate the context of the second reading and encourage a greater familiarity with St Paul's writings.

The letters to Timothy in the Sunday Lectionary

The first letter to Timothy is read from Sundays 24–26 in Ordinary Time Year C and followed by the second letter on Sundays 27–30.

My advice is that, first of all, there should be prayers offered for everyone — petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving — and especially for kings and others in authority, so that we may be able to live religious and reverent lives in peace and quiet. To do this is right, and will please God our saviour: he wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth.

1 TIMOTHY 2:1–4

Christ Jesus was made visible in the flesh, attested by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed to the pagans, believed in by the world, taken up in glory.

1 TIMOTHY 3:16

God our Father,
you gave your saint, Timothy,
the courage and wisdom
of the apostles:
may his prayers help us to live holy lives
and lead us to heaven, our true home.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.

**Liturgy
Office**
ENGLAND
& WALES

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the letters to Timothy

*If we have died with Christ,
then we shall live with him.
If we hold firm,
then we shall reign with him.
If we disown him,
then he will disown us.
We may be unfaithful,
but he is always faithful,
for he cannot disown his own self.*

2 TIMOTHY 2:11–13



2008–2009
YEAR OF
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St Paul's letters to Timothy

These two letters, with the letter to Titus, are often lumped together as the “Pastoral Letters”. Some people say that this is not very helpful, as it makes us see all three of them as the same sort of thing, whereas in fact they are very different. So the first thing that I should like you to do is to read through the two letters addressed to Timothy, looking out for their differences and their similarities.

If you do that, one thing that you may notice is that 1 Timothy is much more about how to run a church (by which I mean an assembly of Christians, not the building in which they assemble), and 2 Timothy is much more personal and intimate. In addition, 2 Timothy is written from prison, though it does not say where Paul's captivity was. Acts of the Apostles tells us of an imprisonment at Caesarea Maritima, on the coast north-west of Jerusalem, and another in Rome; and some scholars argue that Paul was also imprisoned at some point in Ephesus, in what is Turkey today; but this letter is not telling us which if any of these incarcerations the author has in mind.

You may also notice that 1 and 2 Timothy are also rather different from other Pauline letters, such as Romans and Corinthians. Now of course that might mean that Paul was writing for a rather different situ-

ation; or it might be, as some scholars argue, that it was not Paul who wrote these letters, but someone else, in a later generation, dealing with a situation where the Christian Church had become more established, and needed more permanent structures to keep going in a largely hostile world. You will see, for example, that both these letters contain quite a lot of instruction on Church discipline, and on the appointment of church officers; so by the time these letters have been written, there is the familiar three-fold structure of bishops and presbyters and deacons, and there is not really very much of that sort of thing in Paul's earlier letters.

The point seems to be that in these “Pastoral” Epistles we can see the Church struggling with new challenges, and changing to face a very different situation from that of its earliest years. As you read these letters, you might like to ask yourself how in your experience the Church grows and develops; and how it learns by tackling new problems.

One of the things that happens is that of ‘modelling’; so in these letters you will notice how Paul takes Jesus as his ‘model’, and in turn offers himself as a role-model for Timothy. Another development is that we find rules being laid down for different sections of the community: you will find

instructions for men, women, bishops, deacons, widows, elders, slaves, and the wealthy. In the earliest days of the Church there was much more emphasis on the equality of all in the body of Christ, and although this has not been lost, we can feel the group of Christians turning (inevitably, perhaps) into an institution, in which officials are appointed by the laying-on of hands. This is particularly true of 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy, you will find, is more personal and less institutional; but both of them speak of the ‘deposit of faith’ and of various church structures. They are also notably less fiery than the earlier Pauline letters, and show much more emphasis on ordered living, and on the need to make the Church acceptable to outsiders.

Some questions to consider:

- Do you notice any differences between 1 and 2 Timothy?
- Do you think that these “Pastoral Letters” have a different tone from those of Paul's earlier period?
- 1 and 2 Timothy have particular opponents in view, and give instructions on how to deal with them. Do you think that the Church today has dangerous enemies? If so, what should we do about them?