

# Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

## The Year of Saint Paul

### Part 6: Saint Paul the Preacher<sup>1</sup>

There is not a single person in Christian history more worthy of the title, “preacher,” than Saint Paul. His zeal and passion for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ was the hallmark of his life after his conversion on the road to Damascus. We know from Sacred Scripture that Paul traveled extensively, preaching mainly to the Gentiles and bringing many pagans to faith in Christ. In this article, I am going to point out two features in Paul’s life as a preacher that strike me as important in understanding him and understanding our own duty to share the Gospel.

Preaching was not an option for Paul, but an obligation. In his letters to various churches, Saint Paul frequently mentioned the drive he had to preach. Proclaiming the Gospel was not simply one part of his life amidst many other parts, but it was something central to his identity. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote, “If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it!” (1 Cor. 9:16). In this same letter, Saint Paul explained that preaching was the main ministry to which Christ had called him. He wrote, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel...” (1 Corinthians 1:17).

The most ironic feature of Paul’s life as a preacher was the fact that he did not consider himself a worthy or gifted preacher. He expressed his humility and unworthiness by writing, “To me, the very least of all the holy ones, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inscrutable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). Not only did Paul feel *unworthy* to be preaching the Gospel, he felt he lacked the *ability* to preach. In fact, many Bible scholars believe that Saint Paul may have struggled with some form of speech impediment since he was so vocal about his struggles preaching. In his second letter to the Corinthians he describes his preaching ability as “untrained,” writing, “Even if I am untrained in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things” (2 Cor. 11:6).

Regardless of whether Saint Paul was worthy or properly gifted to preach, he answered God’s call to share the saving news of Jesus Christ with anyone who would listen. He understood the extremely important role that preaching played in leading people to Christ. He expressed this beautifully in his letter to the Romans when he wrote—

But how can they call on [Christ] in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring (the) good news!”

-Romans 10:14-15

The faithfulness of Paul to the ministry of preaching serves as an inspiration to all of us. Sharing the Good News is not merely the job of priests and deacons, but it is a ministry that every single Christian shares. While not everyone will have an opportunity to preach at Mass, every Christian is called to proclaim the Gospel message in both word and deed to those around them. We can find great encouragement and strength in Saint Paul’s example, especially since we, like Paul, often feel unworthy and unprepared to serve Christ in such an awesome ministry. If Paul could dedicate his life to preaching despite his unworthiness and trouble speaking, then you and I can dedicate ourselves to spreading the Good News, too!

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<sup>1</sup> In honor of the “Year of Saint Paul,” this is part six of a ten part series on his life and writings.