

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 2nd letter to the Corinthians in the Sunday Lectionary

The letter is proclaimed over Sundays 7–14 in Year B.

For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here. It is all God's work. It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation. In other words, God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, and holding men's faults against them, and he has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled. So we are ambassadors for Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17–20

Father of mercies
and God of all consolation,
you do not wish the sinner to die
but to be converted and live.
Come to the aid of your people,
that they may turn from their sins
and live for you alone.
May we be attentive to your word,
confess our sins, receive your forgiveness,
and be always grateful
for your loving kindness.

Help us to live the truth in love
and grown into the fullness of
Christ your Son,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen. Rite of Penance

**Liturgy
Office**
ENGLAND
& WALES

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the 2nd letter to the Corinthians

*Blessed be the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
a gentle Father
and a God of all consolation,
who comforts us in all our sorrow,
so that we can offer others,
in their sorrows,
the consolation that we have received
from God ourselves.*

2 CORINTHIANS 1: 3–4



2008–2009
YEAR OF
ST PAUL

St Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians

One of the difficulties about 2 Corinthians is that it may be several different letters, all by Paul, and all addressed to Corinth, but put together in a slightly haphazard manner. So if you sit down and read it all the way through, that will explain why you may feel that it doesn't seem to 'hang together' all that well. It is nevertheless a fascinating document, and well worth reading reflectively.

The background seems to be that Paul had written 1 Corinthians, partly in response to the Corinthian divisions that he had heard about, and partly to answer some questions that they had put to him in a letter of their own. Paul's letter did not quite do the trick, however; some people were offended by Paul's tone (he gets a bit sarcastic in places in 1 Corinthians). So they were ready to listen to opponents of Paul who arrived in Corinth and announced that Paul was not a 'real apostle'. There were things that they could point to, of course: he had not been one of the Twelve, and he had, on his own admission, persecuted the Church. There was also another reason that may strike you as rather odd: some in Corinth had criticised him because he had refused to accept money for doing the work of the gospel! That is not generally a reason for criticising church leadership. So Paul went back to Corinth, and that visit was a disaster; Paul was publicly insulted (see 2 Corinthians

2:5-6), and subsequently wrote the Corinthians a 'tearful letter', which caused them great pain, as you will see if you look at 2 Corinthians 7:8-13. Some people think that this letter may have been what you find at 10:1-13:10, although others simply think that this 'tearful letter' has been lost. Certainly the tone seems to change rather suddenly at the beginning of chapter 10. But we cannot be sure, and most readers will prefer simply to take the letter as it stands.

What should you be looking out for as you read through this document? Possibly the first thing to notice is the emphasis on 'affliction' and 'comfort' (though different translations will give various versions of these words). For Paul, both affliction and receiving comfort in affliction are an important part of Christian ministry. The second thing is to observe that Paul's ministry has been under attack, and that he is quick to defend himself. So at 1:15-2:4 he is repelling the charge of not 'walking the talk'; he had promised to come to Corinth and failed to turn up. Then in chapters 3:1-6:2 he deals with various charges that they have been making against him in Corinth. In chapters 7-9, he is trying to persuade them to be generous in the matter of the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem. This was a matter of some importance to Paul, because the brethren there had nothing to live on; and for Paul

you could not call yourself a Christian if you did nothing to help those in need. But the Corinthians, who were certainly not short of cash, had proved very reluctant to put their hands into their pockets.

As we said above, the tone changes at chapter 10, where Paul deals with the charges that have been made by those who thought that they were 'real apostles'. Paul invents a ringingly contemptuous phrase for them, which we might translate as 'super-duper-apostles'. Then, in chapters 11 and 12, because he has got so cross with them, he gives us some precious autobiographical details, a thing that he only does when he is annoyed. So we must be grateful to his opponents who provoked him into revealing his ancestry (11:22), his sufferings (11:23-29), and, in an extraordinary passage that you should read very closely indeed, his mystical experiences (12:1-6). And it is typical Paul that he then goes on to talk about his 'thorn in the flesh' (12:7-10). No one knows what it was, though suggestions have included sexual temptations, epilepsy, blindness and even a literal 'thorn in the flesh'!

In 2 Corinthians, partly because he is so annoyed, we learn a good deal of intensely personal material about Paul; read this letter carefully, and use it to get to know this remarkable Apostle, warts and all.