

Pilgrimage to the Tomb of St Paul

Patriarchal Basilica of St Paul-Outside-the-Walls

After a welcome lie-in and a free morning, the next tour on the Fraternity itinerary was the pilgrimage to the Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Wall. This pilgrimage had an added significance given that the Church is celebrating the Pauline Year this year. The majestic basilica stands on the site of the burial place of St Paul and while the tomb of the Apostle was believed to be below the high altar, recent archeological excavations have proved this hypothesis to be true as the tomb itself has been unearthed. The present basilica is the second to stand on this site the first, built by the Emperor

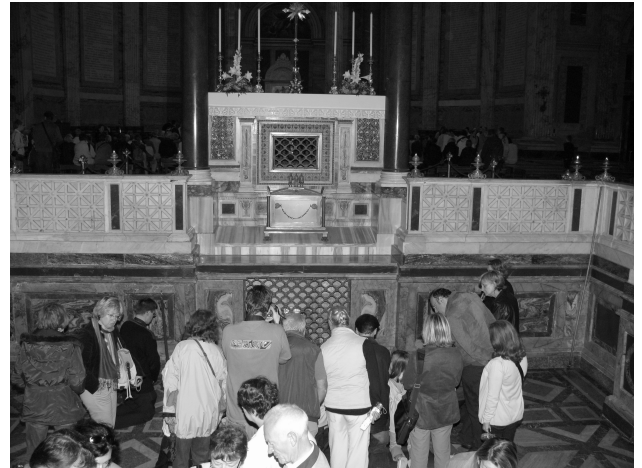


Constantine and modified and expanded a number of times over the centuries, was destroyed by fire in 1823. It was decided to rebuild the basilica as quickly as possible and governments and peoples from around the world contributed to the rebuilding and beautification of the new church. The basilica was reopened in 1840 but had to wait fifteen years before it was solemnly re-consecrated by Blessed Pope Pius IX.

The group arrived at the basilica as heavy rain was falling. A quick dash brought the pilgrims through the magnificent colonnade to the Pauline Door, a special doorway opened for the duration of the Jubilee Year. The basilica was crowded with pilgrims, as expected for the year that was in it. The confessio in particular was packed with people as they came to pray before St Paul's tomb.

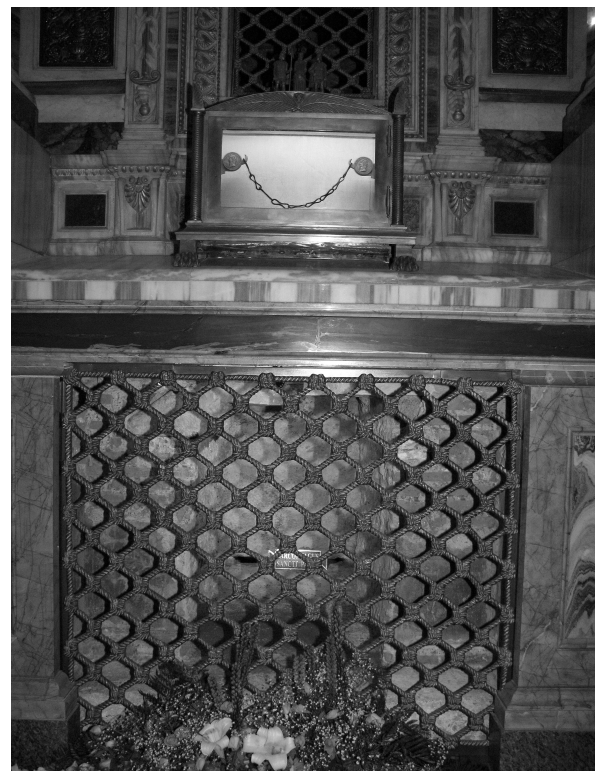
Our pilgrims made their way down into the confessio and spent some time in prayer. With Pope Benedict having granted a Plenary Indulgence under the usual conditions to all who visited the tomb, a number of pilgrims were keen to obtain it. The tomb

is situated directly under the Papal Altar and can be seen through a grille. Above the tomb part of the chain with which St Paul was bound is preserved in a reliquary.



Pilgrims praying before the tomb of St Paul

Following this time of prayer the group gathered with Bishop Smith in the Chapel of St Benedict for a Solemn Mass in honour of St Paul. The Bishop reminded the pilgrims of the reason for the Pauline Year: the means through which the members of the Church may become more familiar with the life, writings and teachings of the Apostle of the Gentiles.



Tomb of St Paul with the Reliquary with his chain above.

News had just come to the group of the death of one of the Fraternity's members, Evelyn Dowling, and she was remembered at the Mass. Fr Vincent Twomey delivered the homily in which he reflected on St Paul's life and teaching and drawing out its relevance for the Fraternity of St Genesius for whom St Paul is the theological master.



Bishop Smith, Fr Vincent and Fr John celebrating Mass in the chapel of St Benedict

Following the Mass, the group had a brief tour of the basilica, noting in particular the portraits of all the popes from St Peter to Pope Benedict XVI which decorate the frieze which surrounds the interior of the building. Other notable sights within the basilica include the large 12th century Candlestick, an altar of lapis lazuli gifted to the basilica by Tsar Nicholas I of Russia and a 12th century mosaic of Our Lady (*see below*) before which St Ignatius Loyola and his companions made their first public profession of vows in 1541. From the apse a magnificent mosaic dating from 1220 dominates the building. The 13th century cloister is a masterpiece of medieval architecture.



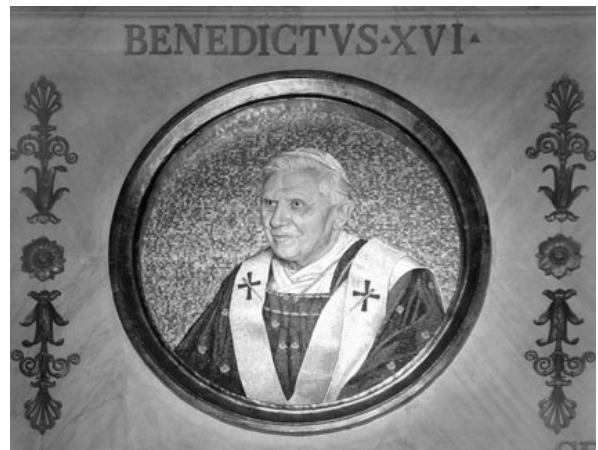
Not quite singing in the rain



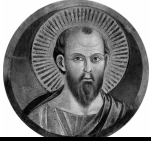
Christopher McCamley contemplating the basilica



Fr Vincent Twomey prepares to lead the troops through the Pauline Door



Portrait of Pope Benedict XVI in the frieze of the basilica



The Pauline Year

28th June 2008 – 29th June 2009

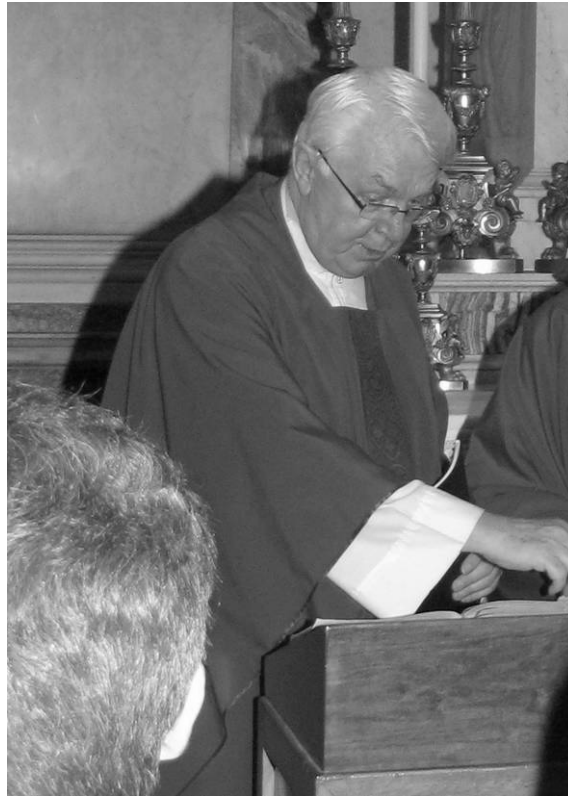
Homily of Rev. Prof. D. Vincent Twomey, SVD, at the Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls

This is another momentous occasion. We are here at the Tomb of St Paul after having visited the spot where the great Apostle to the Gentiles was martyred, probably in the year of Our Lord 67. And we are here in what has been designated the Year of St Paul by Pope Benedict, since it marks the 2000th anniversary of Paul's birth, which scholars calculate was probably in the year 8. Images of St Paul show him with a sword. The sword reminds us, first of all, of his death by beheading, since he was a Roman citizen, unlike Peter and others who were therefore crucified, but also it reminds us of passage in the Letter to the Hebrews, which tradition attributes to St Paul. It is a passage that sums up the life and theology of St Paul: *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* The Word of God made flesh is Jesus of Nazareth. To encounter him is to be wounded to core of our being by his love. To know the truth that He is, is to be liberated from all falsity and error, to be able to put everything into perspective, to see things from God's perspective. To know Christ is to be reborn. That is a key to what happened Paul when he encountered the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus in Syria. At the time, he was persecuting the Christians, and was literally struck down.

Why was he persecuting the early Christians? Saul, his original name, was born outside Palestine, in Tarsus, Asia Minor. Ever since the sixth century before Christ, Jews lived dispersed throughout the world in various cities. They formed tightly knit communities who loved their homeland, Palestine, the land God himself had given them. Like many Irish Americans, who are more Irish than those who lived at home, Jews of the Diaspora were more often more Jewish than the inhabitants of Palestine. Living among the pagan peoples and nations, they were acutely conscious that

they alone were God's chosen People, that no other people had a god that was as close to them as their God, that he had chosen their people to reveal his law exclusively to them, so that they could find their way to God. The Book of Baruch sums it up: *"This is our God; no other can be compared to him. He found the whole way to knowledge and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom he loved. Afterward she [divine wisdom] appeared upon earth and lived among men."* (Bar 3:36-7).

Saul was a Pharisee from the Diaspora. As a young boy, he came to Jerusalem to study at the school of the Rabbi



Gamaliel. He was zealous for his people and their sacred traditions sanctioned by God himself, summed up in the term The Law of Moses. He was horrified that some of his fellow-Jews were breaking away from these traditions and founding a sect based on the claims of a man who had been executed as a criminal and died the most shameful death possible, on a cross. Now they were claiming that the criminal had risen from the dead. This was blasphemy to him. He witnessed the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr, and approved of it: got what he deserved, he thought in his heart. Then he began to hunt down and imprison the adherents of this breakaway sect that was troubling his people and getting them to abandon the

Law, the sacred traditions of their fathers – until one day, on the road to Damascus, he was struck down and heard the voice: *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me."* *"Who are you, Lord"*, he cried out. *"I am Jesus whom you are prosecuting"*, came the reply. Stunned and blinded he was helped to Damascus, where he was baptized by Ananias, who was reluctant to baptize Saul until he was told by the Lord that he, the Lord, had chosen this man to carry his name to the other nations. Precisely that man who burned with zeal in his belief that God had bound himself exclusively to his own nation, Israel, was chosen by God to preach to all the nations that all are chosen, that all are called, that all are loved by the

one God, who created the Heavens and the earth. Now, in Christ, as Paul would write to the Galatians, there is neither Jew nor Pagan, slave or free, male or female, all are one in Christ. How did Paul come to this understanding?

At the centre of Paul's preaching was the Crucified Lord Jesus, a scandal to Jews and folly to the Pagans. Woe to me, if I preach anything but Christ Jesus and Him crucified, he once wrote. But how did he come to understand the meaning of the Crucifixion? Though the Eucharist, more precisely through the words of institution: This is my body, which is given for you. This is my blood poured out for the many. Let me quote the Holy Father, a quote taken from a Wednesday catechesis devoted to St Paul:

"... the Eucharist illumines the curse of the cross, changing it into a blessing (Gal 3:13-14), and on the other, [the words of Jesus at the Last Supper] explain the breadth of the very death and resurrection of Jesus. In [Paul's] letters, the "for you" of the institution becomes the "for me" (Gal 2:20), personalized, knowing that in that "you" he himself [Paul] was known and loved by Jesus and, on the other hand, "for all" (2 Cor 5:14): this "for you" becomes "for me" and "for the Church" (Eph 5:25), that is, also "for all" of the expiatory sacrifice of the cross (cf. Rom 3:25). By and in the Eucharist, the Church is built and recognizes herself as "Body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27), nourished every day by the strength of the Spirit of the Risen One".

The Church, Paul taught, is the Body of Christ that transcends all national, social and human boundaries: there is neither Jew nor Pagan, slave or free, male or female, all are one in Christ

That neatly sums up the core of Paul's theology as expressed in his writings. His whole missionary zeal was focused on bringing Christ crucified to anyone who would listen to the Good News that, irrespective of who we are or what evil we have done in the past, Christ Jesus, the Son of God, has died for each one of us personally, that he forgives us, that by accepting Christ in faith, we rise with Him and share in the Holy Spirit of God Himself. Now, we too can address God the Father in the most intimate way possible as Jesus Himself did when he called him Abba. And this transforms our lives in a way that is particularly relevant to the Fraternity of St Genesius, since it sums up the spirituality of the Fraternity. Just as Christ died for us, we who are "in Christ", who have accepted his personal love for us revealed on the Cross, now live not for ourselves but for Him and "for others", those whom he loves, which is everyone else. Our lives are to be lived like that of Christ "for others".

Our prayers are for others, especially the Mass, when we take part in Christ's own sacrifice "for others". This being "for others" is expressed not only in the prayers



of intercession but above all in the Canon of the Mass, the Eucharistic Prayers, when we pray for the Pope, Bishop, priests, laity, and, indeed, for all people of good will. We no longer live for ourselves, we no longer worry just about ourselves, we entrust our own cares to God's loving providence. We who are "in Christ" live for others. We share their sufferings and, above all, their joys. Since we are otherwise limited as individuals in our daily lives, then we can only focus on certain others, like our family and neighbours, our fellow-workers and friends. But our horizon must remain "all others". And so, above and beyond those who are close to us, the "others" for whom the Fraternity suffer and pray are those who engaged in the world of the theatre and the cinema. This is a special calling: to pray for those on stage and screen. These are men and women who can inspire and give much pleasure to others. They deserve our gratitude. Praying for them is one way of giving thanks. Those who work on stage and screen can also be of considerable influence on the way other people think and behave. The pull of transitory fame and vain glory can be overpowering. There is usually a price to be paid for celebrity status and it can be very high. Many suffer. We are concerned for them. They deserve our support, our suffering and our prayers. We pray that they will learn to remain humble, as only the greatest actors were and are. We pray above all that they too may come to know and accept the love of God for them revealed in Christ who died for us who wishes only one thing: that they may experience the joy and the glory that He alone can give. Amen.