

## Paul the Sinner (24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

### 1 Timothy 1:12-17—The Mercy Shown to Paul

<sup>12</sup> I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, <sup>13</sup> *though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,* <sup>14</sup> *and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.* <sup>15</sup> The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners;* <sup>16</sup> *but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.* <sup>17</sup> To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:12-17)

1. Pastoral Epistles: one of the “pastoral epistles” (3 letters: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus)
  - a. Written to individuals, not communities
  - b. To two young church leaders: Timothy and Titus
2. Paul the Persecutor: “I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted *him*” (1:13)

<sup>3</sup> Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. <sup>4</sup> And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, *why do you persecute me?*” <sup>5</sup> And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting...*” (Acts 9:3-5)

3. Mercy: because Paul acted “ignorantly” in “unbelief” (1:13)
4. Mission: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1:15)
5. Example: chooses Paul to be “an example” (1:16)

<sup>3</sup> “I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but *brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel*, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day. <sup>4</sup> *I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women...* (Acts 22:3-4)

### Living Tradition

John Chrysostom: If you have sinned and God has pardoned your sin, receive your pardon and give thanks. But do not be forgetful of your sin. It is not that you should fret over the thought of it, but that you may school your soul not to grow lax or relapse again into the same snares. This is what Paul did, not hiding his actions as a blasphemer, persecutor and injurer... For when you have learned who he was before, then you will be the more astonished at him. When you see what he came to be out of what he was, then you will commend him the more. *So if you have greatly sinned, you yourself upon*

*being changed will hope all the more by seeing him. Such an example comforts those who are in despair and causes them again to stand tall.* (John Chrysostom, *Homilies Concerning the Statues* 12.1; trans. NPNF 1)

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

1. How can Paul say that he is the “foremost of sinners” (1 Tim 1:15)? What sins do you think he is referring to?

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### For Further Reading

1. George T. Montague, S.M. *First and Second Timothy, Titus*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008.
2. Peter Gorday, *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2000.