

The Obedience of Faith (4th Sunday of Advent, Year A)

Romans 1:1-7—The Gospel of God

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for *the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets* in the holy Scriptures, *the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord*, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the obedience of faith* for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-7)

1. Context: opening lines of Paul's famous letter to the Romans (1:1)
2. Good News = "gospel" (Greek *euangelion*); promised by "prophets" (Rom 1:1-2)
 - a. Judaism: "good news" of coming of God (Isaiah 40:1-12)
 - b. Rome: "good news" of the birth of Caesar Augustus (Priene Inscription)

Since the Providence which has ordered all things is deeply interested in our life has set in most perfect order by giving us *Augustus*, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit mankind, *sending him as a savior*, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance (Greek *epiphanein*), surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god (Greek *theos*) Augustus was the beginning of the world of the good tidings (Greek *euangeliōn*) that came by reason of him."¹

3. Son of God:
 - a. Birth: descended from David (cf. 2 Sam 7:4)
 - b. Resurrection: "designated" Son of God "in power" through "resurrection" (1:4)
4. Obedience: "obedience" (Greek *hypakoē*) = listen and follow instructions:

Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient (Greek *hypakoē*) slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of *obedience, which leads to righteousness*? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Rom 6:16-18)

¹ Translation in M. Eugene Borin, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe, *Hellenistic Commentary on the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 169.

5. Faith: “faith” (Greek *pistis*) = “belief,” “trust,” “confidence,” “faithfulness”

[Abraham] did not weaken in *faith* (Greek *pistis*) when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. *No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God*, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, *fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised*. (Rom 4:19-21)

The Catechism on the “Obedience of Faith”

Catechism: By his Revelation, “the invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends, and moves among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company.” The adequate response to this invitation is faith. *By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God*. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls this human response to God, the author of revelation, “*the obedience of faith*.” (Rom 1:5) (CCC 142-43)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (4th Sunday of Advent, Year A)

1. If someone asked you, “What is the Good News?” or “What is the Gospel?,” what would you say? What does Paul mean by the expression?

For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. Gerald Bray, ed. *Romans* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1998).
3. Frank J. Matera, *Romans* (Paideia; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).