

Introduction to Philippians (25th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A)

Philippians 1:20-24

²⁰ Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* ²² If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. *My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.* ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account... ²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.... (Philippians 1:20-24, 27)

Introduction to Philippians

1. Authorship: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:1)
2. Date: ca. A.D. 61-63 (traditional)
 - a. During Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome (cf. Acts 28:17-31)
 - b. Same time as other “Prison Epistles” (Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians)
 - c. While Paul is in “Caesar’s household” (Phil 4:22)
3. Audience:
 - a. Laity: “to *all the saints* in Christ Jesus at Philippi” (Phil 1:1)
 - b. Clergy: “with *bishops* and *deacons*” (Phil 1:1)
4. Church at Philippi: founded during Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-40)

¹¹ Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to *Philippi*, which is *the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony.* (Acts 16:11-12)

- a. Jewish Community: Paul goes first to the “place of prayer” (Acts 16:13)
- b. Conversion of Lydia: “a worshiper of God” (Acts 16:14-15)
- c. Exorcism: of a girl with a “spirit of divination” (Acts 16:16-18)
- d. Arrested: for teaching “not lawful” for “Romans (Acts 16:20-21)

No one [=no Roman] shall have gods for himself, either new or foreign gods, *unless they are officially recognized.* (Cicero, *De legibus* 2.8.19)¹

- e. Imprisonment and Miraculous Earthquake: Paul and Silas beaten, imprisoned, miraculous escape through an earthquake (Acts 16:22-26)
- f. Baptism of Philippian Jailer: and his household (Acts 16:27-34)
- g. Release and Public Apology: because of Paul’s citizenship (Acts 16:35-40)

¹ Translation in Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 587. Cf. Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 67.14.2; 57.18.5.

4. Purpose:

- a. Thanksgiving for Partnership in the Gospel (Phil 1:3-11)
- b. Paul’s Imprisonment: Providence, Prayers for Deliverance (Phil 1:12-26)
- c. Encouragement: while suffering for Christ (Phil 1:27-30)
- d. Imitation of Christ: exhortation to *humility* (Phil 2:1-13)
- e. Timothy and Epaphroditus: Paul’s hopes to send them (Phil 2:19-30)
- f. Circumcision Party: warnings against them (Phil 3:1-21)
- g. Euodia and Synteche: reconciliation (Phil 4:1-3)
- h. The Secret of Joy and Peace (Phil 4:4-13)
- i. Gratitude for financial assistance (Phil 4:14-23)

5. Lectionary: Ordinary Time, follows the letter to the Romans

Year A

Philippians 1-4, samples

(25th-28th Sundays in Ordinary Time)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (25th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. Why does Paul consider it “gain” to “die” (Phil 1:21)? What is the historical context of Paul’s life that leads him to make such a statement?

For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. Mark J. Edwards, ed. *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VIII; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1999).
3. Dennis Hamm, S.J., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).