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Two Pauls

Rev. Edward L. O'Malley

In the Epistle today, from St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle speaks of the brother "who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel," — the same brother who was "appointed by the churches" to travel with the Apostle in his missionary journeys. This brother was St. Luke, to whom St. Paul refers in another place as his "most dear physician." St. Luke not only took part in the work of doing all that his medical expertise could do to protect and sustain the physical strength of the ardent Apostle who was willing "to spend and be spent" if only Christ might be known and loved by all.

We know that St. Luke was the author of the Acts of the Apostles and also of the Third Gospel — so precious because of its details concerning the Annunciation, the Visitation and the

infancy and childhood of Christ. Beyond that there is little that can be established with any appreciable degree of historical certitude concerning St. Luke. But in that little that is known with certitude there is one detail that speaks volumes concerning Luke's character, his loyalty, his fidelity.

We find it in another of St. Paul's Epistles — in the Second Letter to Timothy, written at the close of Paul's life from the Mamertine prison in Rome where St. Paul awaited his final witnessing to his Lord. After warning Timothy that there will be false teachers "holding the form of religion but denying the power of it," and after exhorting Timothy to preach the word, (to) be urgent in season and out of season, (to) convince, rebuke and exhort, (to) be unflinching in patience

(Editor's Note: This is the sermon given by Father O'Malley at the White Mass on the feast of St. Luke. Father O'Malley is Diocesan Director of the Propagation of the Faith and Moderator of St. Luke's Guild of Albany.)

and teaching," the Apostle St. Paul speaks of himself: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his coming." (2 Timothy, 4,2;4,7-8)

Then St. Paul expresses his human longing for some who will stand with him and console him. He mentions one Demas, who, he says, "in love with this present world, has deserted me. . ." He mentions two others who have departed. Then he refers to Luke: "Luke alone is with me." (4,9-11)

"Luke alone is with me." Luke the most dear physician, faithful to the end — faithful and loyal to the Apostolic Leader, supporting and consoling him in tribulation, unto the end.

That was nineteen hundred years ago when Luke the faithful physician remained with Paul the Apostle in the Roman prison. How greatly the world has changed since then! There is not a surviving trace of the seemingly impregnable imperial power of that ancient world; all that remain are ruins and dead monuments. They are only museum pieces and tourist attractions! Whole civilizations and cultures have made their appearance, have flourished and declined, and disappeared.

But throughout all this process of historical development and change there is one living Presence that has perdured, — one authoritative Voice that has spoken through the centuries, and that still speaks, — one

trans-historic Power of the Spirit, that alone is not overcome and displaced by the inexorable march of time. *This Presence is the presence of Christ*, speaking in the Voice of the Apostolic authority which he—Christ—illumines and sustains by the same strength today with which he sustained Paul in his prison. Listen to the words which the Apostle wrote from prison to Timothy: "At my first defense no one took my part; all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the word fully, that all the Gentiles might hear it." (2 Tim. 4,18-19)

When we hear these words, I wonder if our thoughts turn to another Paul who today exercises the supreme authority of the Apostolic See, and who, strengthened by the Lord, must bear the burden of proclaiming the word fully before a resisting world.

"You will know the Truth," Christ said to the crowds in Jerusalem, "and the Truth will make you free." (John, 8,32). The Truth of Christ, steadfastly witnessed to and proclaimed by the teaching authority of his Church, has led our fathers down through the Christian centuries. It has led them out of darkness into light, out of every threat of slavery — personal, social, economic, political, spiritual — into an ever developing freedom of the sons of God. Hilaire Belloc was not exaggerating when in his famous epigram he expressed his conviction that European civilization was the fruit of the Christian gospel proclaimed and set forth by the teaching Church: "The Faith is Europe, and Europe is the Faith."

But this has not always been a triumphal procession. The Church has ever known persecution—Popes have ever had to face misunderstandings. Remember less than 100 years ago Pius IX went into hiding to escape death and that his body had to be buried in secret lest it be thrown in the Tiber by an angry and misunderstanding mob.

Yes, the teacher of Christian Truth that leads to freedom has never had an easy time. The apostolic Authority has always had to bear misunderstanding, opposition, hostility, abuse. What Paul wrote to Timothy finds its reflection in all ages of the Church: "You have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed all who desire to lead a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. . ." (2 Tim. 3,10-12)

But just as the Apostle Paul, awaiting the end of his labors in the Roman prison, was humanly consoled by the fidelity of followers like Timothy, the worthy bishop, and Luke, the faithful physician, so today's Paul VI knows a deep measure of human consolation in the knowledge that throughout the Church there are legions of the

faithful, priests and laity, bishops like Timothy, and physicians like Luke, who are with him — unto the end.

And they are with him for one supreme reason, namely, that when they hear the Voice of the Apostolic authority, whether it speaks in Paul VI or John or Pius or Leo — or Peter, they hear not a human teacher but the divine Teacher Himself. And they remember the answer that Peter made to the Master in Capharnaum of Galilee long ago, when Christ first promised the gift of the Eucharist to his followers — "After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him because they found it "a hard saying." Jesus said to the twelve, 'Will you also go away?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'" (John, 6. 66-8)

As your moderator, my dear physicians of the diocese of Albany, and on this day when we come together to give our corporate act of worship to our heavenly patron, I simply invite you to reflect—in the light of history—upon the deep aspects of our situation today. Realize each is called to give witness, to manifest his loyalty, to prove his fidelity to Christ in this critical moment of history. Yes, my dear doctors I invite you to be other Lukes—God love and bless you.