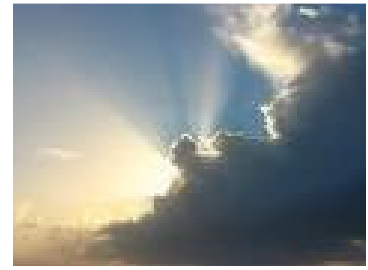


Reflection #9: Paul's Masterpiece

When Paul went to Corinth in 55 AD, he found (to his relief!) that his letters had had a healing effect on the community and that harmony had been restored. He then decided to go to Spain and for the sake of his credibility, wanted to be sent by the church of Rome (Rom. 15:24). Having asked Prisca and Aquila to go to Rome to prepare the way for him, he spent the spring of 56 writing his letter to the Romans - his masterpiece! The theme is "the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16).



The first eleven chapters show a wide historical perspective, vast knowledge of scripture, sophisticated interpretation and remarkable literary quality. Earlier (while imprisoned in Ephesus) he had written about the supremacy of Christ and the glory of creation to the Colossians who had become influenced by "angelizers" - a Jewish mystical-ascetic movement. In Rom 8, he develops this theme further as he includes all of creation in the salvation won by Christ (Rom.8:19-23). A favorite theme - the love of Christ - shines forth ecstatically in the passage: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom.8:35-39).

His greatest literary gem is considered by some to be the hymn in Chapter 11: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rm11:33-36).

Ch.12-15, treating specific issues in Rome, illustrate his constant theme of self-sacrificing love in the community, like Christ on the cross. Ever the community-builder, Paul ends his letter with affectionate personal greetings to a long list of women and men in Rome (Rom.16:1-16).

Allowing the Christians in Rome the time they needed to reflect on his lengthy letter, Paul decided to go on a collecting tour to help the struggling church in Jerusalem. However, when in arrived in the Holy City, he was arrested for supposedly bringing a Gentile into a Temple section reserved to Jews and was then held in jail in Caesarea for two years. Appealing to the procurator, Festus, to have his case heard by the emperor, Paul was sent to Rome in fall of 59 AD but his ship was caught in a storm and suffered shipwreck near the island of Malta where he and the other prisoners then spent the three winter months. Through Paul's preaching and healing the Maltese were converted to Christ. When he arrived in Rome in spring of 60 AD, Paul was held under house arrest for two years during which time he received visitors and continued to preach. Finally set free, he spent a fruitless summer in Spain, then did missionary work in Illyricum (Croatia) for two years, after which he returned to Ephesus then settled at nearby Miletus.

1. As I reflect on my life, what achievement can I identify as the "masterpiece" that God has worked through me?
2. How have I been a reflection of God's beauty, truth and goodness?
3. What feelings do these memories arouse in me?