

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost



Those who Saw the Risen Lord

IN TODAY'S READING St Paul articulates what he calls "*the Gospel*," the heart of the Christian message "*in which you stand, by which also you are saved*" (1 Cor 15:1, 2). That Gospel is the message of Christ's resurrection: both that He rose (the historical event) and that He is risen (that He lives now in glory).

St Paul stresses here that he **received** this Gospel which he has passed on to the Corinthians. We are told that, after Paul was converted and baptized, he stayed for "*some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God*" (Acts 9:19, 20). After "*many days were past*" (v.23) he went to Jerusalem and was taken to the Apostles. It has been generally assumed that St Paul "received" the Gospel at these early contacts.

St Paul himself, writing earlier to the Galatians, gives us another scenario. He affirmed that "*... the Gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ*" (Gal 1:12). Here St Paul is emphasizing the divine origin of the Gospel message – it is not just a story or philosophy developed by men; its origin is God. Some commentators have suggested that Paul received this Gospel from Christ at his conversion on the road to Damascus.

The chronology St Paul recounts in Galatians also differs from that in Acts. In Acts we are told that Paul spent some days in Damascus then returned to Jerusalem where he recounted his experience of Christ to the Apostles (see Acts 9:23-26, ff.). He tells the Galatians, however, that he did not go back to Jerusalem at that time but to "Arabia" (the modern Kingdom of Jordan). "*I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother*" (Gal 1:16-18).

In any case the purpose of these passages was not to provide a diary of Paul's experiences; it was to authenticate Paul's conversion by the Lord (Acts) and His approach to the Gentiles (Galatians). This may be why the compilers of the New Testament included both Galatians and Acts in the canon despite these conflicting accounts. The doctrines they teach rather than the biographical details they present are the reason why these books are Scripture.

Appearances of the Risen Christ

Paul indicated that his message is "*...that Christ died for our sins*

according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3, 4), then lists a number of people who saw the risen Christ, some of whom are mentioned in the Gospels while others are not.

The first mentioned are "Cephas, then the twelve." The Evangelists recount a number of these manifestations as well. They also say that Christ's tomb was first found to be empty by the myrrh-bearing women who heard the angelic announcement of the Resurrection but did not see Jesus. Only John tells of Christ manifesting Himself to Mary Magdalene, who "came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord" (Jn 20:18). Paul does not mention any of these women. In the Roman Empire the witness of women had no legal standing. They could not vote or hold office. They could not give testimony or even witness legal documents. To proclaim Christ's resurrection on the strength of a woman's testimony would have been unthinkable.

Appearance to 500 Brethren

The remaining appearances which St Paul cites here are not found in the Gospels. There are no first century document attesting to them. In his retelling of the Gospels, Pope Benedict XVI simply says that these three accounts come from "further traditions."

The most questioned is St Paul's testimony that Christ was seen by "over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep" (v. 6). Such a manifestation would have attracted such attention that many would have recorded it.

Some have speculated that this appearance refers to the Ascension. St John Chrysostom acknowledges the existence of this opinion but does not adopt it himself. His comment on this verse is based, of course, on the original Greek which is not translated literally in modern English Bibles. It reads: "After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:6). Chrysostom offered this opinion: "Some say that *above* means *above, from heaven*; that is, not walking upon earth, but above and overhead He appeared to them: adding, that it was [Paul's](#) purpose to confirm, not only the Resurrection, but also the Ascension. Others say that the expression, *above five hundred, means more than five hundred*" (Hom. 38 on 1 Cor.).

This account also seems to contradict the witness of St Peter. Speaking to the centurion Cornelius and his companions Peter witnessed that the risen Christ "...showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and

drank with Him after He arose from the dead" (Acts 10:40-44. Scholars, both ancient and modern, have been unable to satisfactorily identify the event St Paul is citing.

The Appearance to James

The Lord Jesus' relatives appear frequently in the Gospels as doubters of His mission. They reacted strongly when Jesus called together the Twelve at the start of His work, "*But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind'*" (Mk 3:21).

Jesus' relatives are depicted as "outsiders" to the community of His followers. "*Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, 'Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.' But He answered them, saying, 'Who is My mother, or My brothers?' And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother'" (Mk 3:33-35).*

It does not seem that Jesus' relatives were among His disciples before His resurrection, with the likely exception of the Theotokos. This may be why the Lord entrusted her to His favorite disciple, John.

After the Resurrection, however, we find James, the son of St Joseph by his first wife, described as a leading apostle. He and other family members may have been converted when Christ appeared to James, as St Paul mentioned. Since James, as the eldest son, was the head of the family it was natural that the believers in Jerusalem looked to him as the head of their local Church.

All the Apostles

We are used to thinking of the Twelve first chosen by Christ as "the Apostles." In the Scriptures, however, the term apostle is also used for the Seventy whom He sent "*two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go*" (Lk 10:1). The two disciples who encountered the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus (see Lk 24:13-35) were of this company.