

New Brighton, Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2022

## St Paul

### His life, his missions (part 2)

Along his first missionary trip, Saint Paul made contact with this pagan world, this world that God reserved for his conquest through the powerful preaching of his vase of election, St Paul.

In the first talk of this series about the Apostle of the Gentiles and his doctrine, we were introduced to know a bit more about him and his personality, his education and religious background, and we understood, how Saint Paul received the light of the Faith on Damascus' way; how he learned everything from God. We stopped after his first missionary trip across Anatolia and his decisive inputs for the Council of Jerusalem.

Moses' Law being formally abolished for the newly baptised Christians, it was time for Saint Paul to start again his missionary trips. During his first trip he saw the souls in distress, their great spiritual needs and how powerful the word of the Gospel could be for these people drown in the spiritual darkness of paganism. He also knew how much the cost was to gain all these conversions: sufferings in his own flesh, tiredness, persecutions, thorn into his soul. But he knew that to produce life in these souls, death had to be active in him.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Second missionary trip. (*Act, XV, 36 – XVIII, 22*)

Antioch – Tarsus – Derbe – Troas – Philippi – Tessalonia – Athens – Corinth – Ephesus – Caesarea – Jerusalem – Antioch.

The first intention of Saint Paul was to visit again the first Christian communities he founded during his first journey. "Paul said to Barnabas: let us return and visit our brethren in all the cities wherein we have preached the word of the Lord to see how they do."<sup>2</sup>

Barnabas accepted without hesitation, but he wanted to take with them his cousin Mark, the same Mark who renounced to follow Saint Paul across Anatolia during the first trip. Saint Paul refused, and Barnabas left him to go back to Cyprus. Saint Paul went to Cilicia and started his mission again. We don't know anything else about Barnabas from the Act of the Apostles. But we cannot forget here all the things he did for the Church at the very beginning. Since the very first days he sold all his belongings and gave it to the Apostles. It's also him who

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<sup>1</sup> Auguste Fliche & Victor Martin (under the direction), *Histoire de l'Église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, Jules Lebreton & Jacques Zeiller, Vol 1, L'Église primitive, Bloud & Gay, Paris, 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Act. XV, 36.

introduced Saint Paul to the Apostles and to the Church, when they were a bit reluctant about his conversion.

This apparent argument of one hour contributed the expansion of the preaching of the Gospel across Mediterranean Sea. Barnabas and Mark would go to Cyprus; Saint Paul would be the tireless pilgrim of the Gospel across Asia Minor and Greece.

Instead of having his old companion Saint Paul took with him Silas. He was one of the prophets of the Church of Jerusalem. As he was sent from Jerusalem to Antioch and known from the Jewish people, this quality would make easier the accordance with the converted Jews, and his privilege of roman citizenship would be a guarantee in the official world, Hellenistic and Roman.<sup>3</sup>



Saint Paul never abandoned the christian communities he founded. He started his new journey with the visit of these communities. When he arrived in Debre and Lystris, he met a disciple named Timothy. He was the son of a Jewish woman who became Christian and of a Greek father. As he had good reputation, Saint Paul decided to take Timothy with him, to help him in his mission.<sup>4</sup> He gave him the circumcision. Don't get it wrong. Nothing here, is in contradiction with what was decided during the Council of Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, Saint Paul refused to give the circumcision to Titus to affirm the freedom of the pagans who converted. But for Timothy, who was born of a Jewish mother, he should have

<sup>3</sup> Auguste Fliche & Victor Martin (under the direction), Histoire de l'Église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours, Jules Lebreton & Jacques Zeiller, Vol 1, L'Église primitive, Bloud & Gay, Paris, 1946

<sup>4</sup> Act, XVI, 1-3

received circumcision at birth. To not be seen as a renegade, and to be able to enter the synagogues with Saint Paul, Timothy was given the circumcision. In those circumstances, as in many others, Saint Paul acts himself as a Jew amongst the Jews.

After visiting the first Christian communities he founded during his first travel, he went up to the north of Asia Minor, around Galatia and Bithynia. We don't have many reports in the Acts of the Apostles about the preaching of the Gospel in Galatia, but the epistle to the Galatians is giving us a quick overview of how well welcomed was the apostle, and how the relationships with the Galatians were full of gratitude and paternal confidence.

*“Be ye as I, because I also am as you, brethren, I beseech you: You have not injured me at all. And you know, how through infirmity of the flesh, I preached the Gospel to you heretofore: And your temptation, my flesh; you despise not, nor rejected: but received me as an Angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then your blessedness? For I bear you witness, that, if it could be done, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and would have given them to me.”<sup>5</sup>*

The preaching of the Gospel to the Galatians was mentioned with only few words in the Acts. Obviously, Saint Luke is moving quickly towards Macedonia. And the Holy Spirit is also pushing Saint Paul. *“And a vision was shewed to Paul in the night, which was a man of Macedonia standing and beseeching him and saying: Pass over into Macedonia and help us.”<sup>6</sup>*

The mission of Macedonia, which start with this divine appeal, was reserving to Saint Paul some of the greatest joys of his apostolate, joys that will mostly be paid through lot of sufferings and persecutions. All his conquests here, like everywhere, were paid at high cost. But, in Macedonia, the apostle was less contested and less fought. He never found in other place than Philippi and Thessalonica an attachment to him which would be so devoted and faithful.

Until then, the greatest obstacle to the preaching of the apostle was the hostility of the Jews. In Philippi, difficulties came from other situations. Saint Paul had to deal directly with the demon. A young possessed slave, who was predicting the future with a certain financial success for his masters, started to follow St. Paul's preaching, and like in Jesus' time, she was giving testimony of the truth of his preaching. Saint Paul imposed the silence to the demon and freed that young slave. We can imagine how the masters were upset with that, seeing the source of their benefits going away. They accused Saint Paul, Timothy and Silas of preaching another religion. Immediately, the leaders of the city, worried about the public order, put them into jail. But during the night, a miracle happened: an earthquake move the walls of the prison. The doors opened and the chains of the prisoners felt by themselves. The guard was so terrified and despaired, that he was about to commit suicide. But the voice of Saint Paul reassured him, as none of the prisoners escaped. Docile with the preaching of the Apostle, the man requested the Baptism. The day after the leaders of the city came to free the prisoners. But proudly, Saint Paul refused a hidden liberation. Silas and himself were roman citizens. They were unjustly treated by the magistrates. Therefore, they requested a public reparation.

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<sup>5</sup> Gal. IV, 12-15

<sup>6</sup> Act, XVI, 9

They continued their trip to Thessalonica. This city was the biggest harbour of Macedonia. City of trade, Thessalonica gathered an important Jewish community. Saint Paul did not ignore that. As per his custom, he addressed these of his race first. For three weeks, on the Sabbath day, Saint Paul and Silas argued with the Jews about the Holy Scriptures. Through the Bible, the apostle was showing that the Messiah was to suffer and resuscitate. And then, he was giving the evidence that all these divine prophecies were realised by Jesus.

The apostolate of Saint Paul in Thessalonica was probably rather long. But the success of the apostle upset a lot the Jews. They tried to assault the house where he was staying, but finding nobody, they decided to accuse them in front of the master of the city using exactly the same insult that was made against Jesus, years before: These people who are announcing the kingship of Jesus, are they not going against Caesar? That was nothing else than high treason. After such a warning, a longer stay would have been imprudent. Without delay, during the night, Paul and Silas went away.

Although Saint Paul was truly desiring to come back to Thessalonica, he had to be careful for a while. He went to Athens. While he was waiting his companions, the sight of a city full of idols was making him full of anger. He spent a lot of time each Sabbath day chatting with the Jews and using all the time he could have on the Agora. The Agora was truly the centre of Athens life. The place where everybody was, brought by curiosity, politics, business.

Despite the concurrency of Alexandria, Tarsus, or Antioch, Athens was the homeland of bright speakers. Philosophers were listening to Saint Paul. But they contempt him. Hearing him speaking about Jesus and the resurrection, there were only imagining he was propagating the worship of a new idol. They dragged him to the famous place of Athens: the Areopagus. The Herald of Christ could not miss such opportunity that was offered to him. Taking as a starting point the scripture upon an altar he spotted alongside his visits of the city.

*“For passing by and seeing your idols, I found an altar also, on which was written “to the unknown god”. What therefore you worship, without knowing it, that I preach to you: God, who made the world, and all things therein; he, being Lord of heaven on earth, dwelleth not in temples, made with hands.”<sup>7</sup>*

As the Jews were remembering about their traditions, the Greek loved about their philosophers and artists. Saint Paul understood that more than anyone else. For the Jews, Saint Paul was calling to their memory the remembrance of Israel. For the Greek, after observing their religion He reminded them all these religious principles that the philosophers and poets acknowledged. His preaching at the Areopagus was listened until he spoke about the resurrection of the dead: they smiled.

In no other place than Athens, the fruits of his apostolic work were so weak. What a deception! In many other places, Saint Paul founded local churches. In Athens, nothing. A few generous souls came to him. But not enough to found a real church. Saint Paul himself made a comment about this situation: *“For the word of the cross, to them, indeed that perish, is foolishness; but to them that are saved, that is, to us, it is the power of God. For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of*

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<sup>7</sup> Acts, XVII, 23-24

*the wise, and the prudence of the prudent I will reject. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world, by wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God, that by the foolishness of our preaching, to save them that believe.”*<sup>8</sup>

In these few words we can find the condemnation of the blindfold and contempt wisdom of the Athenians, but also, all the preaching of Saint Paul to Corinthians.

For a traveller who was coming from Athens to Corinth he had a same kind of impression we could have from Oxford to London. From the University City where everything is concentrated in its colleges, we are thrown into the agitation of a city and harbour. Athens was nothing more than a university city. But it was keeping only pride and decorum. They rejected the preaching of Saint Paul. And for a long time, it remained one of the most dangerous centres of the pagan opposition to Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

Corinth was one of the most important centre for business in Mediterranean Sea. It was no longer only a Greek city as a lot of people from Italy were living there as well as Oriental. The original people from Greece were only a small part of the population.

The biggest obstacle Saint Paul had to encounter in Corinth was the degeneration of the civilization. Only the grace from Christ could win. The answers of Saint Paul to the Corinthians in his letters are giving us a small overview of where they were coming from. Saint Paul wrote to his faithful: Do not mix with immodest people. Corinthians were answering: Therefore, we need to go out of this world. And the apostle patiently explained them that he was not forbidding any relationship with sinners, but forbidding to tolerate them in the Church.

A lot of people came to Saint Paul to receive the Baptism. But as he knew, all these conversions never happened without a lot of sufferings before and during. In Corinth, like anywhere else, most of the difficulties came from the Jews, alongside with the licence of moral.

For 18 months, St. Paul preached the Gospel in Corinth, but also in the cities around. The Jews jealous because of the success of Saint Paul's preaching, dragged him in front of the proconsul, who was the brother of the Roman philosopher Seneca. As many Romans, he was only contempt for the Jews. His answer to the Jews is demonstrating it quite clearly. They're not only rejected from their complaint. But the proconsul explained them that Rome is not to intervene in their religious quarrels. Through his judgement, the brother of Seneca was giving freedom to Christian propaganda. Saint Paul used it to stay longer in Corinth.

Saint Paul finally left Corinth and went by boat to Ephesus and from there to Caesarea and Jerusalem. He greeted the church in Jerusalem, and came back to Antioch, where he rest a little bit before starting his third trip.

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<sup>8</sup> I Cor, I, 18-21

<sup>9</sup> Auguste Fliche & Victor Martin (under the direction), Histoire de l'Église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours, Jules Lebreton & Jacques Zeiller, Vol 1, L'Église primitive, Bloud & Gay, Paris, 1946

## 2. Third missionary trip (Acts XVIII, 23 – XXI, 16)

Antioch – Tarsus – Iconium – Ephesus – Smyrna – Pergamum – Philippi – Thessalonica  
– Athens – Corinth – Berea – Philippi – Troas – Tyre – Caesarea – Joppa – Jerusalem.

Saint Paul visited again the first Christian communities he founded during his first missionary trip. From Antioch he went to Tarsus, Lystra and Antioch in Phrygia. After seeing them, he went to Ephesus again. During the 1<sup>st</sup> century of our era, Ephesus was the capital of the proconsular Asia, one of the most flourishing cities of the empire. Ephesus was well known for the beauty of his monuments, such as the Artemision, the Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world. The theatre, which was up the city could contain up to 23,000 people. As soon as he arrived in Ephesus, Saint Paul found people he thought were Christians. But asking them about the sacrament of confirmation, he realised that those people who were calling themselves Christians were not even baptised. They didn't know about the existence of the Holy Ghost and therefore about the Holy Trinity. They were baptised, but with the penitential baptism of John the Baptist. Without the belief in Holy Trinity, there is no christian baptism, because by the authority of Christ, baptism is given in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. The Apostle completed their instruction, baptised them and confirmed them.

After his apostolate in Ephesus, Saint Paul went Troas and Philippi and Thessalonica. We don't know very much from the Acts of the Apostles about this part of the trip. After the feast of Easter he celebrated in Philippi, Saint Paul and his companions crossed again the strait and went to Ephesus and Miletus. One interesting thing to notice is what happened in Ephesus. At that time, a riot started against the Apostle because the business of the little statues of Artemis, therefore an idol, was threatened through the numerous conversions encouraged by the preaching of the apostle. This riot deserves our attention because it revealed the apostolic action of Saint Paul and its fecundity. The first time, in 52, when the Apostle arrived in Ephesus, he didn't find any Christian. But when he came back a year after, he found a dozen of people who were converted. And after 2-3 years, the progress of christianism was so quick that the idol makers felt threatened in their business. Saint Paul testified himself in the Second Epistle to the Corinthian about that: *"For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, of our tribulation, which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure above our strength, so that we were weary even of life. But we had in ourselves the answer of death, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, who raiseth the dead. Who hath delivered and doth deliver us out of so great dangers: in whom we trust that he will yet also deliver us."*<sup>10</sup>

Once more, Saint Paul seems to escape, and be like a fugitive for his enemies. He left Ephesus, as he left Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea or Corinth. Instead of understanding these as a flee from the danger, we should see the tireless missionary who, leaving behind him established churches, was leaving to found new churches. All the Epistles we have in the Bible to the

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<sup>10</sup> II Cor, I, 8-9

Thessalonians, the Philippians, to the Corinthians are giving a testimony of the vigilant authorities St. Paul is continuously having above his disciples.

The conclusion of this third trip across Asia and Greece finished to Caesarea, where St. Paul stayed a little while, and then to Jerusalem. In order to demonstrate his faith to the law and the teaching of the Gospel, and to purify himself, he made the vow of being a nazirite. Nazirite comes from the Hebrew word *nazir* meaning "consecrated" or "separated". Those who put themselves under a Nazirite vow do so by adding unto themselves a degree of sanctity, as it says: "Until the time is completed, etc., he shall be holy." A person who puts himself under a Nazirite vow without designating how long he intends to remain as such, he is obligated in all that pertains to Nazirite strictures for a period of thirty days. This vow required the person to observe the following strictures:

- Abstain from all wine and anything else made from the grape vine plant.
- Refrain from cutting the hair on one's head; but to allow the locks of the head's hair to grow.
- Not to become ritually impure by contact with corpses or graves, even those of family members.

After following these requirements for a designated interval (which would be specified in the individual's vow), the person would make three offerings: a lamb as a burnt offering (*olah*), a ewe as a sin offering (*hatat*), and a ram as a peace offering (*shelamim*), in addition to a basket of unleavened bread, grain offerings and drink offerings, which accompanied the peace offering. He would also shave his head in the outer courtyard of the Temple in Jerusalem and then he would place the hair on the same fire as the peace offering (Numbers 6:18).

The word נָזִיר appears first in the Hebrew Bible in Genesis chapter 49, verse 26, which speaks of the blessings given to Joseph by his father Jacob. The word is translated in English as *prince*, which is inaccurate; Jacob used the term because Joseph spent time in forced isolation from his family to fulfill the will and plan of God, making Joseph a Nazirite before the laws of Moses and thereby implying that there was no sin attached to this status by Jacob, who was describing how blessed Joseph was of the God of his fathers.

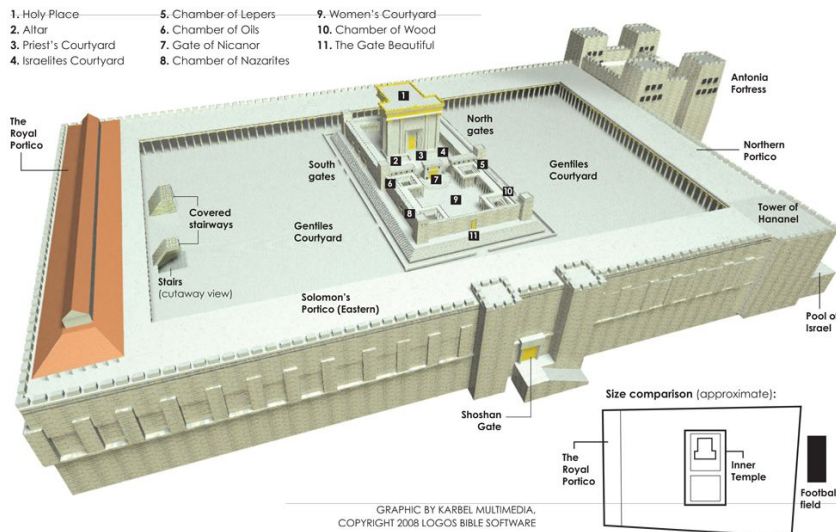
### **3 Trip to Rome: St Paul's captivity (Acts XXI, 17 – XXIII, 35)**

Saint Paul made this vow of nazirite, to be clean of all reproaches the Jews were continuously making about him. Following the advice of the priests of Jerusalem and also of St. James the Apostle, he made himself all for all, to avoid the scandal of the weak.

This vow of Nazirite was usually concluded with offerings in Temple of Jerusalem. His presence inside the Sacred Temple did not please some other people. They accused him without any other evidence to bring inside temple somebody who did not receive circumcision. Saint Paul was dragged out by a crowd ready to kill him. But from the palace of the Governor, which

# Herod's Temple

King Herod the Great began renovations on the Second Temple approximately 20-19 BC. The entire temple wasn't completed until approximately 62-64 AD, only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.



was just above the Temple, roman soldiers were watching. They arrested Saint Paul and brought him inside the fortress.

Saint Paul requested the privilege to speak to the people, which was granted to him. In his speech, wisely, Saint Paul addressed the crowd a defence of himself, claiming that his entire life was under the

sign of the law. He made of himself persecutor of Christians. And nothing more than an apparition of Jesus upon Damascus' way was needed to change him. In Damascus, it's an authentic Jew who introduced him into the church. And in the same temple of Jerusalem, a vision confirmed his mission towards the Gentiles. The only mention of the Gentiles was enough to start again the protest. The Roman governor, not understanding a word of Saint Paul's speech, thought that, by scourging him, he will obtain some answers. Saint Paul said:

"Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a roman and uncondemned? Which the Centurion hearing went to the tribune and told him saying: What are they about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen. And the tribune coming, said to him: Tell me, art thou a Roman? But he said: yes. And the tribune answered I obtained the being free of this city with a great sum. And Paul said: but I was born so. Immediately therefore, they departed from him that were about to torture him. The tribune also was afraid after he understood that he was a Roman citizen and because he had bound him."<sup>11</sup>

The day after, to understand better that quarrel, the tribune ordered Saint Paul to come and face the Sanhedrin and to explain himself. Saint Paul, knowing the disputes between pharisees and Sadducees, spoke about the resurrection and said: Is it because I'm preaching about the resurrection of a dead that I'm under trial? That was enough to start again a violent discussion between the two parties. The tribune, hearing at the ferocious debate, decided that the only solution to protect the apostle was to put him into custody. During the night, Jesus appeared to his disciple to comfort him, and told him he would bring the Gospel to Rome.

Saint Paul was sent to Caesarea. The high priest, with a few priests of the Temple and a barrister, came together to complain about Saint Paul to Felix, the procurator of Judea. They presented Saint Paul, as an agitator of the people, a defiler of the temple and the chief of the

<sup>11</sup> Acts, XXII, 25-29



Nazirites' sect. Saint Paul answered the same way as in Jerusalem. His only crime, as he already proclaimed, was his belief into the resurrection.

After a few time spent in custody in Caesarea, Saint Paul finally appealed for the justice of the Emperor. And although everybody was convinced of him being innocent, as he called to Caesar, it was no longer in the power of the procurator to stop the trial.

Saint Paul board a ship to go to Rome, as a prisoner. Before he left, Saint Paul preached the Gospel until the very end. He said it was because of the hope of Israel that he was carrying these chains. To those who do not believe these last words of the apostle before he left his homeland, St. Paul is opposing only one word: *"When did the Holy Ghost speak to your fathers by Isaiah the Prophet saying: go to these people and say to them: With the ear you shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive. For the heart of these people is grown gross, and with their ears have they heard heavily, and their eyes they have shut; Lest perhaps they should see with their eyes and hear with the ears and understand with their heart and should be converted, and I should heal them."*<sup>12</sup>

This prophecy is concluding the book of the Acts of the Apostles. This prophecy of Isaiah was also quoted by Jesus to the crowds of Galilee when he was preaching in parables the Kingdom of God, and Saint John will remind it by the end of his Gospel. But this hardening of the heart of the Jews will not be made without any compensation. God will not be frustrated in his glory. The message of the Gospel rejected by Israel will be received by the Gentiles.<sup>13</sup>

For two years, Saint Paul was kept in custody in Rome. Although he was not kept in public jail, as he was living in a house he rented, he was still carrying chains and watched by soldiers night and day. He could not preach anymore in synagogues. He could not visit anymore his friends. Anyone he wanted to meet had to come to him. This was obviously a great suffering. But Paul being prisoner of Christ acquired a new authority. His mission was no longer contested as it used to be. At the price of his own freedom, he bought the liberty of the pagans. Moreover, this captivity in Rome became an advantage for the preaching of the Gospel. All the soldiers who watched him all along these two years, became privileged witnesses of all his meeting, and all of them knew about Christ. That's what Saint Paul said in the Epistle to Philemon: *"Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered to me in the bands of the Gospel"*<sup>14</sup>. The Christians in Rome were encouraged because he was in chains. Several letters were written during this captivity: to the Colossians, to the Philippians...

After a total of four or five years in prison Saint Paul was made free. He highly probably went to Spain to spread the Gospel there. He also visited all the communities in Macedonia, Creta and then Corinth. During that last trip, he established several new bishops as Timothy and Titus. Time is urging. The worry about the future is becoming more present to him. All these churches Saint Paul was the founder were about to be taken of his support. They were in

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<sup>12</sup> Acts, XXVIII, 25-27

<sup>13</sup> Auguste Fliche & Victor Martin (under the direction), Histoire de l'Église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours, Jules Lebreton & Jacques Zeiller, Vol 1, L'Église primitive, Bloud & Gay, Paris, 1946

<sup>14</sup> Phil, I, 13

need to be taken care by faithful pastors who would maintain the work of the Apostle and Christ. Once more in the teaching of Saint Paul, the double aspect of the authority and the spirit is shown: there is a tradition, a deposit, which is received in obedience and faithfully transmitted. This deposit is living, animated by the Holy Ghost, who communicates to each baptised person and to the entire church, light and life.

Around the year 64 Saint Paul was arrested again in Rome. But this captivity did not shine as well as the first one. The persecution of Nero, the emperor, scared and pushed to revolt even the enemies of Christianity. Hurt by this barbarian rage the Roman church remains quiet. She was not dead and we will see her soon raising and flourishing. Only eternal hope was supporting Saint Paul now. Here on earth he was not waiting anything else, but only death:

*“For I am even now ready to be sacrificed: and the time of my dissolution is at hand. I have fought a good fight: I have finished my course: I have kept the faith. As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord the just judge will render to me in that day: and not only to me, but to them also that love his coming. Make haste to come to me quickly.”<sup>15</sup>*

As we know, Saint Paul was beheaded, as he was a Roman citizen, just outside of the wall of the City of Rome. Upon the place of his martyrdom is now built a basilica known as St. Paul of the three fountains, because, when severed from Paul's body, his head bounced and struck the earth in three different places, from which fountains sprang up. These still flow today and are located in the sanctuary, as a last living testimony of Saint Paul's powerful teaching across the 2000 years of History of the Church.

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<sup>15</sup> 2 Tim, IV, 6-8