

## Saint Paul - A Model for Us All

by Bishop Michael

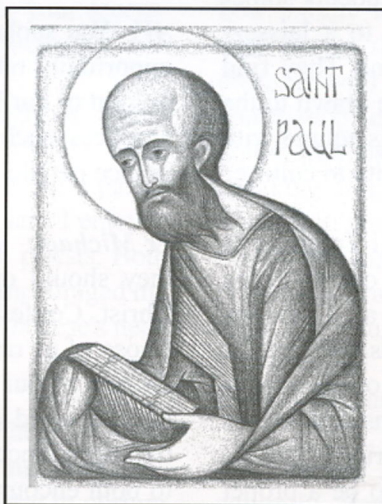
As we embark on a new ecclesiastical year, we do well to recommit ourselves - bishop, clergy and faithful - to our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ and to the service of His Holy Church. Someone who epitomized such a constantly renewed commitment was Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, whose faithful preaching and tireless labors brought the message of the Gospel "to the very ends of the world."

For 2,000 years the Church has recognized St. Paul as a model for all of us to follow. When one reflects on the life and teaching, the missionary labors and martyrdom of the Apostle, it is no wonder that St. John Chrysostom wrote of him: "I love all the saints, but I love most the blessed Paul, the chosen vessel, the heavenly trumpet, the friend of the Bridegroom, Christ."

The Acts of the Apostles reveals to us many things about St. Paul. Clearly he was a man of character - zealous and totally committed to Christ. He proudly proclaimed his habit of speaking the full truth without waffling (20:20,27), and refused to be intimidated by the threat of chains and trials in Jerusalem (20:23). He refused to offer a bribe to Felix the Roman governor in exchange for his freedom (24:26), and he demanded his case be heard in Rome by the emperor himself so that he could preach the Gospel in that city (26:32). Such character is the mark of the Christian and is necessary in order for the Church to be truly holy, truly "other" than the world.

Paul was also a man of prayer - in prison or in court, in the synagogue or alone. Right from the start, immediately after he met the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, he turned to prayer and fasting as he awaited the Lord's will (9:9). Following his baptism, we find him time and time again in prayer in the synagogues, where he proclaimed that Jesus was indeed the awaited Messiah (9:22). Publically he was a preacher of the Word "in season and out of season." Yet at Philippi, he exited the city gates and found a place for private prayer near a river (16:13). He teaches us by example of the necessity of both liturgical prayer and personal prayer, both public worship and private prayer.

He was a member of the Church - no "lone ranger" but rather the consummate team player. As soon as he was formally initiated into the Faith, he met with the members of the very community that as Saul the Pharisee he had attempted so vigorously to destroy only a short time earlier (9:17,ff.). Throughout his life he attended the gatherings of the People of God - in Damascus, in Iconium, in Corinth, and in Ephesus. He teamed up with Barnabas, then Silas, then Luke, and later Aquila and Priscilla, and finally James and the elders in Jerusalem. He teaches us how to truly be a member of the Body of Christ, and always faithful to His holy Church.



Sketch by Fr Andrew Tregubov

Paul was a witness to the Resurrection - the central message of his faith, preaching and theology. The focus of his ministry, stemming from his first encounter with the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus (9:5), was that Christ was victorious over death and sin. This is the Good News that he had been chosen to proclaim to the children of Israel and the Gentile nations: Jesus is the Messiah! Christ is Risen! And we who live this faith are being saved! ... "But if Christ is not risen, our faith is futile ... and we of all men are the most pitiable" (I Cor.

15:17,19). So too the Resurrected Savior must be the object of our worship, the theme of our sermons, the pattern of our lives, and the inspiration of our ideals.

The Apostle was an agent of conversion and change - repentance from sin and purity of heart. In summarizing his work for the elders at Miletus, Paul referred to the basic acts of repentance before God as fundamental to the faith (Acts 20:21). He repeatedly insisted on "metanoia" - the change of one's mind (26:16,21). And because such transformation took time, Paul stayed for long periods in the various churches - weeks at Thessalonica, a year and a half in Corinth, two years each in Ephesus, in Caesarea, and in Rome - all of this because of Paul's conviction that he was called by God to be an agent of change of heart. The focus of our spiritual life must also be constant repentance for our sins, and encouraging others to return to Christ.

