

The 7 Authentic Letters of St. Paul

- At this time in my life the 7 authentic letters of St. Paul are my favorite of the 27 books of the New Testament and the whole Bible.
 - The rest of my time with you will be to persuade you to read and study them more.
 - They are in order of composition: 1st Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1st & 2nd Corinthians, and Romans.
 - I say “authentic” letters because 6 of the 13 letters attributed to St. Paul are not considered to be authentic by most Catholic scholars.
 - Instead, they are what scholars have come to call Deutero-Pauline...D e u t e r o, from which we get the words “duce”, “two”, and “second”.
 - These 6 are in order of composition: Titus, 1st Timothy, 2nd Timothy, Colossians, Ephesians, and 2nd Thessalonians.
 - Therefore, they are also classified as pseudepigraphic or pseudonymous, even though we still announce that they are “A reading from St. Paul” at Mass.
 - In other words, they were not actually written by Paul.
 - In the case of these 6 New Testament letters, the authors claim Paul as their author for the sake of patronage, persuasion, authority, and credibility.
 - But because of their grammar, theology, and the Church’s stage of growth expressed in them scholars have concluded that they were not actually written by Paul.
 - The best way to encourage you to read and study the 7 authentic letters of Paul is to read a representative passage from each of them after I say a little about them.
 - I will do this chronologically based on the sequence in which Paul wrote them:
 - So let me start with 1st Thessalonians which was written about the year 50.
 - It may not be the first letter that Paul wrote during his missionary activity in Turkey and Greece, but it is the earliest one that we have.
 - Paul was more of a missionary than a pastor.

- Nevertheless, he had a very pastoral approach as this passage illustrates.
 - Coincidentally, at this time in our liturgical year the 2nd Scripture at Mass on Sunday is from 1st Thessalonians.
 - We just heard Paul's wonderful introduction to this letter this past Sunday.
 - Let us listen to Chapter 2, verses 1-12.
- Next is Galatians written about 55.
 - It is Paul's strongest and most angry letter since he is very concerned about the Judaizers, a group of missionary Jews who were trying to persuade Jewish-Christians back into Judaism.
 - Paul even confronts Peter, then the head-apostle, about this.
 - This passage is evidence of that.
 - Let us listen to Chapter 2, verses 11-14.
- Philippians was also written about 55.
 - We just finished listening to it for 4 Sundays.
 - It is Paul's happiest letter.
 - He repeatedly uses the word "joy" which I why I encourage people to "flip" to Philippians when they are feeling sad or depressed!
 - Sometimes St. Paul gets a bad rap as being an arrogant and pushy missionary.
 - Nothing is more untrue as this passage from Philippians indicates:
 - Let us listen to Philippians 1:3-11.
 - Philemon, written about 60 is next.
 - It is the shortest letter that we have of St. Paul...only 25 verses.
 - But it is a very impressive and revealing book of the Bible about friendship, slavery, and conversion!
 - It is worth listening to the whole letter since it is so short, so let's do that.
 - 1st and 2nd Corinthians were written next about 57.
 - Because Corinth was a seaport city, Paul had to deal with a lot in regard to this community.
 - According to what he autobiographically tells us, he struggled the most with this parish...his letters and many contacts with them are indicative of that.

- In 1st Corinthians he deals with the immorality, division, and giftedness of the Corinthians.
 - So, let us listen to a passage from 1st Corinthians where Paul deals with the division that was going on in regard to the celebration of Eucharist.
 - The first 4 verses are the oldest passage that we have about the Mass, older than the 4 Gospels.
 - Because of this preeminence it is proclaimed on Holy Thursday.
 - Let us listen to 1st Corinthians 11:23-26.
 - I already read from 2nd Corinthians, the passage that started me off on my biblical journey.
 - But let's also listen to Paul's autobiographical comments about his struggles as a missionary in Chapter 11 verses 22-33.
- Finally, and best of all let us listen to Romans, the last letter that we have that St. Paul wrote.
 - I call it "pure theological and spiritual silk".
 - We listen to Romans 32 times in our 3-year cycle of Sunday Scriptures.
 - We just finished listening to it at Sunday Eucharist during the past few months.
 - We are currently listening to it for 2 ½ more weeks.
 - Father Raymond Brown says it so well: "Longer than any other New Testament letter, more reflective in outlook than any other authentic Pauline letter, more calmly reasoned than Galatians in treating the key question of justification and the Law, Romans has been the most studied of Paul's writings".
 - Written from Cenchreae, the seaport-city of Corinth in the winter of 57/58, after St. Paul had been a missionary for 20-25 years in Greece and Turkey, it is the best of Paul's authentic letters.

- It is his introduction of himself to the Jewish-Christians in Rome as he was planning on going there and then to Spain where Christianity had not yet been implanted.
- This makes it difficult to choose a passage since the whole letter is so wonderful.
- Nevertheless, to conclude let us listen to a passage from Chapter 8, considered to be the heart of this letter.
- Coleen, would you please read verses 18-30?