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## Christian Unity Octave and the Year of St Paul

Pope Benedict XVI declared June 2008 - June 2009 a 'Year of Saint Paul' in celebration of the 2000th anniversary of the apostle's birth. It is believed that he was born in the early part of the first century AD, between 6 - 10 A.D.

The Holy Father explained that: "The Apostle of the Gentiles, who dedicated himself to the spreading of the good news to all peoples, spent himself for the unity and harmony of all Christians. May he guide us and protect us in this bimillenary celebration, helping us to advance in the humble and sincere search for the full unity of all the members of the mystical body of Christ."

Last Sunday, 25th January, marked the start of this year's Christian Unity Octave and, to mark the Year of St Paul, a Mass using the texts of the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul (rather than 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time) was permitted, though the second reading was of the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time).

The Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship authorising this read...

"The Apostle St. Paul, who proclaimed the truth of Christ to the whole world and did so

after being Christ's persecutor, spent himself in using every means to proclaim the Good News to the nations, committing himself with zeal to the unity and concord of all Christians, has always been and continues to

be venerated by the faithful, especially in this particular year, the bimillennium of his birth, which the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI desired to institute as a special jubilee year.

"Thus, in virtue of the faculties conferred on this Congregation by the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI it is permitted, in an extraordinary manner, that on 25th January 2009, the Third Sunday 'per annum', a Mass according to the formulary 'Conversion of St. Paul', as is found in the Roman Missal, may be celebrated in the individual churches. In such a case, the second reading of the Mass is taken from the Roman Lectionary for the Third Sunday 'per annum,' and the Creed will be recited"

**Saint Paul**, of Jewish descent, was born in Tarsus in the early part of the first century A.D. His family were Roman citizens, and



violent attacks against Christians. He was known as the man who was present, and fully agreed, with the stoning of Stephen.

We read in the New Testament that on a journey to Damascus - going there with the intention of persecuting the Christians, he had a life changing vision of Jesus. This led to such great zeal in his newfound faith in Christ, that both he and the apostle Peter became two of the main contributors to the spread of the Christianity.

Paul made three major trips around the Roman world as a missionary, spreading the Gospel as he went. He met his death (A.D.67) while a captive in Rome; this as a direct result of his message. While his first journey centered largely on the area that is now western Anatolia, his latter two journeys included the area that are now the Greek eastern mainland and islands. His first journey began in Seleucia from which he and his companions

had a large business making tents. He moved to the city of Jerusalem as a boy where he joined in the attacks against the newly emerging Christian faith and later became personally and passionately involved in

made for Cyprus. Later they set out from the seaport of Paphos for Perga in Pamphylia. Taking the road to the interior, they reached Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and later Lystra and Derbe. Spending a short period in each of the cities encouraging the believers, they returned by the same route and arrived back in Perga. Setting out once again, they made for Antioch by boat and completed their first journey via Jerusalem.

On the second journey, A.D. 50-53, beginning again from Antioch, Paul was accompanied by another Roman citizen by the name of Silas. Making their way overland through Anatolia, they were joined by Timothy, and together made for Troy and then straight on to Macedonia. At this time, they established the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Due to serious dangers, they moved on to Athens and later spent almost two years in Corinth.

The third journey, beginning around A.D 53, centered around Ephesus, and once again the Greek mainland at Macedonia.

Because of his work, Paul is recognized worldwide for his message of the 'Good News'.

Also known as 'Paul of Tarsus', partially due to the excellent education received in both Tarsus and Jerusalem, he combined this with his experiences as a Christian spreading the Good News. Despite not being amongst the original twelve Apostles, along with Peter, he showed great courage in spreading the Gospel and standing strong in their faith in Christ. It is partially for this reason that many knew him as the 'Apostle from Tarsus'.

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