

THE GOSPEL I PREACH TO YOU

*The gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin;
for I did not receive it from a human source,
not was I taught it, but I received it
through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal 1:11-12)*

We take it for granted that we have only four accounts of the gospel in the New Testament – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But then, what is Paul trying to prove when he claims that he had been “set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1), or that “The gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin... but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:11-12)? What “gospel” is he talking about?

It may come as a surprise that among the four evangelists, only Mark uses the term “gospel” to refer to God’s saving activity in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet the number of times Mark uses the term (8 times) is far less than the usage of Paul, which is 56 times within 7 letters actually written by him.

The fact that chronologically Paul wrote much ahead of Mark renders the statistics even more significant. The fact is that Paul was the very first to articulate the gospel of the early Church. The gospel is “Paul’s personal way summing up the significance of the Christ-event, the meaning that the person, life, ministry, passion, death, resurrection and lordship of Jesus of Nazareth had and still has for human history and existence.”

Paul’s articulation of the Gospel is built upon his own very personal encounter with Jesus of Nazareth on the road to Damascus. On the road to Damascus, Paul encounters the glorified Christ. The decisive insight from this encounter is that God has already fulfilled all his promises in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the representative of Israel, in whose cross God metes out judgment on the forces of evil that oppose the establishment of the Kingdom. God vindicates Jesus Christ by raising him from the dead and turning his cross from an emblem of shame to that of victory.

The cross of Christ ushers in a period wedged between the “present evil age” and the “age to come” (or “new creation”).

Believers in Christ are situated in this “already-but-not yet” era, where they are called to participate in the victory won by Christ by living under the shadow of the cross, while anticipating the second coming of Christ to seal the victory inaugurated by his cross.

This is what Paul calls “his gospel,” taught to him not by human beings, but received through a direct revelation by Jesus Christ. It is a message of hope for all peoples of all times. It announces that no one is excluded from the loving plan of God, but a personal response is asked of each of us.

Suffering and pain assume new meaning when accepted in faith, for they become opportunities to participate in the victory inaugurated through the cross of Christ. Suffering, in this sense, becomes the place of transformation, for it opens a person up to divine power that works in weakness.

This is the gospel of Paul, and it is Good News indeed!

From the book by Bernardita Danzon, FSP: Glimpses of Paul and His Message