

Encouragement in Christ (Acts 18:1-8)

Our first reading continues to bring us through St. Paul's missionary journey in the Acts of the Apostles. Paul is on his second missionary journey, which was roughly 2.5 to 3 years. About half of that journey was spent in the city of Corinth. Scholars believe this was around the year AD 49 or 50, which was roughly when the Rome Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because of the quarrels between Christians and Jews in the eternal city.

Paul is coming off some difficult stops. For example, he was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. In Athens, the Athenians were willing to listen to Paul until he spoke about the resurrection from the dead. He made very few converts in Athens. Divine providence brought Paul to Corinth, which was somewhat akin to the ancient Las Vegas – what happens in Corinth stays in Corinth. Luke tells us that every Sabbath (in this case, Saturday), Paul enters the synagogue and debates with Jews and Greeks that Jesus is the Christ.

What kept Paul going? I might suggest that along with prayer, what kept him going was **encouragement** – first from the Lord and then from his friends. In the verse following today's passage, Luke tells us that one night Paul had a vision where the Lord said to Paul, "*Do not be afraid. Go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you. No one will attack you, for I have many people in this city*" (1 Cor. 18:9-10). The Lord provided encouragement. Essentially, the Lord was telling Paul not to give up or become discouraged. To encourage means "to strengthen." The Lord strengthened Paul or gave heart to Paul that what the great servant did was worth it!

Additionally, I suggest that what kept Paul going was friendships. Notice that in Corinth, Paul does not evangelize alone as he did in Athens but with friends. First, he met a lovely couple, Aquilla and Priscilla. One commentator calls Aquilla and Priscilla a *dynamic duo*. Even their names are fascinating. They sound like fun couple from a Dr. Seuss book: *Priscilla and Aquilla and their vanilla gorilla like to walk their chinchilla on the way to Manilla*. "Fr. Andrie, seriously?"

Additionally, we hear that Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth. They had come from Macedonia or the northern province of Greece. Silas was considered a "faithful brother" (1 Peter 5:12) who was a teacher and leader in the early Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:22, 32). After the Jerusalem Council, he was chosen to communicate the council's decision to Antioch, along with the Apostle Paul. Paul took Silas with him on his missionary journey (Acts 15:40-41).

Timothy was from Lystra or Derbe. He was born of a Jewish mother and a Greek father who became a Christian. Paul met him on his second missionary journey. Throughout their journey, one gets the sense that Paul was a wonderful spiritual father for Timothy. St. Paul addressed two New Testament letters to Timothy.

In short, notice that Paul is not a lone ranger as he evangelizes! The Lord is with Paul. Additionally, Paul brings the good news of Jesus Christ within the context of friendships. As the master evangelizer, he reminds us that our most fruitful missionary endeavors are always done in the context of live-giving prayer and faith-filled friendships. May we take a page out of his playbook and do the same.

~St. Thérèse, pray for us!