

**March 18, 2012**

Third Sunday of Lent

### **Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings**

From the very beginning, the Gospel was declared according to a narrative structure, which embraced the ministry of Jesus from the time of his baptism to his Resurrection (cf. Acts 1:21-22; 10:36-37; 13:23-25).

Pretty early, it appears, part of this kerygmatic narrative became creedal. That is to say, the latter components of the original story---the section most pertinent to the mystery of Redemption---took on a definitive framework, on which the very faith of the Church was established.

According to the evidence, this framework was founded on four creedal affirmations: (1) "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"; (2) "he was buried"; (3) "he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures"; and, afterwards, (4) "he was seen" (1 Corinthians 15:3-6).

In other words, when the Gospel story was proclaimed, these four narrative elements were considered basic to the message: Christ's death, his burial, his Resurrection, and his sundry appearances afterwards. These were the four corners of the structure.

Thus, when Paul arrived in Corinth toward the end of the year 49---"determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:2)--his proclamation in that city was founded on these four creedal elements "as matters of primary importance" (*en protois*-15:3). These four components were "primary" as a summary of the faith "in which you stand and by which also you are being saved" (15:1-2).

Some biblical readers (Joachim Jeremias, Vincent Taylor) have regarded this passage in First Corinthians as a nucleus---a "first stage"---from which the written Gospel accounts later took on a narrative shape, as seen in the Four Gospels.

Respectfully, I think this theory unsound. It surely was not the case that the Gospel was first proclaimed as "bare bones" and then, later on, "fleshed out" in story form. Quite simply, there is no evidence that the Gospel was ever proclaimed except in story form.

Given what we know of the narrative structure of the Christian proclamation from the beginning (cf. the passages from Acts cited above), I think this passage in 1 Corinthians should be regarded, rather, as Paul's outlined summary of the full story he told his listeners when he arrived at Corinth. He

portrayed for the Corinthians the same precious details of these events, as later found in the Four Gospels. Paul did for the Corinthians exactly what he had done for the Galatians, "before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified" (Galatians 3:1). That is to say, wherever he preached the message, Paul presented the full story of Jesus' death, his burial, his Resurrection, and his subsequent appearances. These matters were all "of primary importance."

Indeed, it appears that the standard, transmitted narrative of Jesus' death included, as well, the whole account of his sufferings, starting with the supper "on the night in which he was betrayed." This account, too, was part of what "I received from the Lord [and] which I also delivered to you" (1 Corinthians 11:23).

In his evangelical outline, Paul mentions two supporting authorities: the Scriptures and the eyewitnesses. The latter---Cephas, James, the Twelve, and so forth---testified to what transpired with respect to Jesus (15:5-8). The Scriptures, on the other hand, testified to the theological significance of what transpired: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. . . . he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (15:3-4).

The four traditional components of the Gospel story, as listed by Paul in First Corinthians, are clearly discernible in our earliest written Gospel---Mark. In considerable detail, beginning with the final supper, Mark tells the story of Jesus' death, mentioning those who witnessed it (Mark 14:33,66; 15:21,39-41). He records Jesus' burial, once again naming the witnesses (15:42-47). Finally, Mark writes of Jesus' Resurrection (16:1-6). With respect to the subsequent appearances of the risen Christ, Mark refers only to those in Galilee: "He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you" (16:7; cf. 14:28).

Paul, listing the authoritative witnesses to the risen Christ, declared, "He was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:5). Although none of the Evangelists describes the appearance to Cephas prior to the rest of the Apostles, Luke does speak of it (Luke 24:34). This special appearance is also intimated by Mark, who records the angelic commission to the myrrhbearing women, "But go, tell His disciples---*and Peter*"(Mark 16:7).

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