

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings September 4, 2016

The Wordling

During the two years that the Apostle Paul spent in prison at Caesarea (Acts 24:27), certain of his fellow workers had sufficient access to him that he could include them with the note “sends greetings” in the epistles that he wrote at that time. Their number included his “fellow laborers,” Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke (Philemon 24). It is curious, as we shall see, that Paul mentions Demas and Luke together. Near the end of the Epistle to the Colossians (4:14), composed during the same period, Paul wrote, “Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.”

It appears that these two men, Demas and Luke, afterwards traveled with Paul to Rome, where he spent another two years under house arrest (Acts 28:30). When, writing to Timothy toward the end of that time, Paul was preparing to die, he made one final and very significant reference to Demas and Luke: “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessaloniki . . . Only Luke is with me” (2 Timothy 4:10).

We know a good deal about the rest of Luke's career, of course, but about Demas we hear not another word, nor does this final reference prompt us much to hope for him—“having loved this present world.”

Demas had his chance, so to speak. Had he not loved “this present world” (literally, “the *now* age”—*to nun aiona*), there is every reason to suspect that he would be invoked throughout Christian history as Saint Demas and, like Luke, be remembered with a feast day in the Christian calendar.

So what happened? Demas loved “the present age,” we are told. That is to say, through all his time of ministry, even sharing in some measure the apostolic hardships of St. Paul, Demas remained at root a worldly man. Mark, another of his friends, described folks of this sort, in whom “the cares of the world [*tou aionos*], the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:19).

Surely it was not the case that Demas, St. Paul's fellow worker, had never been cautioned about worldliness. Is it possible to think he had not once heard Paul admonish, “do not be conformed to this world [*to aioni touto*]” (Romans 12:2)? How could any companion of the Apostle Paul be ignorant about the perils of “the world” or “the present age” (1 Corinthians 1:20; 2:6,8; 3:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 1:21; 6:12; Titus 2:12 [*en to nun aioni*]).

Nor was this pessimism concerning the world a peculiarity of Paul. The Apostle John, though he does not use Paul's expression *aion* to speak of it, often employs the noun *kosmos* in pretty much the same moral sense—namely, the “world” as creation in rebellion against God. This was the world for which Jesus refused to pray (John 17:9), the world out of which the Lord called His disciples that they should not belong to it (17:6,11), the world that hates both Him and them (15:18,19; 17:14; 1 John 3:1,13; 4:17).

The failure of Demas was that he “loved” the world. It is remarkable that Paul should use the participle *agapesas* in reference to Demas's love of the world, because normally this verb refers to God's love for men, men's love for God, and their love of one another in God. However unusual, nonetheless, this is the same verb employed by St. John when he warns Christians, “Do not love the world [*me agapate ton kosmon*] or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15).

The context of this passage throws a helpful light on the tragedy of Demas, for John goes on to comment, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” The world does not know God and cannot receive the Holy Spirit (John 14:7). There is an absolute gulf, therefore, between the world and the Father. We suspect that Demas did not see this right away, because a man does not suddenly go from complete fidelity to total loss of faith. The decline is usually by degrees.

Toward the end, however, and perhaps after years of compromising, Demas himself came to see that God and the world constitute a decisive either/or, because “all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:16). One cannot forever have it both ways. Faced with this radical either/or, worldly Demas made his choice.