

2 Tim 3:14 -- 4.2

This week's second reading is from the second letter of Paul to Timothy. Timothy is a 1st century priest, Bishop and martyr; ordained by and a companion of St. Paul. His mother was Jewish and he was raised in the Scriptures [read that as the Torah]. His father was a Greek gentile. We know from tradition that Paul circumcised Timothy in order to make him acceptable to the Jewish audiences. Conversely, it was Paul who convinced Peter [head of the Church] that gentiles should not be bound by circumcision. In this reading, the aging and imprisoned Paul is writing to Timothy, then-Bishop of Ephesus, about his responsibilities as pastor. He gives earnest advice to: hold fast to the traditions he has received; use Scripture [Torah and teachings of the Prophets] for his own ongoing formation and for the formation of his people; and, to persevere in his ministry in preaching the Gospel.

Paul is very compelling on many levels. Paul did not know Jesus and he was not a follower of Jesus before the crucifixion. He is a Jewish rabbi taught by Gamaliel, a first century authority on Jewish law; later St. Gamaliel. His birth name is Saul. He hates Christians; he is a bounty hunter of Christians. He zealously persecuted Christians and participated in the stoning of St. Stephen, the first martyr in the Christian faith. One day on the way to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial and possible execution, he was knocked off his horse by a blinding light and hears the divine voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asks. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:4-6) In other words, Saul's conversion is supernatural and he becomes an Apostle for the Christian faith. His name is changed to Paul, which signifies a change in both status and mission. Based on the revelation given to him by Jesus, Paul would become the Apostle to the gentiles.

The bedrock of Protestant theologies is the notion of "sola Scriptura," which means "Scripture alone." Protestants claim that Scripture alone is the pillar and bulwark of truth. The basis for this theology is 2 Tim 3:16; so, let's pay close attention, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). This statement is **THE** Protestant proof-text for the sole sufficiency of Scripture, right? I doubt it and you should too. In fact, if it were intended that way by Paul, it would exclude the entire New Testament (including his letters), which wasn't codified and determined to be "inspired" for another 250 years. Sola Scriptura is nowhere taught in the Bible; nowhere even *implied*. Rather the context of Sunday's reading is that Paul is exhorting Timothy to hold fast to the oral traditions (the oral Gospel) he has received and the Torah. Why would Paul say this?

Paul is from the sect of Jews known as the Pharisees. Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees believed that the Scriptures (the Law that God gave to Moses, the "Torah") was twofold, consisting of the Written Law and the Oral Law, *i.e.*, the teachings of the prophets and the oral traditions of the Jewish people. Whereas the Sadducees taught that the written Torah was the **ONLY** source of revelation. Sound familiar? The Pharisees taught, much like Jesus, that men must use their reason in

interpreting the Torah and applying it to contemporary problems according to the spirit of the law; rather than only the letter of the Law. As a Pharisee, Paul did not believe in sola Scriptura, thus he would never have intended the Scripture alone to be the pillar and bulwark of truth. In fact, the mystery of our religion is set forth by Paul in his first letter to Timothy, "I hope to come to you soon....if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). In other words, Paul believes that the Church is set in place to support (rediphim) the concepts of the Gospel truth. The Spirit makes this possible through the teaching authority granted to the Church.

The Church is the sole interpreter of the Bible. If the Church wasn't interpreting it from the beginning, how would we know which books are "inspired." We know because the "infallible" teaching authority of the Church is inspired by the Holy Spirit. At the time the Bible was codified there were 27 gospels. Only four were considered inspired because they aligned with the oral tradition. The same Catholic Church that compiled the Bible is the interpreter; and, nobody else. There can be only one source of interpretation; so, that every interpretation remains true to the original spirit and becomes a "living truth" to solve contemporary problems. In this way, all inspired Scripture, "is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness." That's what Paul meant.