

December 19, 2004
Last Sunday of Advent

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

It is evident that the Apostle Paul placed a great deal of confidence in Tychicus, whom he called "a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant" (Colossians 4:7; cf. Ephesians 6:21).

Although we are not certain exactly when Tychicus was joined to Paul's evangelism team, the New Testament provides enough facts about him to warrant a sound conjecture on the subject. The earliest certain information we have on Tychicus (information, that is, apart from Titus 3:12, a text difficult to date) places him in Macedonia and then Troas in early spring of A.D. 58. This data comes from Acts 20:4, which also tells us that Tychicus was a native of Asia Minor.

It seems reasonable, then, to think of his coming under the influence of Paul during the latter's extensive ministry in Asia Minor from 52 to 55 (cf. 19:8-10; 20:31). Indeed, most of what we know about Tychicus is related to the churches of Asia.

When we first run into him, Tychicus is paired with another Asian Christian named Trophimus, the two of them part of a larger group who are to accompany Paul on his final trip to Jerusalem at the end of the Third Missionary Journey.

This fact too is significant. I have always imagined that at least some of the men chosen for that final trip--Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus--were big and brawny. This surmise is sensible, I think, in view of the fact that this group of men was charged with carrying to Jerusalem the money that Paul and his company had collected for several years toward the relief of the famished saints in the Holy City (Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-28,31; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4; 9:1,2,12). The transport and safeguarding of these resources was a demanding task, certainly no job for weaklings. After all, we are not talking about travelers' checks here, or even of paper money. These were bags of minted coins, and raw muscle was needed to convey these assets and to protect them from robbery. That list of men in Acts 20:4, then, surely includes individuals of more than common physical size and strength. Was Tychicus one of them? It seems an intelligent suggestion.

This group of men, including Tychicus, sailed to Troas, where they waited for Paul and Luke (Acts 20:5-6). As far as we may ascertain, Tychicus remained with Paul for the rest of the journey down to Jerusalem, and it is clear that he was available to Paul during the latter's imprisonment at Caesarea from 58 to 60 (24:27).

It was during those two years that Paul wrote the letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians--all of them epistles going to Asia Minor. What could be more logical than for Paul to send these by the hand of Tychicus? In fact, Paul certainly did this. Tychicus carried these letters back to Asia Minor, accompanied by Onesimus, the runaway slave from Colossae, who had fled to Paul in prison (Colossians 4: 7-9). Paul himself, during his further confinement in Rome somewhat later (Acts 28: 30), mentioned to Timothy that he had sent Tychicus to Asia (2 Timothy 4: 12).

Tychicus, as Paul's loyal companion and representative, was numbered among those select men who served as vital connections between the Apostles and churches they established. That is to say, Tychicus was a first living link in what the Church calls the "apostolic succession" of its Gospel witness. He was counted among those "many witnesses" that heard the words of Paul and then committed them "to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2: 2). (We observe that here Paul himself already lists four stages in the historical transmission of the Gospel.)

Tychicus was thus among that first post-apostolic generation of delegated preachers and pastors, whose authority derived from the apostles themselves. Prior to the year 100 the authority of that special succession of ministry was already considered essential to the proper transmission of pastoral authority in the Church. Christians were convinced that as "the Apostles received the Gospel for us from Jesus Christ," so "they appointed their first converts, after testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers." Moreover, they "added the stipulation that if these should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry" (Clement of Rome, To the Corinthians 42,44). Through the ministry of such men the Gospel is rendered present to all ages until the consummation of time.

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