

January 27, 2008
Third Sunday after Theophany

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Although in the early Church the Holy Spirit poured the gift of prophecy upon women as well as men (Acts 2:18; 1 Corinthians 11:5), the New Testament never names any of those women. Indeed, it says precious little about them.

Exceptional in this regard are the daughters of Philip the evangelist, of whom Luke writes, "Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied" (Acts 21:9). As unmarried daughters, these women lived in their father's home in Caesarea. Since Luke accompanied Paul on his last visit to that place in the late spring of A.D. 59 (cf. "we" in 21:8,10), he certainly met them and was able to write about them first-hand.

What else do we know about these four daughters of Philip? Several things, I believe. We know, for example, they had formerly lived in Jerusalem, where their father had been one of the original "seven" chosen to assist the Apostles (6:5). Thus, we know that the family spoke Greek (6:1-5).

For a while, things went well, inasmuch as "the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem" (6:7).

After the conversion of a large number of Sadducees, however, things in Jerusalem turned ugly. A persecution arose against the Church, leading to the stoning of Stephen, another of those original "seven" Greek-speaking converts (6:7-7:60). Since Philip and Stephen had been associated so closely, Philip's family was surely in an extra measure of peril. Consequently, they were among the large number of Jewish Christians who fled Jerusalem at that time (8:1).

The family moved up to Samaria, where Philip, no longer in imminent danger from the Jews, had a fruitful ministry, his preaching being accompanied by miracles and exorcisms (8:5-8).

We do not know if the family accompanied Philip in the preaching tour that he undertook from the Gaza Strip up to Caesarea (8:40), but we do know that they were soon all together again in that latter city on the Mediterranean coast. It was there that Luke met them several years later, on Paul's final trip back to the Holy Land.

We don't know how long the family stayed at Caesarea, but they eventually left for Asia Minor. There is late evidence (and a bit suspect, I think) that Philip became the bishop of Tralles (Basil II, *Menology* 1.111).

Although Polycrates of Ephesus, in the late second century, famously confused the evangelist Philip with the apostle of the same name, he was apparently closer to the truth when he mentioned Philip's burial at Hierapolis in Asia Minor. Two of the daughters were buried there too.

A third daughter was buried at Ephesus. Polycrates, as the bishop of that city less than a century later, was heir to her memory of her preserved in the local church. She was apparently endowed with the gift of prophecy up to the end, for Polycrates wrote, "she conducted herself in the Holy Spirit" (*en Hagio Pnevmati polytevsamene*) (Eusebius, *Church History* 3.31.3).

Since most of the family had lived at Hierapolis, however, they were better known to Papias, the bishop of that city. Papias was a contemporary of three other great bishops living near the turn of the century -- Clement of Rome, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Ignatius of Antioch (Eusebius, 3.34-36)-but he seems to have been alive (and writing) some decades later.

It was from the daughters of Philip, who must have been rather old by the end of the first century, that Papias heard first-hand stories about the Apostles themselves. One of those stories concerned Justus Barsabbas, of whom we otherwise know nothing except that he was one of the two candidates proposed to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:23). According to the daughters of Philip, who had still lived at Jerusalem back in those very early days, Justus Barsabbas once drank poison (either by accident or as a form of execution, we presume) but was not harmed (Eusebius, 3:39.9). It may be the case that this is the story reflected in the section later added to the Gospel of Mark (16:18).

The historical record does not preserve the names of Philip's four daughters, but it does intimate quite a bit about their interesting life during the first century of the Church, their familiarity with the Apostles, and the impression they left on the Tradition.

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