

**Homily for Wednesday in the Thirteenth Week after
Pentecost**

August 21, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year 2, Proper 16: 2 Thessalonians 3:1–18; Psalm 128; Matthew 23:27–32*

The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians is among the seven letters for which there is an almost universal scholarly consensus that they come from Paul's hand.¹ Our first reading today is the conclusion of the Second Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians. If the commemoration of Saint Barnabas on Monday and Louis, King of France yesterday, had not taken precedence, we would have heard all of this Second Letter at the daily Mass.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha Revised Standard Version Containing the Second Edition of the New Testament and an Expanded Edition of the Apocrypha, from 1971, makes no mention that, since the late 1700s, students of the New Testament have questioned whether Paul himself wrote the second letter.² That said, David Horrell, professor of New Testament Studies at the University of Exeter in the UK, is the

¹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 409.

² *Ibid.*, 592.

author of the introductions to First and Second Thessalonians in the 2010 edition of the *Fully Revised Fourth Edition The New Oxford Annotated Bible New Revised Standard Version With The Apocrypha An Ecumenical Study Bible*. The professor writes, “From the second century on this letter has been uncontroversially accepted as part of the letters of Paul within what became the New Testament canon.”³ He goes on to write, “However, since the nineteenth century the authenticity of this letter has been seriously challenged, and modern commentators are divided over whether this letter is genuinely from Paul himself or was composed by a later follower to correct misunderstandings of Paul’s teaching.”⁴

Whether from Paul’s own hand or one of his disciples, it is Holy Scripture. At the beginning of his *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Raymond Brown wrote, “None of the Gospels mentions an author’s name, and it is quite possible that none was actually written by the one whose name was attached to it at the end of the [second] century.”⁵ But Brown also

³ David G. Horrell, “The Second Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians,” *New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, An Ecumenical Study Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2080.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Brown, 7.

wrote that “those names constitute a claim that Jesus was being interpreted in a faithful way to the first and second generation of apostolic witnesses and preachers.”⁶ So Second Thessalonians, whether by Paul or a disciple, is Holy Scripture.

Here is the significant theological issue addressed by the letter that would have been read yesterday: “As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction.”⁷

The letter doesn’t name or describe the “lawless one.” I associate questions about the end of time with the Revelation to John, not literally, but as an encouragement to faith.

Here is the beginning of the New Testament lesson appointed for the Feast of Saint Michael and All

⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁷ 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3.

Angels: “Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.”⁸ I also am moved to faith by the words near the end of Revelation about the new heaven and the new earth and the holy city, New Jerusalem, where God wipes every tear from every eye.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁸ Revelation 12:7–9a.