

Homily for Wednesday in the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost

October 7, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year 2, Proper 22: Galatians 2:1–14; Psalm 117; Luke 11:1–4*

The first section—four chapters—of Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell Johnson’s book, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*,¹ is called “Sabbath and Sunday.” They begin by pointing out that it is all too easy to presume that the only three possible references to a weekly assembly on Sunday may well not have been on Sunday. If you are a Jewish Christian in Galatia in the year 54 or 55—the years most scholars now assign to its writing²—the first day of the week starts when night falls on Saturday.

For the Christians in Galatia to whom Paul wrote, their weekly shared meals were focused begin ready for the Risen Lord’s coming again.³ Bradshaw and Johnson write, “The language used to describe [their weekly assembly] confirms that it was understood primarily not as a memorial of Christ’s resurrection” —

¹ Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), 3–36.

² Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 468.

³ Bradshaw and Johnson, 13.

much less his death and sacrifice (my words yet truly historically accurate)⁴—“but as the key weekly expression of . . . the constant readiness for the *parousia*”—“arrival, second coming”—which was intended to permeate the whole of a Christian’s daily prayer and life.”⁵

It is with the Peace of Constantine that Sunday begins to take over from Saturday.⁶ In 321, Constantine made Sunday the day of rest in the Roman world. The first recorded example of Sunday taking over from Saturday is from Eusebius of Caesarea in 330. The Eucharist has already been detached from a meal—the church kept growing. As the decades pass, Saturday will become a memorial of creation, and Sunday will become the day of worship.⁷ The spiritual need to feed on the life-giving Jesus shapes this movement.⁸

There is no existing historical record for Peter being in Rome and being martyred there. Yes, the First Letter of Clement, nowadays “usually dated around [the year] 96, “mentions Peter.”⁹ Yet, in Luke’s second book, the

⁴ Paul F. Bradshaw, “The Eucharistic Sayings of Jesus,” *Studia Liturgica* 35 (2005), 11.

⁵ Bradshaw and Johnson, 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ Bradshaw, “Eucharistic Sayings,” 11.

⁹ Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 86.

Acts of the Apostles, now dated around the year 85, “give or take ten years,”¹⁰ Peter drops out in chapter 15. From then on, it’s about Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles.

We learn from Galatians that Peter was entrusted with the ministry to Jews, Paul to Gentiles.¹¹ It’s not surprising that an educated Roman citizen like Paul traveled to Rome. It’s fair to ask that if Peter had prevailed over Paul in Antioch, what would have happened next?

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

Copyright © 2020 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.

¹⁰ Brown, 226.

¹¹ Galatians 2:9.