

Homily for Friday in the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost

October 30, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year 2, Proper 25: Philippians 1:1–11; Psalm 111; Luke 14:1–6

Philippi was an inland city in northern Greece, founded in the fourth century before the Christian Era. The Battle of Philippi fought on the plains west of the city is where Mark Antony and Julius Caesar's, heir Octavius, later Caesar Augustus, defeated the assassins Brutus and Cassius's army in the year forty-two Before the Christian Era. After the battle, the city became a Roman colony where soldiers were settled. It was governed under Roman law. It was a place of commerce. Greek and Latin were spoken. Here, Paul, accompanied by Silas and Timothy, gathered the first church community in Europe.¹

Paul's Letter to the Philippians is generally regarded as the third oldest of his letters. There's scholarly debate about whether it's one letter or from two or three different letters. Ephesus, Rome, and Caesarea are the three possible places from which Paul wrote. Written

¹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 484–85, also n.484-85.

circa the year 56 if, from Ephesus, the years 61 to 62, if from Rome, and years 58 to 60, if from Caesarea.²

Raymond Brown wrote, “In some ways this is the most attractive Pauline letter, reflecting more patently than any other the warm affection of the apostle for his brothers and sisters in Christ.”³

In First Thessalonians, in First and Second Corinthians, and Romans, Paul urges his brothers and sisters to greet one another with “a holy kiss.”⁴ In his book *Ancient Christian Worship*, Andrew McGowan writes, “[Paul] feels no need to explain or justify the practice, implying it was established and readily understood by his readers.”⁵ When I hear or read Jesus’ words about division in families over belief, parallel passages in Matthew and Luke, I try to remember that the kiss was holy for believers because, in the Mediterranean world, one only greeted one’s family and close colleagues with a kiss. The kiss is a reminder too of the physical dimension of worship for the world of the New Testament.⁶

² Ibid., Summary of Basic Information, 484.

³ Ibid., 483.

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:26

⁵ Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 55.

⁶ Ibid., 6–7.

I often wish that the New Revised Standard Version's editors and translators had been more willing to translate Hebrew and Greek more directly. One crazy example: at the supper before the Passover in John, the disciple, known only as the disciple whom Jesus loved, is “reclining next to Jesus” in chapter 13, verse 23. In verse 28, we read, “Now no one at the table knew why [Jesus] said this to [Judas son of Simon Iscariot].” The Greek says, “None of those reclining knew what [Jesus] had said to him.”

I think it is often misleading to translate the Greek word for “overseer” or “superintendent” as bishop and “servant” as deacon. It’s too easy to read back what we know as bishop and deacon’s roles into the world of the New Testament. It’s worth noting that the word “priest” is a title for the baptized in the New Testament.

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

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