



## Year of St. Paul Archdiocese of Toronto

# St. Paul the Apostle

Prior to his conversion, the man we know as Paul was originally named Saul. He was born in Tarsus, (modern day Turkey). Given the wealth of information about Paul in the New Testament (Acts of the Apostles and the 13 letters attributed to him), we are offered much information about his life. For example, from St. Luke's account (Acts 9, 22, 26) and his own self-description (Gal 1), we know that he was born into a well-to-do Jewish family, the son of a Roman citizen, and was sent to Jerusalem to be trained in the famous rabbinical school headed by Gamaliel. Here, in addition to studying the Law and the Prophets, he learned a trade, as was the custom. Young Saul chose the trade of tent-making. Although his upbringing was orthodox, while still at home in Tarsus, he had come under the Greek and Roman influences which at this time had permeated all levels of urban society in Asia Minor. As a result, the Judaic, Roman, and Greek traditions and cultures all had a part in shaping this great Apostle.

At first he persecuted Christians, even taking part in the stoning of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. In his own words, his journey to Damascus forever changed his life. While traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians, Paul describes his experience, "a great light from heaven, suddenly shone about me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? ... I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting." (Acts 22: 6-8) From that moment, all his energy was placed at the exclusive service of Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

A tireless missionary and elegant writer, he led a dangerous and adventurous life on behalf of Christ. He traveled and worked in the ancient cities and countries: Jerusalem, Antioch, Cyprus, Asia Minor, Greece, Ephesus, Macedonia, and Achaia.

Upon a return visit to Jerusalem, he was attacked and imprisoned for his preaching and invoked the privilege of his Roman citizenship to be tried in Rome. On his way there, he was shipwrecked at Malta. After reaching Rome, he was kept in house arrest for two years awaiting trial and wrote four of his letters while in captivity, as an ambassador "in chains." (Eph 6:20)

After his appeal, Paul was acquitted and continued on with the last of his missionary journeys. According to tradition, he was beheaded upon his return to Rome during the persecution of Nero and is buried where the basilica of St. Paul's "outside the walls" now stands. The date of his death is thought to be June 29, 65 AD.

His often repeated themes include: redemption/justification through faith in Christ; Christianity as the fulfillment of the Old Law; new life in the Spirit; the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ; Christians live in Christ and will eventually be transformed at the final resurrection. The risen Jesus he personally experienced on the road to Damascus he presented as the external Son of God who pre-existed before the Incarnation; the God-man; the innocent one who was crucified and raised to life by his Father; the one who was exalted to God's right hand.