

Bishop Robert J. Baker
Announces Plans For The Year Of St. Paul Celebration

June 11, 2008

Feast of St. Barnabas

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On this feast of the great co-worker of the Apostle St. Paul, St. Barnabas, I wish to lay out before you our plans to celebrate the Year of St. Paul in the Diocese of Birmingham. Pope Benedict XVI commenting on Barnabas' influence on St. Paul (cf. Galatians 2:1ff) said: "Barnabas, as it were, restored Paul to the Church; in this sense he gave back to her the Apostle to the Gentiles (The Apostles, p.156)."

Pope Benedict XVI, by proclaiming a Year of St. Paul, is also restoring Paul to the Church—placing before us this great Apostle on the 2,000th anniversary of his birth.

As we approach the beginning of the year of St. Paul, I would first like to thank each of you who have made our publishing venture between The Birmingham Catholic Press and Our Sunday Visitor a great success (*St. Paul: A Bible Study Guide for Catholics*). We were able to sell over 8,000 copies. These books are now being distributed to all who ordered them prior to the deadline. Additional copies may be ordered in the future from Our Sunday Visitor Publishing. I encourage parishes and schools to put this excellent work of Father Mitch Pacwa, S.J., to good use—as a true tool to learning more about the Apostle Paul and his teaching on six of the Sacraments of our Faith.

I also want to encourage each parish or religious community to find a special way to highlight the celebration of the Year of St. Paul in your area. I have noticed, for instance, that at St. Theresa's parish in Leeds the parish staff has made a banner of the Year-of-St.-Paul logo that is displayed prominently in the sanctuary of the church.

Father Charles Alookaran purchased a beautiful statue of St. Paul that will be displayed prominently in St. Paul's in Athens for the Year of St. Paul and afterwards occupy a spot of prominence in the church. The Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration have a statue of St. Paul in their monastery courtyard. St. Bernard's Abbey has an icon of St. Paul gracing one of its side altars in the Abbey church. St. George the Great Martyr has a beautiful icon of St. Paul as part of the iconostasis in their church. Catholic High School in Huntsville has expressed an interest in their having their high school renamed "St. Paul Catholic High School."

Each of these examples offers an excellent way to highlight to our parishes and communities this time of grace that has been offered to us by our Holy Father.

I would ask all of our clergy to pay special attention to the Pauline texts proclaimed at Mass during this Year of St. Paul. Too often these texts, which follow a continuous reading of Paul's letters and are often disconnected from the First Reading and the Gospel, present a problem for the deacon or priest preparing a homily—but during this time of grace there is an opportunity to bring these treasures to the forefront of our preaching of St. Paul, who is always pointing the way to Jesus Christ.

This is a time to familiarize ourselves with the canonical writings attributed to St. Paul, not to dissect them, but rather to savor them. A reading list has been made available online at the diocesan web site: www.bhmdiocese.org. This same reading guide is in the Appendix of *St. Paul: A Bible Study Guide for Catholics*. I have been using this checklist myself since April to make my way through St. Paul's letters and have found this an easy way to reacquaint myself with his teachings. It is my hope that each of you will take a few minutes each day to read through all of St. Paul's letters during this special year.

The Year of St. Paul formally begins with Solemn Vespers on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul on June 28th. Pope Benedict XVI will formally open the Year from the Basilica of St. Paul Outside of the Walls in Rome. On Sunday June 29th I will offer Holy Mass at Our Lady of the Angels Chapel in Irondale, on the grounds of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), at 7 a.m. The Mass will be broadcast live to an international audience. Everyone is welcome to attend this Mass.

A plenary indulgence may be obtained by those who receive the special Papal Blessing that I have been authorized by the Vatican to give at the end of this opening Mass to all in attendance who fulfill the usual conditions. This indulgence may be gained also by those unable to attend Mass because of some illness or other legitimate reason, who view the Mass on television or by listening on the radio.

Later that morning Bishop Foley will offer Holy Mass at St. Paul's in Athens at 11 a.m. Immediately following the Mass in Athens, there will be Eucharistic Adoration until 4 p.m., at which time there will be a procession of the statue of St. Paul and the Blessed Sacrament, followed by Benediction.

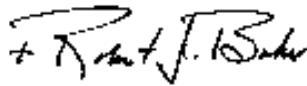
In the evening I will preside over Solemn Vespers (Evening Prayer) and Eucharistic Benediction at the Cathedral of St. Paul in Birmingham. I will be assisted by the Benedictine Monks of St. Bernard Abbey in Cullman. I would like each parish to send representatives to this event to make it a true diocesan event. Everyone is welcome to attend.

A Plenary Indulgence may be gained by the Faithful who attend any Sacred Rite (and fulfill the usual conditions) at the Cathedral of St. Paul or St. Paul's in Athens during the Year of St. Paul (June 28, 2008-June 29, 2009). This would include attendance at either of the events to be celebrated on June 29th of this year at both churches.

These celebrations are only the beginning of our observance of the Year of St. Paul. In the Fall, the Cathedral of St. Paul will host a series of lectures on St. Paul and the Sacraments by Father Mitch Pacwa, S.J., that will complement the book published by The Birmingham Catholic Press and Our Sunday Visitor Publishing. There are a number of events that are still in the planning stages in parishes and retreat houses throughout the diocese. Continue to watch the diocesan web site; and read information in our diocesan newspaper, *One Voice*, for these announcements. Each of these events has a common purpose: to help us understand the message of St. Paul in a way that will enable each of us to be open to the Spirit of God, to live in Christ, and to give praise to the Father.

The message of St. Paul is urgently needed today. May our participation in the celebration of this Year of St. Paul enable us to follow the counsel of the Apostle to rejoice in hope, be patient under trial, and persevere in prayer (Romans 12:12). May the Apostle to the Gentiles help us to realize fully what this great mystic and evangelizer came to realize through his close encounter with Christ, that "to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert J. Baker". The signature is stylized and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Reverend Robert J. Baker, S.T.D.

Bishop of Birmingham in Alabama