

Peter Wolf

## *In the school of the Apostle Paul*

Sermon at the Opening of the Year of St. Paul

Schoenstatt Pilgrims' Church

June 28, 2008



Dear Pilgrims from far and near, dear Schoenstatt family,

Not 3 hours have passed since the Holy Father Pope Benedict opened the Year of St. Paul in Rome. To everyone's surprise he announced a year ago today that the world-wide Church would be invited to celebrate the anniversary of the 2000<sup>th</sup> birthday of St. Paul. Today he opened one of the doors of St. Paul Outside the Wall and lit a candle at the grave of the apostle. He would like to clear the way to the primary sources of our faith. He wants to bring us in touch with the original joy and beauty of Christianity. He invites us become acquainted with Paul, the great witness and teacher at the beginning of the Church and to go into his school.

### *Father Kentenich went into St. Paul's school*

Soon after Pope Benedict's announcement of the Year of St. Paul, the idea and wish came up here in Schoenstatt to publish a collection of inspiring texts as in the years leading up to the Jubilee year 2000. I dedicated myself to this task together with a small circle of people from the Joseph Kentenich Institute.

We did not cease to be amazed as more and more texts surfaced in which our founder spoke about St. Paul. In over 20% of the talks, sermons and letters which we had at our disposal, we stumbled upon the name of the apostle to the peoples. It became clearer and clearer to us and we became more and more aware that our founder had worked out entire topics and core content of his spirituality based on St. Paul.

He went into his school of thought and was inspired by him and made entire sections of his letters his own. Immediately after the founding of the Marian Congregation he spoke about the leadership style and the missionary method of St. Paul. There is a talk in which it becomes clear that he knows Paul and has reflected on his methodology. It is from this talk that Joseph Engling picked up the formulation of his personal ideal: to become all things to all men. From Paul the young spiritual director works out his early and continuous favorite theme of freedom. It is important to him to establish and orient this theme in the Pauline view of the freedom of a Christian. He extensively compiles everything Paul says about childship before God and finds the supporting and effective pillars for his view of childship before God, which he then develops into a four-week retreat. From the prison in Coblenz, where he only has at his disposal the bible and the then well-known book by Holzner about St. Paul, on note after note he writes training material for a course of Sisters of Mary to their re-

ception. It is the great world of the membership in Christ which he takes up and makes his own.

Throughout his life our Father makes use of such themes that he worked out for himself in just such manner. One can only be amazed at how connections and citations are constantly present and at his disposal over decades. He is one who has gone into the school of St. Paul and let himself be shaped by it.

*Father Kentenich invited his followers to go into the school of St. Paul.*

Out of his own experience with Paul he invites us to go into the school of St. Paul time and again. We find the invitation addressed to the young people of the congregation and to the thousands who attended his courses and to the many, many who join his foundation. Time and again we find the words, “to learn from St. Paul”, “to study in Paul”, “to go into the school of St. Paul”. Even when he says “we want to examine what St. Paul says”, Paul remains our teacher. In a retreat course in 1935 he introduces St. Paul as a master and leader whom one can really trust. It cannot escape the careful listener how he juxtaposes St. Paul as a leader figure next to the “Führer” who had come into power two years previously in Germany

Our founder brings together what distinguishes St. Paul as a true leader and teacher and encourages his listeners to go beyond the retreat and pick up the letters of St. Paul and daily read the bible.

Sometimes one senses something of his apparent ardor for St. Paul when he introduces St. Paul to the young men of the congregation as the “greatest of the great, or when he recommends that the Sisters of Mary study St. Paul as the “man with 1000 hearts”. (Some of us found these characterizations so original that we made a title for a workshop out of them.)

It is really worthwhile to become more deeply with St. Paul and his letters and grapple with his thinking. We have his authentic letters. The Christians of all times have so treasured his writing that they copied and distributed his letters over centuries. Yes, they read them at their Eucharistic celebrations as holy texts, next to the texts of the prophets and the evangelists. In these letters we meet a person of flesh and blood, who writes of himself and his experiences. Previously he had been a decisive opponent of the young church and only through his encounter with Christ did he become one, who believing in Christ and his gospel, carried it untiringly through the then known world.

In his letters we meet the earliest witnesses of the resurrection, the Eucharist and Christian spirituality. In the letter to the Galatians we find the oldest written witness of a Christian who knows that Christ loves him.

St. Paul cannot have copied that from somewhere. He uses a new way of speaking in order to express his new feeling toward life and what has become the new reality of his life. “Not I live, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal 2: 20). His new life is „a living in and with Christ”. He attempts in ever new ways to express what is new and different in his life through his encounter with the Resurrected Christ. The words of the gospel about discipleship seem not to suffice for him. He speaks of a “being in Christ” and of “Christ in himself”. A new certainty has grown within him that doesn’t allow him to be separated from the love of God in Christ our Lord.” (Romans 8:39).

The founder of the Schoenstatt Movement followed St. Paul throughout his life and tried to plumb to the inmost depths of our faith. To be gripped by Christ in the way that he observed it in St. Paul is what he wants to open up for and bring him to his own followers. So today, too, Fr. Kentenich invites us to go into the school of St. Paul

and trace the original experiences of this great witness of the beginning of Christianity and in this way discover the joy and beauty of being a Christian.

*Father Kentenich took on some of the features of his teacher in the school of St. Paul*

Our founder did not just go into the school of St. Paul and pick up this or that theme to make it fruitful for his movement. If you have occupied yourself for a longer period of time with his relationship to Paul, it cannot escape you how some of the features and intentions of the great apostle are mirrored in the person and life of Fr. Kentenich. Both let themselves be guided by God's Spirit and shy away from no daring in their apostolic undertaking. Both are filled with mission consciousness that drives them and completely fills them. In the course of their lives, they go to great lengths for their mission. Both live their vocation strongly in the proclamation of the word as preachers and authors of letters.

When Fr. Kentenich landed in prison and concentration camp during the Nazi regime, St. Paul's destiny became a key to understanding for himself and his followers. From prison he keeps contact and trusts that this time will become fruitful for his followers as Paul did. The letters to the Philippians which St. Paul wrote from prison suddenly receive a new, entirely relevant sound for Fr. Kentenich and his disciples and helps both understand the will of God during this difficult time. Not without reason did Paul become the alias and pseudonym for Fr. Kentenich in the Dachau time. It is no coincidence or randomly chosen name just to escape the vigilance of SS and Gestapo mail censors. During this time the letters of Paul receive a whole new meaning and proximity. Suddenly the school of St. Paul is tangibly present and perceptibly real.

During this time a deeper and deeper attachment grows, as it grew around St. Paul. Paul was not only a teacher and mediator of knowledge for his communities, but rather engaged like a father or mother. Paul knows the difference between numerous teachers but few fathers in Christ (see. 1 Cor 4: 15).

He sees himself as the father of his communities. Paul claims to suffer for those entrusted to him as a mother suffers labor pains. (see Gal. 4:19). Many of those who gathered around our Father and founder suddenly understood what St. Paul was talking about and how seriously he meant those words. Experiencing our own founder and the similarity of their destiny and mission will give many people lively access to the great apostle of 2000 years ago whose birth we now celebrate.

I would like to cordially encourage everyone to accept the Holy Father's invitation to celebrate the Pauline year together. I am full of joy and hope that this year will become a great blessing for the Schoenstatt family and the worldwide church. With our founder I invite you this year to go together into the school of the St. Paul, the apostle.

*Translation: scm, Schoenstatt*