



September 21
Feast of St Matthew



September 21 - Kalambaka, Meteora

My dear Little Flower - co-pilgrims on this journey,

Today, we embark on a journey to Meteora, a place of profound spiritual importance for countless Christian pilgrims. Meteora, located about 230km southwest of Thessaloniki, is not mentioned in relation to St. Paul in the Bible, but it became a center of Christian monasticism much later. Established in the 11th century, long after the time of Saint Paul, the monasteries of Meteora stand as a testament to the enduring Christian legacy that he played a pivotal role in establishing within this region. Monks began to settle in the area seeking isolation and a closer relationship with God, inspired by early Christian hermits and ascetics who followed traditions of solitude that echoes the spirit of Paul's dedication to spreading the gospel and living a Christ-centered life. These monasteries, nestled amidst awe-inspiring rock formations, bear witness to the unwavering faith and devotion of those who sought solace and spiritual enlightenment within their hallowed halls.

As we embark on the pilgrimage to Kalambaka and Meteora, we can reflect on the spread of Christianity in Greece and the significant contributions of St. Paul. His extensive travels through cities such as Corinth and Thessaloniki laid the groundwork for vibrant Christian communities to flourish in the region. This pilgrimage offers a profound opportunity to engage with St. Paul's spiritual legacy through the iconic monasteries of Meteora, which stand as a testament to the faith and dedication of those who followed in his footsteps.

Thessaloniki and Meteora hold significant importance for Christian pilgrims. Thessaloniki draws visitors due to its biblical connection to Paul, symbolizing active mission and evangelism similar to Philippi. Meteora, on the other hand, represents contemplative monasticism, attracting pilgrims with its profound spiritual heritage and awe-inspiring monasteries. These two destinations collectively embody the broader dimensions of Christian faith - from engaging in active mission work to seeking solace in prayer and solitude.

The unplanned visit to a town called Veria

Because we needed to celebrate daily Mass today and we were avoiding having to celebrate it at the Hotel, our tour guide introduced the idea of passing through a town called Veria, where we could celebrate at an outdoor area.

On a personal note, I was trying to escape having to preach at this daily Mass that I was assigned to celebrate. If you hadn't known me by now, I get shy and insecure about speaking in public. The night before, at dinner, I was trying to convince Fr Vincent to let me celebrate the Mass, but that our group would want to hear him preach, so that he should do the homily.

Of course, he said no - I was going to be on duty; then, I told him that since we were visiting the monasteries, we probably should be practicing the spirituality of silence - so at the moment of the homily, I was going to ask everybody to sit quietly and allow the silence to gift us with God's grace.

But God has a great sense of humor. The place where we ended up celebrating Mass was a place where St Paul preached! It was God's wink to tell me: *JC, I need you to open your mouth in public!* So, I will try my best - I wouldn't be Chris Stephanik or Bishop Robert Barron, but for the Lord, I will try to get over myself and open my mouth to bring forward the mission and build God's Kingdom.



The town of Veria (also known as Berea in the Bible) holds significant relevance in the Acts of the Apostles as one of the key stops during St. Paul's second missionary journey. It is remembered for the positive reception Paul and his companions received there and for the diligence of the local Jews in studying the scriptures. The small and simple town of Veria was visited by St Paul two times between 50AD and at the beginning of 57AD. Acts 17:10-15 describes Paul's visit to Berea after he was forced to leave Thessaloniki due to opposition. The Bereans, however, were open-minded and eager to hear Paul's message about Jesus as the Messiah. They listened to Paul's preaching and crucially, examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true. This attitude of diligence and careful study of Scripture has made the Bereans a positive example for Christians throughout history. As a result of their openness and diligent study, many Bereans believed, including a number of prominent Greek men and women (Acts 17:12). This marked another successful establishment of a Christian community in Macedonia, and another testament to the diversity of the early Christian communities that Paul helped to form.

Jews from Thessaloniki who had previously opposed him traveled to Berea to stir up trouble (Acts 17:13). Due to this increasing tension, Paul had to leave Berea, continuing his journey to Athens, while Silas and Timothy remained in Berea to help strengthen the newly formed church (acts 17:14-15).



St Paul's "two ships in the night moment"

The Bereans' careful examination of Paul's message against the Scriptures serves as a model for Christians to approach teachings with discernment and devotion to the Word of God. Paul's brief but impactful ministry in Berea contributed to the further spread of Christianity in the region of Macedonia. Despite the persecution that followed him, Berea became part of the growing network of early Christian communities in the region.

The legacy of the Bereans continues to inspire Christians today, encouraging a thoughtful and rigorous approach to understanding the Scripture.



Homily: The Journey of Jesus in Luke 8:1-3

Feast of St Matthew

Veria - Altar of St Paul, Greece

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 8, verses 1-3, we encounter a beautiful and profound account of Jesus' journey. This passage invites us to reflect on our own pilgrimage and journey as followers of Christ.

Right off the bat, we realize (at least I did, as I reflected on today's gospel) that the journey of Jesus, as described in this passage (Lk 8:1-3), was not like our journey and travels; rather, his journey was a purposeful and demanding journey - a mission to be accomplished, marked by both joy and suffering.

I also realize that each one of us here today carries with us our own intentions and prayers and desires for others in this pilgrimage; we are not here fore merely sight-seeing (although what we are experiencing and seeing together are truly a blessings), we are also here because we are called to be here to offer our many intentions and prayers that we would want to bring up with Jesus - along our way. Today, was a perfect day at the Varlaam Monastery for that!

We are called to be more than just passive recipients of God's grace in the journey of faith. We are called, like St. Paul and St. Matthew, St Lydia and the women who accompanied Jesus along the journey in the gospel passage today - those who were healed and transformed by God's saving grace, to be active witnesses of our faith with others, using our gifts, blessings, and talents to build up God's Kingdom.

The journey of Jesus is an invitation to embark on a pilgrimage of faith with one another, filled with purpose and meaning. It is an invitation to walk together alongside Jesus, accompanied by a community of friends and believers, and to share in his mission of love, service, and compassion.

As we continue on our pilgrimage, walking the path of St. Paul's Second and Third Missionary Journeys, let us heed the calling to embrace the adventure of faith, trusting in Jesus. Let us use our many blessings to serve others like Jesus, St Paul and St Matthew, St. Lydia, making a difference the world, for God's greater glory.

*Your parish priest,
Fr JC Merino*

Reading

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God [that is] with me. Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1Cor 15:10-11).

Reflecting on St. Paul with Pope Benedict XVI

“St. Paul gave himself to the Gospel with his entire existence; we could say 24 hours a day! And he exercised his ministry with faithfulness and joy, ‘that I might by all means save some’ (1 Cor 9: 22). And with regard to the Church, even knowing that he had a relationship of fatherhood with her (cf. 1 Cor 4: 15), if not actually of motherhood (cf. Gal 4: 19), he adopted an attitude of complete service, declaring admirably: ‘Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy’ (2 Cor 1: 24). This remains the mission of all Christ’s apostles in all times: to be his fellow workers in true joy” (General Audience, Sept. 10, 2008).

Prayer

Dear St. Paul, by the help of your prayers, may we be strengthened in our commitment to follow your example and give our all to proclaiming the gospel to the people of our times. And hear all the desires of my heart. Amen.

Our Father ...

Hail Mary ...

Glory Be ...

St. Paul the Apostle, pray for us!