

Lesson Three Notes

What were the circumstances of Paul's imprisonment?

Apparently, while he was awaiting his trial, he would have been allowed to rent a private room. This was not a prison cell as one might imagine, and yet he would have been chained to a guard at all times. According to our sources, Paul would have been allowed to conduct his affairs—praying, reading Scripture, dictating letters, and receiving visitors.

What would this have been like?

No privacy, for starters. How would you sleep well? Just the physical toll this would take from the weight of the chain, to the restriction of movement. The lack of freedom would be intolerable given that you know you have done nothing wrong. And if this was his imprisonment in Rome, this would have lasted for up to two years! While it's easy to imagine how horrible it must have been, I can also imagine Paul, being Paul, would be nearly gleeful that each new guard would give him an opportunity to evangelize for Christ. Play the scene out in your mind. One guard after another would come to respect and admire Paul for his strange response to his conditions and would also come to be persuaded by his message. Can you even imagine them trying to continue to find a guard that they would think would never fall under his influence?—"Send that guy. He's ruthless. He'll never be taken by this man." And one after the next—and even those who bring him food, or provide other care—listen to the Good News and are moved, perhaps even to baptism.

What does this say about Paul? What kind of person could affect this kind of influence in his situation?

It says that Paul was the best kind of disciple—one that influenced others by the way he lived out his faith, even amidst the most trying conditions. He was courageous, hopeful, joyful, encouraging, and able to consider his own trials in light of how it would bring others to Christ.

Catechism

Why are they called "sacramentals" and what do we mean by that term?

Sacramentals are sacred signs that bear a resemblance to the sacraments by signifying the spiritual effects that are obtained by the intercession of the Church. Huh? Well, for example, Holy Water, water that has been blessed and the most common sacramental, is a sacramental that is used in baptism. Blessing ourselves with Holy Water reminds us of our baptism and the promise that was made that day. Each time we bless ourselves with Holy Water, we renew the graces that we received. "Sacramentals do not confer the grace of the Holy Spirit in the way that the sacraments do, but by the Church's prayer, they prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it." (1670)

"Sacramentals include blessings, actions such as processions, prayers such as the Rosary, and objects such as holy water, ashes, palms, candles, and medals." Crucifixes, missals and prayer books, scapulars, statues, Bibles, icons—anything that is used in prayer and worship, usually, but not necessarily blessed by a priest. (An item can become a sacramental without being blessed simply by its use and benefit. Some priests, in fact, do not like the disposability of monthly missals or subscription devotionals like Magnificat because they are used in prayer and then thrown in the garbage after their use. I put mine in recycling. Is that better? Ha.) Sacramentals are religious objects or actions created by the Church, not by Christ himself. For that reason, new

ones can be created and old ones can be suppressed. (I wish someone would have suppressed the What Would Jesus Do? stuff. Again, ha.)

First among all sacramentals are blessings. Blessings are a way of giving God thanks for divine grace and for putting people or items under his watchful care. Blessings change items into sacramentals but not magical lucky charms. Once an item has been blessed, it can't be sold or used in an unholy manner.

Who should be giving blessings and when? This seems to be somewhat of a gray area, but here's what I've discovered. Blessings are "constitutive" and "invocative". A constitutive blessing confers a sacred character on a person or thing. An Invocative blessing asks for God's blessing, but does not make it sacred. A good rule of thumb is that ordained should do the first, laypeople only the second. I've also read that as laypeople, with the exception of blessing ourselves with holy water, we should not bless with the laying on of hands or with our hands extended; our hands should be folded. So, there are many people who believe that Extraordinary Eucharistic Ministers should probably not be blessing people who approach the sanctuary for Communion but do not receive. There are even people who believe that the congregation should not extend hands during a blessing at church, for instance in the case of blessing catechists, or Moms on Mother's Day, etc.