

The second reading at our Sunday Eucharist for the next four weeks is taken from St Paul's *Letter to the Philippians*. Paul and his co-workers, Luke, Timothy, and Silvanus around about 50 AD had established the first Christian community in Europe at Philippi, a city on the north-east coast of present day Greece, located on the Roman-built highway, the Via Egnatia, that ran from the Adriatic Sea in the west, to Byzantium, or modern day Constantinople, in the east. Paul's letter, written from prison in Rome, or possibly Ephesus, reveals his fondness for this community and his desire to sustain their mutual friendship.

In today's reading Paul shares with the Philippians his experience of imprisonment. He has faced the possibility of being sentenced to death, but with equanimity, for he writes: "Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by my life or by my death." Paul is confident that his death, too, will witness to Christ – in that sense his ministry will continue after his death - and, moreover, he believes that his death will bring him a deeper union with his risen Lord which is his great desire: "Life to me is Christ, but then death would bring me something more." His understanding of his death, he acknowledges, gives rise to an interior conflict. On the one hand he sees that the better thing for him is to die and be with Christ. However, he recognises that the more urgent need is that he lives to minister to the Philippians (and others).

But we need not think that Paul is ruling out an alternative way of looking at his situation. After all Paul was not executed at this time so he continued his ministry, and he continued to grow in union with Christ. Thus we might describe his relationship with the risen Lord as one of communion and collaboration, dimensions of the relationship that were distinct but inter-related. We might see our work and our prayer in the same light, as distinct but inter-related, for as one perceptive theologian has remarked, "Not all work is prayer. But when one's work in fact carries out the will of God which one has discerned and accepted with loving firmness in prayer, then indeed to work is to pray, and to fail to give one's whole heart and attention to one's work is to nullify prayer."

For us now, as it was for Paul while he was alive, our relationship with Christ involves communion and collaboration and these can be seen as mutually enriching.

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