

Priest sheds light on Year of St. Paul

Even though scholars believe St. Paul wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament, many Catholics don't know much about the famous Christian preacher.

Father Ronald D. Witherup, S.S., superior general of the Sulpicians and an author of numerous writings on St. Paul, helped shed light on the misunderstood saint during the first of a three-part lecture series on St. Paul held Sept. 16 at Our Lady of the Angels in Catonsville.

"Paul gives us the message of the Risen Lord," said Father Witherup, noting that St. Paul never knew the historical Christ. The saint, who had famously persecuted Christians before his conversion, encountered the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

"Paul is our model," Father Witherup said. "If Paul can be called to become an apostle, then we all can be called to be apostles."

Like St. Paul, Catholics know Jesus not because they walked with him on the face of the earth, the priest said, but through their faith and through the sacraments.

Father Witherup was elated when Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed a Year of St. Paul from June 28, 2008 to June 29, 2009. The priest believes it's the first time a holy year has been dedicated to St. Paul.

Catholics have shied away from St. Paul, Father Witherup said, because Martin Luther based much of his theology on his writings - launching the Protestant Reformation. There is much to learn about the meaning of faith by studying St. Paul, he said.

"Paul gives us a model of faith to say we can be called to do some form of ministry in our own day," Father Witherup said.

Acknowledging that St. Paul has been controversial from the very beginning of the

church, the lecturer said some find St. Paul to be “boastful and arrogant.” St. Paul isn’t really boasting in himself when he recounts how he survived ship wrecks, snake bites, robbers, stoning and more, according to Father Witherup.

“He’s saying all those things are due to his miraculous call and it’s by grace that he does anything,” the priest said. “When he boasts, he always boasts in the Lord.”

Sister Pat Huesman, S.S.N.D., pastoral associate of Our Lady of the Angels, said Father Witherup’s talks are free and open to the public. The second talk was held Sept. 23 and the final talk is scheduled for Sept. 30 from 10-11:30 a.m.