

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT— YEAR C

#### Second Reading Philippians 3: 17–4:1

Philippi was an important town in Macedonia (a region owing its name to Philip II of Macedon), with a large population of Romans and local Greeks. Paul established his first community there around 50 AD when he visited during his second missionary journey. From the names of the people mentioned in his letter, it would seem that it was predominantly made up of Gentiles.



Paul wrote his letter from prison. Whether this was in Rome or Ephesus is not known, but he seems to have been under house arrest. The sudden changes in tone and the disjointed character of this letter have led some scholars to believe that this epistle was in fact a collection of three different letters.

The passage we are reading and praying today comes towards the end of his epistle. Paul uses strong, emotional language.

Whereas asking his followers to imitate his 'rule of life' might seem arrogant or conceited to some, Paul has no qualms about it. He himself imitates Jesus Christ; and often invites his readers to follow him in this way (see 1 Thessalonians 1: 6 or 1 Corinthians 4: 16): '*Take me for your model, as I take Christ*' (1 Corinthians 11: 1).

Scholars are divided as to who the '*enemies of the cross*' are. They could be Jewish Christians who wanted Gentiles to become Jews and follow strict Jewish rituals before becoming Christians; or people preaching a gospel not centred on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; or even hedonistic, loose-living, non-Christian Philippians.

The reference to '*making food into their gods*' would then refer either to strict Jewish dietary laws or to gluttony. The '*something they ought to think shameful*' may refer to the undue pride which some attached to being circumcised.

Paul quotes Psalm 8: 6 in connection with the Lord who can '*subdue the whole universe*', and once we are in heaven '*transfigure our wretched*

#### Gospel Luke 9: 28–36

##### Jesus went up the mountain to pray

The Church presents Jesus's Transfiguration every year in the Gospel for the Second Sunday of Lent. It is a significant moment in Jesus's life prior to his journey to Jerusalem and his crucifixion.

No specific mountain is named and the fact that Jesus and his disciples went there to pray may indicate that it was as much a theological mountain as a real one, a place of prayer where God revealed himself.

##### Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory.

Moses, the great law-giver of the people of Israel, and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, represent the totality of the Old Testament. They indicate that the purpose of the Law and the Prophets, in preparing for Christ, is now being fulfilled. According to biblical tradition, both men had been taken up into heaven.

Two men also '*suddenly appear*' at the time of Jesus's Resurrection (Luke 24: 4) and Ascension (Acts 1: 10).

##### And they were speaking of his passing

Moses and Elijah spoke of Jesus's passing or '*passage*', translated from the word '*exodus*'. For Jesus it meant that he would pass into heavenly glory through death, as when the angel of death had passed over the homes of the Hebrews in Egypt, and as Israel had passed over from slavery into freedom.

##### Peter and his companions saw Jesus's glory

As the two men were leaving, Peter wanted to set up three tents in order to keep them there and stay in the wonder of the moment. He may have been thinking of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles or Booths – *Succoth* in Hebrew (Zechariah 14: 16) which recalled Israel's forty years of wandering through the desert, when they lived in tents or booths.

##### A cloud came and covered them

This was no ordinary cloud but a *shekinah*, a cloud that signalled God's presence and inspired awe and fear in those who witnessed it and were engulfed in it.

