

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Epistle, Year A

WHO AM I?

Romans 1:1-7

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Analysis by Peter Keyel

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

7 To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

DIAGNOSIS: Defined by the World

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Uncertainty and Conflict

What are you going to do with your life? We look at the world, and see lots of options. How do we decide how we will define ourselves and what career we will follow? Do we just squander our time with meaningless entertainments? What are we doing?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Choosing Our Calling

In looking for careers, some speak of our calling or vocation—those activities and employments that speak out to us. We're urged to trust one of our many internal voices—our conscience, our confidence in our ability, our desire for worldly success. On top of that, we hear other voices: parents, friends, promises of worldly success, our merit. We choose one or more voices to trust.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Our Beloved Gods

Ultimately when we put our trust in these voices for our calling, we end up making gods out of them. However, no matter which of these beloved gods we trust, no matter the vocation or calling, the end is still the same: we'll die and be forgotten.

PROGNOSIS: Defined by Jesus

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): God's Beloved

In the opening letter to the Romans, Paul offers an alternative solution: God's promise in the Gospel. Jesus Christ, who is promised through prophets, has overcome death and has come to set us apart and give us a new calling.

Step 5 Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Called to be Saints

That new calling takes many names, some of which Paul offers here: "apostle," "set apart for the Gospel," "God's beloved," "saints," those who "belong to Jesus Christ." This calling and vocation is the one that will see us through death!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Grace and Peace

So what? Has that answered the question, what are you going to do with your life? There are still a lot of options in the world. However, Paul has an answer: "Bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves" (vv. 5-6). How do we bring about that obedience? By speaking it and living it: "Grace to you and peace

from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 7).