



LETTERS OF PAUL

From the beginning, the churches took care to preserve the letters they received from the apostles, since in them they had authoritative witnesses to the faith. It was more difficult then than it is today to gather these documents, and even save the perishable material of papyrus from dampness.

Before long, there was an initial collection of the first seven epistles arranged in the order of decreasing length: the four “great” letters to the Romans, to the Corinthians, and to the Galatians, and “the letters from captivity.” Others came to be added: first, those to the Thessalonians which are actually the oldest; and then those that were passed on under the patronage of Paul: the letters to Timothy and Titus which were written some twenty or thirty years later, and the beautiful letter to the Hebrews, written most likely under the influence of Paul but by an unknown author. A phrase from the “second letter of Peter” (not written by himself but about fifty years after his death) is evidence that from this time the letters of Paul were counted among the inspired writings (2 Pt 3:15-16).

Paul saw himself as “the apostle to the pagan nations,” seeing there

his personal vocation beside Peter (to whom God had confided the charge of evangelizing the Jewish world) not only in Palestine, but also throughout the Roman Empire, wherever they were established. Paul received this mission from Jesus himself at the time of his conversion (Acts 22:21; Gal 2:7); so highly fundamental was it in the divine project of the mission and extension of the Church that it remained unfinished at the time of his death. The spirit of Paul, one of the great manifestations of the spirit of Jesus, is always at work in our midst through his letters.



LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Jesus presented himself as the Savior. First of all, he wanted to save the Jewish people. He spoke to them of the kingdom and they understood that God would reign over them just as he would reign in their lives. Their collective aspirations were not unknown to him, but he oriented them toward a more universal mission: it was truly “good news” for them.

With the beginning of the mission into Roman territory, the Gospel had equally to be good news for the Greeks of the Roman Empire who were listening to the word of the apostles. Protected by solid structures that no one questioned, they did not share the Jewish longing for liberation. In absorbing them the Roman Empire had practically reduced to nothing the pride and ambitions of nations great and small, leaving a void for religious concerns to take root. These people were interested in all that related to the human person and searched high and low in a jumble of doctrines and religions as a means of escaping Fate. So it was essential to speak to them of Christ, as the one who unravels our contradictions and gives us life.

In this letter to the Christians of Rome, capital of the Empire, Paul intends to respond to the concerns of the Greeks but without thereby neglecting the Jews.

The Letter to the Romans is, for the most part, a long exposition about Christian vocation. To us, it will seem difficult because that is what it is. It must be remembered that Paul's teaching does not stem from a doctrinal system or from a theology: rather it constantly springs from his own experience. The encounter with the Risen Christ, the call made to Paul that put him at the service of the Gospel, the long experience as an apostle, the gifts of the Spirit acting in him, and constant communion with Jesus: these were the sources of his vision of faith.

So Paul spoke of God's salvation as if forgetful of the explosive Palestinian context where Jewish nationalism was at grips with the Romans and where all religious hopes were politicized. God's salvation is the salvation of the human race, a total project, but taking place in the heart of people; all will depend on our response to God's call: can we trust him?

Paul, marked by his own history, presents the beginning of faith as a dramatic conversion. People are slaves to sin (it would be necessary to understand what Paul means by that). We have been created to share the life of God, and as long as we do not achieve this we carry within ourselves a conscious or unconscious rebellion against God. Must we turn toward religion? We would gain very little, says Paul, with the insistence that will shock many people: as long as we believe in becoming "good" through religious practices we turn our back on the only power that can free us: God's merciful love. The only response he expects from us is our act of faith, a faith which immediately frees us.

This salvation is the one announced by Scripture, but it will disconcert those believers who do not go beyond religious practices. These belong to a first stage of sacred history that ended with Jesus' death. Our baptism gives us entrance to a mysterious world which is no other than the Risen Christ: from now on we are "in Christ," and living by his Spirit. The gift of the Spirit opens a new era where all is inspired by the law of love, for those who have become true sons and daughters of God.

Why Did Paul Send This Letter?

Paul had decided to leave the Eastern provinces of the empire and to reach its very heart, that is to say, Rome (Rom 15:23). But others had established and formed that community, Peter for sure, and many others who are unknown. These Christians already had their own ways and

their customs. Some of them had heard comments that did not predispose them favorably toward Paul and his methods. Therefore, it is understandable that Paul wanted to prepare his coming. He may have been thinking even more about the Jerusalem Christians who were spreading rumors and slandering him (Acts 21:21). Before Paul went to Rome, he had to go to Jerusalem to bring the proceeds of the collection taken in the Greek communities for the poor of Jerusalem. Paul was not too sure of being welcomed as a brother (Rom 15:31). So, he sent this letter to Rome, knowing that it would quickly reach Jerusalem. In this letter, Paul dwells on the complementary vocation of the Jews and the pagans.

His calls for mutual understanding that make up the content of Chapters 13–15 of this letter, were important concerns of Paul at the time. Even if he addressed the Jewish community of Jerusalem in a special way, his remarks were not out of place in Rome. There, like everywhere, it was not easy to gather Jews and converted pagans in the same community. Paul was already preaching what we fail to put into practice, namely, to accept one another with our differences.

Paul probably sent this letter from Corinth in the winter of 57–58.

The Letter to the Romans and the Church

It is now impossible to speak of the letter to the Romans without saying at least a word on the place it has held and continues to hold in Protestant Churches. It has been considered by many as the key to the interpretation of the entire Scriptures.

It is known that Luther deepened the Reformation by commenting on this epistle. He was not wrong in seeing in this letter the condemnation of a Church established in the world, where faith had been degraded, becoming no more than practice devoid of faith which saves. The Christianity of the Middle Ages was, in fact, a people, rather like what the people of Israel had become. A person was a Christian by birth and continued to be one; he/she could be a believer, but as one is in any culture whatever. It was thought that salvation was gained by religious rites and by the practice of good deeds that merited heaven.

It was therefore very important to remember that faith is at the heart of every conversion, and that this conversion is the response to a freely given call from God. This letter emphasizes Christ the Savior and this

emphasis was sufficient to devalue the whole religious system which at the time was crushed by tradition and devotions. There was faith, at a time when preaching rarely touched on anything other than morality with its catalogs of moral principles. There was the word of God directed toward the individual person at a time when people were quite happy to trust Church leaders. It was then, a radical criticism of the Church, which ended up looking at itself instead of turning toward God, and of a Church whose whole system—political, doctrinal and repressive—blocked the horizon.

We have said, however, that this letter had its roots in Paul's experience as a Jew, a Pharisee and as an apostle called directly by Christ. It is from that point that Paul spoke of sin and justification, of call, of salvation through faith. For their part, Luther and his contemporaries read this letter against the backdrop of their own problems—or better—of their anguish.

They magnified the perspective of sin and eternal condemnation, victims of a philosophy (nominalism) in which nothing was good or bad in itself but only if God declares it so. Because of that, everything Paul said about the predestination of the Jewish people was interpreted by them as a personal predestination to heaven or hell.

When Paul spoke of justification—a word which at that time had a large and imprecise meaning—he meant that God re-establishes in us an order which is the true one; they understood instead that, if we believe, God will accept us even if nothing has been changed in us. The great perspectives of humankind and history as a battlefield of sin and grace, were reduced to a personal problem: am I really free or am I enslaved to sin or grace. Taking literally Paul's images and comparisons, a doctrine of original sin was developed in which we all pay now and forever, for the sin of our first ancestors.

Several generations of Protestants and Catholics have been marked by these controversies: salvation through faith alone, or through faith and works, or through faith, works, and sacraments? The love of the Father who saves and of Christ the Savior were eclipsed in fact by an obsession for salvation: how can I escape from this rigid frame in which God confines me? The concept of a just God, of inexorable decisions, which so easily condemns people into hell would traumatize the West and prepare a revolt in the next centuries, that of militant atheism.

It is not pointless for us today to know this. We are all children of our time and the remedy, if we do not wish to be enslaved, is to not give over-importance to one biblical text to the detriment of others. When you have become familiar with Paul and first with the letter to the Romans you see that for him the Father of Jesus is really father, and passionately loved. Thousands of details are to be discovered in Paul that disclose his experience of a continual communion and a life "in" the Triune God, an experience very close to that of St. John.

That will not prevent us from finding in this letter just what Luther, after St. Augustine, saw there: a genial presentation of the mystery of humanity redeemed by Christ. There is a certain forgetfulness perhaps of this letter and of this doctrine which too often has allowed Catholics to hem themselves in by their practices and their sacraments, and neglect mission.

LETTER TO THE ROMANS



1 ¹From Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ,
an apostle called and set apart for God's Good News,
²the very promises he foretold through his prophets in the sacred
Scriptures regarding his Son,
³who was born in the flesh a descendant of David,
⁴and has been recognized as the Son of God endowed with Power,
upon rising from the dead through the Holy Spirit.
Through him, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵and for the sake of his name,
we received grace and mission in all the nations for them to accept
the faith.
⁶All of you, the elected of Christ, are part of them;
you, the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy:
⁷May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and
peace.

Paul longs to visit them

⁸First of all, I give thanks to my God through Jesus Christ for all of
you, because your faith is spoken of all over the world. ⁹And God, whom
I serve in spirit by announcing the Good News of his Son, is my witness
that I remember you in my prayers at all times. ¹⁰I pray constantly that,
if it is his will, he makes it possible for me to visit you. ¹¹I long to see
you and share some spiritual blessings with you to strengthen you. ¹²In
that way, we will encourage each other by sharing our common faith.

¹³You must know, brothers and sisters, that many times, I have made
plans to go to you, but till now, I have been prevented. ¹⁴I would like to
harvest some fruits among you, as I have done among other nations.
Whether Greeks or foreigners, cultured or ignorant, I feel under obliga-
tion to all. ¹⁵Hence, my eagerness to proclaim the gospel also to you
who are in Rome.

¹⁶For I am not ashamed at all of this Good News; it is God's power, saving those who believe, first the Jews, and then the Greeks. ¹⁷This Good News shows us the saving justice of God; a justice that saves exclusively by faith, as the Scripture says: *The upright one shall live by faith.*

ROMANS 1:1-17

Read: Paul begins this letter greeting a community that he had not founded, hence his suggestive presentation: "servant of Jesus Christ," "called to be an apostle," "chosen to announce the Good News." Since only a few in this local church know him, in this letter he summarizes his understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Reflect: Paul feels chosen to announce the Good News. In one sentence salvation is for all, but do you think people know this? How do you, in your life, share this Good News.

Pray: Pray for people of all beliefs, that faith in the Love of God may be strong.

Act: Be always willing to learn from others. Share your faith with those who need it; may your life be Good News to them.

Humankind is under God's "wrath"

¹⁸For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice, of those who have silenced the truth by their wicked ways. ¹⁹For everything that could have been known about God was clear to them: God himself made it plain. ²⁰Because his invisible attributes—his everlasting power and divinity—are made visible to reason, by means of his works since the creation of the world.

So they have no excuse, ²¹for they knew God, and did not glorify him as was fitting; nor did they give thanks to him. On the contrary, they lost themselves in their reasoning, and darkness filled their minds.

²²Believing themselves wise, they became foolish: ²³they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likes of mortal human beings, birds, animals, and reptiles. ²⁴Because of this, God gave them up to their inner cravings; they did shameful things and dishonored their bodies.

²⁵They exchanged God's truth for a lie; they honored and worshiped

created things instead of the Creator, to whom be praise for ever, Amen! ²⁶Because of that, God gave them up to shameful passions: their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷Similarly, the men giving up natural sexual relations with women were lustful of each other: they did, men with men, shameful things, bringing upon themselves the punishment they deserve for their wickedness. ²⁸And since they did not think that God was worth knowing, he gave them up to their senseless minds so that they committed all kinds of obscenities.

²⁹And so, they are full of injustice, perversity, greed, evil; they are full of jealousy, murder, strife, deceit, bad will, and gossip. ³⁰They commit calumny, offend God, are haughty; they are proud, liars, clever in doing evil. They are rebellious toward their parents, ³¹senseless, disloyal, cold-hearted and merciless. ³²They know of God's judgment, which declares worthy of death to anyone living in this way; yet, not only do they do all these things, they even applaud anyone who does the same.

ROMANS 1:18-32

Read: Paul reminds the Romans that without God's saving action humanity is lost. Humans tend to replace the true God with false gods in all areas of their lives, even the most intimate.

Reflect: Sin and evil seem everywhere. When you get discouraged by this how do you trust God, and trust God enough to make changes in your own life? What situations of death and sin should Christians condemn and redeem?

Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to perceive God's saving action in your life, and share it with your loved ones. Ask also for courage to denounce the situations of death that you see around you.

Act: Make an examination of conscience and recognize your weaknesses and avoid judging the weakness of others.

The Jews also must fear judgment

2¹Therefore, you have no excuse, whoever you are, if you are able to judge others. For, in judging your neighbor, you condemn yourself, for you practice what you are judging. ²We know that the condemnation of God will justly reach those who commit these things, ³and do you

think that by condemning others, you will escape from the judgment of God, you who are doing the same?

⁴This would be taking advantage of God and his infinite goodness, patience, and understanding; and not to realize that his goodness is in order to lead you to conversion. ⁵If your heart becomes hard and you refuse to change, then you are storing for yourself a great punishment on the day of judgment, when God will appear as just judge.

⁶He will give each one his due according to his actions. ⁷He will give everlasting life to those who seek glory, honor and immortality, and persevere in doing good. ⁸But anger and vengeance will be the lot of those who do not serve the truth, but injustice. ⁹There will be suffering and anguish for everyone committing evil, first the Jew, then the Greek. ¹⁰But God will give glory, honor, and peace to whoever does good, first the Jew, then the Greek, ¹¹because one is not different from the other before God.

Everyone is judged by his conscience

¹²Those who, without knowing the law, committed sin, will perish without the law; and whoever committed sin, knowing the law, will be judged by that law. ¹³What makes us righteous before God is not hearing the law, but obeying it. ¹⁴When the non-Jews, who do not have the law, practice naturally what the law commands, they are giving themselves a law, ¹⁵showing that the commandments of the law are engraved in their minds. Their conscience speaking within them also shows it when they condemn or approve their actions. ¹⁶The same is to happen on the day when God, according to my gospel, will judge people's secret actions in the person of Jesus Christ.

¹⁷But, suppose you call yourself a Jew: you have the law as foundation and feel proud of your God. ¹⁸You know the will of God and the law teaches you to distinguish what is better, ¹⁹and so, you believe you are the guide for the blind, a light in darkness, ²⁰a corrector of the foolish and the instructor of the ignorant, because you possess in the law the formulation of true knowledge. ²¹Well then, you who teach others, why don't you teach yourself? If you say that one must not steal, why do you steal? ²²You say one must not commit adultery, yet you commit it! You say you hate idols, but you steal into their temples! ²³You feel proud of the law, yet you do not obey it, and you dishonor your God. ²⁴In fact, as

the Scripture says, *the other nations despise the name of God because of you.*

²⁵Circumcision is of value to you if you obey the law; but if you do not obey, it is as if you were not circumcised. ²⁶On the contrary, if those who are uncircumcised obey the commandments of the law, do you not think that in spite of them being pagans, they make themselves like the circumcised? ²⁷The one who obeys the law without being marked in his body with circumcision will judge you who have been marked with circumcision and who have the law, which you do not obey. ²⁸For external things do not make a true Jew, nor is real circumcision that which is marked on the body. ²⁹A Jew must be so interiorly; the heart's circumcision belongs to the spirit and not to a written law; he who lives in this way will be praised not by people but by God.

ROMANS 2:1-29

Read: To Paul, the most important thing is not to listen to the Law but to fulfill it. Therefore, those who know it and do not comply with it will be judged. On the other hand, those who do not know it but live in a loving fashion will receive glory and honor, because the divine law is engraved in the heart of the human being.

Reflect: The judgment of humanity belongs to God alone. What does the following expression suggest to you: "nobody should judge anyone, because we are all sinners"? Is this how you live as a Christian? How do your behavior and attitudes differ from those proposed by Jesus?

Pray: Ask the Lord strength to live your faith and in so doing be a witness to the salvation that Jesus offers to all those who believe in Him.

Act: Talk to someone you trust, and ask him or her to help you to see what things you should improve in your life so that your faith be consistent with the saving message of the Good News of Jesus.

What advantage is it to be a Jew?

3¹ Then, what is the advantage of being a Jew? And what is the use of circumcision? ² It is important from any point of view. In the first place, it was to the Jews that God entrusted his word.

³ Well, now, if some of them were not faithful, will their unfaithfulness do away with the faithfulness of God? Of course not! ⁴ Rather, it will be proved that God is truthful, *every human a liar*, as the Scripture says: *it will be proved that your words are true and you will be the winner if they want to judge you.*

⁵ If our wickedness shows God to be just, would it be right to say that God is unjust when he gets angry and punishes us? (I speak in a human way.)

⁶—Not at all because, otherwise, how could God judge the world?

⁷—But if my lie makes the truth of God more evident, thus increasing his glory, is it correct to call me a sinner?

⁸—Then your only choice would be to sin, so that good may come of it. Some slanderers say that this is my teaching, but they will have to answer for those words.

⁹ Do we have, then, any advantage? Not really. For we have just demonstrated that all, Jews and non-Jews, are under the power of sin, ¹⁰ as the Scripture says:

Nobody is good, not even one,

¹¹ *no one understands, no one looks for God.*

¹² *All have gone astray and have become base. There is no one doing what is good, not even one.*

¹³ *Their throats are open tombs, their words deceit.*

¹⁴ *Their lips hide the poison of vipers, from their mouths come bitter curses.*

¹⁵ *They run to where they can shed blood, ¹⁶ leaving behind ruin and misery. ¹⁷ They do not know the way of peace.*

¹⁸ *There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

¹⁹ Now, we know that whatever the Scripture says, it is said for the people of the law, that is for the Jews. Let all be silent, then, and recognize that the whole world is guilty before God. ²⁰ Still more: *no mortal will be worthy before God* by performing the demands of the law. What comes from the law is the consciousness of sin.

Faith, the way to salvation

²¹But now it has been revealed altogether apart from the law, as it was already foretold in the law and the prophets: ²²God makes us righteous by means of faith in Jesus Christ, and this is applied to all who believe without distinction of persons. ²³Because all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴and all are graciously forgiven and made righteous through the redemption effected in Christ Jesus. ²⁵For God has given him to be the victim whose blood obtains us forgiveness through faith.

So God shows us how he makes us righteous. Past sins are forgiven, which God overlooked till now. ²⁶For now, he wants to reveal his way of righteousness: how he is just and how he makes us righteous through faith in Jesus.

²⁷Then, what becomes of our pride? It is excluded. How? Not through the law and its observances, but through another law, which is faith. ²⁸For we hold that people are in God's grace by faith, and not because of all the things ordered by the law. ²⁹Otherwise, God would be the God of the Jews; but is he not God of pagan nations as well? ³⁰Of course, he is, for there is only one God, and he will save by faith the circumcised Jews, as well as the uncircumcised nations. ³¹Do we, then, deny the value of the law because of what we say of faith? Of course not, rather, we place the Law in its proper place.

ROMANS 3:1-31

Read: Jews and gentiles, those who know the Law and those who do not, all sin and will be judged. But Jesus, by his death and resurrection, reconciles all with God. Jesus makes possible for human beings to overcome sin and live according to the divine will.

Reflect: What "guarantee" of salvation does being a Christian offer? Can we truly believe in Jesus without acting as He did? What personal and communitarian commitments are required by the Christian faith?

Pray: Give thanks to God for the salvation offered to humanity through Jesus. Ask him to free you from the pride of thinking and feeling that you can live in fullness by your own.

Act: Live with humility the demands of the Christian faith that this reflection has suggested to you.

Abraham, father of the just

4¹Let us consider Abraham, our father in the flesh. What has he found? ²If Abraham attained righteousness because of his deeds, he could be proud. But he cannot be this before God ³because Scripture says: *Abraham believed God who took it into account and held him to be a just man.*

⁴Now, when someone does a work, salary is not given as a favor, but as a debt that is paid. ⁵Here, on the contrary, someone who has no deeds to show, but believes in him, who makes sinners righteous before him: such faith is *taken into account* and that person is held as righteous. ⁶David congratulates in this way those who become righteous, by the favor of God and not by their actions: ⁷*Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven and whose offenses are forgotten;* ⁸*blessed the one whose sin God does not take into account!*

⁹Is this blessing only for the circumcised, or is it also for the uncircumcised? We have just said that because of his faith Abraham was made a just man, ¹⁰but when did this happen? After Abraham was circumcised or before? Not after, but before. ¹¹He received the rite of circumcision as a sign of the righteousness given him, through faith, when he was still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those uncircumcised who come to faith and are made just. ¹²And he was to be the father of the Jews, provided that, besides being circumcised, they also imitate the faith Abraham showed before being circumcised.

¹³If God promised Abraham, or rather his descendants, that the world would belong to him, this was not because of his obeying the law, but because he was just and a friend of God, through faith. ¹⁴If now the promise is kept for those who rely on the law, then faith has no power and nothing is left of the promise. ¹⁵For it is proper of the law to bring punishment, and it is only when there is no law that it is possible to live without breaking the law.

¹⁶For that reason, faith is the way, and all is given by grace; and the promises of Abraham are fulfilled for all his descendants, not only for

his children, according to the law, but also for all the others who have believed.

Abraham is the father of all of us ¹⁷ as it is written: *I will make you the father of many nations.* He is our father in the eyes of Him who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence what does not yet exist, for this is the God in whom he believed.

¹⁸ Abraham believed and hoped against all expectation, thus becoming the father of many nations, as he had been told: *See how many will be your descendants.* ¹⁹ He did not doubt, although his body could no longer give life—he was about a hundred years old—and, in spite of his wife, Sarah, being unable to have children. ²⁰ He did not doubt, nor did he distrust the promise of God, and by being strong in faith, he gave glory to God: ²¹ he was convinced that He who had given the promise had [the] power to fulfill it.

²² This was taken into account for him to attain righteousness. ²³ *This was taken into account:* these words of Scripture are not only for him, ²⁴ but for us too, because we believe in him who raised Jesus, our Lord, from among the dead, ²⁵ he, who was delivered for our sins and raised to life for us to receive true righteousness.

ROMANS 4:1-25

Read: Abraham occupies an important place both for Jews and Christians. God asked him to believe in Him, and he trusted and obeyed, and for that God kept His promise and made Him a model for all those who have faith.

Reflect: God asked Abraham to trust in His word. What does God ask from you?

Pray: Give thanks to God for belonging to the great family of all those who have faith, from Abraham to the present day. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you embrace today the Word of God as Abraham did.

Act: Read the stories that speak of Abraham's faith in the Book of Genesis (12:1-9; 17:1-26). Do any of the conflicts in his journey reflect the questions in your spiritual journey?

Now we are at peace with God

5¹By faith, we have received true righteousness, and we are at peace with God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. ²Through him, we obtain this favor in which we remain, and we even boast to expect the glory of God.

³Not only that, we continue to shout our praise even in trials, knowing that trials produce patience, ⁴from patience comes merit; merit is the source of hope ⁵and hope does not disappoint us because the Holy Spirit has been given to us, pouring into our hearts the love of God.

⁶Consider, moreover, the time that Christ died for us: when we were still helpless and unable to do anything. ⁷Few would accept to die for an upright person; although for a very good person, perhaps someone would dare to die. ⁸But see how God manifested his love for us: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us; ⁹and we have become just through his blood. With much more reason now he will save us from any condemnation. ¹⁰Once enemies, we have been reconciled with God through the death of his Son; with much more reason, now we may be saved through his life. ¹¹Not only that, but we even boast in God because of Christ Jesus our Lord, through whom we have been reconciled.

ROMANS 5:1-11

Read: Jesus died on the cross to forgive all sins. The love of God is so great that He offers us His forgiveness even before we ask for it. Jesus reconciles us to God enabling us to trust in God's love completely.

Reflect: Do you really have faith and hope that God intends your salvation and will help you to get it? What does the experience of the forgiveness of the Father and of the goodness of the Son, require from you in your daily life?

Pray: Give thanks for the salvation that God offers to all humanity. Ask to deepen your trust in God's love for you and for all.

Act: Conscious of God's infinite love, try to respond to that love by loving the people around you.

Adam and Jesus Christ

¹²Therefore, sin entered the world through ¹²one man; and through sin, death; and later on, death spread to all humankind because all sinned.

¹³As long as there was no law, they could not speak of disobedience, but sin was already in the world. ¹⁴This is why, from Adam to Moses, death reigned among them, although their sin was not disobedience as in Adam's case—this was not the true Adam, but foretold the other who was to come.

¹⁵Such has been the fall, but God's gift goes far beyond. All died because of the fault of one man, but how much more does the grace of God spread when the gift he granted reaches all, from this unique man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁶Again, there is no comparison between the gift and the offense of one man. The disobedience that brought condemnation was of one sinner, whereas the grace of God brings forgiveness to a world of sinners. ¹⁷If death reigned through the disobedience of one and only one person, how much more will there be a reign of life for those who receive the grace and the gift of true righteousness through the one person, Jesus Christ!

¹⁸Just as one transgression brought sentence of death to all, so too, one man's good act has brought justification and light to all; ¹⁹and, as the disobedience of only one made all sinners, so the obedience of one person allowed all to be made just and holy.

²⁰The law itself, introduced later on, caused sin to increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹and as sin caused death to reign, so grace will reign in its own time, and after making us just and friends of God, will bring us to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

ROMANS 5:12-21

Read: Paul highlights how the first man, Adam, sinned and since then we all sin. Jesus, not Adam, is the model for humanity, and his trust in the love of God saves us all.

Reflect: Jesus shows us that Grace is always stronger than sin, and the love of God stronger than human failing. It is the way of God's love to which we trust our life.

Pray: Prayer is the time to experience God's love for us and to ask for the strength to manifest that love in our daily life.

Act: That your life be always Good News of salvation to all those around you. Share with your own people the gratuitous and generous love of God that you have experienced in prayer.

Through baptism, we died with Christ

6¹Then, what shall we say? Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may come more abundantly? ²Can we live again in sin? Of course not: we are now dead regarding sin.

³Don't you know that in baptism, which unites us to Christ, we are all baptized and plunged into his death? ⁴By this baptism in his death, we were buried with Christ and, as Christ was raised from among the dead by the glory of the Father, we begin walking in a new life. ⁵If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his, so shall we be, by a resurrection like his.

⁶We know that our old self was crucified with Christ so as to destroy what of us was sin, so that we may no longer be in slavery to sin. ⁷If we are dead, we are no longer in debt to sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, once risen from the dead, will not die again and death has no more dominion over him. ¹⁰For, by dying, he is dead to sin once and for all, and now, the life that he lives is life with God.

¹¹So you, too, must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God, in Christ Jesus. ¹²Do not allow sin to have control over your mortal bodies; do not submit yourselves to its evil inclinations, ¹³and do not give your members over to sin as instruments to do evil. On the contrary, offer yourselves, as persons returned from death to life, and let the members of your body be as holy instruments at the service of God. ¹⁴Sin will not lord it over you again, for you are not under the law, but under grace.

¹⁵I ask again: are we to sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Certainly not. ¹⁶If you have given yourselves up to someone as his slave, you are to obey the one who commands you, aren't you? Now, with sin, you go to death, and by accepting faith, you go the right way. ¹⁷Let us give thanks to God, for after having sin as your master, you have been given to another, that is, to the doctrine of faith to which you listen willingly. ¹⁸And being free from sin, you began to serve true righteousness—¹⁹you see that I speak in a very human way taking into account that you are not fully mature.

There was a time when you let your members be slaves of impurity and disorder, walking in the way of sin; convert them now into servants of righteousness, to the point of becoming holy.

²⁰When you were slaves of sin, you did not feel under obligation to righteousness, ²¹but what were the fruits of those actions of which you are now ashamed? Such things bring death. ²²Now, however, you have been freed from sin and serve God. You are bearing fruit and growing in holiness and the result will be life everlasting. ²³So, on one side is sin: its reward, death; on the other side is God: He gives us by grace life everlasting, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 6:1-23

Read: Knowing that God saves us cannot be an excuse to continue sinning. On the contrary, in baptism Christians abandon the life of sin forever and commit themselves to live as Jesus lived.

Reflect: Baptism is how Christians signify that they have embraced the meaning and purpose of life revealed by the Risen Christ. How does Baptism affect how you think about and live your life?

Pray: Pray for the strength to live out the Christian life. Pray also for all those who are searching for the love of God in their lives.

Act: Get the text of the promises of Baptism. Read them by yourself, repeat them, with all your will to be faithful and trusting fully in God.

The Christian is not bound by the Jewish religion

7¹You, my friends, understand the law. The law has power only while a person is alive. ²The married woman, for example, is bound by law to her husband while he is alive; but if he dies, she is free from her obligations as a wife. ³If she gives herself to another while her husband is alive, she will be an adulteress; but once the husband dies, she is free, and if she gives herself to another man, she is not an adulteress.

⁴It was the same with you, brothers and sisters: you have died to the law with the person of Christ and you belong to another who has risen from among the dead so that we may produce fruit for God. ⁵When we lived as humans used to do, the law stirred up the desires for all that is sin, and they worked in our bodies with fruits of death. ⁶But we

have died to what was holding us; we are freed from the law and no longer serve a written law—which was the old; with the Spirit, we are in the new.

⁷Then, shall we say that the law is part of sin? Of course not! However, I would not have known sin, had it not been for the law. I would not be aware of greed if the law did not tell me: *Do not covet*. ⁸Sin took advantage of the commandment to stir in me all kinds of greed, whereas, without a law, sin lies dead.

⁹First, there was no law and I lived. Then the commandment came and gave life to sin, ¹⁰and I died. It happened that the law of life had brought me death. ¹¹Sin took advantage of the commandment. It lured me and killed me through the commandment.

¹²But the law itself is holy, just and good. ¹³Is it possible that something good brings death to me? Of course not. This comes from sin that may be seen as sin when it takes advantage of something good to kill: the commandment lets sin appear fully sinful.

The law without Christ makes humans divided

¹⁴We know that the law is spiritual; as for me, I am flesh and have been sold to sin. ¹⁵I cannot explain what is happening to me, because I do not do what I want, but, on the contrary, the very things I hate. ¹⁶Well then, if I do the evil I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good; ¹⁷but, in this case, I am not the one striving toward evil, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that what is right does not abide in me, I mean, in my flesh. I can want to do what is right, but I am unable to do it. ¹⁹In fact, I do not do the good I want, but the evil I hate. ²⁰Therefore, if I do what I do not want to do, I am not the one striving toward evil, but sin, which is in me.

²¹I discover, then, this reality: though I wish to do what is right, the evil within me asserts itself first. ²²My inmost self agrees and rejoices with the law of God, ²³but I notice in my body, another law, challenging the law of the spirit and delivering me as a slave to the law of sin, written in my members. ²⁴Alas for me! Who will free me from this being which is only death? ²⁵Let us give thanks to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!

So, with my conscience, I am a servant of the law of God, and with my mortal body, I serve the law of sin.

ROMANS 7:1-25

Read: Paul details his interpretation of the Law. The Law is good but does not save. God loves us because we are, not because of what we accomplish. Living out of God's love is what helps us reject sin.

Reflect: Have you already experienced this tension of wanting to do one thing and be pushed to do another? In what ways is sin still attractive enough to choose over the love God offers you?

Pray: Ask forgiveness for the times that sin is stronger than love in your daily life, and also ask for the strength to face it and overcome it.

Act: Next time you feel the temptation to do the opposite of what you know is good, entrust yourself to the Lord asking for the strength to do the right thing. Then write the feelings that that has awakened in you.

We have received the spirit

8¹This contradiction no longer exists for those who are in Jesus Christ. ²For in Jesus Christ the law of the spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death. ³The law was without effect, weak as it was through the flesh. God, planning to destroy sin, sent his own Son in the likeness of those subject to the sinful human condition; by doing this he condemned the sin in this human condition. ⁴Since then, the perfection intended by the law would be fulfilled in those not walking in the way of the flesh but in the way of the spirit.

Life through the spirit

⁵Those walking according to the flesh tend toward what is flesh; those led by the spirit, to what is spirit. ⁶The flesh tends toward death, while spirit aims at life and peace. ⁷What the flesh seeks is against God: it does not agree, it cannot even submit to the law of God. ⁸So, those walking according to the flesh cannot please God.

⁹Yet, your existence is not in the flesh, but in the spirit, because the Spirit of God is within you. If you did not have the Spirit of Christ, you

would not belong to him. ¹⁰But Christ is within you; though the body is branded by death, as a consequence of sin, the spirit is life and holiness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him, who raised Jesus from the dead, is within you, he who raised Jesus Christ from among the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies. Yes, he will do it through his Spirit who dwells within you.

¹²Then, brothers and sisters, let us leave the flesh and no longer live according to it. ¹³If not, we will die. Rather, walking in the Spirit, let us put to death the body's deeds, so that we may live.

¹⁴All those who walk in the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God. ¹⁵Then, no more fear: you did not receive a spirit of slavery, but the spirit that makes you sons and daughters, and every time we cry, "Abba! (this is Dad!) Father!" ¹⁶the Spirit assures our spirit that we are sons and daughters of God. ¹⁷If we are children, we are heirs too. Ours will be the inheritance of God and we will share it with Christ; for if we now suffer with him, we will also share glory with him.

ROMANS 8:1-17

Read: When Paul speaks about "the flesh" he means a life lived only for material things, a life without a spiritual dimension of any sort. He contrasts this way of life with the power of God through the Spirit. The Spirit is in us, is stronger than sin, and moves us to call God: "Abba, Father." As children, we are also heirs of His love.

Reflect: How does the Holy Spirit act in your life? Paul is confident that God is a loving parent, do you share his confidence?

Pray: Pray to recognize the Holy Spirit in your life, the Spirit that inspires you to witness to God's love.

Act: Invoke the strength of the Holy Spirit in your life at the start of each day: "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love."

The universe, too, waits for its redemption

¹⁸I consider that the suffering of our present life cannot be compared with the glory that will be revealed and given to us. ¹⁹All creation is eagerly expecting the birth, in glory, of the children of God. ²⁰For, if now,

the created world was unable to attain its purpose, this did not come from itself, but from the one who subjected it. But it is not without hope; ²¹for even the created world will be freed from this fate of death and share the freedom and glory of the children of God.

²²We know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pangs of birth. ²³Not creation alone, but even ourselves; although the Spirit was given to us as a foretaste of what we are to receive, we groan in our innermost being, eagerly awaiting the day when God will give us full rights and rescue our bodies as well.

²⁴In hope, we already have salvation. But if we saw what we hoped for, there would no longer be hope: how can you hope for what is already seen? ²⁵So we hope for what we do not see, and we will receive it through patient hope.

²⁶Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us without words, as if with groans. ²⁷And he, who sees inner secrets, knows the desires of the Spirit, for he asks for the holy ones what is pleasing to God.

Who shall separate us from the love of God?

²⁸We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him, whom he has called according to his plan. ²⁹Those whom he knew beforehand he has also predestined to be like his Son, similar to him, so that he may be the Firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰And so those whom God predestined, he called; and those whom he called, he makes righteous; and to those whom he makes righteous, he will give his glory.

³¹What shall we say after this? If God is with us, who shall be against us? ³²If he did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not give us all things with him? ³³Who shall accuse those chosen by God: He takes away their guilt. ³⁴Who will dare to condemn them? Christ who died, and better still, rose, and is seated at the right hand of God interceding for us?

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Will it be trials, or anguish, persecution or hunger, lack of clothing, or dangers or sword? ³⁶As the Scripture says: *For your sake, we are being killed all day long; they treat us like sheep to be slaughtered.*

³⁷No, in all of this we are more than conquerors, thanks to him who

has loved us. ³⁸I am certain that neither death, nor life, neither angels nor spiritual powers, neither the present nor the future, nor cosmic powers ³⁹were they from heaven or from the deep world below, nor any creature whatsoever, will separate us from the love of God, which we have in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

ROMANS 8:18-39

Read: Although we now suffer because of sin, we who believe in Jesus, look forward to the glory of God. The Spirit helps us in our weakness and helps us to seek what is good for us. If we are united to the love of God, no one or nothing can separate us from the Love of God.

Reflect: Much of this world is not encouraging: hunger, war, corruption, injustice and death. Despite this, do you retain the hope in a better world? How should the Christian live in this world?

Pray: Pray for those who work for the betterment of our world and its environment. Pray that rulers will make just decisions that reflect the will of God and care for those who are without.

Act: Do something positive for someone in need. Promote in your family the practice of justice and solidarity toward the most helpless. Do not neglect to protect the environment.

Why have the Jews not believed?

9¹I tell you sincerely, in Christ, and my conscience assures me in the Holy Spirit that I am not lying: ²I have great sadness and constant anguish for the Jews. ³I would even desire that I myself suffer the curse of being cut off from Christ, instead of my brethren: I mean my own people, my kin. ⁴They are Israelites whom God adopted, and on them rests his glory. Theirs are the Covenants, the law, the worship and the promises of God. ⁵They are descendants of the patriarchs, and from their race, Christ was born, he who as God is above all distinctions. Blessed be He forever and ever: Amen!

⁶We cannot say that the promise of God has failed. For not all Israelites belong to Israel. ⁷And not because they are of the race of Abraham they are all his children, for it was said to him: *The children of Isaac will be*

called your descendants. ⁸This means that the children of God are not identified with the race of Abraham, but only with the children born to him because of the promise of God. ⁹To such a promise this text refers: *I shall return about this time and Sarah will have a son.* ¹⁰And listen: Rebecca, the wife of our father Isaac, became pregnant, ¹¹and before the twins were born or had done anything, right or wrong, in order that God's purpose of election might continue ¹²not on the merits but of who is called, she was told: *The elder will serve the younger,* ¹³as the Scripture says: *I chose Jacob and rejected Esau.*

God is not unjust

¹⁴Shall we say that God is unjust? Of course not. ¹⁵However, God said to Moses: *I shall forgive whom I forgive, and have pity on whom I have pity.* ¹⁶So what is important is not that we worry or hurry, but that God has compassion. ¹⁷And he says in Scripture to Pharaoh: *I made you, Pharaoh, to show my power in you, and for the whole world to know my name.* ¹⁸And so God takes pity on whom he wishes, and hardens the heart of whomsoever he wishes.

¹⁹Maybe you say: "Why then, does God complain if it is impossible to evade his decision?" ²⁰But you, my friend, who are you to call God to account? Should the clay pot say to its maker: Why did you make me like this? ²¹Is it not up to the potter to make from the same clay a vessel for beauty and a vessel for menial use?

²²Thus, God endures, very patiently, vessels that deserve his wrath, fit to be broken, and through them, he wants to show his wrath and the extent of his power. ²³But he also wants to show the riches of his glory in others, in vessels of mercy prepared for glory. ²⁴And he called us, not only from among the Jews, but from among the pagans too, ²⁵as he said through the prophet Hosea: *I will call "my people" those that were not my people, and "my beloved" the one who was not beloved.* ²⁶And in the same place where they were told, "You are not my people," they will be called children of the living God.

²⁷With regard to Israel, Isaiah proclaims: *Even if the Israelites are as numerous as the sand of the sea, only a few will be saved.* ²⁸This is a matter that the Lord will settle in Israel, without fail or delay. ²⁹Isaiah also announced: *If the Almighty Lord had not left us some descendants, we would have become like Sodom and similar to Gomorrah.*

³⁰What are we saying, then? That the pagans, who were not aiming at true righteousness, found it (I speak of righteousness through faith); ³¹while Israel, striving to observe a law of righteousness, lost the purpose of the law. ³²Why? Because they relied on the observance of the law, not on faith. And they stumbled over the stumbling stone (Christ), ³³as it was said: *Look, I am laying in Zion a stone, that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall; but whoever relies on him will not be deceived.*

ROMANS 9:1-33

Read: Paul's conflict is that God's promises are given to the people of Israel, and through them comes the Messiah. However, most Jews do not recognize Jesus as Messiah. He resolves this struggle with the faith that God can give His mercy to whomever He pleases, Gentiles and Jews alike.

Reflect: This chapter reflects a conflict between Christians and Jews, a difference which led Christians to anti-Semitism, although Jesus himself was a Jew.

Pray: Pray that Christians and Jews recognize they worship the same God, though in different traditions. Pray that religious differences will never be the excuse for violence.

Act: Talk with someone who has a different faith, ask about the fundamentals of his/her faith, on their practices and rites, etc. Share this experience with those close to you.

They tried to achieve their own righteousness

10¹My brothers and sisters, I wish with all my heart that the Jews be saved, and I pray to God for them. ²I can testify that they are zealous for God, but this is not the way. ³They don't know God's way of righteousness, and they try to achieve their own righteousness: this is why they did not enter God's way of righteousness. ⁴For Christ is the aim of the law, and it is then that the believer reaches this righteousness.

⁵Moses, indeed, speaks of becoming just through the law; he writes: *The one who obeys the law will find life through it.* ⁶But the righteousness coming from the faith says instead: *Do not say in your heart: Who will go up to heaven?* (because in fact, Christ came down from there)

⁷or *who will go down to the world below?* (because in fact, Christ came up from among the dead). ⁸True righteousness, coming from faith, also says: *The word of God is near you, on your lips and in your hearts.* This is the message that we preach and this is faith.

⁹You are saved if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and in your heart, you believe that God raised him from the dead. ¹⁰By believing from the heart, you obtain true righteousness; by confessing the faith with your lips, you are saved. ¹¹For Scripture says: *No one who believes in him will be ashamed.* ¹²Here, there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; all have the same Lord who is very generous with whoever calls on him. ¹³Truly, *all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*

¹⁴But how can they call upon the name of the Lord without having believed in him? And how can they believe in him without having first heard about him? And how will they hear about him if no one preaches about him? ¹⁵And how will they preach about him if no one sends them? As Scripture says: *How beautiful are the feet of the messenger of good news.* ¹⁶Although, not everyone obeyed the good news, as Isaiah said: *Lord, who has believed in our preaching?* ¹⁷So, faith comes from preaching and preaching is rooted in the word of Christ.

¹⁸I ask: Have the Jews not heard? But of course, they have. Because the voice of those preaching *resounded all over the earth and their voice was heard to the ends of the world.* ¹⁹Then, I must ask: *Did Israel not understand?* Moses was the first to say: *I will make you jealous of a nation that is not a nation; I will excite your anger against a senseless nation.* ²⁰Isaiah dares to add more: *I was found by those not looking for me; I have shown myself to those not asking for me.* ²¹While referring to Israel, the same Isaiah says: *I hold out my hands the whole day long to a disobedient and rebellious people.*

ROMANS 10:1-21

Read: Paul insists that God's salvation is universal: "all those who invoke the name of the Lord will be saved," and regrets that his countrymen, the Jewish people, do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

Reflect: In your everyday life, do you live your faith in a universal way, welcoming all who seek God, or in a sectarian manner,

considering companions on the way only those who think and believe like you? Do you cling to your accustomed way of believing, or are you open to what the Word of God inspires, although breaking your own schemes?

Pray: Ask God to help you renew your ideas of what is good, even your idea about Him. Ask God to help you not to fall into the arrogance of thinking yourself an “expert of the divine.” Allow yourself to be surprised by God.

Act: Live your faith in a universal manner, as Jesus, our Master did: welcome all those who seek and need God and let yourself be surprised by the unpredictable ways of divine acting. Find an opportunity to visit a synagogue or visit with a rabbi to learn about their tradition of faith.

A remnant of Israel has been saved

11¹And so I ask: Has God rejected his people? Of course not! I, myself, am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin. ²No, God has not rejected the people he knew beforehand. Don't you know what the Scripture says of Elijah when he was accusing Israel before God? ³He said: “*Lord, they have killed your prophets, destroyed your altars, and I alone remain; and now they want to kill me.*” ⁴What was God's answer? “*I kept for myself seven thousand who did not worship Baal.*” ⁵In the same way, now there is a remnant in Israel, those who were chosen by grace. ⁶It is said: by grace, not because of what they did. Otherwise, grace would not be grace.

⁷What then? What Israel was looking for it did not find, but those whom God elected found it. The others hardened their hearts ⁸as Scripture says: *God made them dull of heart and mind; to this day their eyes cannot see nor their ears hear.* ⁹David says: *May they be caught and trapped at their banquets; may they fall, may they be punished.* ¹⁰*May their eyes be closed so that they cannot see and their backs be bent forever.*

Do not despise those who stumbled

¹¹Again, I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall? Of course not. Their stumbling allowed salvation to come to the pagan nations, and this, in

turn, will stir up the jealousy of Israel. ¹²If Israel's shortcoming made the world rich if the pagan nations grew rich with what they lost, what will happen when Israel is restored?

¹³Listen to me, you who are not Jews: I am spending myself, as an apostle to the pagan nations, ¹⁴but I hope my ministry will be successful enough to awaken the jealousy of those of my race and finally, to save some of them. ¹⁵If the world made peace with God when they remained apart, what will it be when they are welcomed? Nothing less than a passing from death to life.

¹⁶When the first fruits are consecrated to God, the whole is consecrated. If the roots are holy, so will be the branches. ¹⁷Some branches have been cut from the olive tree while you, as a wild olive tree, have been grafted in their stead, and you are benefiting from their roots and sap. ¹⁸Now, therefore, do not be proud and despise the branches, because you do not support the roots, the roots support you. ¹⁹You may say, "They cut off the branches to graft me." ²⁰Well and good! But they were cut off because they did not believe while you stand by faith. Then do not pride yourself on this too much, rather beware: ²¹if God did not spare the natural branches, even less will he spare you.

²²Admire at the same time both the goodness and severity of God: he was severe with the fallen and he is generous with you, as long as you remain faithful. Otherwise, you will be cut off. ²³If they do not keep on rejecting the faith they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them back again. ²⁴If you were taken from the wild olive tree to which you belonged and, in spite of being a different specie, you were grafted into the good olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

Israel will be saved

²⁵I want you to understand the mysterious decree of God, lest you be too confident: a part of Israel will remain hardened until the majority of pagans have entered. ²⁶Then the whole of Israel will be saved as Scripture says: *From Zion will come the Liberator who will purify the descendants of Jacob from all sin.* ²⁷And this is the Covenant I will make with them: *I will take away from them their sins.*

²⁸Regarding the gospel, the Jews are opponents, but it is for your

benefit. Regarding the election, they are beloved, because of their ancestors; ²⁹because the call of God and his gifts cannot be nullified.

³⁰Through the disobedience of the Jews, the mercy of God came to you who did not obey God. ³¹They, in turn, will receive mercy in due time, after this disobedience that brought God's mercy to you. ³²So, God has submitted all to disobedience, in order to show his mercy to all.

³³How deep are the riches, the wisdom, and knowledge of God! His decisions cannot be explained, nor his ways understood! ³⁴*Who has ever known God's thoughts? Who has ever been his adviser?* ³⁵*Who has given him something first so that God had to repay him?* ³⁶For everything comes from him, has been made by him and has to return to him. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

ROMANS 11:1-36

Read: God does not reject His people, but the Jewish people do not accept the offer of salvation. For Paul, this attitude has made it possible for the Gospel to reach the gentiles. Therefore he affirms: "If the pagan nations grew rich with what they (Israel) lost, what will happen when Israel is restored?" Paul believes the Jews are irrevocably God's chosen people, and that God's mercy remains with them.

Reflect: Christians must never adopt an attitude of superiority toward other believers or non-believers. We must be witnesses to God's mercy: "How deep are the riches, the wisdom and the knowledge of God! His decisions cannot be explained, nor his ways understood!"

Pray: Give thanks for the gift of faith. Ask the Holy Spirit light to contemplate the mercy of God and humility to accept His mysteries.

Act: Observe what surrounds you as if your eyes were the eyes of God, full of mercy. Be merciful as God is merciful.

Christian life: be concerned for others

12¹I beg you, dearly beloved, by the mercy of God, to give yourselves as a living and holy sacrifice pleasing to God; that is the kind of worship for you as sensible people. ²Don't let yourselves be shaped by the world where you live, but rather be transformed through the renewal of your mind. You must discern the will of God: what is good, what pleases, what is perfect.

³The grace that God has given me allows me to tell each of you: don't pretend too much, but think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

⁴See, the body is one even if formed by many members, but not all of them with the same function. ⁵The same with us; being many, we are one body in Christ depending on one another. ⁶Let each one of us, therefore, serve according to our different gifts. Are you a prophet? Then give the insights of faith. ⁷Let the minister fulfill his office; let the teacher teach, ⁸the one who encourages, convince.

You must, likewise, give with an open hand, preside with dedication, and be cheerful in your works of charity.

⁹Let love be sincere. Hate what is evil and hold to whatever is good. ¹⁰Love one another and be considerate. Outdo one another in mutual respect. ¹¹Be zealous in fulfilling your duties. Be fervent in the spirit and serve God.

¹²Have hope and be cheerful. Be patient in trials and pray constantly. ¹³Share with other Christians in need. With those passing by, be ready to receive them.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not wish evil on anyone. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who are joyful, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in peace with one another. Do not dream of extraordinary things; be humble and do not hold yourselves as wise.

¹⁷Do not return evil for evil, but let everyone see your good will. ¹⁸Do your best to live in peace with everybody. ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves but let God be the one who punishes, as Scripture says: *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.* ²⁰And it adds: *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him to drink; by doing this you will heap burning coals upon his head.* ²¹Do not let evil defeat you, but conquer evil with goodness.

ROMANS 12:1-21

Read: Paul invites the Romans to offer their lives “as a living and holy sacrifice, pleasing to God; that is the king of worship for you.” This spiritual sacrifice means to humbly accept God’s gifts and sharing them generously in the community.

Reflect: Is life in community important for a Christian? Why? Do you think that you have some gift that you can share with the community? What does the following expression suggest to you: “Do not let evil defeat you, but conquer evil with goodness”?

Pray: Pray for the unity of your community and also of the Church. Ask for the God’s help to always do good and offer your life as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.

Act: Promote dialogue in your community. Practice hospitality. Bless always and do not condemn others. May your daily life be a sign of the unity of your community and of the Church.

Submission to authority

13¹Let everyone be subject to the authorities. For there is no authority that does not come from God, and the offices have been established by God. ²Whoever, therefore, resists authority, goes against a decree of God, and those who resist deserve to be condemned.

³In fact, who fears authority? Not those who do good, but those who do evil. Do you want to be without fear of a person in authority? Do good and you will receive praise. ⁴They are the stewards of God, for your good. But if you do not behave, fear them, for they do not carry arms in vain; they are at the service of God when they judge and punish wrongdoers.

⁵It is necessary to obey, not through fear, but as a matter of conscience. ⁶In the same way, you must pay taxes and the collectors are God’s officials. ⁷Pay to all what is due them; to whomsoever you owe contributions, make a contribution; to whom taxes are due, pay taxes; to whom respect is due, give respect; to whom honor is due, give honor.

⁸Do not be in debt to anyone. Let this be the only debt of one to another: Love. The one who loves his or her neighbor fulfills the law. ⁹For

the commandments: *Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not covet,* and whatever else, are summarized in this one: *You will love your neighbor as yourself.* ¹⁰Love cannot do the neighbor any harm; so love fulfills the whole law.

Children of the light

¹¹You know what hour it is. This is the time to awake, for our salvation is now nearer than when we first believed; ¹²the night is almost over and the day is at hand. Let us discard, therefore, everything that belongs to darkness and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³As we live in the full light of day, let us behave with decency; no banquets with drunkenness, no promiscuity or licentiousness, no fighting or jealousy. ¹⁴Put on, rather, the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not be led by the will of the flesh nor follow its desires.

ROMANS 13:1-14

Read: The initial verses may refer to a tax increase in Rome. Like Jesus, Paul advises obedience to civil authorities. In any case, those who act out of love cannot commit evil whatsoever. We Christians must live like Jesus lived: doing good.

Reflect: How should our Christian behavior be with the civil society? How do you love your neighbor as yourself in a complicated civil society? "Owe no one anything, except to love one another" how is this part of your life?

Pray: Ask forgiveness for the times you have failed the law of love and have not given witness of your Christian faith. Ask for the grace to live as a good Christian.

Act: Check how you behave with others in your day to day, and try to live as a good Christian "clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ."

The weak and the strong

14¹Welcome those weak in faith and do not criticize their scruples. ²Some think they can eat any food, while others less liberated eat only vegetables. ³If you eat, do not despise those who abstain; if you abstain, do not criticize those who eat, for God has welcomed them.

⁴Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? Whether he stands or falls, the one concerned is his master. But he will not fall, for his master is able to keep him standing.

⁵Some judge one day to be better than the other; let us act according to our own opinion. ⁶The one who distinguishes among days, does that for the Lord; and the one who eats, eats for the Lord and in eating, gives thanks to the Lord. And the one who does not eat does it for the Lord and gives him thanks as well.

⁷In fact, none of us lives for himself, nor dies for himself. ⁸If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. Either in life or in death, we belong to the Lord. ⁹It was for this purpose that Christ both died and came to life again, to be Lord both of the living and of the dead.

¹⁰Then you, why do you criticize your brother or sister? And you, why do you despise them? For we will all appear at the tribunal of God. ¹¹It is written: *I swear by myself—word of the Lord—every knee will bend before me and every tongue shall give glory to God.* ¹²So each of us will account for himself before God.

¹³Therefore, let us not continue criticizing one another; let us try, rather, never to put in the way of our brother or sister anything that would make him stumble or fall. ¹⁴I know, I am sure of this in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself, it is only unclean for those who consider it unclean. ¹⁵But if you hurt your brother or sister because of a certain food, you are no longer walking according to love. Let not your eating cause the loss of one for whom Christ died.

¹⁶Don't put yourself in the wrong with something good. ¹⁷The kingdom of God is not a matter of food or drink; it is justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸and if you serve Christ in this way, you will please God and be praised by people. ¹⁹Let us look then for what strengthens peace and makes us better.

²⁰Do not destroy the work of God because of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat. ²¹And it may be better not to eat meat, or drink wine, or anything else that causes your brother or sister to stumble.

²²Keep your own belief before God, and happy are you if you never act against your own belief. ²³Instead, whoever eats something in spite of his doubt, is condemned by his conscience, because whatever we do against our conscience is sinful.

ROMANS 14:1-23

Read: Paul exhorts to “look for what strengthens peace and makes us better” in the community. We Christians must be tolerant and welcoming those who are different, because “everyone belongs to the Lord.”

Reflect: It is easy to judge others. How do you react to attitudes or approaches different from yours within your family or your community? What does the following expression suggest to you: “Let us not continue criticizing one another; let us try, rather, never to put in the way of our brother anything that would make him stumble or fall”?

Pray: Ask the Lord the grace of knowing to look at the qualities of those who think differently from you. Also, ask for humility to recognize your own capabilities and limitations.

Act: Check your prejudices and don’t judge anyone without first examining and putting yourself in the place of the other.

15¹We, the strong and liberated, should bear the weakness of those who are not strong instead of pleasing ourselves. ²Let each of us bring joy to our neighbors, helping them for the good purpose, for building up. ³Christ, himself, did not look for his own contentment, as Scripture says: *The insults of those insulting you fell upon me.* ⁴And we know that whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, for both perseverance and comfort, given us by the Scripture, to sustain our hope. ⁵May God, the source of all perseverance and comfort, give to all of you to live in peace in Christ Jesus, ⁶that you may be able to praise in one voice God, Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord.

⁷Welcome then one another, as Christ welcomed you for the glory of God. ⁸Look: Christ put himself at the service of the Jewish world to fulfill the promises made by God to their ancestors; here you see God’s faithfulness. ⁹The pagans instead, give thanks to God for his mercy, as Scripture says: *Because of that, I will sing and praise your name among the pagans.* ¹⁰And in another place: *Rejoice, pagan nations, with God’s people.* ¹¹And again: *Praise the Lord, all people, and let all nations speak of*

his magnificence. ¹²Isaiah says: *A descendant of Jesse will come who will rule the pagan nations and they will hope in him.*

¹³May God the source of hope, fill you with joy and peace in the faith, so that your hope may increase by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul feels responsible for the Christians of Rome

¹⁴As for me, brothers and sisters, I am convinced that you have goodwill, knowledge, and the capacity to advise each other; ¹⁵nevertheless, I have written boldly in some parts of this letter to remind you of what you already know. I do this according to the grace God has given to me ¹⁶when I was sent to the pagan nations. I dedicated myself to the service of the Good News of God as a minister of Christ Jesus, in order to present the non-Jews to God as an agreeable offering, consecrated by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷This service of God is for me a cause of pride, in Christ Jesus.

¹⁸Of course, I would not dare to speak of other things, but what Christ, himself has done through me, my words and my works, ¹⁹with miracles and signs, by the power of the Holy Spirit—so that non-Jews may obey the faith. In this way, I have extended the Good News to all parts, from Jerusalem to Illyricum.

²⁰I have been very careful, however, and I am proud of this, not to preach in places where Christ is already known, and not to build upon foundations laid by others. ²¹Let it be as Scripture says: *Those not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.*

Help for the Christians in Jerusalem

²²This work has prevented me from going to you. ²³But now there is no more place for me in these regions and, as I have wanted for so long to go and see you, ²⁴I hope to visit you when I go to Spain. Then you could help me go to that nation, once I have fully enjoyed your company.

²⁵Right now I am going to Jerusalem to help that community. ²⁶Know that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia have decided to make a contribution for the poor among the believers of Jerusalem. ²⁷They have decided to do that, and in fact, they were indebted to them. For the non-Jews have shared the spiritual goods of the Jews, and now they must help them materially. ²⁸So I am to complete this task and give over the

amount that has been collected. Then I will go to you, and from there, to Spain. ²⁹And I am sure, that when I go to you, I will go with all the blessings of God.

³⁰I beg of you, brothers and sisters, by Christ Jesus our Lord and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in the fight, praying to God for me; ³¹pray that I may avoid the snares of the enemies of faith in Judea and that the community of Jerusalem may welcome the help I bring. ³²And so I will go to you with joy and, God willing, be refreshed in your company. ³³The God of peace be with you. Amen.

ROMANS 15:1-33

Read: Christians must be characterized for being solicitous with others, following the example of Jesus. "Welcome one another, as Christ welcomed you for the glory of God," exhorts Paul.

Reflect: What does the following expression suggest to you: "May God, the source of perseverance and comfort, give to all of you, to live in peace in Jesus Christ"?

Pray: Ask, through the intercession of St. Paul, to improve your relationship with people who are not in agreement with you. Ask also for humility to see in them the presence of Jesus.

Act: Foster in your daily life attitudes of acceptance, consent and good manners. Become an apostle of Christian living.

Greetings

16¹I recommend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church of Cenchreae. ²Please receive her, in the name of the Lord, as it should be among brothers and sisters in the faith and help her in whatever is necessary, because she helped many; among them, myself.

³Greetings to Prisca and Aquilas, my helpers in Christ Jesus. ⁴To save my life they risked theirs; I am very grateful to them, as are all the churches of the pagan nations. ⁵Greetings also to the church that meets in their house. Greetings to my dear Epaenetus, the first in the province of Asia to believe in Christ. ⁶Greet Mary, who worked so much for you.

⁷Greetings to Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and companions in prison; they are well-known apostles and served Christ before I did.

⁸Give greetings to Ampliatus, whom I love so much in the Lord.

⁹Greetings to Urbanus, our fellow worker, and to my dear Stachys.

¹⁰Greetings to Apelles, who suffered for Christ, and the family of Aristobulus.

¹¹Greetings to my relative Herodion and those in the household of Narcissus who work in the Lord's service.

¹²Greetings to Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who toil for the Lord's sake.

¹³Greetings to Rufus, elected of the Lord, and his mother who was a second mother to me.

¹⁴Greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers and sisters staying with them.

¹⁵Greetings to Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas and all the holy ones in Christ Jesus with them.

¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send their greetings.

A warning

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, I beg of you, to be careful of those who are causing divisions and troubles in teaching you a different teaching from the one you were taught. Keep away from them,

¹⁸because those persons do not serve Christ our Lord, but their own interests, deceiving with their soft and entertaining language those who are simple of heart. ¹⁹Everybody knows that you are very obedient, and because of that I am happy, but I want you to be sensible in doing good and firm against evil.

²⁰The God of peace will soon crush Satan and place him under your feet. May Christ Jesus, our Lord, bless you.

²¹Timothy, who is with me, sends you greetings, and so do Lucius, Jason and Sosipatros, my relatives.

²²I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, send you greetings in the Lord.

²³Greetings from Gaius who has given me lodging and in whose house the church meets. Greetings from Erastus, treasurer of the city, and from our brother Quartus. (²⁴)

²⁵Glory be to God!

He is able to give you strength according to the Good News I proclaim, announcing Christ Jesus.

Now is revealed the mysterious plan kept hidden for long ages in the past.

²⁶By the will of the eternal God, it is brought to light through the prophetic books, and all nations shall believe the faith proclaimed to them.

²⁷Glory to God who alone is wise, through Christ Jesus, for ever! Amen.

ROMANS 16:1-27

Read: Paul ends his letter showing his gratitude. The list of men and women is long and detailed. Each name is followed by a few words of appreciation and gratitude for the work done in favor of the community, and for the ties of friendship that bind them to the apostle.

Reflect: Do you have friends in the Christian community? Do you feel close to its members? Do you consider the Church as a community of friends in the Lord?

Pray: Pray for your Christian community, that its members may become friends in the Lord and collaborators of a mission that is the responsibility of all: the proclamation of the Gospel.

Act: Make a list with the names of all the friends you have in the Christian community, and write them a letter with much affection for what they mean in your life and in your evangelizing mission.