

The Risen Christ: Has Jesus of Nazareth Been Distorted?

Jesus' figure, as it emerges from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is the figure of a rabbi, a teacher of the Law in the purest tradition of the people of Israel (Jn 3:2). Although, later on, the first Christian community gave more importance to the conflicts with the Pharisees than actually occurred, they did not forget that Jesus' teaching was very close to the teaching of the Pharisees on many points (Mk 2:16; 12:28; 12:32). Both disciples and opponents saw him as a self-taught master of the law (Jn 7:15). How then did we go from there to the figure of Christ as it appears particularly in Paul's letters: the Lord of history, the new Adam, the one who received the ineffable "Name"?

The apostles believed in the resurrection of Jesus and so did the entire Christian community who were born of this conviction. There was no doubt that he was the Messiah; people also believed that he was God's Son in a very special sense, different from what the Jews understood by this term. A long time was needed to draw all the inferences from this. This passage was undoubtedly more difficult for those who had known Jesus personally and who had seen him through the eyes of their Jewish culture, not because Jesus was not utterly Jewish, including his way of teaching, but because what they loved in him was preventing them from seeing beyond.

They certainly recognized themselves in James' letter, the most "Jewish" of the apostolic writings. While acknowledging Jesus as "our Lord," the author of the letter sees Jesus first as the teacher of a new law which included the best of the Old Testament (2:1 and 8). With the help of the impact of the Nazareth group, the "brothers of Jesus," the Christian communities of Palestine would grow fond of this image they had of the Galilean rabbi. He had risen, of course, but he had not set the world clock back to zero, and his heritage was, first of all, an example of doing good, not just teaching the Law.

Within just a few generations, these "Judeo-Christians" would find themselves like strangers to the faith of the Church whose center had

moved from Jerusalem to Antioch, then to Rome. It is there that Paul played a decisive role that he himself did not choose. He did not invent Christ the Lord and Redeemer: he was already present in Peter's first proclamations (Acts 2:32-36; 3:15). Paul, however, had not been influenced (and at the same time limited) by the image and the words of the Galilean rabbi. On the contrary, his conversion had been an encounter with God himself in the person of Jesus, and he saw the Master's itinerant preaching as the first stage of a wider destiny (2 Cor 5:16).

If Jesus had not risen, he would have remained a teacher; until then, his words were perhaps more important than he himself was. But his body disappeared from the tomb; this first-ever happening did not fit into the laws of the universe. So the visions of the resurrected one conveyed but one message: Jesus, the Lord! This went far beyond Jeremiah's exultant in glory or Elijah taken up to heaven. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said that God had raised his holy servant (Acts 3:15) and he added: "God has made him Lord." Before long Jesus will be recognized as "the son of the woman taken up to heaven to seize the book of history" (Rev 12:5; 5:7). Paul and John have the authority to speak about him because they are true witnesses; both of them were privileged to get a glimpse of the above (Rev 4:1; 2 Cor 12:2).

From that moment, it was knowing who Jesus was that gave the understanding of his words because he was God born of God. From that point on, his whole human adventure was a new beginning.

Therefore, when Paul speaks of Christ as the "image of God" (Col 1:15), he is not primarily inviting us to find the goodness of the Father in Jesus' gestures: instead he is thinking more directly about the Son who, from the beginning, is the manifestation, the projection and the active wisdom of the forever invisible God. Christ is the one who passed through our history and our time so that, through him, all of creation including humankind would be seen as part of the divine mystery (Col 1:20).

In the gospels, Jesus chose to be the proclaimer of the Reign of God. With Paul, however, there is not just kingdom, but our life in the risen Christ (Col 3:1). There we see the gap between Christian faith and the position of the non-Christian Jews who were the most sympathetic toward Jesus and acknowledged him as one of their own. Paul was not the one who built a wall of misunderstanding; the scandal was found in Jesus' resurrection as well as in his death on the cross.

These are not less scandalous for today's Christians. Although we have faith, at times we are besieged by doubt: is all of that certain? Many books written by unbelievers, or even by educated Christians, will reinforce our doubts: "The resurrection? There is no other basis than an empty tomb—and do we even know that? Yet, all these reasons do not overcome a deep-seated conviction in the hearts of believers. Then, people interpreted; they believed; they saw.... To say that he had risen was a way of exalting him and of reasserting the hope of the community...." A sense of God tells them that truth is found in the mystery rather than in the interpretations that seek to do away with it (1 Jn 2:27).

We have just said "a sense of God," because it is not a matter of human feeling: we believe, which means first of all that we receive the testimony of the apostles and of the Church, and we believe the way they did. If we welcome faith, God will not leave us alone with our doubts, there is also an added promise: the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:18). There can be no lasting faith without a spiritual experience (Heb 12:18-24), and this is even truer for those living in a culture impervious to faith, as we are.

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FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

Some persons praise the first Christians as if they had been models of all virtue. In fact, there were no more miracles then than now. Here as elsewhere, Paul addresses men and women living in a world as real as our own. Corinth had its own particular character among the Mediterranean cities. Situated on a tongue of land separating two gulfs, it had the best part of its privileged site. The two ports of the east and west had been joined by a kind of paved way on which boats were pulled by means of enormous wagons drawn by bullocks. This spared sailors having to detour to Greece by the south: a very long voyage at the time and very dangerous. Obviously, it had to be paid for; this financially benefited the town; it also needed labor which meant many slaves. The city had a sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of "love" for the Greeks, around which had developed (with the help of money) a prostitution that had nothing sacred about it other than its name. The prostitutes were counted in the thousands. Quite near Corinth, there was a sportive celebration—rather

similar to the Olympic Games of our day—every two years. This drew large crowds of people. We notice in these two letters of Paul very clear allusions to these different aspects of Corinthian history: slavery, prostitution, stadium sports.

In Corinth, there existed a dynamic, though not well ordered Church, composed of Jews and Greeks converted by Paul. Many of them were in danger of returning to the vices of their former lives, once the enthusiasm of their first years as Christians had worn off. Those responsible in the Church apparently were not capable of dealing with many problems: internal divisions and doubts about faith. They, therefore, called upon Paul, who wrote the present letter, because he could not interrupt his work in Ephesus.

We notice the authority with which Paul, from afar, leads the Church in the name of Christ; also his manner of teaching: before answering any question, he reasserts the foundations of the faith.

The Corinthians, in the midst of a pagan world, were concerned about matters that are again relevant in our times:

- about celibacy and marriage,
- about living together with those who do not share the Christian faith,
- about conducting the assemblies, for both the celebration of the Eucharist and the use of “spiritual gifts,”
- about the resurrection of the dead.



FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

1 ¹From Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and from Sosthenes our brother, ²to God's Church which is in Corinth; to you whom God has sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy together with those who everywhere call upon the name of our Lord Christ Jesus, their Lord and ours.

³Receive grace and peace from God, our Father, and Christ Jesus, our Lord.

⁴I give thanks constantly to my God, for you, and for the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus. ⁵For you have been fully enriched in him with words, as well as with knowledge, ⁶even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you. ⁷You do not lack any spiritual gift and only await the glorious coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord. ⁸He will keep you steadfast to the end, and you will be without reproach on the day of the coming of our Lord Jesus. ⁹The faithful God will not fail you after calling you to this fellowship with his Son, Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Divisions among the faithful

¹⁰I beg of you, brothers and sisters, in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, to agree among yourselves and do away with divisions; please be perfectly united with one mind and one judgment.

¹¹For I heard from people of Cloe's house about your rivalries. ¹²What I mean is this: some say, "I am for Paul," and others: "I am for Apollos," or "I am for Peter," or "I am for Christ." ¹³Is Christ divided, or have I, Paul, been crucified for you? Have you been baptized in the name of Paul?

¹⁴I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and

Gaius, ¹⁵so that no one can say that he was baptized in my name. ¹⁶Well, I have also baptized the Stephanas family. Apart from these, I do not recall having baptized anyone else.

The folly of the cross

¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to proclaim his gospel. And not with beautiful words! That would be like getting rid of the cross of Christ. ¹⁸The language of the cross remains nonsense for those who are lost. Yet for us who are saved it is the power of God, ¹⁹as Scripture says: *I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and make fail the foresight of the foresighted.* ²⁰Masters of human wisdom, educated people, philosophers, you have no reply! And the wisdom of this world? God, let it fail.

²¹At first, God spoke the language of wisdom and the world did not know God through wisdom. Then God thought of saving the believers through the foolishness that we preach.

²²The Jews ask for miracles and the Greeks for a higher knowledge, ²³while we proclaim a crucified Messiah. For the Jews, what a great scandal! And for the Greeks, what nonsense! ²⁴But he is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God, for those called by God among both Jews and Greeks.

²⁵In reality, the “foolishness” of God is wiser than humans and the “weakness” of God is stronger than humans.

²⁶Brothers and sisters, look and see whom God has called. Few among you can be said to be cultured or wealthy and few belong to noble families. ²⁷Yet God has chosen what the world considers foolish to shame the wise; he has chosen what the world considers weak to shame the strong. ²⁸God has chosen common and unimportant people, making use of what is nothing, to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that *no mortal may boast before God.* ³⁰But by God’s grace you are in Christ Jesus who has become our wisdom from God, and who makes us just and holy and free. ³¹Scripture says: *Let the one who boasts, boast of the Lord.*

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-31

Read: Paul, with Sosthenes, writes to a Corinthian community divided into factions. He points the factions to what they have in common, belief in the crucified and Risen Lord. To others this

belief is nonsense, but for the Christians in Corinth, this is the meaning of life.

Reflect: Paul tells the Corinthians they are called into community by Jesus Christ, is that your experience? In a world with so many different points of view, is it possible for faith in Jesus Christ to unify Christians?

Pray: Pray that you may be an instrument of peace in the community. Pray that your faith in Christ helps you to build bridges between the gaps that separates people.

Act: Strive to be a person who listens to different points of view. Look for ways to help people discover what they have in common.

2¹When I came to reveal to you the mystery of God's plan, I did not count on eloquence or on a show of learning. ²I was determined not to know anything among you but Jesus, the Messiah, and a crucified Messiah. ³I, myself, came weak, fearful and trembling; ⁴my words and preaching were not brilliant or clever to win listeners. It was rather a demonstration of spirit and power, ⁵so that your faith might be a matter, not of human wisdom, but of God's power.

The Spirit teaches us wisdom

⁶In fact, we do speak of wisdom to the mature in faith, although it is not a wisdom of this world or of its rulers who are doomed to perish. ⁷We teach the mystery and secret plan of divine wisdom, which God destined from the beginning, to bring us to glory.

⁸No ruler of this world ever knew this; otherwise, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But as Scripture says: *Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it dawned on the mind what God has prepared for those who love him.* ¹⁰God has revealed it to us through his Spirit because the Spirit probes everything, even the depth of God.

¹¹Who, but his own spirit, knows the secrets of a person? Similarly, no one but the Spirit of God knows the secrets of God. ¹²We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who comes from God and, through him, we understand what God, in his goodness, has given us.

¹³So we speak of this not in terms inspired by human wisdom, but in

a language taught by the Spirit, explaining a spiritual wisdom to spiritual persons. ¹⁴The one who remains on the psychological level does not understand the things of the Spirit. They are foolishness for him; and he does not understand, because they require a spiritual experience. ¹⁵On the other hand, the spiritual person judges everything, but no one judges him. ¹⁶*Who has known the mind of God so as to teach him?* But we have the mind of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-16

Read: Paul came humbly and without pretense to preach the Gospel of Jesus. Truth comes not from the preacher but from the Spirit of God in our midst, opening hearts to the ways God works in people's lives.

Reflect: How should we, Catholics, express our faith? Do you allow the Holy Spirit to be present in your life? How? Paul writes: "We have received the Spirit of God so can understand the gifts bestowed on us from God." How do you interpret that?

Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and use the gifts God has given to you.

Act: Before speaking about matters of faith in your community, ask for the help of the Spirit so that he may be present in your words. May your faith be rooted not in human wisdom but on the power of the Spirit.

There are many workers, the building is one

3¹I could not, friends, speak to you as spiritual persons but as fleshly people, for you are still infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk, and not solid food, for you were not ready for it, and, up to now, you cannot receive it ³for you are still of the flesh. As long as there are jealousy and strife, what can I say, but that you are at the level of the flesh and behave like ordinary people.

⁴While one says: "I follow Paul," and the other: "I follow Apollos," what are you, but people still at a human level?

⁵For what is Apollos? What is Paul? They are ministers and, through them, you believed, as it was given by the Lord to each of them. ⁶I

planted, Apollos watered the plant, but God made it grow. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who makes the plant grow.

⁸The one who plants and the one who waters work to the same end, and the Lord will pay each, according to their work. ⁹We are fellow-workers with God, but you are God's field and building.

¹⁰I, as a good architect, according to the capacity given to me, I laid the foundation, and another is to build upon it. Each one must be careful how to build upon it. ¹¹No one can lay a foundation other than the one which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Then, if someone builds with gold upon this foundation, another with silver and precious stones, or with wood, bamboo or straw, ¹³the work of each one will be shown for what it is. The day of Judgment will reveal it because the fire will make everything known. The fire will test the work of everyone. ¹⁴If your work withstands the fire, you will be rewarded; ¹⁵but if your work becomes ashes, you will pay for it. You will be saved, but it will be as if passing through fire.

¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit abides within you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him. God's temple is holy, and you are this temple.

Do not divide the Church

¹⁸Do not deceive yourselves. If anyone of you considers himself wise in the ways of the world, let him become a fool so that he may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's eyes. To this, Scripture says: *God catches the wise in their own wisdom.* ²⁰It also says: *The Lord knows the reasoning of the wise, that it is useless.*

²¹Because of this, let no one boasts about human beings, for everything belongs to you; ²²Paul, Apollos, Cephas—life, death, the present, and the future. Everything is yours ²³and you, you belong to Christ, and Christ is of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-23

Read: The community appears divided in following one or other preacher. Paul reminds us that a Christian follows only Christ. Christ is the only foundation of the community and of each believer.

Reflect: Who is at the center of your parish community? Is your parish rooted in Christ and his Word in Scripture? Paul tells the Corinthian community that they are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells within them. Does your community feel that way?

Pray: "You belong to Christ," St. Paul says; pray for a deeper appreciation of what it means for you to belong to Christ.

Act: Paul says, "You are God's field, God's building, God's temple." Have a conversation with a member of your community about this means to them.

4¹Let everyone, then, see us as the servants of Christ and stewards of the secret works of God. ²Being stewards, faithfulness shall be demanded of us; ³but I do not mind if you, or any human court, judges me. I do not even judge myself; ⁴my conscience, indeed, does not accuse me of anything, but that is not enough for me to be set right with God: the Lord is the one who judges me.

⁵Therefore, do not judge before the time, until the coming of the Lord. He will bring to light whatever was hidden in darkness and will disclose the secret intentions of the hearts. Then each one will receive praise from God.

⁶Brothers and sisters, you forced me to apply these comparisons to Apollos and to myself. Learn by this example not to believe yourselves superior by siding with one against the other. ⁷How then are you more than the others? What have you that you have not received? And if you received it, why are you proud as if you did not receive it?

Comforted Christians and harassed apostles

⁸So, then, you are already rich and satisfied and feel like kings, without us! I wish you really were kings so that we might enjoy the kingship with you!

⁹It seems to me that God has placed us, the apostles, in the last place as if condemned to death and as spectacles for the whole world, for the angels as well as for mortals.

¹⁰We are fools for Christ, while you show forth the wisdom of Christ. We are weak, you are strong. You are honored, while we are despised.

¹¹Until now, we hunger and thirst, we are poorly clothed and badly treated while moving from place to place. ¹²We labor, working with our hands. People insult us and we bless them, they persecute us and we endure everything; ¹³they speak evil against us, and ours are works of peace. We have become like the scum of the earth, like the garbage of humankind until now.

¹⁴I do not write this to shame you, but to warn you as very dear children. ¹⁵Because, even though you may have ten thousand guardians in the Christian life, you have only one father and it was I who gave you life in Christ through the gospel. ¹⁶Therefore, I pray you to follow my example. ¹⁷With this purpose, I send to you Timothy, my dear and trustworthy son in the service of the Lord. He will remind you of my way of Christian life, as I teach it in all churches everywhere.

¹⁸Some of you thought that I could not visit you and became very arrogant. ¹⁹But I will visit you soon, the Lord willing, and I will see, not what those arrogant people say, but what they can do. ²⁰Because the kingdom of God is not a matter of words but of power. ²¹What do you prefer, for me to come with a stick, or with love and gentleness?

1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-21

Read: In Corinth, there were some arrogant Christians Who were sure they knew how everyone else should believe and act. Paul exhorts not to judge anyone, to recognize God's gifts and to live in humility remembering their own origins.

Reflect: What is the meaning that preachers are servants of Christ and administrators of the secrets of God? What is most convincing, words or deed?

Pray: Pray that preachers in your community be first of all messengers of the Gospel of Jesus, Uniting people and inspiring them to do the deeds of Christ.

Act: Build up unity with your attitudes and announce the Gospel mainly through the witness of your life.

Expel the immoral brother!

5¹You have become news, with a case of immorality, and such a case that is not even found among pagans. Yes, one of you has taken as

wife his own stepmother. ²And you feel proud! Should you not be in mourning instead, and expel the one who did such a thing? ³For my part, although I am physically absent, my spirit is with you and, as if present, I have already passed sentence on the man who committed such a sin. ⁴Let us meet together, you and my spirit, and in the name of our Lord Jesus, and with his power ⁵you shall deliver him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit be saved in the day of Judgment.

⁶This is not the time to praise yourselves. Do you not know that a little yeast makes the whole mass of dough rise? ⁷Throw out, then, the old yeast and be new dough. If Christ became our Passover, you should be unleavened bread. ⁸Let us celebrate, therefore, the Passover, no longer with old yeast which is sin and perversity; let us have unleavened bread, that is purity and sincerity.

⁹In my last letter, I instructed you not to associate with immoral people. ¹⁰I did not mean, of course, those who do not belong to the church and who are immoral, exploiters, embezzlers or worshipers of idols. Otherwise, you would have to leave this world. ¹¹What I really meant was to avoid and not to mingle with anyone who, bearing the name of brother or sister, becomes immoral, exploiter, slanderer, drunkard, embezzler. In which case, you should not even eat with them.

¹²Why should I judge outsiders? But you, are you not to judge those who are inside? ¹³Let God judge those outside, but as for you, *drive out the wicked person from among you.*

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-13

Read: Evil can exist within the community when greed, idolatry, slander, lying or debauchery is tolerated. These create distrust and abuse within the community. The community must have the courage not to allow this to go uncorrected.

Reflect: What behaviors divide your community? How does your community respond to abuse when it happens? Are injustice and exploitation of others tolerated?

Pray: Ask to be faithful to the Christian principles and values. Ask not to be indifferent when seeing hunger, misery, sicknesses, and distress in the people around you.

Act: Seek ways of ensuring for each person the rights and dignity that God bestows on all. This is a communitarian obligation in which all must be united.

Do not bring another Christian to court

6¹When you have a complaint against a brother, how dare you bring it before pagan judges instead of bringing it before God's people? ²Do you not know that you shall one day judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you incapable of judging such simple problems?

³Do you not know that we will even judge the angels? And could you not decide everyday affairs? ⁴But when you have ordinary cases to be judged, you bring them before those who are of no account in the Church! ⁵Shame on you! Is there not even one among you wise enough to be the arbiter among believers?

⁶But no. One of you brings a suit against another one and files that suit before unbelievers. ⁷It is already a failure that you have suits against each other. Why do you not rather suffer wrong and receive some damage? ⁸But no. You wrong and injure others and those are your brothers and sisters. ⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Make no mistake about it: those who lead sexually immoral lives, or worship idols, or who are adulterers, perverts, sodomites, ¹⁰or thieves, exploiters, drunkards, slanderers or embezzlers will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹Some of you were like that, but you have been cleansed and consecrated to God and have been set right with God by the name of the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of our God.

Sexual immorality

¹²Everything is lawful for me, but not everything is to my profit. Everything is lawful for me, but I will not become a slave of anything. ¹³Food is for the stomach as the stomach is for food, and God will destroy them both. Yet the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. ¹⁴And God, who raised the Lord, will also raise us with his power.

¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? And you would make that part of his body become a part of a prostitute? Never!

¹⁶But you well know that when you join yourselves to a prostitute, you become one with her. For Scripture says: *The two will become one flesh.*

¹⁷On the contrary, anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

¹⁸Avoid unlawful sex entirely. Any other sin a person commits is outside the body but those who commit sexual immorality sin against their own body.

¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, given by God? You belong no longer to yourselves. ²⁰Remember at what price you have been bought, and make your body serve the glory of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-20

Read: Paul asks the Corinthians to use mediation not punishment when there are disputes among themselves. Avoid what is not beneficial or leads to the debasement of the body or spirit. We must recognize our own dignity and not engage in acts that are unworthy of our calling.

Reflect: How do you deal with situations of conflict regarding moral issues in the community? Am I aware of my own failings toward others? Does the Church have a duty to denounce situations of corruption in society?

Pray: "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit," writes St. Paul; pray that your body and spirit always live in harmony.

Act: Try to condemn no one; but, above all, avoid actions that will generate immorality and injustice in the society.

Marriage and abstinence

7¹Now I will answer the questions in your letter. It is good for a man not to touch a woman. ²Yet to avoid immorality every man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³Let the husband fulfill his duty of husband and likewise the wife. ⁴The wife is not the owner of her own body: the husband is. Similarly, the husband is not the owner of his own body: the wife is.

⁵Do not refuse each other, except by mutual consent, and only for a time in order to dedicate yourselves to prayer, and then come together again lest you fall into Satan's trap by lack of self-control. ⁶I approve of

this abstention, but I do not order it. ⁷I would like everyone to be like me, but each has from God a particular gift, some in one way, others differently.

⁸To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it would be good for them to remain as I am, ⁹but if they cannot control themselves, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Marriage and divorce

¹⁰I command married couples—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband. ¹¹If she separates from him, let her not marry again, or let her make peace with her husband. Similarly, the husband should not divorce his wife.

¹²To the others I say—from me and not from the Lord—if a brother has a wife who is not a believer, but she agrees to live with him, let him not separate from her. ¹³In the same manner, if a woman has a husband who is not a believer, but he agrees to live with her, let her not separate from her husband. ¹⁴Because the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband who believes. Otherwise, your children also would be apart from God; but as it is, they are consecrated to God.

¹⁵Now, if the unbelieving husband or wife wants to separate, let them do so. In this case, the Christian partner is not bound for the Lord has called us to peace. ¹⁶Besides, are you sure, wife, that you could save your husband, and you, husband, that you could save your wife?

¹⁷Except for this, let each one continue living as he was when God called him as was his lot set by the Lord. This is what I order in all churches. ¹⁸Let the circumcised Jew, not remove the marks of the circumcision when he is called by God and let the non-Jew not be circumcised when he is called. ¹⁹For the important thing is not to be circumcised or not but to keep the commandments of God.

²⁰Let each of you, therefore, remain in the state in which you were called by God. ²¹If you were a slave when called do not worry; yet if you can gain your freedom, take the opportunity.

²²The slave called to believe in the Lord is a freed person belonging to the Lord just as whoever has been called while free becomes a slave of Christ. ²³You have been bought at a very great price; do not become slaves of a human being.

²⁴So then, brothers and sisters, continue living in the state you were before God at the time of his call.

Marriage and virginity

²⁵With regard to those who remain virgins, I have no special commandment from the Lord, but I give some advice hoping that I am worthy of trust by the mercy of the Lord.

²⁶I think this is good in these hard times in which we live. It is good for someone to remain as he is. ²⁷If you are married, do not try to divorce your wife; if you are not married, do not marry. ²⁸He who marries does not sin, nor does the young girl sin who marries. Yet they will face disturbing experiences and I would like to spare you.

²⁹I say this, brothers and sisters: time is running out and those who are married must live as if not married; ³⁰those who weep as if not weeping; those who are happy as if they were not happy; those buying something as if they had not bought it, and those enjoying the present life as if they were not enjoying it. ³¹For the order of this world is vanishing.

³²I would like you to be free from anxieties. He who is not married is concerned about the things of the Lord and how to please the Lord. ³³While he who is married is taken up with the things of the world and how to please his wife and he is divided in his interests.

³⁴Likewise, the unmarried woman and the virgin are concerned with the service of the Lord, to be holy in body and spirit. The married woman instead worries about the things of the world and how to please her husband.

³⁵I say this for your own good. I do not wish to lay traps for you but to lead you to a beautiful life, entirely united with the Lord.

³⁶If anyone realizes he will not be behaving correctly with his fiancée because of the ardor of his passion, and that things should take their due course, let him marry; he commits no sin. ³⁷But if another of firmer heart thinks that he can control his passion and decides not to marry so that his fiancée may remain a virgin, he does better. ³⁸So then, he who marries does well, and he who does not marry does better.

³⁹The wife is bound as long as her husband lives. If he dies, she is free to be married to whomsoever she wishes, provided that she does so in the Christian way. ⁴⁰However, she will be happier if, following my advice, she remains as she is, and I believe that I also have the Spirit of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-40

Read: Paul insists on equality between husband and wife, not only in marriage, but in situations of divorce. He repeats that circumcision is unimportant for Christians, as is social status. Slaves and free persons are equally called by God.

Reflect: What role does marriage play in the spiritual life of partners? In that Paul shortly expected the end of the world he was concerned it would be a distraction, in what ways is it a grace? The Corinthian Church was composed of slaves and free people whom Paul treats equally. Are there issues of social status that divide the Church today?

Pray: Pray that your sexuality be a vehicle for holiness and your relationships an expression of love.

Act: Live your sexuality in an integral way and according to the life option you have chosen. Let it be a witness to the love of God you experience, and an always-valid offer for human realization.

Can we share in pagan customs?

8¹Regarding meat from the offerings to idols, we know that all of us have the knowledge, but knowledge puffs up, while love builds. ²If anyone thinks that he has the knowledge, he does not yet know as he should know, ³but if someone loves (God), he has been known (by God).

⁴Can we, then, eat meat from offerings to the idols? We know that an idol is without existence and that there is no God but one. ⁵People speak indeed of other gods in heaven and on earth and in this sense, there are many gods and lords. ⁶Yet for us, there is but one God, the Father, from whom everything comes and to whom we go. And there is one Lord, Christ Jesus, through whom everything exists and through him we exist.

⁷Not everyone, however, has that knowledge. For some persons, who until recently took the idols seriously, that food remains linked to the idol, and eating of it stains their conscience, which is unformed.

⁸It is not food that brings us closer to God. If we eat, we gain nothing, and if we do not eat, we do not lose anything. ⁹We are free, of course, but let not your freedom cause others, who are less prepared, to fall.

¹⁰What if others with an unformed conscience see you a person of knowledge sitting at the table in the temple of idols? Will not their weak conscience, because of your example, move them to eat also? ¹¹Then, with your knowledge, you would have caused your weak brother or sister to perish, the one for whom Christ died. ¹²When you disturb the weak conscience of your brother or sister and sin against them, you sin against Christ himself. ¹³Therefore, if any food will bring my brother or sister to sin, I shall never eat this food, lest my brother or sister fall.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13

Read: Paul deals with the problem of conscience that, at that time, generated from eating meat offered to idols. This is not sin in itself since idols are just that: idols and not gods. There is only one God. But one should think about others: "If food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall," is Paul's conclusion.

Reflect: Do you have any doubt about God's existence? Do you think that society today has idols? Which ones? Are we, Christians, free from them? And you, which idols do you adore?

Pray: Modern life can fall victim to the idols of prestige, money and power. Pray that Christ's love always has first place in your heart.

Act: Let your everyday life manifest Christ's presence; let your deeds reveal the Father's love and may your life example extend the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Renouncing one's own rights: the example of Paul

9¹As for me, am I not free? I am an apostle and I have seen Jesus the Lord, and you are my work in the Lord. ²Although I may not be an apostle for others, at least I am one for you. You are, in the Lord, evidence of my apostleship.

³Now, this is what I answer to those who criticize me: ⁴Have we not the right to be fed? ⁵Have we not the right to bring along with us a sister as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶Am I the only one, with Barnabas, bound to work?

What soldier goes to war at his own expense? ⁷What farmer does not

eat from the vineyard he planted? Who tends a flock and does not drink from its milk? ⁸Are these rights only accepted human practice? No. The law says the same. In the law of Moses it is written: *Do not muzzle the ox which threshes grain.* ⁹Does this mean that God is concerned with oxen, ¹⁰or rather with us? Of course, it applies to us. For our sake, it was written that no one plows without expecting a reward for plowing, and no one threshes without hoping for a share of the crop. ¹¹Then, if we have sown spiritual riches among you, would it be too much for us to reap some material reward? ¹²If others have had a share among you, we could have it all the more.

Yet, we made no use of this right and we prefer to endure everything rather than put any obstacle to the gospel of Christ. ¹³Do you not know that those working in the sacred service eat from what is offered for the temple? And those serving at the altar receive their part from the altar? ¹⁴The Lord ordered, likewise, that those announcing the gospel live from the gospel. ¹⁵Yet, I have not made use of my rights, and now I do not write to claim them: I would rather die! No one will deprive me of this glory of mine.

¹⁶Because I cannot boast of announcing the gospel: I am bound to do it. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷If I preach voluntarily, I could expect my reward, but I have been trusted with this office against my will. ¹⁸How can I, then, deserve a reward? In announcing the gospel, I will do it freely without making use of the rights given to me by the gospel.

¹⁹So, feeling free with everybody, I have become everybody's slave in order to gain a greater number. ²⁰To save the Jews, I became a Jew with the Jews, and because they are under the law, I myself submitted to the law, although I am free from it. ²¹With the pagans, not subject to the law, I became one of them, although I am not without a law of God since Christ is my law. Yet, I wanted to gain those strangers to the law. ²²To the weak, I made myself weak to win the weak. So I made myself all things to all people in order to save, by all possible means, some of them. ²³This, I do for the gospel, so that I, too, have a share of it.

Faith demands sacrifice

²⁴Have you not learned anything from the stadium? Many run, but only one gets the prize. Run, therefore, intending to win it, ²⁵as athletes

who impose upon themselves a rigorous discipline. Yet, for them the wreath is of laurels, which wither, while for us it does not wither.

²⁶So then, I run knowing where I go. I box, but not aimlessly in the air.

²⁷I punish my body and control it, lest, after preaching to others, I myself should be rejected.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-27

Read: Paul declares himself an apostle to the Gentiles. Those who announce the Good News should live from their ministry, this is their right. But Paul preferred not to use this right to avoid placing an obstacle to the Gospel. For him, to announce the Good News is not a reason for pride, but an obligation he cannot renounce. He preaches to reach an incorruptible crown: eternal salvation.

Reflect: It is just to earn a living by working. So, how is it that Paul preaches for free and does not live by it? Can preaching the Gospel be considered a simple work, or rather an obligation for all Christians?

Pray: Pray for those who make out of the preaching of the Gospel their only occupation and work: priests, missionaries, religious men and women... Ask for them the strength of the Spirit.

Act: Help according to your possibilities those who leave everything for the Gospel. Collaborate with your time, talents or treasure.

10¹Let me remind you, brothers and sisters, about our ancestors. All of them were under the cloud and all crossed the sea. ²All underwent the baptism of the land and of the sea to join Moses; ³and all of them ate from the same spiritual manna; ⁴and all of them drank from the same spiritual drink. For you know that they drank from a spiritual rock following them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵However, most of them did not please God and the desert was strewn with their bodies.

⁶All of this happened as an example for us so that we might not become people of evil desires as they did.

⁷Do not follow idols as some of them did, and Scripture says: *The*

people sat down to eat and drink and stood up for orgy. ⁸Let us not fall into sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day, twenty-three thousand of them fell dead. ⁹And let us not tempt the Lord, as some of them did, and were killed by serpents; ¹⁰nor grumble, as some of them did, and were cut down by the destroying angel.

¹¹These things happened to them as an example, and they were written as a warning for us as the last times come upon us. ¹²Therefore, if you think you stand, beware, lest you fall. ¹³No trial greater than human endurance has overcome you. God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond your strength. He will give you, together with the temptation, the strength to escape and to resist.

¹⁴Therefore, dear friends, shun the cult of idols.

¹⁵I address you as intelligent persons; judge what I say. ¹⁶The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion with the blood of Christ? And the bread that we break, is it not a communion with the body of Christ? ¹⁷The bread is one, and so we, though many, form one body sharing the one bread.

¹⁸Consider the Israelites. For them, to eat of the victim is to come into communion with its altar.

¹⁹What does all that mean? That the meat is really consecrated to the idol, or that the idol is a being. ²⁰However, when the pagans offer a sacrifice, the sacrifice goes to the demons, not to God. I do not want you to come into fellowship with demons. ²¹You cannot drink at the same time from the cup of the Lord and from the cup of demons. You cannot share in the table of the Lord and in the table of the demons. ²²Do we want, perhaps, to provoke the jealousy of the Lord? Could we be stronger than he?

Practical solutions

²³Everything is lawful for me, but not everything is to my profit. Everything is lawful for me, but not everything builds up: ²⁴let no one pursue his own interests, but the interests of the other.

²⁵Eat, then, whatever is sold at the market, and do not raise questions of conscience about it. ²⁶Because: *the earth and whatever is in it belongs to the Lord.* ²⁷If someone who does not share your faith invites you, go and eat of anything served to you without problems of conscience. ²⁸However, if somebody tells you that the meat is from the

offerings to idols, then do not eat out of consideration for those warning you and for the sake of their conscience.

²⁹I say: "In consideration of their conscience," not of yours, for is it convenient that my rights be misinterpreted by them and their conscience? ³⁰Is it good that I bring on me criticism for some good thing I am sharing and for which I will give thanks?

³¹Then, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it for the glory of God. ³²Give no offense to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the Church of God, ³³just as I try to please everyone in everything. I do not seek my own interest, but that of many, this is: that they be saved.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-33

Read: Paul exhorts the community of Corinth to avoid idolatry and not to fall in sexual immorality. "All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial." Christians should do everything for the glory of God, should look for the good of others before their own, and should avoid being a cause of scandals to others.

Reflect: Do you trust that you can overcome all your difficulties with God's help? Do you have any behavior that may scandalize others even if you consider them normal?

Pray: Trust that God listens to your prayers. Ask for help in your difficulties and to give you humility to give up your ways when necessary.

Act: Explore the faiths of other people, not as an alternative of your own but in order to broaden your understanding of the richness of God.

Women's dress and Mediterranean customs

11 ¹Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. ²I praise you because you remember me in everything and you keep the traditions that I have given you. ³However, I wish to remind you that every man has Christ as his head, while the wife has her husband as her head; and God is the head of Christ. ⁴If a man prays or prophesies with his head covered, he dishonors his head. ⁵On the contrary, the woman who prays or prophesies with her head

uncovered does not respect her head. She might as well cut her hair. ⁶If a woman does not use a veil, let her cut her hair; and if it is a shame for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved, then let her use a veil.

⁷Men do not need to cover their heads, for they are the image of God and reflect his glory, while a woman reflects the glory of man. ⁸Man was not formed from woman, but woman from man. ⁹Nor did God create man for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰Therefore, a woman must respect the angels, and have on her head the sign of her dependence.

¹¹Anyway, the Christian attitude does not separate man from woman and woman from man, ¹²and if God has created woman from man, man is born of woman and both come from God.

¹³Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray without a veil? ¹⁴Common sense teaches us that it is shameful for a man to wear long hair ¹⁵while long hair is the pride of a woman and it has been given to her precisely as a veil.

¹⁶If some of you want to argue, let it be known that it is not our custom, nor the custom in the churches of God.

The Lord's Supper

¹⁷To continue with my advice, I cannot praise you for your gatherings are not for the better but for the worse.

¹⁸First, as I have heard, when you gather together, there are divisions among you and I partly believe it. ¹⁹There may have to be different groups among you so that it becomes clear who among you are genuine.

²⁰Your gatherings are no longer the Supper of the Lord, ²¹for each one eats at once his own food and while one is hungry the other is getting drunk. ²²Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or perhaps you despise the Church of God and desire to humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say? Shall I praise you? For this, I cannot praise you.

²³This is the tradition of the Lord that I received and that in my turn I have handed on to you; the Lord Jesus, on the night that he was delivered up, took bread and, ²⁴after giving thanks, broke it, saying, "This is my body which is broken for you; do this in memory of me." ²⁵In the same manner, taking the cup after the supper, he said, "This cup is the new Covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of

me.”²⁶ So then, whenever you eat of this bread and drink from this cup you are proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes.

²⁷ Therefore, if anyone eats of the bread or drinks from the cup of the Lord unworthily, he sins against the body and blood of the Lord.

²⁸ Let each one, then, examine himself before eating of the bread and drinking from the cup. ²⁹ Otherwise, he eats and drinks his own condemnation in not recognizing the Body.

³⁰ This is the reason why so many among you are sick and weak and several have died. ³¹ But if we examine ourselves, we will not be examined by God and judged in this way. ³² The Lord’s strokes are to correct us so that we may not be condemned with this world.

³³ So then, brothers and sisters, when you gather for a meal, wait for one another ³⁴ and, if someone is hungry, let him eat in his own house. In this way, you will not gather for your common condemnation. The other instructions I shall give when I go there.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1-34

Read: In the Church, we are all united in God, in the same way, that during the Eucharist we should all participate as equals, with the conviction that we form part of the body of Jesus. When we are gathered as Church there should not be any differences.

Reflect: To what does the celebration of the Eucharist commit us? What does this expression suggest to you: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”? When you celebrate the Eucharist how are you and your community conscious of the death and resurrection of the Lord? Are there ways in which celebrating the Eucharist could be hypocritical?

Pray: Paul’s attitudes toward women are conditioned by his time. Pray that women are seen everywhere as equal disciples of the Lord.

Act: Decide how you are going to live the Eucharist you celebrate.

Spiritual gifts and harmony

12¹With respect to spiritual gifts, I will remind you of the following: ²When you were still pagans, you were irresistibly drawn to your dumb idols. ³I tell you that nobody inspired by the Spirit of God may say, “A curse on Jesus,” as no one can say, “Jesus is the Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴There is a diversity of gifts, but the Spirit is the same. ⁵There is a diversity of ministries, but the Lord is the same. ⁶There is a diversity of works, but the same God works in all.

⁷The Spirit reveals his presence in each one with a gift that is also a service. ⁸One is to speak with wisdom through the Spirit. Another teaches according to the same Spirit. ⁹To another is given faith in which the Spirit acts; to another the gift of healing, and it is the same Spirit. ¹⁰Another works miracles, another is a prophet, another recognizes what comes from the good or evil spirit; another speaks in tongues, and still, another interprets what has been said in tongues. ¹¹And all of this is the work of the one and only Spirit, who gives to each one as he so desires.

Comparison with the body

¹²As the body is one, having many members, and all the members while being many form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³All of us, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, have been baptized in one Spirit to form one body, and all of us have been given to drink from the one Spirit.

¹⁴The body has not just one member, but many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, “I do not belong to the body for I am not a hand,” it would be wrong: it is part of the body! ¹⁶Even though the ear says, “I do not belong to the body for I am not an eye,” it is part of the body. ¹⁷If all the body were an eye, how would we hear? And if all the body were an ear, how would we smell?

¹⁸God has arranged all the members, placing each part of the body as he pleased. ¹⁹If all were the same part where would the body be? ²⁰But there are many members and one body. ²¹The eye cannot tell the hand, “I do not need you,” nor the head tell the feet, “I do not need you.”

²²Still more, the parts of our body that we most need are those that seem to be the weakest; ²³the parts that we consider lower are treated with much care ²⁴and we cover them with more modesty because they are less presentable, whereas the others do not need such attention.

²⁵God himself arranged the body in this way, giving more honor to those parts that need it so that the body may not be divided but rather each member may care for the others. ²⁶When one suffers all of them suffer, and when one receives honor all rejoice together.

²⁷Now, you are the body of Christ, and each of you individually is a member of it. ²⁸So God has appointed us in the Church. First apostles, second prophets, third teachers. Then come miracles, then the gift of healing, material help, administration in the Church and the gift of tongues.

²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Can all perform miracles ³⁰or cure the sick or speak in tongues or explain what was said in tongues? ³¹Be that as it may, set your hearts on the most precious gifts and I will show you a much better way.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-31

Read: Divisions within the community are often based simply on legitimate personal differences. People are different, but the Spirit is one and in that way, we are all members of the one body of Christ.

Reflect: Are you aware of being united by the Holy Spirit to the other members of your community? Which are your gifts for the community? What does the following text suggest to you: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

Pray: Ask from the Holy Spirit the grace to strengthen the bonds with the members of your community. Ask also that each member of the community may generously offer their gifts for the benefit of others.

Act: Talk to some people in your community to whom you trust. Tell them about the gifts of the Spirit that you perceive in them and ask them to do the same with you.

No gift higher than love

13¹If I could speak all the human and angelic tongues, but had no love, I would only be sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ²If I

had the gift of prophecy, knowing secret things with all kinds of knowledge and had faith great enough to remove mountains but had no love I would be nothing. ³If I gave everything I had to the poor and even give up my body to be burned if I am without love it would be of no value to me.

⁴Love is patient, kind, without envy. It is not boastful or arrogant. It is not ill-mannered, nor does it seek its own interest. ⁵Love overcomes anger and forgets offenses. ⁶It does not take delight in the wrong but rejoices in the truth. ⁷Love excuses everything, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love will never end. Prophecies may cease, tongues will be silent and knowledge, disappear. ⁹For knowledge grasps something of the truth and prophecy as well. ¹⁰And when what is perfect comes, everything imperfect will pass away. ¹¹When I was a child, I thought and reasoned like a child, but when I grew up I gave up childish ways. ¹²Likewise, at present, we see dimly as in a mirror, but then it shall be face to face. Now we know in part, but then I will know as I am known. ¹³Now, we have faith, hope, and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Read: Paul describes the gift of God whereby Christians imitate Jesus. It's a lifetime of experience wrapped into one statement: faith, hope, and love, with the greatest of these being love.

Reflect: In what ways is your love, patient, kind, not irritable or resentful, never jealous or judgmental, but builds up those you love? How does your Church live the love of which St. Paul speaks?

Pray: Give thanks to God for all the love you received in life, asking that you may share this love with others.

Act: Read again verses 4 to 7. Do something concrete to make your love real to those around you.

Gifts of prophecy and tongues

14¹Strive, then, for love and set your hearts on spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ²The one who speaks in tongues does not speak to people, but to God for no one understands him; the

spirit makes him say things that are not understandable. ³The prophet, instead, addresses all people to give them strength, encouragement, and consolation. ⁴He who speaks in tongues strengthens himself, but the prophet builds the Church.

⁵I should like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The prophet has an advantage over the one who speaks in tongues unless someone explains what was spoken so that the community may profit. ⁶Suppose, brothers and sisters, I go to you and I speak in tongues, of what use will it be to you if I do not bring you some revelation, knowledge, prophecy or teaching?

⁷When someone plays the flute or harp or any musical instrument, if there are no tunes and notes, who will recognize the tune? ⁸And if the bugle call is not clear who will get ready for battle? ⁹The same with you. If your words are not understood, who will know what is said? You will be talking to the moon! ¹⁰There are many languages in the world and each of them has a meaning, ¹¹but if I cannot find any meaning in what is said, I become a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker to me.

¹²As you set your heart on spiritual gifts, be eager to build the Church and you will receive abundantly. ¹³Because of this those who speak in tongues should ask God for the ability to explain what they say.

¹⁴When I am praying in tongues my spirit prays, but my mind remains idle. ¹⁵What shall I do, then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with my mind. I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind. ¹⁶If you praise God only with your spirit, how will the ordinary person add the "Amen" to your thanksgiving since the outsider has not understood what you said? ¹⁷Your thanksgiving was indeed beautiful, but it was useless for others.

¹⁸I give thanks to God because I speak in tongues more than all of you, ¹⁹but when I am in the assembly I prefer to say five words from my mind, which may teach others than ten thousand words in tongues.

²⁰Brothers and sisters, do not remain as children in your thinking. Be like infants in doing evil, but mature in your thinking. ²¹God says in the law: *I will speak to this people through those talking other tongues and through lips of foreigners, but even so, they will not listen to me.* ²²So, speaking in tongues is significant for those who refuse to believe, not for those who believe; while prophecy is a sign for those who believe, not for those who refuse to believe.

²³Yet, imagine that the whole Church is gathered together and all speak in tongues when unbelievers and uninformed people enter. What will they think? That you are crazy. ²⁴Instead, suppose that each of you speaks as a prophet; as soon as an unbeliever or an uninformed person enters all of you call him to account and disclose his most secret thinking. ²⁵Then, falling on his face, he would be urged to worship God and declare that God is truly among you.

²⁶What then shall we conclude brothers and sisters? When you gather, each of you can take part with a song, a teaching, or a revelation, by speaking in tongues or interpreting what has been said in tongues. But let all this build up the Church.

²⁷Are you going to speak in tongues? Let two or three at most, speak, each in turn, and let one interpret what has been said. ²⁸If there is no interpreter, hold your tongue in the assembly and speak to God by yourself.

²⁹As for the prophets, let two or three speak with the others commenting on what has been said. ³⁰If a revelation comes to one of those sitting by let the first be silent. ³¹Even all of you could prophesy, one by one, for the instruction and encouragement of all. ³²The spirits, speaking through prophets, are submitted to prophets ³³because God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.

³⁴(Let women be silent in the assemblies as in all the churches of the saints. They are not allowed to speak. Let them be submissive as the law commands. ³⁵If there is anything they desire to know, let them consult their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in Church.)

³⁶Did the word of God perhaps come from you? Or did it come only to you? ³⁷Anyone among you who claims to be a prophet or a spiritual person should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸If he does not recognize that God will not recognize him.

³⁹So, my friends, set your hearts on the gift of prophecy and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰However, everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-40

Read: In prayer services, speaking in tongues seems to have been a common practice. Paul recognizes this and doesn't

dismiss the practice but puts it below the building up of the Church.

Reflect: The chapter begins: pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, how can you do this?

Pray: Give thanks to God for the richness and diversity of gifts you find in your community. Let them be of use for the building up of the Church.

Act: Place at the service of the community the gifts the Lord has given you. If you know how to speak in public, look for the occasion, in coordination with the priest or the ministry of the Word, and comment the Word of God in the assembly.

Resurrection is a fact

15¹Let me remind you, brothers and sisters, of the Good News that I preached to you and which you received and on which you stand firm. ²By that gospel, you are saved provided that you hold to it as I preached it. Otherwise, you will have believed in vain.

³In the first place, I have passed on to you what I, myself, received: that Christ died for our sins as Scripture says; ⁴that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures; ⁵that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. ⁶Afterward, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters together; most of them are still alive although some have already gone to rest. ⁷Then he appeared to James and after that to all the apostles. ⁸And last of all, he appeared to the most despicable of them, this is to me. ⁹For I am the last of the apostles, and I do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the Church of God. ¹⁰Nevertheless, by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been without fruit. Far from it, I have toiled more than all of them, although not I, rather the grace of God in me.

¹¹Now, whether it was I or they, this we preach and this you have believed. ¹²Well then, if Christ is preached as risen from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is empty, and our belief comes

to nothing. ¹⁵And we become false witnesses of God, attesting that he raised Christ, whereas he could not raise him if indeed the dead are not raised. ¹⁶If the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith gives you nothing and you are still in sin. ¹⁸Also, those who fall asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹If it is only for this life that we hope in Christ, we are the most unfortunate of all people.

Christ gave us the way

²⁰But no, Christ has been raised from the dead and he comes before all those who have fallen asleep. ²¹A human being brought death; a human being also brings resurrection of the dead. ²²For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive. ²³However, each one in his own time: first Christ, then Christ's people when he comes.

²⁴Then, the end will come when Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father, after having destroyed every rule, authority, and power. ²⁵For he must reign and put all enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed will be death. ²⁷As Scripture says: *God has subjected everything under his feet.*

When we say that everything is put under his feet, we exclude, of course, the Father who subjects everything to him. ²⁸When the Father has subjected everything to him, the Son will place himself under the One who subjected everything to him. From then on, God will be all in all.

²⁹Tell me: what are these people doing who are baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead cannot be raised, why do they want to be baptized for the dead?

³⁰As for us, why do we constantly risk our lives? For death is my daily companion. ³¹I say that, brothers and sisters, before you who are my pride in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³²Was it for the human interest that I fought in Ephesus like a lion tamer? If the dead are not raised, *let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die!*

³³Do not be deceived; bad theories corrupt good morals. Wake up and do not sin, ³⁴because some of you are outstandingly ignorant about God; I say this to your shame.

The body after the Resurrection

³⁵Some of you will ask: How will the dead be raised? With what kind of body will they come?

³⁶You fools! What you sow cannot sprout unless it dies. ³⁷And what you sow is not the body of the future plant, but a bare grain of wheat or any other seed, ³⁸and God will give the appropriate body as he gives to each seed its own body. ³⁹Now, look: not all flesh is the same; one is the flesh of human beings, another the flesh of animals, and still others the flesh of birds and of fish. ⁴⁰There are, likewise, heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the earthly bodies do not shine as do the heavenly ones. ⁴¹The brightness of the sun differs from the brightness of the moon and the stars, and the stars differ from one another in brightness.

⁴²It is the same with the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in decomposition; it will be raised never more to die. ⁴³It is sown in humiliation and it will be raised for glory. It is buried in weakness, but the resurrection shall be with power. When buried, it is a natural body, but it will be raised as a spiritual body. ⁴⁴For there shall be a spiritual body as there is at present a living body. ⁴⁵Scripture says that Adam, the first man, became a living being; but the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit.

⁴⁶The spirit does not appear first but the natural life and afterward comes the spirit. ⁴⁷The first man comes from the earth and is earthly while the second one comes from heaven. ⁴⁸As it was with the earthly one so is it with the earthly people. As it is with Christ, so with the heavenly. ⁴⁹This is why after bearing the image of the earthly one we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.

The day of Resurrection

⁵⁰This I say, brothers: Flesh and blood cannot share the kingdom of God; nothing of us that is to decay can reach imperishable life. ⁵¹So I want to teach you this mystery: although not all of us will die, all of us have to be transformed, ⁵²in an instant, at the sound of the trumpet. You have heard of the last trumpet; then, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead will be raised, imperishable, while we shall be transformed. ⁵³For it is necessary that our mortal and perishable being put on the life that knows neither death nor decay.

⁵⁴When our perishable being puts on imperishable life when our mortal being puts on immortality, the word of Scripture will be fulfilled: *Death has been swallowed up by victory.* ⁵⁵*Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?*

⁵⁶Sin is the sting of death, to kill, and the law is what gives force to sin. ⁵⁷But give thanks to God who gives us the victory through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

⁵⁸So then, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast and do not be moved. Improve constantly in the work of the Lord, knowing that, with him, your labor is not without fruit.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-58

Read: The resurrection is the core belief of Christianity, symbolizing God's merciful and forgiving love. Jesus is raised from the dead, and so will all who follow him experience resurrection to a spiritual body. The resurrection of Christ shows that we do not need to fear death, it only leads to eternal life with Christ.

Reflect: Have you ever questioned the mystery of the resurrection? Even if it cannot be explained, do you believe that there is another life that we do not know, after this one that we know? Does this help to accept the death of your loved ones?

Pray: Allow the rebirth into the love lived by Christ to be the guiding principle of your life. Consider what that means in your everyday life and let the radiance of divine affirmation be real.

Act: Celebrate with your family the gift of life and the triumph over death, giving thanks to God for all the deceased loved ones, be it with a Mass or with dinner.

Commendations and greetings

16¹With regard to the collection in favor of the saints, follow the rules that I gave to the churches of Galatia. ²On the first day of the week, let each of you put aside what you are able to spare so that no collection need be made when I come. ³Then, when I arrive, I will send those whom you approve with letters of explanation to carry your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴And if it seems better for me to go they will go with me.

⁵I will visit you after passing through Macedonia for I want to go only through Macedonia. ⁶I would like to stay with you for a while and perhaps I will spend the winter so that you may help me on my way wherever I go. ⁷I do not want to see you now, just in passing, for I really hope

to stay with you, if the Lord permits. ⁸But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost ⁹because I have a door wide open here, even though there are many opponents.

¹⁰When Timothy comes, make him feel at ease with you. Consider that, like me, he is working for the Lord. ¹¹Let no one look down on him. Help him continue his journey so that he may return to me without difficulties. I am expecting him with the brothers.

¹²With respect to our brother Apollos, I have strongly urged him to visit you with the brothers, but he did not want to go at all; he will visit you at his first opportunity.

¹³Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong. ¹⁴Let love be in all. ¹⁵Now, brothers and sisters, you know that in Achaia there is none better than Stephanas and his family and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the holy ones. ¹⁶I urge you to be subject to such persons and to anyone who works and toils with them.

¹⁷I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, who were able to represent you. ¹⁸In fact, they appeased my spirit and yours. Appreciate persons like them.

¹⁹The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you in the Lord as does the church that gathers in their house. ²⁰All the brothers and sisters greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

²¹The greeting is from me, Paul, in my own hand. ²²A curse on anyone who does not love the Lord! Maranatha! Come, Lord!

²³The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. ²⁴My love to all, in Christ Jesus.

1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-24

Read: Paul concludes his letter by asking that a collection be taken up for the Jerusalem Church. He tells them he hopes to visit them again, and to welcome Timothy when he visits. He specifically greets specific people, including the married couple Aquila and Prisca, and says how much he enjoyed it when some of their community visited him.

Reflect: Paul says: “Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” In what ways does this describe your life?

Pray: Give thanks for the material things, big or small, that you have and pray for those who lack what is necessary: let Christians help one another and share in this way the gift of faith.

Act: Follow Paul's exhortation: "Stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong, and do everything with love" Have your church community help poorer or struggling church communities in a practical way.

SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS



At the end of his first letter to the Corinthians Paul expressed the desire to come back and see them soon. He was unable to return, and they took this badly.

“Judaizing” preachers, that is to say, those Jews insufficiently converted to Christ, whom Paul had to face all the time, were trying to undermine his authority. Paul sent a messenger whom the Corinthians deeply offended: some members of the community were openly rebelling against the apostle. Paul responded in a letter “written in the midst of tears” (2:4) whereby he demanded the submission of the community. One of Paul’s best assistants, Titus, brought the letter and concluded his mission successfully. Upon Titus’ return, Paul, reassured, sent this “second” letter (in fact, it was the third or fourth) to the Corinthians.

What is the content of this letter? What Paul feels with regard to the Corinthians and what he suffers from their lack of understanding. It is not much and yet it is a great deal. Paul is incapable of speaking about

himself without speaking of Christ. This restless man, eager for understanding and affection, is so permeated with the love of Christ, that he cannot express a suspicion or a reproach without giving the most profound sermons on faith. In trying to justify himself he writes the most beautiful pages on *evangelization* and on what it means to be an apostle of Christ.

We shall see that this letter includes pages which were not a part of it—fragments of other letters or notes sent by Paul to the Church of Corinth: in particular, 6:14-18 was probably written before our First Letter to the Corinthians; Chapter 9 (see commentary of 9:1); Chapters 10–13 which should contain a good part of the “letter written in tears” (see preceding paragraph).



SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

1 ¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother to the church of God in Corinth and to all the saints in the whole of Achaia. ²May you receive grace and peace from God our Father, and from Christ Jesus, the Lord.

Blessed be God, the source of all comfort

³Blessed be God the Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord, the all-merciful Father and the God of all comfort! ⁴He encourages us in all our trials so that we may also encourage those in any trial with the same comfort that we receive from God.

⁵For whenever the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so through Christ a great comfort also overflows. ⁶So, if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we receive comfort it is also for you. You may experience the same comfort when you come to endure the same sufferings we endure. ⁷Our hope for you is most firm; just as you share in our sufferings, so shall you also share in our consolation.

⁸Brothers and sisters, we want you to know some of the trials we experienced in the province of Asia. We were crushed; it was too much; it was more than we could bear and we had already lost all hope of coming through alive. ⁹We felt branded for death, but this happened that we might no longer rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰He freed us from such a deadly peril and will continue to do so. We trust he will continue protecting us, ¹¹but you must help us with your prayers. When such a favor is obtained by the intercession of many, so will there be many to give thanks to God on our behalf.

The plans of Paul

¹²There is something we are proud of: our conscience tells us that we have lived in this world with the openness and sincerity that comes from God. We have been guided, not by human motives, but by the grace of God, especially in relation to you. ¹³There were no hidden intentions in my letter, but only what you can read and understand. ¹⁴I trust that what you now only partly realize, you will come to understand fully and so be proud of us, as we shall also be proud of you on the Day of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁵With this assurance, I wanted to go and visit you first and this would have been a double blessing for you, ¹⁶for I would have left you to go through Macedonia and I would have come back to you on my way back from Macedonia and you would have sent me on my way to Judea. ¹⁷Have I planned this without thinking at all? Or do I change my decisions on the spur of the moment, so that I am between No and Yes?

¹⁸God knows that our dealing with you is not Yes and No, ¹⁹just as the Son of God, Christ Jesus, whom we—Silvanus, Timothy and I—preach to you, was not Yes and No; with him, it was simply Yes. ²⁰In him, all the promises of God have come to be a Yes, and we also say in his name: *Amen!* giving thanks to God. ²¹God, himself, has anointed us and strengthens us with you to serve Christ; ²²he has marked us with his own seal in a first outpouring of the Spirit in our hearts.

Paul refers to a scandal

²³God knows, and I swear to you by my own life, that if I did not return to Corinth, it was because I wanted to spare you. ²⁴I do not wish to lord it over your faith, but to contribute to your happiness; for regarding faith, you already stand firm.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-24

Read: Paul is distressed, he is currently suffering and has had an attempt on his life, he has had to postpone his trip to Corinth, and is very sad that there is a rift between himself and them.

Reflect: Have you ever felt the presence of God protecting you in difficulties? Do you feel responsible, in some way, for the life

of your community? How do you take care of your faith so that it will be strong at difficult moments?

Pray: Ask that at moments of trials your faith and the faith of the community will not decay. Ask also for the leaders in your parish that they may fill the support of the community and, above all, God's help.

Act: Talk to your parish priest, express your thankfulness for his ministry, and offer yourself for help in the parish.

2¹So I gave up a visit that would again be a distressing one. ²If I make you sad, who will make me happy, if not you whom I have grieved? ³Remember what I wrote you, "May it be that when I come, I do not feel sad because of you who should rather make me happy." I trust in everyone and I am sure that my joy will be the joy of you all.

⁴So afflicted and worried was I when I wrote to you, that I even shed tears. I did not intend to cause you pain but rather to let you know of the immense love that I have for you.

⁵If anyone has caused me pain, he has hurt not me, but in some measure, (I do not wish to exaggerate) all of you. ⁶The punishment that he received from the majority is enough for him. ⁷Now you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest excessive sorrow discourage him. ⁸So I beg you to treat him with love.

⁹This is why I wrote to you, to test you and to know if you would obey in everything. ¹⁰The one you forgive, I also forgive. And what I forgave, if indeed I had anything to forgive, I forgave for your sake in the presence of Christ, ¹¹lest Satan takes advantage of us, for we know his designs.

We are the fragrance of Christ

¹²So I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and the Lord opened doors for me. ¹³However, I could not be at peace because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went to Macedonia.

¹⁴Thanks be to God, who always leads us in the triumphant following of Christ and, through us, spreads the knowledge of him everywhere like an aroma. ¹⁵We are Christ's fragrance rising up to God and perceived by those who are saved as well as by those who are lost. ¹⁶To the latter,

it smells of death and leads them to death. To others, it is the fragrance of life and leads to life.

¹⁷But who is worthy of such a mission? Unlike so many who make money out of the word of God, we speak with sincerity: everything comes from God and is said in his presence in Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-17

Read: Paul feels hurt because of an unexplained rift between himself and the community. He asks that everyone practice forgiveness, and reminds them that he speaks to them sincerely from his heart and belief in Christ.

Reflect: Have you ever felt offended by somebody you tried to help? How did you react? Have you been able to forgive?

Pray: Ask from God the grace to forgive offenses you received in your life and ask for forgiveness for the ones you have inflicted. Slowly pray the Our Father.

Act: Seek out someone who has caused you distress and find a way to reconcile with forgiveness and love.

The great dignity of Christ's ministers

3¹Am I again commending myself? Or do I need to present to you letters of recommendation as some do; or should I ask you for those letters? ²You are the letter. This letter is written in your inner self, yet all can read and understand it. ³Yes, who could deny that you are Christ's letter, written by us—a letter written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God carved not in slabs of stone but in hearts of flesh.

⁴This is how we are sure of God through Christ. ⁵As for us, we would not dare consider that something comes from us: our ability comes from God. ⁶He has even enabled us to be ministers of a new covenant no longer depending on a written text, but on the Spirit. The written text kills but the Spirit gives life.

⁷The ministry of the law carved on stones brought death; it was, nevertheless, surrounded by glory, and we know that the Israelites could not fix their eyes on the face of Moses, such was his radiance, though fleeting. ⁸How much more glorious will the ministry of the Spirit be! ⁹If there is greatness in a ministry, which used to condemn, how much more will

there be in the ministry that brings holiness? ¹⁰This is such a glorious thing that, in comparison, the former's glory is like nothing. ¹¹That ministry was provisory and had only moments of glory, but ours endures with a lasting glory.

The veil of Moses

¹²Since we have such a great ambition, we are quite confident—¹³unlike Moses, *who covered his face with a veil*. Otherwise, the Israelites would have seen his passing radiance fade.

¹⁴They became blind, however; until this day, the same veil prevents them from understanding the Old Covenant and they do not realize that in Christ it is nullified. ¹⁵Up to this very day, whenever they read Moses, the veil remains over their understanding, ¹⁶but for whoever *turns to the Lord, the veil shall be removed*. ¹⁷The Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.

¹⁸So, with unveiled faces, we all reflect the glory of the Lord while we are transformed into his likeness, and experience his glory more and more by the action of the Lord who is Spirit.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-18

Read: Formalities are hardly needed when personal relationships are strong. We now recognize that sin is not the end. When we are open to God's mercy in and through Christ. Aware of our merciful God, we can only celebrate forgiveness and focus on the enduring bonds that unite us with God and with one another.

Reflect: Paul's stress on God's forgiveness of our sins is applied here to offenses within the believing community. We must not hold grudges but instead seek ways to reconcile, even in instances of broken trust.

Pray: If sinning is human and forgiving divine, we need to seek divine guidance and strength to let forgiveness renew our fractured relationships. Ask for God's help in this.

Act: Seek out a fractured relationship in your life and find ways to mend it with forgiveness and love.

We carry this treasure in vessels of clay

4¹ Since this is our ministry, mercifully given to us, we do not weaken. ²We refuse to stay with half-truths through fear; we do not behave with cunning or falsify the message of God, but manifesting the truth, we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

³In fact, if the gospel we proclaim remains obscure, it is obscure only for those who go to their own destruction. ⁴The god of this world has blinded the minds of these unbelievers, lest they see the radiance of the glorious gospel of Christ who is God's image. ⁵It is not ourselves we preach, but Christ Jesus, as Lord; and for Jesus' sake, we are your servants. ⁶God who said, "*Let the light shine out of darkness,*" has also made the light shine in our hearts to radiate and to make known the glory of God as it shines in the face of Christ.

⁷However, we carry this treasure in vessels of clay so that this all-surpassing power may not be seen as ours, but as God's. ⁸Trials of every sort come to us, but we are not discouraged. ⁹We are left without an answer, but do not despair; persecuted, but not abandoned, knocked down but not crushed. ¹⁰At any moment, we carry in our person, the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us. ¹¹For we, the living, are given up continually to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may appear in our mortal existence. ¹²And as death is at work in us, life comes to you.

¹³We have received the same spirit of faith referred to in Scripture that says: *I believed and so I spoke.* We also believe, and so we speak. ¹⁴We know that he who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus, and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵Finally, everything is for your good so that grace will come more abundantly upon you and great will be the thanksgiving for the glory of God.

We long for our heavenly dwelling

¹⁶Therefore, we are not discouraged. On the contrary, while our outer being is wasted away, the inner self is renewed from day to day. ¹⁷The slight affliction that quickly passes away, prepares us for an eternal wealth of glory, so great and beyond all comparison. ¹⁸So we no longer pay attention to the things that are seen, but to those that are unseen, for the things that we see last for a moment, but that which cannot be seen is eternal.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-18

Read: The Good News is only hidden to those who are lost. We are not announcing ourselves, but Jesus; and we are only servants of our brothers and sisters because of the love of Jesus. We carry this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the power of the Good News does not rest in us but in God. The present anguish prepares us for an eternal glory that surpasses all measures since we have set our eyes on something that will last forever.

Reflect: We are destined to live in God's love forever; that's why our faith needs to be nurtured and shared with those who do not know Christ. This is not an easy task, it brings many anxieties, and even suffering, but what awaits us is to be in God's presence forever.

Pray: Paul tells us not to lose heart. Pray when you are discouraged.

Act: Loving means commitment. Commit yourself to announce with your life the Gospel of Jesus to your people. Don't be afraid of your failures, you are the earthen vessel that contains God's grace.

5¹We know that when our earthly dwelling, or rather our tent, is destroyed, we may count on a building from God, a heavenly dwelling, not built by human hands, that lasts forever. ²Therefore, we long and groan: Why may we not put on this heavenly dwelling over that which we have? ³(Indeed, are we sure that we shall still be wearing our earthly dwelling and not be unclothed?)

⁴As long as we are in the field-tent, we indeed bemoan our unbearable fate, for we do not want this clothing to be removed from us; we would rather put the other over it, that the mortal body may be absorbed by true life. ⁵This is God's purpose for us and he has given us the Spirit as a pledge of what we are to receive.

⁶So we feel confident always. We know that while living in the body, we are exiled from the Lord, ⁷living by faith without seeing; ⁸but we dare to think that we would rather be away from the body to go and live with

the Lord. ⁹So, whether we have to keep this house or lose it, we only wish to please the Lord. ¹⁰Anyway, we all have to appear before the tribunal of Christ for each one to receive what he deserves for his good or evil deeds in the present life.

We proclaim the message of reconciliation

¹¹So, we know the fear of the Lord and we try to convince people while we live openly before God. And I trust that you know in your conscience what we truly are. ¹²Once more, we do not try to win your esteem; we want to give you a reason to feel proud of us that you may respond to those who heed appearances and not the reality. ¹³Now, if I have spoken foolishly let God alone hear; if what I have said makes sense take it for yourselves.

¹⁴Indeed, the love of Christ holds us and we realize that if he died for all, all have died. ¹⁵He died for all so that those who live may live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and rose again for them. ¹⁶And so, from now on, we do not regard anyone from a human point of view; and even if we once knew Christ personally, we should now regard him in another way.

¹⁷For that same reason, the one who is in Christ is a new creature. For him, the old things have passed away; a new world has come. ¹⁸All this is the work of God who, in Christ, reconciled us to himself and who entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹Because in Christ, God reconciled the world with himself, no longer taking into account their trespasses, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

²⁰So we present ourselves as ambassadors in the name of Christ, as if God himself makes an appeal to you through us. Let God reconcile you; this we ask you in the name of Christ. ²¹He had no sin, but God made him bear our sin so that in him we might share the holiness of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-21

Read: We can easily be distracted from what is most important in life. We recognize that anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. God has freed us from sin's grip through Christ and has given us a ministry of reconciliation to make all things new in Christ.

Reflect: How does the love of Jesus Christ make you feel new and refreshed? In your heart, do you believe God does not count your offenses against you, but has trusted you with the message of Christ?

Pray: In prayer allow the love of Christ to urge you on to share the fruits of the new creation with others.

Act: Examine your actions and take steps to eliminate all those that are not giving testimony as a new creation in Christ.

6¹Being God's helpers, we beg you: let it not be in vain that you received this grace of God. ²Scripture says: *At the favorable time I listened to you, on the day of salvation I helped you.* This is the favorable time, this is the day of salvation.

The trials of an apostle

³We are concerned not to give anyone an occasion to stumble or criticize our mission. ⁴Instead, we prove we are true ministers of God in every way by our endurance in so many trials, in hardships, afflictions, ⁵floggings, imprisonment, riots, fatigue, sleepless nights and days of hunger.

⁶People can notice in our upright life, knowledge, patience and kindness, the action of the Holy Spirit, sincere love, ⁷words of truth, and power of God. So we fight with the weapons of justice, to attack as well as to defend.

⁸Sometimes we are honored, at other times, insulted; we receive criticism as well as praise. We are regarded as liars, although we speak the truth; ⁹as unknown, though we are well known; as dead, and yet we live. Punishments come upon us, but we have not, as yet, been put to death. ¹⁰We appear to be afflicted, yet always joyful; we seem to be poor, but we enrich many; we have nothing, but we possess everything!

¹¹Corinthians! I have spoken to you frankly and I have uncovered my inner thought. ¹²My heart is wide open to you, but you feel uneasy because of your closed heart: ¹³repay us with the same measure—I speak to you as to my children—open wide your hearts also.

Have nothing to do with evil

¹⁴Do not make unsuitable covenants with those who do not believe: can justice walk with wickedness? Or can light coexist with darkness, ¹⁵and can there be harmony between Christ and Satan? What union can there be between one who believes and one who does not believe? ¹⁶God's temple must have no room for idols, and we are the temple of the living God. As Scripture says: "*I will dwell and live in their midst, I will be their God and they shall be my people.*"

¹⁷Therefore: *Come out from their midst and separate from them, says the Lord. Do not touch anything unclean* ¹⁸*and I will be gracious to you. I will be a father to you, that you may become my sons and daughters, says the all-powerful God.*"

2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-18

Read: The time to receive God's grace is now! Paul reminds that he always acted with integrity, being docile to the Holy Spirit. He tells the Corinthians that his heart has expanded to accept them all, even if they have not reciprocated. He asks them to open their hearts.

Reflect: Can you assure that all the brothers and sisters of your community are present in your heart? Is your heart open to a pure and sincere love for all of them?

Pray: Ask the Lord that all the believers in your community be united by love and not separated by divisions.

Act: There is strength in numbers; work with others to renew the face of the earth in love.

7¹Since we have such promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from all defilement of body and spirit, and complete the work of sanctification in the fear of God.

Welcome us in your hearts

²Welcome us in your hearts! We have injured no one. We have harmed no one, we have cheated no one. ³I do not say this to condemn you: I have just said that you are in our heart so that together we live, together we die. ⁴I have great confidence in you and I am indeed proud of you. I

feel very much encouraged and my joy overflows in spite of all this bitterness.

⁵Know that when I came to Macedonia, I had no rest at all, but I was afflicted with all kinds of difficulties: conflict outside and fear within. ⁶But God, who encourages the humble, gave me comfort with the arrival of Titus, ⁷not only because of his arrival but also because you had received him very well. He told me about your deep affection for me; you were affected by what happened. You worried about me and this made me rejoice all the more.

⁸If my letter caused you pain, I do not regret it. Perhaps I did regret it, for I saw that the letter caused you sadness for a moment, but now, I rejoice, ⁹not because of your sadness, but because this sadness brought you to repentance. This was a sadness from God so that no evil came to you because of me. ¹⁰Sadness from God brings firm repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. ¹¹See what this sadness from God has produced in you: What concern for me! What apologies! What indignation and fear! What a longing to see me, to make amends and do me justice!

You have fully proved that you were innocent in this matter. ¹²In reality, I wrote to you not on account of the offender or of the offended, but that you may be conscious of the concern you have for me before God. ¹³I was encouraged by this.

In addition to this consolation of mine, I rejoice especially to see Titus very pleased with the way you all reassured him. ¹⁴I had no cause to regret my praise of you to him. You know that I am always sincere with you; likewise, my praise of you to Titus has been justified. ¹⁵He now feels much more affection for you as he remembers the obedience of all and the respect and humility with which you received him. ¹⁶Really, I rejoice, for I can be truly proud of you.

2 CORINTHIANS 7:1-16

Read: On returning from Corinth, Titus brought good news to Paul regarding the repair of relations there, in response to Paul's earlier communications. Paul rejoices because he has confidence in the Corinthians.

Reflect: Every relationship, family, and community is sometimes

faced with conflicts and must find a path to reconciliation. Paul's team worked with the Corinthian community in finding such a path. We also may sometimes need the help of others to repair fractured relations.

Pray: Pray for the openness of heart to be willing to be reconciled with someone with whom you have been in conflict.

Act: If you are aware of having wronged somebody, go and ask for forgiveness.

The collection for those in Jerusalem

8¹Now, I want you to know about a gift of divine grace among the Churches of Macedonia. ²While they were so afflicted and persecuted, their joy overflowed and their extreme poverty turned into a wealth of generosity. ³According to their means—even beyond their means—they wanted to share in helping the saints.

⁴They asked us for this favor spontaneously and with much insistence ⁵and, far beyond anything we expected, they put themselves at the disposal of the Lord and of us by the will of God. ⁶Accordingly, I urged Titus to complete, among you, this work of grace since he began it with you. ⁷You excel in everything: in the gifts of faith, speech and knowledge; you feel concern for every cause and, besides, you are first in my heart. Excel also in this generous service.

⁸This is not a command; I make known to you the determination of others to check the sincerity of your fraternal concern. ⁹You know well the generosity of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Although he was rich, he made himself poor to make you rich through his poverty.

¹⁰I only make a suggestion, because you were the first, not only in cooperating but also in beginning this project a year ago. ¹¹So complete this work and, according to your means, carry out what you decided with much enthusiasm. ¹²When there is a good disposition, everything you give is welcomed and no one longs for what you do not have. ¹³I do not mean that others should be at ease and you burdened. Strive for equality; ¹⁴at present, give from your abundance what they are short of, and in some way, they also will give from their abundance what you lack. Then you will be equal ¹⁵and what Scripture says shall come true: *To*

the one who had much, nothing was in excess; to the one who had little, nothing was lacking.

¹⁶Blessed be God who inspires Titus with such care for you! ¹⁷He not only listened to my appeal, but he wanted to go and see you on his own initiative. ¹⁸I am sending with him the brother who has gained the esteem of the churches in the work of the gospel; ¹⁹moreover, they appointed him to travel with us in this blessed work we are carrying on for the glory of the Lord, but also because of our personal enthusiasm.

²⁰We decided on this so that no one could suspect us with regard to this generous fund that we are administering. ²¹*Let us see to it that all may appear clean, not only before God but also before people.* ²²We also send with them another brother who, on several occasions, has shown us his zeal and now is more enthusiastic because of his confidence in you.

²³You, then, have Titus, our companion and minister, to serve you and with him, you have our brothers, representatives of the churches, and a glory to Christ. ²⁴Show them how you love and prove before the churches all the good things I said to them about you.

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-24

Read: Paul encourages the Corinthians to share their resources with other Christians. He encourages them to strike a fair balance between that others need and their abundance. Titus is coming to see them and they should welcome him.

Reflect: In which acts of generosity have you participated lately? Have you always fulfilled promises you made to someone?

Pray: In addition to being disposed toward what is good, we need strength and endurance. We must rely upon God's graciousness both as a model and pillar for our commitment. Ask the Lord for this to happen.

Act: Seek out support for doing what is good and right. When our commitments are shared, we have a greater likelihood of success.

More about the collection

9¹It is not necessary for me to write to you about assistance to the saints. ²I know your readiness and I praised you before the Macedonians. I said, “In Achaia, they have been ready for the collection since last year.” And your enthusiasm carried most of them along. ³So I send you these brothers of ours. May all my praise of you not fall flat in this case! May you be ready, as I said. ⁴If some Macedonians come with me, let them not find you unprepared. What a shame for me—and perhaps for you—after so much confidence!

⁵So I thought it necessary to ask our brothers to go ahead of us and see you, to organize this blessed work you have promised. It shall come from your generosity and not be an imposed task.

⁶Remember: the one who sows meagerly will reap meagerly, and there shall be generous harvests for the one who sows generously. ⁷Each of you should give as you decided personally and not reluctantly as if obliged. *God loves a cheerful giver.* ⁸And God is able to fill you with every good thing so that you have enough of everything at all times and may give abundantly for any good work.

⁹Scripture says: *He distributed, he gave to the poor; his good works last forever.* ¹⁰God, who provides the sower with seed, will also provide him with the bread he eats. He will multiply the seed for you and also increase the interest in your good works. ¹¹Become rich in every way and give abundantly. What you give will become, through us, a thanksgiving to God.

¹²For this sacred relief, after providing the saints with what they need, will result in much thanksgiving to God. ¹³This will be a test for them; they will give thanks because you obey the requirements of Christ’s gospel and share generously with them and with all. ¹⁴They shall pray to God for you and feel affection for you because the grace of God overflows in you.

¹⁵Yes, thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 CORINTHIANS 9:1-15

Read: Sending a team of brothers ahead to arrange in advance the collection for the poor, Paul encourages the Corinthians to be generous and mindful of how appropriate and necessary their material help to the Jerusalem community. Paul stimulates generosity reminding them that God is more generous than all of us.

Reflect: What God has blessed you with, you should bless others. Generosity should not be reluctant, but cheerful.

Pray: Give thanks to God for the generous people and people of faith that he has placed in your life. Ask for the energy and commitment to be truly generous.

Act: If possible, meet some of the people who have been an example in your life. Tell them what you feel and thank them for their constant witness.

Paul's defense and admonition

10¹It is I, Paul, who, by the humility and kindness of Christ, appeal to you; the Paul “who is timid among you and bold when far away from you!”

²Do not force me to act boldly when I come, as I am determined and will dare to act against some people who think that I act from human motives. ³Human is our condition, but not our fight.

⁴Our weapons for this fight are not human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds—those arguments ⁵and haughty thoughts that oppose the knowledge of God. We compel all understanding that they obey Christ. ⁶So, I am prepared to punish any disobedience when you should show perfect obedience.

⁷See things as they really are. If someone is convinced that he belongs to Christ, let him consider that, just as he is Christ's, so am I. ⁸Although I may seem too confident in the authority that the Lord gave me for building you up and not for pulling you down, I will not be put to shame for saying this. ⁹Do not think that I can only frighten you with letters. ¹⁰“His letters are severe and strong,” some say, “but as he is, he has no presence and he is a poor speaker.” ¹¹To such people, I say, “Be careful: what my letters say from afar is what I will do when I come.”

¹²How could I venture to equate or compare myself with some people who proclaim their own merits? Fools! They measure themselves with their own measure and compare themselves with themselves. ¹³As for me, I will not boast beyond measure for I will not go past the limits that the God of true measure has set for me: He gave the measuring stick when he made me set foot in your place.

¹⁴It is not the same when someone goes beyond his field, to where he has not been able to set foot. But I am he who first reached you with the gospel of Christ. ¹⁵I am not making myself important where others have worked. On the contrary, we hope that as your faith increases, so too our area of ministry among you will be enlarged without going beyond our limit. ¹⁶So, we shall bring the gospel to places beyond yours without entering into the field of others, or boasting and making ourselves important where the work is already done. ¹⁷*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.* ¹⁸It is not the one who commends himself, who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-18

Read: Paul is not afraid to tell his friends things that are hard to hear, but he speaks from his heart. The most important thing is to belong to Christ.

Reflect: What skills and abilities do you have? Do you recognize those that were given by God, or you think they are of your own merits? What responsibilities does God give you along with those talents?

Pray: Pray for the grace to recognize that everything you have comes from God, and ask for strength and wisdom to fulfill your responsibilities, as God wants.

Act: Discern your abilities and assets. Find ways to share them in meaningful ways with others. Ask about a project where you can participate in or the possibility to start a new one.

11 ¹May you bear with me in some little foolishness! But surely you will. ²I confess that I share the jealousy of God for you, for I have promised you in marriage to Christ, the only spouse, to present you to him as a pure virgin. ³And this is my fear: the serpent that seduced Eve with cunning, could also corrupt your minds and divert you from Christian sincerity. ⁴Someone now comes and preaches another Jesus, different from the one we preach, or you are offered a different spirit from the one you have received with a different gospel from the one you have accepted—and you agree!

⁵I do not see how I am inferior to those super-apostles. ⁶Does my

speaking leave much to be desired? Perhaps, but not my knowledge, as I have abundantly shown to you in every way.

Paul commends the apostle Paul

⁷Perhaps my fault was that I humbled myself in order to uplift you, or that I gave you the gospel free of charge. ⁸I called upon the services of other churches and served you with the support I received from them. ⁹When I was with you, although I was in need, I did not become a burden to anyone. The friends from Macedonia gave me what I needed. I have taken care not to be a burden to you in anything, and I will continue to do so. ¹⁰By the truth of Christ within me, I will let no one in the land of Achaia stop this boasting of mine.

¹¹Why? Because I do not love you? God knows that I do! ¹²Yet I do and I will continue to do so to silence any people anxious to appear as equal to me: this is my glory. ¹³In reality, they are false apostles, deceivers, disguised as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴It is not surprising: if Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, ¹⁵his servants can easily disguise themselves as ministers of salvation until they receive what their deeds deserve.

¹⁶I say again: Do not take me for a fool, but if you do take me as such, bear with me that I may sing my own praises a little. ¹⁷I will not speak with the Lord's authority, but as a fool bringing my own merits to prominence. ¹⁸As some people boast of human advantages, I will do the same. ¹⁹Fortunately, you bear rather well with fools, you who are so wise! ²⁰You tolerate being enslaved and exploited, robbed, treated with contempt and slapped in the face. ²¹What a shame that I acted so weakly with you!

But if others are so bold, I shall also dare, although I may speak like a fool. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³Are they ministers of Christ? (I begin to talk like a madman) I am better than they.

Better than they, with my numerous labors. Better than they, with the time spent in prison. The beatings I received are beyond comparison. How many times have I found myself in danger of death! ²⁴Five times the Jews sentenced me to thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with a rod. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked, and once I spent a night and a day adrift on the high seas.

²⁶I have been continually in hazards of traveling; because of rivers, because of bandits, because of my fellow Jews, or because of the pagans; in danger in the city, in the open country, at sea; in danger from false brothers. ²⁷I have worked and often labored without sleep, I have been hungry and thirsty and starving, cold, and without shelter.

²⁸Besides these and other things, there was my daily concern for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, that I do not feel weak as well? Whoever stumbles, am I not on hot bricks?

³⁰If it is necessary to boast, let me proclaim the occasions on which I was found weak. ³¹The God and Father of Jesus the Lord—may he be blessed for ever!—knows that I speak the truth. ³²At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas placed the city under guard in order to arrest me, ³³and I had to be let down in a basket, through a window in the wall. In that way, I slipped through his hands.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-33

Read: Paul is reluctant to ask for support from those he serves in his apostolic mission. Nevertheless, support comes from generous people who are willing to support his other missionary activities. When judging his apostolic service, people should know that he acts with integrity and dedication, no matter how foolish he may seem. He has proven himself through having endured extreme hardships for righteousness.

Reflect: At times, we have to pay a price for our personal commitments. It is during these times that we can assess the extent of our dedication.

Pray: Pray that amidst difficulties you may act like Jesus and Paul: firm in the ministry that you received. Ask for the grace to be able to give witness to Christ at all times.

Act: When the time comes, don't be afraid to be afraid to live your faith openly or to defend others who try to do so.

Extraordinary graces

12¹It is useless to boast; but if I have to, I will go on to some visions and revelations of the Lord.

²I know a certain Christian: fourteen years ago he was taken up to the third heaven. ³Whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows. But I know that this man, whether in the body or out of the body—I do not know, God knows—⁴was taken up to Paradise where he heard words that cannot be told: things which humans cannot express.

⁵Of that man, I can indeed boast, but of myself, I will not boast except of my weaknesses. ⁶If I wanted to boast, it would not be foolish of me, for I would speak the truth. ⁷However, I better give up, lest somebody think more of me than what is seen in me, or heard from me. Lest I become proud, after so many and extraordinary revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a true messenger of Satan, to slap me in the face. ⁸Three times I prayed to the Lord that it might leave me, ⁹but he answered, “My grace is enough for you; my great strength is revealed in weakness.”

Gladly then, will I boast of my weakness, that the strength of Christ may be mine. ¹⁰So I rejoice when I suffer infirmities, humiliations, want, persecutions: all for Christ! For when I am weak, then I am strong.

¹¹I have acted as a fool but you forced me. You should have been the ones commending me. Yet I do not feel outdone by those super-apostles, ¹²even though I am nothing. All the signs of a true apostle are found in me: patience in all trials, signs, miracles, and wonders.

¹³Now, in what way were you not treated like the rest of the churches? Only in this: I was not a burden to you—forgive me for this offense!

This is my third visit to you

¹⁴For the third time I plan to visit you, and I will not be a burden to you, for I am not interested in what you have, but only in you. Children should not have to collect money for their parents, but the parents for their children. ¹⁵As for me, I am ready to spend whatever I have and even my whole self, for all of you. If I love you so much, am I to be loved less?

¹⁶Well, I was not a burden to you, but was it not a trick to deceive you? Tell me: ¹⁷Did I take money from you through any of my messengers? ¹⁸I asked Titus to go to you and I sent another brother with him. But did Titus take money from you? Have we not both acted in the same spirit?

¹⁹Perhaps you think that we are again apologizing; but no: we speak in Christ and before God, and I do this for you, dear friends, to build you up. ²⁰I fear that if I go and see you, I might not find you as I would wish,

and you, in turn, might not find me to your liking. I might see rivalries, envy, grudges, disputes, slanders, gossip, conceit, disorder. ²¹Let it not be that in coming again to you, God humbles me because of you, and I have to grieve over so many of you who live in sin, on seeing that they have not yet given up an impure way of living, their wicked conduct, and the vices they formerly practiced.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-21

Read: Paul boasts of having been called, even if his service can be criticized or faulted. Some may call him foolish, but there is no question that he serves with a firm and sincere heart.

Reflect: Dismissive ridicule can destroy even the best of people. It is easier to undermine than to instill confidence. Ridicule rarely produces a fair assessment of people.

Pray: Pray that you, your local Church and the Holy Father have the strength to ignore ridicule and remain faithful to the light.

Act: Seek to make fair assessments and avoid undermining those who pursue good goals. Rejoice with those who act well for the Gospel's sake. Appreciate the work of every person who works with you.

13¹This will be my third visit to you. *Any charge must be decided upon by the declaration of two or three witnesses.* ²I have said and I say again, being still far away, just as I did on my second visit, I say to you who lived in sin, as well as to the rest: when I return to you, I will not have pity. ³You want to know if Christ is speaking through me? So you will. He is not used to dealing weakly with you, but rather he acts with power. ⁴If he was crucified in his weakness, now he lives by the strength of God; and so we are weak with him, but we will be well alive with him because God acts powerfully with you.

⁵Examine yourselves: are you acting according to faith? Test yourselves. Can you assert that Christ Jesus is in you? If not, you have failed the test. ⁶I hope you recognize that we ourselves have not failed it.

⁷We pray God that you may do no wrong, not that we wish to be acknowledged, but we want you to do right, even if in this we appear to

have failed. ⁸For we do not have power against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹We rejoice if we are weak while you are strong, for all we hope, is that you become perfect. ¹⁰This is why I am writing now so that when I come I may not have to act strictly and make use of the authority the Lord has given me for building up and not for destroying.

¹¹Finally, brothers and sisters, be happy, strive to be perfect, have courage, be of one mind and live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹²Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

¹³The grace of Christ Jesus the Lord, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Read: For his third visit, Paul asks that the community examine themselves to see if they are still maintaining the Faith. He warns them not to believe rumor and gossip but to insist on reliable testimony. He urges them to remember that the power of Christ is strong within them.

Reflect: In your Christian behavior, where does your own strength end and where does God's strength begin acting in you? What kind of good deeds does God inspire you to do?

Pray: Give thanks to God for the difficult moments in your life that you would not have been able to overcome by yourself, but you did with His grace. Ask for the acceptance of your weaknesses.

Act: Make a list of all the moments when you felt saved, redeemed and comforted by God. Share it with your people, trying to describe the feelings you experienced on each occasion.