

## The Captivity Letters

**F**our letters are gathered under the title of “Captivity Letters”: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. It is by chance that these four letters are continuous; even if these four letters were written by Paul while in prison, they are not of the same year, nor did he send them from the same prison.

Paul was arrested many times (2 Cor 11:24; Acts 14:29; 16:23). If we speak about his being in prison for any length of time, he may have been imprisoned two times, plus another in “semi-captivity.”

His first stay in prison was undoubtedly in the year 56 A.D., in Ephesus, from where he had sent to the Philippians a letter whose authenticity did not raise any doubts.

His second stay, well documented in Acts 24–26, was in Caesarea on the premises of the Roman administration. Paul stayed there for two entire years and from there, he was taken to Rome (Acts 27–28).

His third stay was in Rome. In Acts, we are told that it lasted two years after which Paul was probably acquitted (Acts 28:30). In reality, Paul enjoyed a certain freedom and he was even lodged in a private house (Acts 28:16).

With a lot of probability, Paul was executed between the years 64 and 66 A.D., during Nero’s great persecution. A wrong interpretation of 2 Timothy 1:17 led some to think that Paul was again in prison in Rome before his execution.

Therefore, it was either in the years 58–60 A.D., in Caesarea, or in the years 60–62 A.D., in Rome, that Paul would have written the letters, showing him as a prisoner, to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Many reasons suggest that these letters were written in Caesarea.

Numerous biblicists question Paul as the author of the letters to the Ephesians and even to the Colossians. There are arguments for that although the aspects of these letters in favor of their authenticity are equally numerous. As the hypotheses attributing these letters to a disciple of Paul from the following generation showed their weakness, new theories had to be created as contradictions appeared.

The letters to the Ephesians and Colossians are intimately linked and

the same topics are dealt with in both letters in the same way. Therefore it is impossible that one letter be authentic and not the other. On the other hand, how could a forger convince the Church to accept these letters as written by Paul? It is clear that if the churches received these letters so early and without questioning it is because the churches of Ephesus and Colossae, necessarily well informed, would not have accepted them unless they were Paul's. Then we have the short message to Philemon that everybody accepts as Paul's; but this is inseparable from Colossians: see Colossians 4:9 and Philipians 24–26.

In some people's view, the style and content of the letters differ too much from Paul's previous letters to have been written by him. However, as they read through, they are constantly forced to recognize words and ideas that are typically Paul's. How sure are we that an author is always going to speak in the same manner and keep the same style? Who can say that Paul could not say anything new after he had written Romans and Corinthians?

It is clear that the author of the letter to the Romans is no longer the same Paul as in the first letter to the Thessalonians. In addition, after Romans, two major changes were to affect Paul. On one hand, Paul decided to leave for Rome and the West since he believed that he had completed his apostolate in Asia Minor and Greece. On the other hand, Paul was going to experience years in prison.

Under guard in Caesarea, even though he was treated humanely and well (Acts 24:23), Paul did not live like a lord and his chains impaired his apostolic activity. Paul now looked at people and institutions differently and it is here that something more than a theological revision took place: it was a spiritual change of setting. Instead of accumulating contradictions with a simplistic solution, claiming that all the captivity letters were written by a forger, we could ask ourselves what else Paul had to discover, which is precisely what emerges in these captivity letters.

### **Access to Fulfillment**

In simple terms, we might say that, up to that time, Paul had kept the vocabulary and the images of the God of the Old Testament. God the monarch established in heaven, God the judge who welcomes all to his heaven or the one who condemns. In the commentary on Romans, we have said that *justification* primarily consists in a recreation of the human

person by God. Yet, we cannot deny the juridical aspect of this justification. Whether it is a question of the relations between God and humankind, or the struggle between good and evil, Paul is always thinking within the juridical setting of the rabbis. In addition, the aggressive language is manifest. A rereading of the first letter to the Thessalonians, will show that the violence of the language corresponds to the persecutions that Paul was enduring on the part of the Jews. That violence was also in Jesus' language, a popular preacher's language that did not, in any way, diminish the mystery of God but always presented it through these images.

It was within this legalistic and Jewish setting (we dare say: biblical) that the discovery of God as Father and the experiences of the Spirit occurred, combined with Paul's creativity and interior presence. These experiences had softened up the austerity and the violence that may have been in the religion of God as king and judge and joy was prevailing in the expectation of the Lord. These new feelings, the fruits of the Spirit, continued to go hand in hand with ancient images that contained a good measure of violence. The most notorious passages are in 1 Thessalonians and also in 2 Corinthians 11:13 and Galatians 2:4.

God is Spirit. Although Paul knew it, he had not yet become fully aware of it. The day he "realized" that God is not the one "who had the right to rule over our lives" (as some put it), he understood better the way that Father looks at human beings. His encounter with the religions of Asia Minor had probably prepared Paul's new conversion. Paul did use some terms common in the region of Ephesus but changed their meaning. Was Paul thinking only of fighting them or did he discover in them a certain way of conceiving the relations of God and the universe?

Eternity is very much present in Ephesians and Colossians. In the beautiful hymn of Ephesians 1:1-14 the eternal praise of divine grace is everywhere and *predestination*, already found in Romans 8:28, took its place in the divine nature. All suggests a divine mystery liberated from rights, obligations, and laws. What appears now in Paul more prominently is a God present in everybody and everything (Eph 3:14-20).

In those years, the expectation of the Day of the Lord was running out of steam and the God of Paul was going to be situated in a radiance that the wrath of God could not reach, there where all humans could be saved (Eph 3:8 and 1 Tim 2:4). Greater than ever, Christ assumed

the long history that was just beginning. Paul saw himself as being caught up in a cosmic adventure in which, despite his insignificance, he had been needed for eternal praise. Paul, a prisoner, was entering into the depth of the mystery of redemption that was lavished, from Christ, on all those who loved him, and even in his chains (Eph 4:1; Col 1:24).



# LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS



**S**hould we speak of a “letter” of Paul? It does not contain any news or personal message to a specific community. Like the letter to the Romans, it is an exposé on faith and the salvation of the world. Was it a kind of circular letter intended for the churches of the Ephesus region? Instead, should we accept testimonies according to which this letter, written at the same time as the epistle to the Colossians, was meant for the Laodiceans (Col 4:16)?

As we are told in Acts (Chaps. 24–26), Paul was a prisoner in Caesarea between the years 58–60 A.D. He thought that his apostolate in the East was over and he had been arrested as he was getting ready to leave for Rome, the capital of the empire. A few months earlier, he had written the letter to the Romans, a brilliant presentation of the work of salvation, when the news he received from Ephesus prompted Paul to elaborate a new presentation of the divine work. There were new religions springing up in the Roman province of Asia and soon they would spread to Rome. To the extent that these religions claimed to be offering everyone a way of salvation, they were challenging Christ as the sole savior of humankind.

Christians had to be given a broader vision of the hope of which they were the bearers. Where is humankind going? Is Christ the only Savior? These are questions we have to confront more insistently every day insofar as these past few years have seen a type of “mass movements” on the part of very diverse people. Those who want to dominate can only succeed if they appear to be speaking for the majority. Is there a way and hope for human beings? From his prison, Paul responds to us.

This letter to the Ephesians is parallel to the letter Paul sent to the Colossians at the same time. The same messenger took it to the two communities at the same time as the note for Philemon (Col 4:2; Phlm 2). Paul takes up again and develops God’s plan that he said he had understood in a revelation. At the core of this revelation, we have Christ, the Firstborn of God and the world has been created for new Human Beings, a single family in Christ. From now on, every Christian is urged to live this call to a holy and responsible life.

Some people think that Paul is not the author of this letter. How could he have spoken so impersonally to a community where he had worked for over two years, approximately from 55 to 57? As we have said, the letter was not addressed to the Christians of Ephesus but rather to communities in the valley of the Lycus River: Hierapolis and Laodicea that Paul had not personally evangelized.

Others think that the questions raised are more suited to a time after Paul. Or when they see that, compared to Paul’s previous letters, his style has been renewed, they imagine that someone else wrote those letters. However, all the theories run into enormous obstacles. When one is aware of the very low level of Christian literature immediately after the death of the apostles, it is difficult to think that a letter of such theological conviction, such doctrinal richness and so typically “Pauline” in every page, could have matured in someone other than Paul, even if that someone, Tychicus (Eph 6:21) or Timothy (Col 1:1), assisted in writing it.



# LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

- 1** <sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,  
to the saints in Ephesus, to you who share the Christian faith:  
<sup>2</sup>receive grace and peace from God our Father, and from Jesus, the Lord.
- <sup>3</sup>Blessed be God the Father of Christ Jesus our Lord,  
who, in Christ, has blessed us from heaven with every spiritual blessing.
- <sup>4</sup>God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world,  
to be holy, and without sin in his presence.
- <sup>5</sup>From eternity, he destined us in love,  
to be his adopted sons and daughters through Christ Jesus,  
thus fulfilling his free and generous will.  
This goal suited him:
- <sup>6</sup>that his loving-kindness, which he granted us in his beloved,  
might finally receive all glory and praise.
- <sup>7</sup>For, in Christ, we obtain freedom sealed by his blood,  
and have the forgiveness of sins.  
In this, appears the greatness of his grace,  
<sup>8</sup>which he lavished on us.
- In all wisdom and understanding,  
<sup>9</sup>God has made known to us his mysterious design,  
in accordance with his loving-kindness in Christ.
- <sup>10</sup>In him, and under him, God wanted to unite,  
when the fullness of time had come,  
everything in heaven and on earth.
- <sup>11</sup>By a decree of him, who disposes all things  
according to his own plan and decision,

we, the Jews, have been chosen and called,  
<sup>12</sup>and we were awaiting the Messiah  
for the praise of his glory.

<sup>13</sup>You, on hearing the word of truth,  
the gospel that saves you,  
have believed in him.  
And, as promised, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit,  
<sup>14</sup>the first pledge of what we shall receive  
on the way to our deliverance as a people of God,  
for the praise of his glory.

### EPHESIANS 1:1-14

**Read:** The author addresses Christians from Ephesus. A great blessing follows pointing the result of a new life in Christ: divine filiation, forgiveness of sins, incorporation to Christ and the seal of Holy Spirit.

**Reflect:** Are you aware of the consequences of your Christian option in your daily life? Do you really feel like a son or a daughter of God? What does the following text suggest to you: "In Him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses"?

**Pray:** Let your prayer arise from your thankfulness to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for all the gifts you have received through baptism.

**Act:** Always be conscious of your Christian vocation; try to live in a special way the generosity and solidarity that the Christian vocation demands.

### God has put all things under the feet of Christ

<sup>15</sup>I have been told of your faith and your affection toward all the believers, <sup>16</sup>so I always give thanks to God, remembering you in my prayers.

<sup>17</sup>May the God of Christ Jesus our Lord, the Father of glory, reveal himself to you and give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation that you may know him.

<sup>18</sup>May he enlighten your inner vision, that you may appreciate the things we hope for since we were called by God.

May you know how great is the inheritance, the glory, God sets apart for his saints;

<sup>19</sup>may you understand, with what extraordinary power, he acts in favor of us who believe.

<sup>20</sup>He revealed his almighty power in Christ when he raised him from the dead and had him sit at his right hand in heaven, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule, power, authority, dominion, or any other supernatural force that could be named, not only in this world but in the world to come as well.

<sup>22</sup>Thus has God put all things under the feet of Christ and set him above all things as head of the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

### EPHESIANS 1:15-23

**Read:** Upon knowing about the faith and love of the Ephesians, Paul does not cease to give thanks to God and remembering them in his prayers. He prays that they will get to know the Father of glory; that they value the hope to which they have been called. Jesus is the head of all things and his body now is the Church.

**Reflect:** Do you experience the love of God in your daily life? How? Do you share it with your people? What does it mean for you that Christ is the head of the body?

**Pray:** Repeat with Paul the desire to receive a Spirit of wisdom to get to a personal and real knowledge of God through the Word and prayer. Give thanks to God for the salvation He gives you in the Risen Christ.

**Act:** To deepen your relationship with God, spend time every day to pray with the Bible, "the Word of God."

### By grace, you have been saved!

**2**<sup>1</sup>You were dead through the faults and sins. <sup>2</sup>Once, you lived through them according to this world, and followed the Sovereign Ruler who reigns between heaven and earth, and who goes on working in those who resist the faith. <sup>3</sup>All of us belonged to them, at one time, and we

followed human greed; we obeyed the urges of our human nature and consented to its desires. By ourselves, we went straight to the judgment like the rest of humankind.

<sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, revealed his immense love. <sup>5</sup>As we were dead through our sins, he gave us life with Christ. By grace, you have been saved! <sup>6</sup>And he raised us to life, with Christ, giving us a place with him in heaven.

<sup>7</sup>In showing us such kindness in Christ Jesus, God willed to reveal and unfold in the coming ages, the extraordinary riches of his grace. <sup>8</sup>By the grace of God, you have been saved through faith. This has not come from you: it is God's gift. <sup>9</sup>This was not the result of your works, so you are not to feel proud. <sup>10</sup>What we are, is God's work. He has created us in Christ Jesus for the good works he has prepared, that we should devote ourselves to them.

### EPHESIANS 2:1-10

**Read:** Paul reminds the Ephesians that they have been saved by faith and not by their own merits. So, no one may boast; our work is to "do the good works which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

**Reflect:** As Christian, does your daily life bear witness for the gift God offers you by freeing you from sin? What are the deeds you should foment so that your life may be a channel to share with others the gift received from God?

**Pray:** Thank God for the free gift of a new life in Christ. Ask to live the resurrection every day.

**Act:** Do the actions that the Spirit inspired you to do while in prayer to realize the "task that God prepared for you" as a Christian.

## Christ is our peace

<sup>11</sup>Remember that you were pagans, even in your flesh; and the Jews, who call themselves Circumcised (because of a surgical circumcision), called you Uncircumcised. <sup>12</sup>At that time, you were without Christ, you did not belong to the community of Israel; the Covenants of God and his promises were not for you; you had no hope, and were without God in

this world. <sup>13</sup>But now, in Christ Jesus, and by his blood, you, who were once far off, have come near.

<sup>14</sup>For Christ is our peace; he who has made the two people one; <sup>15</sup>destroying, in his own flesh, the wall—the hatred—which separated us. He abolished the law with its commands and precepts. He made peace, in uniting the two people, in him; creating out of the two, one New Man. <sup>16</sup>He destroyed hatred and reconciled us both to God through the cross, making the two one body.

<sup>17</sup>He came to proclaim peace; peace to you who were far off, peace to the Jews who were near. <sup>18</sup>Through him, we—the two people—approach the Father, in one Spirit.

<sup>19</sup>Now you are no longer strangers or guests, but fellow citizens of the holy people: you are of the household of God. You are the house, <sup>20</sup>whose foundations are the apostles and prophets, and whose cornerstone is Christ Jesus. <sup>21</sup>In him, the whole structure is joined together and rises to be a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup>In him, you too, are being built to become the spiritual Sanctuary of God.

### EPHESIANS 2:11-22

**Read:** The Jews and Gentiles are now one. God has united all through Jesus in one household, that of those consecrated to God, the Church. And we are all “built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”

**Reflect:** If we are all one household, one family, why are there countries, businesses, and Christian groups that because they are rich despise or abuse the poor? Can a person, a group, business or country that calls itself Christian practice violence on others? To what does the peace we received in Christ commit us to?

**Pray:** Pray that Christian leaders be faithful to their faith and work for the peace that Christ offers us. Ask also for yourself, to avoid the temptation of being violent with the weaker ones.

**Act:** Collaborate with an institution that works for peace, social justice and for the rights of the weakest ones.

## God's inheritance is for all

**3**<sup>1</sup>For this reason, I, Paul, came to be the prisoner of Christ for you, the non-Jews. <sup>2</sup>You may have heard of the graces God bestowed on me for your sake. <sup>3</sup>By a revelation he gave me the knowledge of his mysterious design, as I have explained in a few words. <sup>4</sup>On reading them, you will have some idea of how I understand the mystery of Christ.

<sup>5</sup>This mystery was not made known to past generations, but only now through revelations given to holy apostles and prophets, by the Spirit.

<sup>6</sup>Now, the non-Jews share the inheritance; in Christ Jesus, the non-Jews are incorporated and are to enjoy the Promise.

This is the Good News, <sup>7</sup>of which I have become a minister by a gift of God; a grace he gave me when his power worked in me.

<sup>8</sup>This grace was given to me, the least, among all the holy ones: to announce to the pagan nations the immeasurable riches of Christ <sup>9</sup>and to make clear to all, how the mystery hidden from the beginning in God, the Creator of all things, is to be fulfilled.

<sup>10</sup>Even the heavenly forces and powers will now discover through the church, the wisdom of God in its manifold expression, as the plan is being fulfilled, <sup>11</sup>which God designed from the beginning in Christ Jesus, our Lord. <sup>12</sup>In him, we receive boldness and confidence to approach God.

<sup>13</sup>So I ask you not to be discouraged at seeing the trials I endure for you, but rather, to feel proud because of them.

### EPHESIANS 3:1-13

**Read:** In Christ is fulfilled what man has always expected from God: universal salvation. God has blessed Paul and has chosen him to announce this news to the Gentiles, and now all can access God. Paul says his sufferings are worth it.

**Reflect:** Are you conscious of the meaning of Jesus in your life? Who helped you find him? Do you share this Good News with others?

**Pray:** Ask the help of the Spirit to understand the Word and ask for strength to be able to share it with others, especially with your own.

**Act:** Go to your parish and express your gratitude to those who are working there; offer your help for the work of evangelization.



<sup>14</sup>And, now, I kneel in the presence of the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth has received its name.

<sup>16</sup>May he strengthen in you the inner self, through his Spirit, according to the riches of his glory;

<sup>17</sup>may Christ dwell in your hearts, through faith;  
may you be rooted and founded in love.

<sup>18</sup>All of this, so that you may understand with all the holy ones, the width, the length, the height, and the depth—in a word, <sup>19</sup>that you may know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge, that you may be filled, and reach the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup>Glory to God, who shows his power in us, and can do much more than we could ask or imagine; <sup>21</sup>glory to him in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, through all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

### EPHESIANS 3:14-21

**Read:** Paul asks for faith and love for the community of the Ephesians; he wants that they “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.”

**Reflect:** Are you aware that there is nothing bigger than the love of God? What does it mean in your life that the love of God surpasses all knowledge? How do you give glory to that love?

**Pray:** Give thanks for the immensely great love from God. Ask to trust in His power and pray for the needs of others.

**Act:** Express the generosity of the love of God by being generous with a member of your community who is in need.

## We shall become the perfect creation

**4**<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I, the prisoner of Christ, invite you to live the vocation you have received. <sup>2</sup>Be humble, kind, patient, and bear with one another in love.

<sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep, among you, the unity of spirit through bonds of peace. <sup>4</sup>Let there be one body, and one Spirit, just as one hope is the goal of your calling by God. <sup>5</sup>One Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God, the Father of all, who is above all, and works through all, and is in all.

<sup>7</sup>But to each of us, divine grace is given according to the measure of

Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore, it is said: *When he ascended to the heights, he brought captives and gave his gifts to people.*

<sup>9</sup>He ascended, what does it mean, but that he had also descended to the lower parts of the world? <sup>10</sup>He himself, who went down, then ascended far above all the heavens to fill all things. <sup>11</sup>As for his gifts, to some, he gave to be apostles; to others, prophets or even evangelists, or pastors and teachers. <sup>12</sup>So, he prepared those who belong to him for the ministry, in order to build up the Body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we are all united in the same faith and knowledge of the Son of God. Thus, we shall become the perfect Man upon reaching maturity and sharing the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup>Then, no longer shall we be like children, tossed about by any wave, or wind of doctrine; and deceived by the cunning of people who drag them along into error. <sup>15</sup>Rather, speaking the truth in love, we shall grow in every way toward him who is the head, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him, comes the growth of the whole body, to which a network of joints gives order and cohesion, taking into account, and making use of, the function of each one. So, the body builds itself, in love.

### EPHESIANS 4:1-16

**Read:** Paul preaches unity in the Church. We all form a body whose head is the Lord. Each one has a gift that allows the growth and building up in love.

**Reflect:** Instead of thinking about what divides us within Christianity and within the Church, think of what unites us. Is Christ the same for everybody? What is your contribution to the construction of the body of Christ?

**Pray:** Jesus prayed that all might be one. Pray not only for the unity of all Christians but also for understanding among the members of the Church.

**Act:** Promote and pray for unity in your parochial community, and for unity of the domestic church that is your family.

### Put on the new self

<sup>17</sup>I say to you, then, and with insistence, I advise you in the Lord: do not imitate the pagans who live an aimless kind of life. <sup>18</sup>Their

understanding is in darkness and they remain in ignorance because of their blind conscience, very far from the life of God. <sup>19</sup>As a result of their corruption, they have abandoned themselves to sensuality, and have eagerly given themselves to every kind of immorality.

<sup>20</sup>But it is not for this that you have followed Christ. <sup>21</sup>For, I suppose, that you heard of him and received his teaching, which is seen in Jesus himself. <sup>22</sup>You must give up your former way of living, the *old self*, whose deceitful desires bring self-destruction. <sup>23</sup>Renew yourselves spiritually, from inside, <sup>24</sup>and put on the *new self*, or *self*, according to God, that is created in true righteousness and holiness.

<sup>25</sup>Therefore, give up lying; let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup>*Be angry, but do not sin*: do not let your anger last until the end of the day, <sup>27</sup>lest you give the devil a foothold.

<sup>28</sup>Let the one who used to steal, steal no more, but busy himself, working usefully with his hands so that he may have something to share with the needy. <sup>29</sup>Do not let even one bad word come from your mouth, but only good words that will encourage when necessary, and be helpful to those who hear.

<sup>30</sup>Do not sadden the Holy Spirit of God with which you were marked. He will be your distinctive mark on the day of salvation. <sup>31</sup>Do away with all quarreling, rage, anger, insults and every kind of malice: <sup>32</sup>be good and understanding, forgiving one another as God forgave you in Christ.

### EPHESIANS 4:17-32

**Read:** Paul offers the Ephesians a series of norms needed to be faithful to the message of Christ. Truth, peace, work, speaking well, forgiveness: these are attitudes of Christians who clothed themselves with the new self “created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

**Reflect:** Has truth become a casualty in society? Do you cut corners when dealing with the truth? How can you manifest that you are clothed with the new self? Are you friendly and compassionate with others?

**Pray:** Ask God to help you clothe yourself with the new self, assuming the attitudes that Jesus preached with his life.

**Act:** Think on one of the recommendations that Paul offers the Ephesians. Try to live it in a special way this day.

## Imitate God

**5**<sup>1</sup>As most beloved children of God, strive to imitate him. <sup>2</sup>Follow the way of love, the example of Christ, who loved you. He gave himself up for us and became the offering and sacrificial victim, whose fragrance rises to God. <sup>3</sup>And since you are holy, there must not be among you, even a hint of sexual immorality or greed, or any kind of impurity: these should not be named among you. <sup>4</sup>So too, for scandalous words, nonsense and foolishness, which are not fitting; instead, offer thanksgiving to God.

<sup>5</sup>Know this: no depraved, impure, or covetous person who serves the god 'Money,' shall have part in the kingdom of Christ and of God. <sup>6</sup>Let no one deceive you with empty arguments for these are the sins which God is about to condemn in people who do not obey. <sup>7</sup>Do not associate with such people. <sup>8</sup>You were once darkness, but now, you are light in the Lord. Behave as children of light; <sup>9</sup>the fruits of light are kindness, justice, and truth, in every form.

<sup>10</sup>You, yourselves, search out what pleases the Lord, <sup>11</sup>and take no part in works of darkness that are of no benefit; expose them instead. <sup>12</sup>Indeed, it is a shame even to speak of what those people do in secret, <sup>13</sup>but as soon as it is exposed to the light, everything becomes clear; and what is unmasked becomes clear through light. <sup>14</sup>Therefore it is said:

"Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, that the light of Christ may shine on you."

<sup>15</sup>Pay attention to how you behave. Do not live as the unwise do, but as responsible persons. <sup>16</sup>Try to make good use of the present time because these days are evil. <sup>17</sup>So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

<sup>18</sup>Do not get drunk: wine leads to levity, but be filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Gather together to pray, with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing, and celebrate the Lord in your heart, <sup>20</sup>giving thanks to God, the Father, in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, always and for everything.

**EPHESIANS 5:1-20**

**Read:** These are bad times for the Ephesians. Paul reminds them that they have been saved by Jesus and they should try to have Jesus' attitudes discerning on how to act.

**Reflect:** Think of one sin that needs attention in your life. What are you to do to be faithful to the Christian vocation?

**Pray:** Seek guidance from the Holy Spirit and an open and ready heart to avoid the sin that you know needs attention.

**Act:** With the help of the Holy Spirit avoid the sin needing attention by practicing the opposite virtue.

**Husbands, love your wives**

<sup>21</sup>Let all kinds of submission to one another become obedience to Christ. <sup>22</sup>So wives, to their husbands, as to the Lord.

<sup>23</sup>The husband is the head of his wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of whom he is also the Savior. <sup>24</sup>And as the church submits to Christ, so let a wife submit in everything to her husband.

<sup>25</sup>As for you husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. <sup>26</sup>He washed her and made her holy by baptism in the word. <sup>27</sup>As he wanted a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any blemish, but holy and blameless, he himself had to prepare and present her to himself.

<sup>28</sup>In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup>And no one has ever hated his body; he feeds and takes care of it. That is just what Christ does for the Church <sup>30</sup>because we are members of his body.

<sup>31</sup>Scripture says: *Because of this, a man shall leave his father and mother, to be united with his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*

<sup>32</sup>This is a very great mystery, and I refer to Christ and the Church. <sup>33</sup>As for you, let each one love his wife as himself, and let the wife respect her husband.

**EPHESIANS 5:21-33**

**Read:** Paul deals with a contemporary society in which the husband owned the wife and attempts to change that. He says

that the husband should love his wife as himself. It is the same love Christ has for the Church, and so the Church should be obedient to Christ.

**Reflect:** The emphasis is on the husbands to love and care for their wives as Christ does for the Church. Is there still male chauvinism today? What is your situation? What is your attitude?

**Pray:** Pray for marriages that live moments of crisis because of male chauvinism; ask that the mutual and gratuitous love of spouses redeem this situation.

**Act:** Promote and support in your parish groups and movements that take care of the Christian formation for marriage.

### Children, parents, servants, and masters

**6**<sup>1</sup> Children, obey your parents, for this is right: <sup>2</sup>*Honor your father and your mother.* And this is the first commandment that has a promise: <sup>3</sup>*that you may be happy and enjoy a long life in the land.* <sup>4</sup>And you, fathers, do not make rebels of your children but educate them by correction and instruction, which the Lord may inspire.

<sup>5</sup>Servants, obey your masters of this world with fear and respect, with simplicity of heart, as if obeying Christ. <sup>6</sup>Do not serve only when you are watched, or in order to please others, but become servants of Christ who do God's will with all your heart. <sup>7</sup>Work willingly for the Lord and not for humans, mindful that the good each one has done, <sup>8</sup>whether servant or free, will be rewarded by the Lord.

<sup>9</sup>And you, masters, deal with your servants in the same way and do not threaten them since you know that they and you have the same Lord, who is in heaven, and he treats all fairly.

### Be strong in the Lord

<sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong in the Lord with his energy and strength. <sup>11</sup>Put on the whole armor of God to be able to resist the cunning of the devil. <sup>12</sup>Our battle is not against human forces, but against the rulers and authorities and their dark powers that govern this world. We are struggling against the spirits and supernatural forces of evil.

<sup>13</sup>Therefore, put on the whole armor of God that, in the evil day, you

may resist and stand your ground, making use of all your weapons. <sup>14</sup>Take truth as your belt, justice as your breastplate, <sup>15</sup>and zeal as your shoes, to propagate the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup>Always hold in your hand the shield of faith to repel the flaming arrows of the devil. <sup>17</sup>Finally, use the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, that is, the word of God.

<sup>18</sup>Pray at all times as the Spirit inspires you. Keep watch, together with sustained prayer and supplication for all the holy ones. <sup>19</sup>Pray also for me, so that when I speak, I may be given words to proclaim bravely the mystery of the gospel. <sup>20</sup>Even when in chains, I am an ambassador of God; may he give me the strength to speak, as I should.

<sup>21</sup>I also want you to know how I am and what I am doing. Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. <sup>22</sup>I am sending him precisely to give you news of us and comfort you all.

<sup>23</sup>May peace and love, with faith from God the Father, and from Christ Jesus the Lord, be with the brothers and sisters. <sup>24</sup>And may his blessing be with all who love Christ Jesus, our Lord, with undying love.

### EPHESIANS 6:1-24

**Read:** Paul cannot change the structures of his society, but he tries to redeem them through love: owners and slaves, parents and children, they all belong and serve Christ. As Christians, we are called to fight evil by doing good.

**Reflect:** Can we radically change our society? Is there any kind of slavery between us? What can we do to improve this situation? Where can we get the strength to do just that?

**Pray:** Pray for the inspiration of the Spirit to know how to preach and live equality among all men and women, as we are all children of God.

**Act:** Regard the person at your side today as if this person is Jesus himself.

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