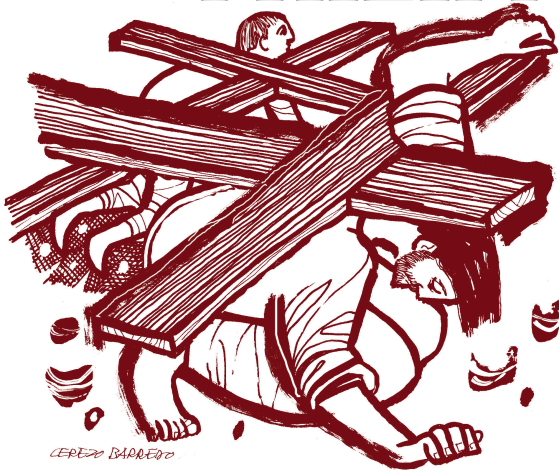


# LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS



**H**ere again a real letter from Paul, personal, full of attention and tenderness that Paul sent from prison to the community that had always been the most concerned for his well-being. More than once Paul counted on their material assistance, showing the confidence he had in them. Usually, in order to avoid any suspicion of personal interest, he preferred to earn his living while continuing his mission. In this letter, we have the famous page: “Let the same project that was in Christ Jesus be found in you.”

We have just said it is a real letter from Paul. Actually, all in it does not follow, as if fragments of several letters from Paul had been combined. We shall draw attention to it as we proceed: 2:19, 21; 4:1. It may well be a question of two short letters, one where Paul wanted to give his news and to thank, the other a warning, in the same style as the letter to the Galatians.

When Paul’s letters were gathered together, the most important were arranged according to length: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians. Then came those we call “captivity letters.” It is there we have Philippians be-

tween Ephesians and Colossians as if the three had been sent from the same prison. Yet there is every reason to think that Philippians was not written when Paul was in Rome, about the year 60 A.D., but several years earlier, more like the year 56 A.D. Perhaps he was at that time imprisoned in Ephesus.



# LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

**1** <sup>1</sup>From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to the saints in Philippi, with their bishops and deacons;  
to you all in Christ Jesus:

<sup>2</sup>May grace and peace be yours from God, our Father, and Christ Jesus the Lord.

<sup>3</sup>I give thanks to my God each time I remember you, <sup>4</sup>and when I pray for you, I pray with joy. <sup>5</sup>I cannot forget all you shared with me in the service of the gospel, from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup>Since God began such a good work in you, I am certain that he will complete it in the day of Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup>This is my hope for you, for I carry you all in my heart: whether I am in prison, or defending and confirming the gospel, you are with me and share the same grace.

<sup>8</sup>God knows that I love you dearly, with the love of Christ Jesus, <sup>9</sup>and in my prayers, I ask that your love may lead you, each day, to a deeper knowledge and clearer discernment, <sup>10</sup>that you may have good criteria for everything. So you may be pure of heart, and come blameless, to the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup>filled with the fruit of holiness that comes through Christ Jesus, for the glory and praise of God.

## PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

**Read:** From prison Paul writes to a community he loves, remembering them in prayer, grateful for their support and encouraging them to deepen their love and faith.

**Reflect:** Does the love Paul has for the Philippians exist in your community? Are the members ready to work for the

Gospel? How do you collaborate with the work of evangelization?

**Pray:** Pray for your friends and family, but also for the members of your parish church, that they may grow stronger in love and faith.

**Act:** Don't be afraid to invite someone to go to church with you.

## Christ is my life

<sup>12</sup>I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup>Actually the whole praetorian guard, and even those outside the palace, know that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup>And what is more, my condition as a prisoner has encouraged the majority of the brothers to proclaim the word of God fearlessly.

<sup>15</sup>Some, it is true, are moved by envy and rivalry, but others preach Christ with good intention. <sup>16</sup>These latter are moved by love and realize that I am here to defend the gospel. <sup>17</sup>The former proclaim Christ to challenge me. They do not act with pure intention but think they are making my imprisonment more unbearable. <sup>18</sup>But, in any case, whether they are sincere or showing off, Christ is proclaimed and because of this I rejoice and have no regrets.

<sup>19</sup>I know that all this will be a grace for me, because of your prayers, and the help given by the Spirit of Christ. <sup>20</sup>I am hopeful, even certain, that I shall not be ashamed. I feel as assured now, as before, that Christ will be exalted through my person, whether I live or die.

<sup>21</sup>For to me life is Christ, and dying is even better. <sup>22</sup>But if I am to go on living, I shall be able to enjoy fruitful labor. Which shall I choose? <sup>23</sup>So I feel torn between the two. I desire greatly to leave this life and to be with Christ, which will be better by far, <sup>24</sup>but it is necessary for you that I remain in this life. <sup>25</sup>And because I am convinced of this, I know that I will stay and remain with you for your progress and happiness in the faith. <sup>26</sup>I will surely come to you again and give you more reason for being proud of belonging to Christ Jesus.

## Stand firm in faith

<sup>27</sup>Try, then, to adjust your lives according to the gospel of Christ. May I see it when I come to you, and if I cannot come, may I at least hear



that you stand firm in the same spirit, striving to uphold the faith of the gospel with one heart. <sup>28</sup>Do not be afraid of your opponents. This will be a sign that they are defeated and you are saved, that is, saved by God. <sup>29</sup>For, through Christ, you have been granted, not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him. <sup>30</sup>And you now share the same struggle that you saw I had, and that I continue to have, as you know.

### PHILIPPIANS 1:12-30

**Read:** Paul reports that he shares his faith even in prison. As long as Christ is shared he doesn't care about the motivations of those that do it. For him "life is Christ and to die is gain." He wants to be with Christ now, but he knows that his presence among the Philippians will make them grow and be joyful in faith. He encourages them to "stand side by side" in living their faith and not to be intimidated by their enemies.

**Reflect:** What makes it difficult to believe in God in public? What is the difference between sharing your belief and proselytizing? What does the following expression suggest to you: "live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ"?

**Pray:** Ask the Lord that nothing may discourage your community from preaching and living the Gospel even when it may entail some risks.

**Act:** How can you help your parish share faith in Jesus Christ?

### Imitate the humility of Jesus

**2**<sup>1</sup>If I may advise you, in the name of Christ, and if you can hear it as the voice of love; if we share the same Spirit and are capable of mercy and compassion, then I beg of you, <sup>2</sup>make me very happy: have one love, one spirit, one feeling, <sup>3</sup>do nothing through rivalry or vain conceit. On the contrary, let each of you gently consider the others as more important than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Do not seek your own interest, but rather, that of others. <sup>5</sup>Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ had:

<sup>6</sup>Though he was in the form of God,

he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped,

<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself,

taking on the nature of a servant, made in human likeness,

and, in his appearance, found as a man,

<sup>8</sup>He humbled himself by being obedient to death,  
death on the cross.

<sup>9</sup>That is why God exalted him

and gave him the name which outshines all names,

<sup>10</sup>so that, at the name of Jesus, all knees should bend  
in heaven, on earth and among the dead,

<sup>11</sup>and all tongues proclaim that Christ Jesus is the Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

### PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

**Read:** Paul wishes that the community be able to overcome any lack of unity. Jesus is the best example to follow. The community should have the same love, unselfish, having the same mind as Christ Jesus. Paul repeats a hymn that celebrates the humility and service of Jesus on the cross that illustrates that he is the Lord.

**Reflect:** Read each verse of the hymn and ask yourself what it might mean to you. How can you be detached from your belongings to be more generous to others?

**Pray:** Humility is the willingness to serve others as did Jesus, pray that you can imitate the humility of Jesus.

**Act:** Think of practical ways where you can be of service to your family, friends and community.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, my dearest friends, as you always obeyed me while I was with you, even more now that I am far from you, continue working out your salvation “with fear and trembling.” <sup>13</sup>It is God who makes you not only wish but also carry out what pleases him. <sup>14</sup>Do everything without grumbling, <sup>15</sup>so that without fault or blame, you will be children of God without reproach, among a crooked and perverse generation. You are a light among them, like stars in the universe <sup>16</sup>holding to the word of life. I shall feel proud of you on the day of Christ, on seeing that my effort and labor have not been in vain. <sup>17</sup>And if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice, and the offering of your faith, I rejoice and continue to share your joy; <sup>18</sup>and you, likewise, should rejoice and share my joy.

## Paul's messengers

<sup>19</sup>The Lord Jesus lets me hope that I may soon send you Timothy, and have news of you. With this, I will feel encouraged. <sup>20</sup>For I have no one so concerned for you as he is. <sup>21</sup>Most follow their own interest, not those of Christ Jesus. <sup>22</sup>But Timothy has proved himself, as you know. Like a son at the side of his father, he has been with me at the service of the gospel. <sup>23</sup>Because of that, I hope to send him to you as soon as I see how things work out for me. <sup>24</sup>Nevertheless, the Lord lets me think that I, myself, shall be coming soon.

<sup>25</sup>I judged it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, who worked and fought at my side, and whom you sent to help me in my great need. <sup>26</sup>In fact, he missed you very much and was still more worried because you had heard of his sickness. <sup>27</sup>He was, indeed, sick and almost died, but God took pity on him and on me, sparing me greater sorrow. <sup>28</sup>And so, I am eager to send him to you so that, on seeing him, you will be glad and I will be at peace. <sup>29</sup>Receive him, then, with joy as is fitting in the Lord. Consider highly persons like him <sup>30</sup>who almost died for the work of Christ; he risked his life to serve me, on your behalf, when you could not help me.

### PHILIPPIANS 2:12-30

**Read:** Paul again compliments the Philippians. God is at work in them and they must work out their salvation in a difficult world so their love shines like stars. Paul is sending Timothy and Epaphroditus and asks them to welcome them.

**Reflect:** "Working out your salvation 'with fear and trembling'" is a famous phrase. What does it mean to you? Do you appreciate the effort of other people who work in your parish for the good of the community? Do you ever invite them to your home?

**Pray:** Paul sent people to help the Philippians grow in belief in God, pray God uses you to help others in their faith.

**Act:** Show your gratitude and support for people who have helped you in your faith.

## Do not turn back to the Jewish law

**3**<sup>1</sup>Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

It is not a burden for me to write again the same things, and for you, it is safer. <sup>2</sup>Beware of the dogs, beware of the bad workers; beware of the circumcised. <sup>3</sup>We are the true circumcised people since we serve according to the Spirit of God, and our confidence is in Christ Jesus, rather than on our merits.

<sup>4</sup>I, myself, do not lack those human qualities in which people have confidence. If some of them seem to be accredited with such qualities, how much more am I! <sup>5</sup>I was circumcised when eight days old. I was born of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; I am a Hebrew, born of Hebrews. With regard to the law, I am a Pharisee, <sup>6</sup>and such was my zeal for the law that I persecuted the Church. As for being righteous according to the law, I was blameless.

<sup>7</sup>But once I found Christ, all those things that I might have considered as profit, I reckoned as a loss. <sup>8</sup>Still more, everything seems to me as nothing compared with the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have let everything fall away, and I now consider all as garbage, if instead, I may gain Christ. <sup>9</sup>May I be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but with the righteousness that God gives to those who believe.

<sup>10</sup>May I know him and experience the power of his resurrection and share in his sufferings and become like him in his death <sup>11</sup>and attain, through this, God willing, the resurrection from the dead!

<sup>12</sup>I do not believe I have already reached the goal, nor do I consider myself perfect, but I press on till I conquer Christ Jesus, as I have already been conquered by him. <sup>13</sup>No, brothers and sisters, I do not claim to have claimed the prize yet. I say only this: forgetting what is behind me, I race forward and run toward the goal, <sup>14</sup>my eyes on the prize to which God has called us from above in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Let all of us who claim to be perfect have the same way of thinking, but if there is something on which you differ, God will make it clear to you. <sup>16</sup>Meanwhile, let us go forward from the point we have each attained.

<sup>17</sup>Unite in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and look at those who walk in our way of life. <sup>18</sup>For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. I have said it to you many times, and now I repeat it with tears: <sup>19</sup>they

are heading for ruin; their belly is their god and they feel proud of what should be their shame. They only think of earthly things.

<sup>20</sup>For us, our citizenship is in heaven, from where we await the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord. <sup>21</sup>He will transfigure our lowly body, making it like his own body radiant in glory, through the power, which is his to submit everything to himself.

### Agree with one another and be happy

**4**<sup>1</sup>Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, you, my glory and crown, be steadfast in the Lord. <sup>2</sup>I beg Evodia and Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>And you, Sycygnus, my true companion, I beg you to help them. Do not forget that they have labored with me in the service of the gospel, together with Clement and my other fellow-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

#### PHILIPPIANS 3:1—4:3

**Read:** This may be part of a different letter that Paul writes because he has heard some have been telling the Philippians that they must first convert to Judaism to be a Christian. Through his own experience, he knows salvation comes from God through Jesus by faith and not through works.

**Reflect:** What does the following expression suggest to you: “Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ my Lord.” Is it possible to believe in Christ and not to live according to his Gospel? Are faith and works opposite? To what concrete deeds does your faith in Jesus commits you?

**Pray:** Ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow in the knowledge of Christ: love of God and of neighbor, and to be more conscious of your condition of being a “citizen of heaven,” a gift received by the faith in Christ Jesus.

**Act:** Show your faith by serving others. Tell your people what it means for you to enjoy the condition of being a “citizen of heaven.”

<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again: rejoice, <sup>5</sup>and may everyone experience your gentle and understanding heart. The Lord is near: <sup>6</sup>do not be anxious about anything. In everything, resort to prayer and

supplication, together with thanksgiving, and bring your requests before God. <sup>7</sup>Then, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with whatever is truthful, holy, just, pure, lovely and noble. Be mindful of whatever deserves praise and admiration. <sup>9</sup>Put into practice what you have learned from me, what I passed on to you, what you heard from me or saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.

### **Paul's thankfulness**

<sup>10</sup>I rejoice in the Lord because of your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me before, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>I do not say this because of being in want; I have learned to manage with what I have. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to be in want and what it is to have plenty. I am trained for both: to be hungry or satisfied, to have much or little. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

<sup>14</sup>However, you did right in sharing my trials. <sup>15</sup>You Philippians, remember that in the beginning, when we first preached the gospel after I left Macedonia, you alone opened for me a debit and credit account, <sup>16</sup>and when I was in Thessalonica, twice you sent me what I needed.

<sup>17</sup>It is not your gift that I value, but rather the interest increasing in your own account. <sup>18</sup>Now I have enough and more than enough, with everything Epaphroditus brought me on your behalf and which I received as "fragrant offerings pleasing to God." <sup>19</sup>God himself will provide you with everything you need according to his riches, and show you his generosity in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup>Glory to God, our Father, for ever and ever: Amen.

<sup>21</sup>Greet all who believe in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters with me greet you. <sup>22</sup>All the believers here greet you, especially those from Caesar's household. <sup>23</sup>The grace of Christ Jesus the Lord, be with your spirit.

#### **PHILIPPIANS 4:4-23**

**Read:** Paul concludes by praising two outstanding women who have worked with Paul in spreading the Gospel. They should live with joy and gentleness, without anxiety, praying to God for

what they need. Paul is grateful for the money they have sent him in his need and prays God will reward them.

**Reflect:** Does your faith in Christ make you joyous? Do you celebrate it? What does the following expression suggest to you: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me”?

**Pray:** Thank God for all the wonderful things especially the wonderful people in your life. Ask to be able to live either in poverty or riches with joy.

**Act:** Go out and celebrate life with someone you love. If your situation allows it, share also your material goods with somebody in need.

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