

# FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS



**I**n the year 50 A.D., Paul arrived in Thessalonica, a major city and the capital of the province of Macedonia (see Acts 17:1). Here, after being rejected by the Jews, he addressed his preaching to the pagans and succeeded in forming a community. After barely three months, a riot caused by the Jews forced him to leave.

What is going to happen to these new Christians who have only received the basics of Christian life from Paul? Because of his concern, Paul asks Timothy to go and to strengthen this young Church. Upon his return, Timothy is optimistic and being reassured, Paul sends this letter at the beginning of the year 51 A.D. This is the oldest text of the New Testament.

We do not always find this letter very inspiring. We might say that Paul's style is still quite "green." We sense both a missionary's attachment to the converts for whom he had spared no effort, his concern about them and the remnants of Paul's early training as fanatic as it was generous.

Christian faith was going against reason in the first communities of the Greco-Roman world, just as it does in our own communities. Sexual

freedom seemed just as legitimate to them as it does to our contemporaries. The resurrection of the dead and the afterlife did not readily enter into their perspectives even if, from time to time, some “mystery-prone” philosophers or some religions were trying to revive such hopes.

In Chapter 4, Paul re-asserts the biblical doctrine concerning these matters. There, we will find the clear and sound affirmation of the moral demands to form an integral part of Christ’s followers: be holy, alert and be people who are waiting for something else.

We will also find the first affirmation of the resurrection of the dead expressed in apocalyptic language and images.

From its beginnings, the community is invited to live in constant prayer and to give priority to the care of its weakest members.



# FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

**1** <sup>1</sup>From Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy, to the church of Thessalonica, which is in God, the Father, and in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

May the peace and grace of God be with you.

<sup>2</sup>We give thanks to God at all times for you, and remember you in our prayers. <sup>3</sup>We constantly recall before God, our Father, the work of your faith, the labors of your love, and your endurance in waiting for Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>4</sup>We remember, brothers and sisters, the circumstances of your being called. <sup>5</sup>The gospel we brought you was such, not only in words. Miracles, the Holy Spirit, and plenty of everything, were given to you. You also know how we dealt with you, for your sake.

<sup>6</sup>In return, you became followers of us and of the Lord, when on receiving the word, you experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit in the midst of great opposition. <sup>7</sup>And you became a model for the faithful of Macedonia and Achaia, <sup>8</sup>since, from you, the word of the Lord spread to Macedonia and Achaia, and still farther. The faith you have in God has become news in so many places that we need say no more about it. <sup>9</sup>Others tell of how you welcomed us and turned from idols to the Lord. For you serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup>and you wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who frees us from impending trial.

## **1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10**

**Read:** Paul praises the active faith, the labor of love and the persevering hope of the Thessalonian community. The reputation of the Thessalonians has spread far and wide and has helped in the conversion of other peoples.

**Reflect:** What does “work of faith, labors of love, and endurance in waiting for Christ Jesus our Lord” mean to you? Does your parish community set an example for other communities? How is the faith that your parish community professes manifested in your daily life?

**Pray:** Ask for the Spirit’s guidance to live according to the Gospel by giving witness to what you believe.

**Act:** Examine your attitudes toward others in your everyday life. Promote those that give a better witness of your faith in Jesus.

### The beginning of the Church of Thessalonica

**2**<sup>1</sup>You well know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not in vain. <sup>2</sup>We had been ill-treated and insulted in Philippi, but trusting in our God, we dared announce to you the message of God and face fresh opposition. <sup>3</sup>Our warnings did not conceal any error or impure motive, nor did we deceive anyone. <sup>4</sup>But, as God had entrusted his gospel to us, as faithful ministers, we were anxious to please God who sees the heart rather than human beings. <sup>5</sup>We never pleased you with flattery, as you know, nor did we try to earn money, as God knows. <sup>6</sup>We did not try to make a name for ourselves among people, either with you or anybody else, although we were messengers of Christ and could have made our weight felt.

<sup>7</sup>On the contrary, we were gentle with you as a nursing mother who feeds and cuddles her baby. <sup>8</sup>And so great is our concern, that we are ready to give you, as well as the gospel, even our very lives, for you have become very dear to us.

<sup>9</sup>Remember our labor and toil; when we preached the gospel, we worked day and night so as not to be a burden to you. <sup>10</sup>You are witnesses with God that we were holy, just and blameless toward all of you who now believe. <sup>11</sup>We warned each of you as a father warns his children; <sup>12</sup>we encouraged you, and urged you, to adopt a way of life worthy of God, who calls you to share his own glory and kingdom.

<sup>13</sup>This is why we never cease giving thanks to God for, on receiving our message, you accepted it, not as human teaching, but as the word of God. That is what it really is, and as such, it is at work in you who believe.

<sup>14</sup>Brothers and sisters, you followed the example of the churches of

God in Judea, churches of Christ Jesus. For you suffered from your compatriots the same trials they suffered from the Jews, <sup>15</sup>who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and who persecute us. They displease God and harm all people <sup>16</sup>when they prevent us from speaking to the pagans and trying to save them. By doing so, they are heaping up their sins, but now, judgment is coming upon them.

<sup>17</sup>We are for a time, deprived of your presence, but not in our heart, and we eagerly long to see you. <sup>18</sup>For we have wanted to visit you, and I, Paul, more than once; but Satan prevented us. <sup>19</sup>In fact, who but you are our hope and our joy? Who but you will be our glorious crown before Jesus, our Lord, when he returns? <sup>20</sup>Yes, indeed, you are our glory and our joy.

### 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-20

**Read:** Paul recounts how he first came to the Thessalonians and how he ministered to them. Paul remembers how they embraced the Word of God, suffering for the Gospel just as the original churches did. He longs to see them again.

**Reflect:** In what way is the word of God at work in your life? How is the word of God working in your parish?

**Pray:** Give thanks to God for the different vocations and ministries in the Church. Ask that He continue to send “laborers for the vineyard.” Pray in a special way for your parish priest and all pastoral agents of your parish; may the Lord be always for them their joy, refuge, and hope.

**Act:** Go to your parish and show your gratitude to all those working there, especially to the parish priest and pastoral agents.

### Paul’s concern

**3**<sup>1</sup>As I could no longer bear it, I decided to go alone to Athens, <sup>2</sup>and send you Timothy, our brother and co-worker of God in the gospel of Christ. I wanted him to encourage you in the faith, and strengthen you, <sup>3</sup>so that none of you might turn back because of the trials you are now enduring. You know that such is our destiny. <sup>4</sup>I warned you of this when I was there: “We shall have to face persecution”; and so it was, as you have seen. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, I could not stand it any longer and sent

Timothy to appraise your faith and see if the Tempter had tempted you and made our work useless.

<sup>6</sup>But now Timothy has just returned with good news of your faith and love. He told us that you remember us kindly, and that you long to see us as much as we long to see you. <sup>7</sup>What a consolation for us, brothers and sisters, in the midst of our troubles and trials, this faith of yours! <sup>8</sup>It is a breath of life for us when you stand firm in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>How can we thank God enough for all the joy that we feel before God because of you? <sup>10</sup>Day and night we beg of him to let us see you again, that we may complete the instruction of the believers.

<sup>11</sup>May God, our Father, and Jesus, our Lord, prepare the way for us to visit you. <sup>12</sup>May the Lord increase more and more your love for each other and for all people, as he increases our love for you. <sup>13</sup>May he strengthen you internally, to be holy and blameless before God, our Father, on the day that Jesus, our Lord, will come with all his saints.

### 1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-13

**Read:** Paul sends Timothy to strengthen and encourage the community that is undergoing persecutions. Upon receiving the good news that they stand firm in the Lord, Paul rejoices and asks, "May the Lord increase, more and more your love for each other and for all people, as he increases our love for you. May he strengthen you, internally, to be holy and blameless before God, our Father, on the day that Jesus, our Lord will come with all his saints."

**Reflect:** Are you aware of the persecutions that the Church is suffering today? Do you feel persecuted or marginalized because of your faith in Jesus? Is faith a forbidden subject where you work or among your friends? How does your love increase from day to day? Do you feel strengthened internally?

**Pray:** Pray for Christians who suffer from religious persecution around the world. Pray also for those who are ridiculed for believing in Jesus.

**Act:** Discuss with your community about the importance of Christians supporting the missionary activity of the Church. Ask if your parish can support a church community that is suffering persecution.

## **A call to a life of purity and work**

**4**<sup>1</sup>For the rest, brothers and sisters, we ask you in the name of Jesus, the Lord, and we urge you to live in a way that pleases God, just as you have learned from us. This you do, but try to do still more. <sup>2</sup>You know the instructions we gave you on behalf of the Lord Jesus: <sup>3</sup>the will of God for you is to become holy and not to have unlawful sex.

<sup>4</sup>Let each of you behave toward his wife as a holy and respectful husband, <sup>5</sup>rather than being led by lust, as are pagans who do not know God. <sup>6</sup>In this matter, let no one offend or wrong a brother or a sister. The Lord will do justice in all these things, as we have warned and shown you. <sup>7</sup>God has called us to live, not in impurity, but in holiness, <sup>8</sup>and those who do not heed this instruction disobey, not a human, but God, himself, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

<sup>9</sup>Regarding mutual love, you do not need anyone to write to you, because God, himself, taught you how to love one another. <sup>10</sup>You already practice it with all the brothers and sisters of Macedonia, but I invite you to do more. <sup>11</sup>Consider how important it is to live quietly, without bothering others, to mind your own business, and work with your hands as we have charged you. <sup>12</sup>In obeying these rules, you will win the respect of outsiders and be dependent on no one.

## **Do not grieve as others do**

<sup>13</sup>Brothers and sisters, we want you not to be mistaken about those who are already asleep, lest you grieve as do those who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>We believe that Jesus died and rose; it will be the same for those who have died in Jesus. God will bring them together with Jesus, and for his sake.

<sup>15</sup>By the same word of the Lord, we assert this: those of us who are to be alive at the Lord's coming, will not go ahead of those who are already asleep. <sup>16</sup>When the command by the archangel's voice is given, the Lord himself will come down from heaven, while the divine trumpet call is sounding. Then those who have died in the Lord will rise first; <sup>17</sup>as for us who are still alive, we will be brought along with them, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the celestial world. And we will be with the Lord forever.

<sup>18</sup>So then, comfort one another with these words.

**1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-18**

**Read:** Paul tells the community “they have been taught by God to love one another” and this love must extend to sexual and financial relationships where no one must be exploited. Since some members are dying before the second coming of Christ, Paul reassures them that they will share in the resurrection.

**Reflect:** How is holiness part of your everyday life and interactions with others? How does God teach you to love others? Have you thought how you will share in the resurrection?

**Pray:** Pray for an increase of everyday holiness in your life. Remember to pray for those who have died.

**Act:** Live your Christian vocation fully today as if it was your last day in your life. At the end of the day, give thanks to God for all the experiences lived.

**You are citizens of the light**

**5**<sup>1</sup>You do not need anyone to write to you about the delay and the appointed time for these events. <sup>2</sup>You know that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>When people feel secure and at peace, the disaster will suddenly come upon them as the birth pangs of a woman in labor, and they will not escape.

<sup>4</sup>But you, beloved, are not in darkness; so that day will not surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup>All of you are citizens of the light and the day; we do not belong to night and darkness. <sup>6</sup>Let us not, therefore, sleep as others do, but remain alert and sober.

<sup>7</sup>Those who sleep, go to sleep at night, and those who drink, get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, let us put on the breastplate of faith and love, and let the hope of salvation be our helmet. <sup>9</sup>For God has not willed us to be condemned, but to win salvation through Christ Jesus, our Lord. <sup>10</sup>He died for us so that we might enter into life with him, whether we are still awake or already asleep. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, encourage one another and build up one another as you are doing now.

<sup>12</sup>Brothers and sisters, I want you to be thankful to those who labor among you, who lead you in the way of the Lord and also reprimand



you. <sup>13</sup>Esteem them highly and love them for what they are doing. Live at peace among yourselves.

<sup>14</sup>We urge you to warn the idle, encourage those who feel discouraged, sustain the weak, have patience with everyone. <sup>15</sup>See that no one repays evil for evil, but try to do good, whether among yourselves or toward others.

<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing <sup>18</sup>and give thanks to God at every moment. This is the will of God, your vocation as Christians.

<sup>19</sup>Do not quench the Spirit, <sup>20</sup>do not despise the prophets' warnings. <sup>21</sup>Put everything to the test and hold fast to what is good. <sup>22</sup>Avoid evil, wherever it may be.

<sup>23</sup>May the God of peace make you holy and bring you to perfection. May you be completely blameless in spirit, soul, and body, till the coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord; <sup>24</sup>he who called you is faithful and will do it.

<sup>25</sup>Brothers and sisters, pray for us. <sup>26</sup>Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. <sup>27</sup>I order you, in the name of the Lord, that this letter be read to all of them.

<sup>28</sup>May the grace of Christ Jesus, our Lord, be with you.

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-28

**Read:** Before his farewell, Paul urges the Thessalonians to be confident in their calling, alert to its challenges, respectful toward one another, encouraging to the discouraged, supportive of their leaders, praying at all times and, most especially, rejoice always in the Lord.

**Reflect:** Do you live intensely the present moment or do you spend your life waiting always for better times? What does the following expression tell you: "God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him."

**Pray:** Ask Jesus for the grace to be able to wait for him at all times, with joy, faith, hope, and love.

**Act:** Share with your people your trust in eternal life and in the definitive encounter with the Lord.

# SECOND LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS



**T**he First Letter to the Thessalonians taught us the importance of looking forward to the coming of Christ in Paul's preaching.

The hope of the day of Christ was a powerful incentive for the faith of the first Christians but it could also lead to an unhealthy nervousness. The church of Thessalonica appears to have suffered from a rather frequent illness among minorities and persecuted groups, namely, the expectation of the end of the world that will solve all the problems. For the time, this expectation only disturbs Christian life.

Is this letter authentic? There have been many doubts on the subject. Why was there a second letter, seemingly so close to the first? In fact, several paragraphs are almost the same as in the first letter to the Thessalonians. There is only one clear new point, in the middle of the letter and of great interest to the author, namely, the warning about the coming of the antichrist and the hour of judgment. Since this warning appears to correct the first letter in which there was an expectation of the

imminent coming of the Lord, it was surmised that, in Paul's name, someone had wanted to add what Paul did not say before.

But what are these arguments worth even if we add to them some stylistic differences? What do we know about problems of communication, delays or about the way Paul dictated his letters? Some people claim that it was common to write a book under the name of a master or of someone whose ideas one wanted to interpret. This is true in the area of philosophical treatises but when we are dealing with a letter and with personal recollections, it is an entirely different situation. You will observe that in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul issues a warning against letters that could be attributed to him and at the end of the letter in 3:17, he gives an example of his own handwriting. If it were the letter of an imitator, shouldn't we speak of a pure and simple lie? From the beginning, it was accepted as a letter of Paul and an inspired book. We cannot suspect the first Christians of having been overly naive and in the context of the Church of that time with so many personal contacts among the communities, it is hard to see how a forger could have succeeded in having his own work taken to be a letter of Paul.

This being the case, the letter fills a small gap in revelation as a whole. It serves to invite us not to let ourselves be impressed by rumors of revelations, tragedies and the end of the world as it has happened throughout history.



## SECOND LETTER TO THE **THESSALONIANS**

**1** <sup>1</sup>From Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God, our Father, and in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

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

<sup>3</sup>Brothers and sisters, we should give thanks to God at all times for you. It is fitting to do so, for your faith is growing and your love for one another increasing. <sup>4</sup>We take pride in you among the churches of God because of your endurance, and your faith in the midst of persecution and sufferings. <sup>5</sup>In this, the just judgment of God may be seen; for you must show yourselves worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are now suffering.

### **The judgment and the coming of Christ**

<sup>6</sup>Indeed, it is just that God repays with affliction those who persecute you, <sup>7</sup>but to you who suffer, he will grant rest with us, when the Lord Jesus will be shown in his glory, coming from heaven and surrounded by his court of angels. <sup>8</sup>*Then, with flaming fire, will be punished those who do not recognize God, and do not obey the gospel of Jesus, our Lord.*

<sup>9</sup>They will be sent to eternal damnation, far away from the face of the Lord and his mighty glory. <sup>10</sup>On that day, the Lord will be glorified in the midst of his saints, and reveal his wonders through those who believe in him, that is, through you who have received our testimony.

<sup>11</sup>This is why we constantly pray for you; may our God make you worthy of his calling. May he, by his power, fulfill your good purposes, and your work prompted by faith. <sup>12</sup>In that way, the name of Jesus, our Lord, will be glorified through you, and you through him, according to the loving plan of God and of Christ Jesus, the Lord.

**2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-12**

**Read:** Paul is grateful for this community who despite suffering persecution remains faithful. He prays the God strengthen them.

**Reflect:** Enduring suffering and persecutions on behalf of faith in Jesus is not a faraway reality today. Are you aware of the persecutions the Church is suffering today? Have you read or listened to news about it? How do you deal with the hardships of being faithful to Christ?

**Pray:** Pray for all the members of the Church who are persecuted because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Pray for the strength to be present to people in their suffering and not ignore them.

**Act:** Be generous with the missionary activity of the Church. Demonstrate your concern when people around you are suffering.

**2**<sup>1</sup> Brothers and sisters, let us speak about the coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord, and our gathering to meet him. <sup>2</sup>Do not be easily unsettled. Do not be alarmed by what a prophet says, or by any report, or by some letter said to be ours saying the day of the Lord is at hand.

<sup>3</sup>Do not let yourselves be deceived in any way. Apostasy must come first when the man of sin will appear, <sup>4</sup>that instrument of evil, who opposes and defiles whatever is considered divine and holy, even to the point of sitting in the temple of God and claiming to be God.

<sup>5</sup>Do you not remember I spoke of it when I was still with you? <sup>6</sup>But you also know what prevents him from appearing until his due time. <sup>7</sup>The mystery of sin is already at work, but the one who restrains it, at present, has to be taken away. <sup>8</sup>Then, the wicked one will appear, whom the Lord is to sweep away with the breath of his mouth and destroy in the splendor of his coming. <sup>9</sup>This lawless one will appear with the power of Satan, performing miracles and wonderful signs at the service of deception. <sup>10</sup>All the deceptions of evil will then be used for the ruin of those who refused to love the truth and be saved. <sup>11</sup>This is why God will send them the power of delusion, that they may believe what is false. <sup>12</sup>So all those who chose wickedness, instead of believing the truth, will be condemned.

**Persevere in faith**

<sup>13</sup>But we have to give thanks for you at all times, dear brothers and

sisters in the Lord. For God chose you from the beginning to be saved through true faith and to be made holy by the Spirit. <sup>14</sup>To this end, he called you through the gospel we preach, for he willed you to share the glory of Christ Jesus, our Lord.

<sup>15</sup>Because of that, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the traditions that we taught you by word or by letter. <sup>16</sup>May Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has loved us, and God our Father, who, in his mercy, gives us everlasting comfort and true hope, strengthen you. <sup>17</sup>May he encourage your hearts and make you steadfast in every good work and word.

**3**<sup>1</sup>Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, as it was with you. <sup>2</sup>May God guard us from wicked and evil people since not everyone has faith. <sup>3</sup>The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and keep you safe from the evil one. <sup>4</sup>Besides, we have, in the Lord, this confidence that you are doing, and will continue to do what we order you. <sup>5</sup>May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

## 2 THESSALONIANS 2:1—3:5

**Read:** Paul admonishes the Thessalonian community not to be intimidated by the fatalistic messages about the definitive coming of the Lord. He urges the Thessalonians to remain steadfast in the Good News that he preached them.

**Reflect:** Do you often listen to fatalistic news about the end of the world? What do you feel? Does the coming of the Lord bring joy or fear to you? What are your greatest worries?

**Pray:** Pray for those who live without hope or are afraid about the future. Ask the Lord for strength for you and your people so that fear and dejection will not be an obstacle to stand up for the Gospel and you may do good at all moments.

**Act:** Talk with your family and with your community about the final hope we Christians have: the joyful and definitive encounter with the Lord, and the need to be prepared for that.

### Let everyone work

<sup>6</sup>We command you, beloved, to stay away from believers who are living in idleness, contrary to the traditions we passed on to you. <sup>7</sup>You

know how you ought to follow our example: we worked while we were with you. <sup>8</sup>Day and night we labored and toiled so as not to be a burden to any of you. <sup>9</sup>We had the right to act otherwise, but we wanted to give you an example.

<sup>10</sup>Besides, while we were with you, we said clearly: If anyone is not willing to work, neither should that one eat. <sup>11</sup>However, we heard that some among you live in idleness—busybodies, doing no work. <sup>12</sup>In the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, we command these people to work and earn their own living. <sup>13</sup>And you, brothers and sisters, do not weary in doing what is right.

<sup>14</sup>If someone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take note and do not have anything to do with him, so that he may be ashamed.

<sup>15</sup>However, do not treat him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

<sup>16</sup>May the Lord of peace give you his peace at all times and in every way. May the Lord be with you all.

<sup>17</sup>I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is my signature in all my letters. This is how I write.

<sup>18</sup>May the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord be with you.

## 2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-18

**Read:** Paul advises the members of the community to be diligent and not be dependent on others. Thus, he said, “You know, how you ought to follow our example: we worked while we were with you. Day and night we labored and toiled so as not to be a burden to any of you.” He also reminds them to always do what is right.

**Reflect:** What does the following text say to you: “If anyone is not willing to work, neither should that one eat.” Can a Christian live at the expense of others? Is it easy to always do what is right? What are the challenges that you find?

**Pray:** Ask for peace and collaboration among the members of your community that they may always enjoy a decent work and always do what is right.

**Act:** Share with your people the importance for a Christian to work diligently. Do your assignments the best possible way, as a thanksgiving offering to God for the gift of work.

BLANK PAGE 560