Here 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 between 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.
From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to the saints in Philippi, with their bishops and deacons;

to you all in Christ Jesus:

May grace and peace be yours from God, our Father, and Christ Jesus the Lord.

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

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.

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

Christ is my life

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has served to advance the gospel. Actually the whole praetorian guard, and even those outside the palace, know that I am in chains for Christ. And what is more, my condition, as prisoner, has encouraged most of our brothers, who are now emboldened, to proclaim the word of God more openly and without fear.

Some, it is true, are moved by envy and rivalry, but others preach Christ with a good intention. These

• 1.1 With their bishops and deacons. In Acts we saw how the apostles used to establish a community, a church, in every city where they proclaimed the Gospel. They did not leave without having established a council of leaders, called presbyters, or elders, according to Jewish custom. After a few years bishops, or supervisors, stood out: they may have been the leading members of the council of presbyters. They were not then like today's bishops.

As to the deacons, they were in charge of various services in the community. And may have done missionary work in areas that did not yet have a community.

God began such a good work in you, I am certain that he will complete it in the day of Christ Jesus (v. 6). The end for which they long is always the manifestation (2 Thes 1:7), or the visit, or the Day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 1:8). No work is done without the expectation of the day when there will be all that one dreamed about. There is no Christian life where someone is content with looking forward to his retirement or feels fulfilled because he has a country house or because the family is growing up without a problem. Let us stop saying these first Christians still had the “illusion” of an early return of Christ. They wanted to meet him personally and be transfigured by him. That is an illusion only for those who enclose themselves in oases of peace within a world in crisis.

Knowledge and discernment... (v. 9). A good heart and generosity are not everything in Christian life. We are not saved, we do not reach our true stature, we are not remade as God would like us to be, unless clarity has guided generosity. It is the same for world salvation. God calls us to discover new ways. We need to reflect, to be attentive, what we could call “revision of life,” in order to discover what is positive and negative in our daily life, work relationships, social duties, leisure. This reflection, however, is not sufficient: among God’s gifts, there is spiritual knowledge that gives us a fresh vision of the order of values and of the will of God.

• 12. Paul is not only persecuted by the Jews: even in the Church “false brothers,” delighted he is in prison, see in this situation the possibility of increasing their own importance. The problem is one for all times: the great names of the apostolate have spent half of their energy in limiting the harm caused by rivals or by powerful groups in the Church. Paul, however, is gifted with wisdom: he sees that even if many do for personal interest what they believe they are doing for God, he knows how to turn it to account.
latter are moved by love and realize that I am here to defend the gospel. 17 The others announce Christ to challenge me. They do not act with a pure intention but think they are making my prison more unbearable. 18 But, in any case, whether they are sincere or showing off, Christ is proclaimed and, because of this, I rejoice and have no regrets.

19 I know that all this will be a grace for me, because of your prayers, and the help given by the Spirit of Christ. 20 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.

21 For to me, living is for Christ, and dying is even better. 22 But if I am to go on living, I shall be able to enjoy fruitful labor. Which shall I choose? 23 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, 24 but it is necessary for you that I remain in this life. 25 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. 26 I will surely come to you again, and give you more reason for being proud of belonging to Christ Jesus.

Stand firm in faith

• 27 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. 28 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. 29 For, through Christ, you have been granted, not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for him. 30 And you now share the same struggle that you saw I had, and that I continue to have, as you know.

Imitate the humility of Jesus

2 • 1 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, 2 make me very happy: have one love, one spirit, one feeling, do nothing through rivalry or vain conceit. On the contrary, let each of you gently
consider the others, as more important than yourselves. 4 Do not seek your own interest, but, rather, that of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ had:

6 Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, taking on the nature of a servant, made in human likeness, 8 and, in his appearance, found, as a man, 9 He humbled himself by being obedient, to death, death on the cross.

10 That is why God exalted him and gave him the name which outshines all names, 11 so that, at the name of Jesus all knees should bend in heaven, on earth and among the dead, 12 and all tongues proclaim, that Christ Jesus is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

• 12 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.” 13 It is God who makes you, not only wish but also, carry out what pleases him. 14 Do everything without grumbling, 15 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, 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. 17 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; 18 and, you, likewise should rejoice and share my joy.

Paul’s messengers

• 19 The Lord Jesus lets me hope that I may soon send you Timothy,
and have news of you. With this, I will feel encouraged. For I have no one so concerned for you as he is. Most follow their own interest, not those of Christ Jesus. 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. Because of that, I hope to send him to you as soon as I see how things work out for me. Nevertheless, the Lord lets me think that I, myself, shall be coming soon.

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. In fact, he missed you very much and was still more worried, because you had heard of his sickness. He was, indeed, sick, and almost died, but God took pity on him, and on me, sparing me greater sorrow. 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. Receive him, then, with joy, as is fitting in the Lord. Consider highly persons like him, who almost died for the work of Christ; he risked his life to serve me, on your behalf, when you could not help me.

**Do not turn back to the Jewish law**

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. Beware of the dogs, beware of the bad workers; beware of the circumcised. We are the true circumcised people, since we serve according to the Spirit of God, and our confidence is in Christ Jesus, rather than in our merits.

• 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

up again in 3:1. Paul announces two visits to the Christians of Philippi.

Timothy is Paul’s assistant; he is entrusted with several missions to the communities. It seems that Timothy did not have much authority and could be easily humiliated by those who disliked Paul’s direction.

As to Epaphroditus, he was a Christian from Philippi who had left his family, spent his money and faced risks in order to go and visit Paul. The community of believers must pay attention to its most committed members, who have little means, in order to assist them. The Church sometimes presents as examples, militants from the working class or peasants who were quite forgotten by their brothers and sisters in the faith during their lives.

• 3.1 The discourse of Paul seems to be interrupted here. Paul begins a violent argument against ill-converted Jews who keep repeating that one must first be faithful to the laws and customs of the Old Testament in order to be a good Christian.

**Beware of the dogs...!** (v. 2) Paul applies to the Jews, proud of being the chosen people, the very insults that they reserved for non-Jews. Jews were sealed by the circumcision, but they mocked people of other religions who incised their skin (1 K 18:28).

Through what Paul says concerning his faithfulness to Judaism, we know something of his past. He was born in Tarsus to a Jewish family who had left their country and had settled there, in “Greek” territory, where they devoted themselves to business. His parents were wealthy and well thought of since they had the dignity and the rights of Roman citizens (see Acts 22:28). Along with Greek culture, Paul received religious education from Scripture and the Jewish people. He saw firsthand the pagan feasts and sacrifices, but was proud of belonging to God’s people, of being circumcised and instructed in God’s promises to his race. His parents sent him to Jerusalem to study Scripture and the law with the great masters of his time (see Acts 22:3).

He was a model of strict Pharisee. He did not meet Christ but did meet the early Christians. Because he was faithful to the religion of his ancestors, he believed it was necessary to persecute, imprison and even kill those preaching a new doctrine and deceiving (so he thought) the people, since they proclaimed a false, defeated and crucified Messiah.

At times, Paul must have had doubts (Acts 26:14), and increasingly so, when he felt duty bound to increase repression. The Pharisees were against the death penalty. To hesitate or go backwards was to recognize that God had taken another road than the one where he him-
much more am I! 5 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, and such was my zeal for the law that I persecuted the Church. As for being righteous according to the law, I was blameless.

6 But once I found Christ, all those things that I might have considered as profit, I reckoned as loss. 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. 7 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.

8 May I know him, and experience the power of his resurrection, and share in his sufferings, and become like him, in his death, and attain, through this, God willing, the resurrection from the dead!

9 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. 10 For, myself had been the defender of God’s cause. Worse still: with Jesus, never more would he be the just man but rather the pardoned sinner. When Jesus forcefully entered into Paul’s life, it was a matter of losing all and Paul from then on accepted to regard as garbage all that he had been proud of.

11 Forgetting what is behind me, I race forward, and run toward the goal, my eyes on the prize, to which God has called us from above, in Christ Jesus. 12 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. 13 Meanwhile, let us go forward, from the point we have each attained.

14 Unite in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and look at those who walk in our way of life. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

15 For us, our citizenship is in heaven, from where we await the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord. 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 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for,
you, my glory and crown, be steadfast in the Lord. 2 I beg Evodia and Syntyche to agree with each other, in the Lord. 3 And you, Sycygus, 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.

4 Rejoice in the Lord, always! I say it again: rejoice, and may everyone experience your gentle and understanding heart. The Lord is near: do not be anxious about anything. In everything, resort to prayer and supplication, together, with thanksgiving, and bring your requests before God. 5 Then, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

8 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. 9 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

• 10 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. 11 I do not say this because of being in want; I have learned to manage with what I have. 12 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. 13 I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

14 However, you did right in sharing my trials. 15 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, and when I was in Thessalonica, twice you sent me what I needed.

17 It is not your gift that I value, but rather, the interest increasing in your own account. 18 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.” 19 God, himself, will provide you with everything you need, according to his riches, and show you his generosity in Christ Jesus. 20 Glory to God, our Father, for ever and ever: Amen.

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