

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

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

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

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

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

Rom 1:1
Gal 1:1
Acts 5:11
Acts 2:21
Rom 10:13

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

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

Lk 17:30
Phil 3:20
1P 1:7

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

faithful God will not fail you after calling you to this fellowship with his Son, Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Rom 8:17
1Thes 5:24
Heb 10:23

Divisions among the faithful

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

Rom 12:16
2Cor 13:11
Phil 2:2

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

3:23
2Cor 10:7

¹⁴I thank God that I did not baptize any of you, except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so that no one can say that he was baptized in my name. ¹⁶Well, I have

Acts 18:8
Rom 16:23

• **1.1** *From Paul called to be an apostle... to God's church in Corinth... with those who everywhere call upon the name of our Lord Christ Jesus.* With these three expressions Paul defends his authority. He reminds the Corinthians, so easily entrenched in their rivalries, that they are part of a greater reality, the Universal Church of God.

Called to be holy. You have to become holy, but you already are. *Holy*, in the biblical sense, is the person or thing that belongs to God. The baptized have been consecrated to God and form part of the people who belong to God, *the assembly of the holy ones*, which is the Church.

God's call does not allow them to remain as they are. Their conscience readily adapted to the moral norms of their milieu, but now, God's call demands a renunciation of a certain vision of existence based on 'the natural.' They will have to be orientated, as best they can, towards an ideal of life found in the person of Christ.

In Christ. A single Greek preposition used by Paul is to be translated into English as *in* or *through* or *with*, according to the case. "In Christ" has many meanings:

- We are sons and daughters of God, made after the image of the only Son of God, and God loves us *in Christ*.
- God the Father saves us *through Christ*.
- The Father calls us to share *with Christ* his inheritance.
- We have become part of the body of Christ; we live *in Christ* and have received his Spirit.
- The word "Christian," used for the first time in Antioch (Acts 11:26) to denote the disciples of

Christ, was still not widely used; often in *Christ* means Christian. So "marry in Christ" signified "to marry in a Christian way."

See Paul's acts of thanksgiving in verses 4-9: what certitude of riches present in a community where all is far from perfect!

In his advice to the Corinthians, Paul shows us how to act when reviewing the activities of our parish or our apostolic group. Instead of being discouraged by the problems we face and accusing one another when something fails, the first thing to do is to remember what we already have in common.

These communities, in fact, like our own had to face their problems and their weakness. Each generation of Christians must learn to follow Jesus and "build Church," or better still "be Church."

He will keep you steadfast to the end (v. 8). The hope that maintains the "tone" of faith is the return of Christ. The first Christian generation expected to witness his glorious coming: he would judge the world and take his own with him (1 Thes 4:13).

• 10. The first sin of the Church is the division among believers. Several apostles (see 12:28) passed through Corinth. Certain members of the community profited by this to affirm their own identity by declaring allegiance to one leader rather than another: a way of satisfying vanity and the need of self-assertion.

Agree among yourselves and do away with divisions (v. 10): be a united family. This admonition is understood when the Church is a com-

also baptized the Stephanas family. Apart from these, I do not recall having baptized anyone else.

The folly of the cross

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

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

²²The Jews ask for miracles and the Greeks for a higher knowledge, ²³while we proclaim a crucified Messiah. For the Jews, what a great scandal! And for the Greeks, what nonsense! ²⁴But he is

Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God for those called by God among both Jews and Greeks.

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

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

2 • ¹When I came to reveal to you the mystery of God’s plan I did not count on eloquence or on a show of learning. ²I was determined not to know anything among you but Jesus,

munity sharing the same concerns. It is a little different when the church gathers together large numbers of people of different backgrounds who are perhaps opposed to one another in daily life. In this case the Christian community must be united, not by ignoring reality and never talking of inequalities, but by recognizing individual and collective faults in daily life. The Church can never be a reunion of passive or “heavenly” people.

I am for Peter (v. 12). Paul says “for Cephas” like in 3:22; this was the aramaic nickname Jesus gave him. *Apollos*: see Acts 18:24.

Christ did not send me to baptize (v. 17). When the Church is fully absorbed in its own problems, Paul reminds them of their mission: Is our first concern to preach the Gospel, or to dispute for the posts of guides and ministers of the community?

• 17. Even if these Christians in Corinth are not great “intellectuals,” as good Greeks that they are, they enjoy fine discourses and want to be seen as cultured persons. At this time throughout the Roman Empire people are in search of esoteric doctrines and some people in the Church see in faith the means of acceding to

a higher knowledge. So Paul will tell them that all Christian wisdom is contained in the cross.

That would be like getting rid of the cross of Christ (v. 17). The cross should be present in the message we preach and in the way we preach it.

Moreover in evangelization it will always cost us to work with poor resources in a world subject to media. We need to count on the grace of God because we are weak and without titles of prestige. It will cost us to remind our communities of the poverty of Jesus and to be criticized by those who are well off in the world.

See whom God has called (v. 26). The Church of Corinth is formed of ordinary people: this is their strength. Everybody has his place and his mission in the Church. Ordinary people and poor communities, often persecuted and calumniated, have a primary role in the evangelization of the world. God wants them to evangelize the rich and at times, even the hierarchy.

• 2.1 *I myself came weak, fearful and trembling.* Paul indeed must have felt weak when for the first time he was bringing the Gospel to a brilliant Greek city well used to slavery and immorality. We experience the same feelings towards the evangelization of the mod-

Rom
1:16
2Cor
2:16

Mt
12:38
16:1
Jn
2:18
4:48
6:30

Col
2:3

Jer
9:23
2Cor
10:17
Gal
6:4

14:25 the Messiah, and a crucified Messiah. ³I
 1Thes myself came weak, fearful and trem-
 1:5 bling; ⁴my words and preaching were
 not brilliant or clever to win listeners. ⁵It
 was, rather, a demonstration of spirit
 and power, so that your faith might be a
 matter, not of human wisdom, but of
 God's power.

The Spirit teaches us wisdom

Col • ⁶In fact, we do speak of wisdom to
 1:28 the mature in faith, although it is not a
 Heb wisdom of this world or of its rulers,
 5:14 who are doomed to perish. ⁷We teach
 Rom the mystery and secret plan of divine
 16:25 wisdom, which God destined from the
 Eph beginning to bring us to Glory.
 1:9
 Col
 1:26

⁸No ruler of this world ever knew
 this; otherwise they would not have
 Is crucified the Lord of Glory. ⁹But as
 64:3 Scripture says: *Eye has not seen, ear
 has not heard, nor has it dawned on the
 mind what God has prepared for those
 who love him.* ¹⁰God has revealed it to
 us, through his Spirit, because the

3:1
 12:10
 1Thes
 5:19

Spirit probes everything, even the
 depth of God.

¹¹Who but his own spirit knows the
 secrets of a person? Similarly, no one
 Is but the Spirit of God knows the secrets
 40:13 of God. ¹²We have not received the
 spirit of the world, but the Spirit who
 comes from God and, through him, we
 understand what God in his goodness
 has given us.

¹³So we speak of this, not in terms
 inspired by human wisdom, but in a
 language taught by the Spirit, explain-
 ing a spiritual wisdom to spiritual per-
 sons. ¹⁴The one who remains on the
 psychological level does not under-
 stand the things of the Spirit. They are
 foolishness for him and he does not
 understand because they require a
 spiritual experience. ¹⁵On the other
 hand, the spiritual person judges ev-
 erything but no one judges him. ¹⁶*Who
 has known the mind of God so as to
 teach him?* But we have the mind of
 Christ.

3:1
 12:10
 1Thes
 5:19

ern world; preparation is important but what is
 it to prepare ourselves? Paul invites us to accept
 the mystery of the cross and to find there the
 strength of the Spirit.

It was a demonstration of Spirit and power
 (v. 5). The power of Spirit, the power of prayer,
 the power of suffering. The Spirit is poured out
 after Jesus has suffered and died. With him, we
 can expect everything. Healings and miracles
 are worthless (and the devil takes advantage of
 them) unless they affirm faith in Jesus crucified,
 acting through the humble, and present in the
 poor.

• 6. Paul never intended to be considered a
 wise or eminent speaker by his audience. Yet he
speaks of wisdom to the mature in faith (v. 6).
 The text says in more precise terms: "to the
 perfect ones." At that time, several religions
 were calling "perfect" any believer who had
 received some secret information not given to all
 the members of the sect. In the Church also
 some considered themselves as belonging to a
 higher class of believers because of gifts of the
 Spirit they had received, especially if they were
 able to speak endlessly on matters of faith.

Paul opposes them with his own gifts as
 prophet and apostle. He is capable of teaching
 these essential truths which need few words but
 which can only be presented by those who have
 experienced the living God. What are these
 secrets? Firstly, what God is for us and what God
 wishes to give us (vv. 7 and 12).

Christian faith proposes that which no human
 doctrine, no religion could have given us. At
 times, comparing ourselves with those who fol-
 low a spiritual way outside Christianity, it would
 seem that we are saying the same thing with
 different words. This is partly true regarding our
 attitudes and our choices in life, but we should
 not be afraid to confess the riches God has given
 us in Christ: his Spirit gives us what no one has
 ever penetrated.

Such knowledge is not intellectual, it is a gift of
 the Spirit that sows and develops in us the one
 and only truth. It is very difficult to give an
 explanation of a truly spiritual experience. We
 can only speak of wisdom to those who have
 attained a certain spiritual level. That is why Paul
 tells the Corinthians that most of them are
 unable to criticize him.

*The one who remains on the psychological
 level* (v. 14). (Paul says precisely: "the psychi-
 c man") does not reach the truth of Christ. How-
 ever the spiritual person, not necessarily the
 intellectual person, knows by gift of God the
 things of God.

*The spiritual person judges everything and
 no one judges him.* He who sees has no way of
 convincing the blind person that there are col-
 ors. He sees them, however, and knows that if
 the blind person does not see them, it is not
 because the thing is doubtful, but because the
 blind person has neither eyes nor criteria for
 that. It is the same with the spiritual person and
 the carnal one.

There are many workers, the building is one

3 • ¹I could not, friends, speak to you as spiritual persons but as fleshly people, for you are still infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk and not solid food, for you were not ready for it and up to now you cannot receive it ³for you are still of the flesh. As long as there is jealousy and strife, what can I say but that you are at the level of the flesh and behave like ordinary people.

^{1:12} ⁴While one says: "I follow Paul," and the other: "I follow Apollos," what are you but people still at a human level?

⁵For what is Apollos? What is Paul? They are ministers and through them you believed, as it was given by the Lord to each of them. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered the plant, but God made it grow. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who makes the plant grow.

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

^{Eph 2:20} ^{1P 2:5} ¹⁰I, as a good architect, according to the capacity given to me, I laid the foundation, and another is to build

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

Is
1:25
Mal
3:2
Mt
3:12

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

6:19
2Cor
6:16

Do not divide the Church

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

1:20
4:10

Job
5:13

• **3.1** *As a good architect I laid the foundation* (v. 10). Paul is founder of churches and others come after him, apostles, prophets or teachers, to preach and encourage the people. Paul is not jealous, but it could be that some of them seek their own prestige, forgetting that the Church belongs only to God. It could also be that the believers compare one apostle with another, and do this readily inasmuch as they are ignorant of what apostolic work really is.

Fire will test the work of everyone (v. 13). This image suggests many things. To Paul as well as to the readers the day of God's judgment seemed to be imminent and everyone thought that God would purify and cleanse the world by fire. So Paul concludes that whatever we did not do according to the will of God and with the means he wanted will be destroyed by fire. Remember what happened with many apostolic projects that were but a smoke screen (how many tons of documents fit for the fire!). To serve Christ without really pure intentions, will not merit hell of course, but a personal purification

will be necessary. This text supports the belief in Purgatory, that is, a process of purification at the time of death or after death for all whose transformation by the Spirit of God was only half-concluded (see commentary on Mt 5: 21).

• **16.** *Do you not know that you are God's temple* (v. 16)? Christ is the new Temple that takes the place of the temple of the Jews (Jn 2:19 and Mk 15: 38). The Temple of God is Christ because in him abides all the divine Mystery. The Temple of God is likewise the Church because in her the Holy Spirit is working. The Temple of God is also each home and each believer (see 6:19) because the Spirit lives in each one of them.

• **18.** *Everything is yours and you belong to Christ* (v. 23). We have here a decisive word on Christian freedom.

On the other hand, remember what non-believing philosophers have said: People created God out of their own misery. Whatever was

Ps 94:11 *wisdom.* ²⁰It also says: *The Lord knows the reasoning of the wise, that it is useless.*

1:12 ²¹Because of this, let no one become an admirer of humans, for everything belongs to you, ²²Paul, Apollos, Cephas – life, death, the present and the future. Everything is yours, ²³and you, you belong to Christ, and Christ is of God.

2Cor 5:19
Titus 1:17
Eph 3:2
2:14
Jn 5:34
Mt 6:22
4 ¹Let everyone then see us as the servants of Christ and stewards of the secret works of God. ²Being stewards, faithfulness shall be demanded of us; ³but I do not mind if you or any human court judges me. I do not even judge myself; ⁴my conscience indeed does not accuse me of anything, but that is not enough for me to be set right with God: the Lord is the one who judges me.

Rom 2:16
2:29
⁵Therefore, do not judge before the time, until the coming of the Lord. He will bring to light whatever was hidden in darkness and will disclose the secret intentions of the hearts. Then each one will receive praise from God.

1:12
3:5
⁶Brothers and sisters, you forced me to apply these comparisons to Apollos and to myself. Learn by this example not to believe yourselves superior by siding with one against the other. ⁷How then are you more than the others? What have you that you have not received? And if you received it, why are you proud, as if you did not receive it?

Comforted Christians and harassed apostles

Rev 3:17 • ⁸So, then, you are already rich and

satisfied, and feel like kings without us! I wish you really were kings, so that we might enjoy the kingship with you!

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

¹⁰We are fools for Christ, while you show forth the wisdom of Christ. We are weak, you are strong. You are honored, while we are despised. ¹¹Until now we hunger and thirst, we are poorly clothed and badly treated, while moving from place to place. ¹²We labor, working with our hands. People insult us and we bless them, they persecute us and we endure everything; ¹³they speak evil against us, and ours are works of peace. We have become like the scum of the earth, like the garbage of humankind until now.

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

¹⁸Some of you thought that I could not visit you and became very arrogant. ¹⁹But I will visit you soon, the Lord willing, and I will see, not what those arrogant people say, but what

lacking in order for them to feel great and happy, they attributed to a superior being, who had everything. In worshiping him, they felt identified with him and forgot their own misery. This theory is not completely false: in fact people make idols for themselves, be they singers, athletes or politicians; and they feel happy when their idols have and do everything they themselves cannot do or have. They die for causes not their own and they feel proud of people and institutions that exploit them. A Christian is wary

of authority becoming idols: he exists and thinks for himself. Even in the Church he is face to face with God with no other intermediary but Christ, and he does not indulge in the cult of personalities.

• **4.8** The Corinthians feel rich in their faith, rich in their spiritual gifts. They have made fair progress in the road of knowledge, and as people expert in the matter, they charitably look down on Paul, the poor Jewish preacher.

15:31
Rom 8:36
2Cor 4:11
Eph 3:10
Heb 10:33

2Cor 4:8
6:4
11:23

Mt 5:44
Rom 12:14

11:1
Phil 2:5
1Thes 3:6

2Cor 13:3
1Thes 1:5
2Cor 10:2
Gal 6:1
they can do. ²⁰ Because the kingdom of God is not a matter of words, but of power. ²¹ What do you prefer, for me to come with a stick or with love and gentleness?

Expel the immoral brother!

Lev 18:8
Col 2:5
Mt 18:18
Rev 2:22
5 • ¹ You have become news with a case of immorality, and such a case that is not even found among pagans. Yes, one of you has taken as wife his own stepmother. ² And you feel proud! Should you not be in mourning instead and expel the one who did such a thing. ³ For my part, although I am physically absent, my spirit is with you and, as if present, I have already passed sentence on the man who committed such a sin. ⁴ Let us meet together, you and my spirit, and in the name of our Lord Jesus and with his power, ⁵ you shall deliver him to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit be saved in the day of Judgment.

Mt 16:6
6 This is not the time to praise yourselves. Do you not know that a little yeast makes the whole mass of dough rise? ⁷ Throw out, then, the old yeast and be new dough. If Christ became our

Passover, you should be unleavened bread. ⁸ Let us celebrate, therefore, the Passover, no longer with old yeast, which is sin and perversity; let us have unleavened bread, that is purity and sincerity.

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

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

Do not bring another Christian to court

6 • ¹ When you have a complaint against a brother, how dare you bring it before pagan judges instead of bringing it before God's people? ² Do

The Apostle knows that his own culture and strong personality would have given him a bright future. He sees at the same time the narrow-mindedness of his adversaries but allows them to make fun of him. They think he is a fool, and in a way he is. However, even if taken for a fool he brought them to Christ.

- **5.1** Paul knows that such a sinner cannot be brought to repentance unless he experiences the bitterness of his treachery. So the community must ask that he suffer in health and belongings (Paul says "delivered to Satan for the ruin of the flesh:" see in Job 1:12 and 2:6 the meaning of *delivered to Satan*). This excommunication is not merely a human gesture. What the Church binds on earth is bound in heaven (Mt 18:18). God is committed to send trials that may be at the same time a warning to the Church and a way of repentance for the sinner.

You should be unleavened bread (v. 7). The believers have been spiritually raised with Christ. As the Jews used unleavened bread to celebrate the Passover, in the same way the Christians have to be, in a figurative sense unleavened bread, that is, they must lead a sinless life before God, and so worthily celebrate their Passover,

which is the Resurrection of Christ. Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to yeast that leavens the whole mass. Here Paul uses the same comparison to show how evil spreads everywhere.

Those who do not belong to the Church (Paul says: *those of this world*) (v. 10). Believers are not afraid of living among sinners, because they themselves are, first, sinners among others (1 Jn 1:8-9) and have as mission to make known the mercy of Christ who ate with sinners. Yet they are not willing to live in a Church community with those who are hardened in sin and refuse to put right a public scandal.

Why should I judge outsiders? (v. 12). Jesus taught us the way to follow, but we cannot demand of unbelievers that they understand and accept our moral standards regarding reconciliation, sex, abortion, as long as their conscience is unable to recognize the criteria of the Gospel. The authorities of the Church are not commissioned to condemn them, but to be witnesses to the light.

- **6.1** "We carry treasures from God in vessels of clay" (2 Cor 4:7). How far is our daily life from what we pretend it is: children of God

Acts 19:22
1Thes 3:6

6:9
Mk 7:20
Rom 13:3
Gal 5:19
1Tim 1:9
Rev 21:8

you not know that you shall one day judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you incapable of judging such simple problems?

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

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

5:11 Gal 5:19
Make no mistake about it: those who lead sexually immoral lives, or worship idols, or who are adulterers, perverts, sodomites, ¹⁰or thieves, exploiters, drunkards, gossips or embezzlers will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹Some of you were like that, but you have been cleansed and consecrated to God and have been set right with God by the Name of the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of our God.

Sexual immorality

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

¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? And you would make that part of his body become a part of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶But you well know that when you join yourselves to a prostitute, you become one with her. For Scripture says: *The two will become one flesh.* ¹⁷On the contrary, anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

¹⁸Avoid unlawful sex entirely. Any

reborn in the Spirit! What do the members of our own family think about this! What do our near neighbors think of us!

Paul points out the contradiction between the contempt of believers for the false “justice” of the world, and the fact of lawsuits among them. What should they do? Settle their differences in the way indicated by the Gospel (Mt 18:15), in so far as there is a real community. How beautiful it would be to follow the letter of the Gospel (Mt 5:40)!

• 12. *Everything is lawful to me, but not everything is to my profit.* People without conscience quoted the first part of this sentence to justify their immoral behavior.

Food is for the stomach... the body is for the Lord (v. 13). Paul contrasts what is purely biological in our body with what makes up our whole person. To eat and drink are requirements of the *stomach* (modern language: body). In sexual union the *body* is given (modern language: person). This is why the believer who belongs to Christ cannot give himself to a prostitute.

Paul finds himself with the same problem that had led him to intervene in 1 Thes 4. For the Jews, all the criteria for morality were in the

commandments of the Law. It was not usually questioned to what degree these commandments were the expression of an eternal order or depended on the beliefs and the culture of past time. Whatever the Law condemned – interpreted by the religious community – was a sin. Yet the Greeks and the pagans were ignorant of this law. Paul recalls the commandments on sexual matters (5:11 and 6:10; Eph 5:3), as Jesus had done (Mk 7:21), but he is careful not to make it the only criterion of what is good and bad. For him what obliges Christians to control and even strongly curb the practice of sexuality is their life in Christ. They want to respond to a call from God rather than satisfy the demands of nature.

Paul’s way of responding is of particular interest for us today in the universal moral crisis. For centuries and through necessity, sexuality was seen above all as the means of procreation; and from there began the search for the natural law ordering sex, pleasure and procreation. Today, union is no longer, primarily, for procreation even if procreation is desired. The cultural evolution and feminine promotion have made of sexual union, for an ever-increasing number of couples, the occasion of an exceptionally deep human exchange.

Col
2:22

Rom
8:11
2Cor
4:14

Rom
6:12

Gen
2:24

Jn
6:63

¹Thes 4:3 other sin a person commits is outside the body but those who commit sexual immorality sin against their own body.

^{3:17} ²Cor 6:16 ^{7:23} ¹P 1:18 ¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, given by God? You belong no longer to yourselves. ²⁰Remember at what price you have been bought and make your body serve the glory of God.

Marriage and abstinence

^{Gen} 2:18 **7** ¹Now I will answer the questions in your letter. It is good for a man not to touch a woman. ²Yet to avoid immorality, every man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³Let the husband fulfill his duty of husband and likewise the wife. ^{Rom} 14:7 ⁴The wife is not the owner of her own

body: the husband is. Similarly, the husband is not the owner of his own body: the wife is.

⁵Do not refuse each other, except by mutual consent and only for a time in order to dedicate yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, lest you fall into Satan's trap by lack of self-control. ⁶I approve of this abstention, but I do not order it. ⁷I would like everyone to be like me, but each has from God a particular gift, some in one way, others differently. ^{Mt} 19:11

⁸To the unmarried and the widows I say that it would be good for them to remain as I am, ⁹but if they cannot control themselves, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. ¹Tim 5:14

At the same time, personal liberation – and the liberation of women who carry all the weight of maternity – has thrown doubt on former moral laws, seen as belonging to a certain time and culture. Almost all countries that are considered “developed” have had to take into account premarital sex, homosexuality, abortion on the mother's decision, the choice of maternity without marriage. Christians get in touch with these questions with religious references their contemporaries lack. Yet if they don't have other motivation than a natural law valid for all, limiting sexuality to procreation and only within marriage, they will probably get bogged down in endless discussions that are scarcely convincing.

So they must do what Paul did. Without forgetting the laws in the Old Testament, recognized by the apostles and the tradition of the Church up to our day, it must be said that the sexual conduct of a Christian obeys, first of all, a logic of faith in Jesus Christ. It is less a matter of defining what is “good” or “evil” than showing where the practice and the experience of love and sexuality should lead us. To proclaim moral principles of sexuality, without first highlighting the eminent dignity of our humanity created in the likeness of God, and then consecrated to Christ by baptism and conversion, is wanting to gather the fruits without having planted the tree.

• **7.1** In this chapter Paul begins to answer some of the questions put to him by the Corinthians in writing. The first are about marriage and chastity.

Christian life encouraged the esteem for chastity. That esteem could be inspired as well by other non-Christian motives. Many doctrines in the Greek world considered evil and unclean whatever came from the body; and so, for some Christians, perfection meant living like angels, condemning among other things, marriage.

Paul does not teach everything on marriage, but only clarifies the relation between chastity and marriage. Spouses belong to Christ with all their being, consecrated by baptism. Therefore they cannot become slaves to the demands of their bodies. Love rather than sex guides them.

But the appeal of sex is there (v. 2). Paul says precisely: *Because of “porneia” let each one take...* This “porneia” has many meanings: prostitution, illegitimate unions, and many other things that go along with the word “porno.” Paul is probably referring to sexual attraction, a force that rebels against our moral projects (similar to the revolt of the flesh in Rom 7:21). He does not say a person should marry “in order to” avoid misconduct but “because” sex is a reality strong enough to impose its demands.

Many are shocked by Paul not speaking of the positive aspect of sexuality at the service of love, but we must not forget that twenty centuries are between him and us. In Paul's time the Greeks considered the sharing of themselves to be an ideal: a spouse for children, a friend for love, and prostitutes for pleasure. Here, on the contrary, Paul presents sexual life as a commitment of the whole human person (6:13) and not the “work of the flesh”: something that is very important.

Christianity was to reveal the dignity of marriage and conjugal love; but only in the twelfth century in Christian countries would there be an awareness of the great beauty of a couple's love. What is here revolutionary is the reminder of the equality of rights of husband and wife according to the teaching of Jesus (Mk 10:1-12).

Lest you fall into Satan's trap (v. 5). We should recall these words when speaking about Christian birth control. Paul says that, except in special cases where a special grace is given, it is not good for husband and wife to abstain from intimate relations for a long time.

Marriage and divorce

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

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

¹⁵Now, if the unbelieving husband or wife wants to separate, let them do so. In this case, the Christian partner is not

bound, for the Lord has called us to peace. ¹⁶Besides, are you sure, wife, that you could save your husband, and you, husband, that you could save your wife?

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

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

²²The slave called to believe in the Lord is a freed person belonging to the Lord just as whoever has been called while free, becomes a slave of Christ. ²³You have been bought at a very great

• 10. *I command married couples* (v. 10). We read after a while: *To the others I say* (v. 12), referring again to married persons. It is almost obvious that in v. 10 Paul addresses married couples recognized by the Church; and in v. 12, all those married before they were baptized, but whose partners do not yet belong to the Church.

If she separates... (v. 11). Paul stresses a teaching of Jesus (Mt 5:32 and 19:5). This fundamental law of marriage as a commitment lasting to death is a divine law: *not I but the Lord* (v. 10). See also Eph 5:22.

If the unbelieving... (v. 15). Paul makes an exception for those who at the time of their conversion and baptism were married. In this one case the new Christian, starting a new life, obtains freedom from the marriage ties if his or her partner does not want to accept his (or her) conversion. Even while praising the desire of the believer to convert his spouse, Paul's advice is that sometimes it would be better to separate, notwithstanding the possibility of a new marriage in the new faith. It is important to remember that Paul was living in a pagan world where separation and divorce were legal and constantly practiced.

Your children also would be apart from God (v. 14). Paul says precisely: "your children would be unclean", using this word with the meaning that Jesus gave it: children who do not yet share the privileges of God's people. Would it be right

to think that children of Christian parents are alien to God as long as they have not been baptized? Grace has already touched them through the tenderness, the care and the prayers of their parents. We must not use false arguments when we invite Christian parents, (and rightly so) not to delay the baptism of their children.

• 17. *Let each one continue living as he was* (v. 17). Paul responds to the thirst for improvement of social conditions that are always real. Free people and slaves lived side by side, often in the same houses; and it was not always a distinction between rich and poor. Paul simply wants to put in its right place ambitions that devour the lives of many people, causing them to forget all the rest. Paul puts interior freedom above recognized liberty and he sees possessing Christ as supreme riches.

Yet if you can gain your freedom, take the opportunity. There are conditions of work and of social life that prevent us from doing God's will and being truly free. However one quickly forgets that each social situation has its element of slavery. The quality of life is not to be confused with better-paid employment, especially if judged according to the criteria of the Gospel. In a world we call inhuman, our slavery largely depends on our whims and our ready response to advertising.

Mk 10:9

Gen 2:24

1Mac 1:15

Rom 2:25
Gal 5:6Eph 6:6
Phlm 16

6:20 price; do not become slaves of a human being.

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

Marriage and virginity

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

²⁶ I think this is good in these hard times in which we live. It is good for someone to remain as he is. ²⁷ If you are married, do not try to divorce your wife; if you are not married, do not marry.

7:16 Lk 12:51 14:26 ²⁸ He who marries does not sin, nor does the young girl sin who marries. Yet they will face disturbing experiences, and I would like to spare you.

Rom 13:11 Eph 5:16 ²⁹ I say this, brothers and sisters: time is running out, and those who are married must live as if not married; ³⁰ those who weep as if not weeping; those who are happy as if they were not happy; those buying something as if they had not bought it, and those en-

joying the present life as if they were not enjoying it. ³¹ For the order of this world is vanishing.

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

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

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

• ³⁶ If anyone realizes he will not be behaving correctly with his fiancée because of the ardor of his passion, and that things should take their due course, let him marry; he commits no sin. ³⁷ But if another, of firmer heart, thinks that he can control his passion and decides not

Jas
1:11
1Jn
2:15

Lk
14:20
Gal
5:1

Lk
2:36

We translate: *If you can gain your freedom, take the opportunity.* It could also be translated as: *Even if you could gain your freedom, take advantage of the present situation,* that is, instead of being concerned so much for the advantages of becoming free, live your life fully today.

• 25. A new question to which Paul must reply. In Corinth, a city with a bad reputation where thousands of prostitutes lived in the vicinity of the temple of Aphrodite (as was the custom with pagans) the new community was discovering the way of virginity.

Choosing chastity “for the kingdom of God” is not a way of gaining time and freedom for apostolic work: it is taking a direction that opens to the love of God with new possibilities. Paul defends this choice he himself made. If Christ, to whom we are consecrated by baptism, is a living person, present to us, if he is the Spouse (Mk 2:19), the choice is valid, even if for most people it looks as strange as voluntary poverty.

Paul’s response goes further than the question of the Corinthians when he adds: *time is running out.* He points to much more than a prompt return of Christ, familiar to the first Christians. The coming of Jesus has shortened

time in a figurative way: we can no longer settle down in the present world as we did before when we could see no further than the present. We are entirely turned towards what is to come. A Christian lives in the present, but all that matters most for him comes in the “after.” Let us not argue with Paul as if he were reasoning on the consequences of a certain coming of Jesus Christ: he is not theologizing but speaks like someone already possessed by Christ.

Paul then points out that all Christian commitments are likely to cause division for those who wish to live according to the logic of their baptism, seen as a total consecration to Christ. Married life or family life can present many obstacles to spiritual freedom and apostolic desires: see the words of Jesus in Mark 10:29.

• 36. *If anyone is not sure* (v. 36). This can also be interpreted as: “if anyone feels he cannot behave correctly with his young virgin.” In this case Paul would be referring to a spiritual trial that in fact took place in the primitive church. Some Christians shared their house with a girl who could have been their girl friend, both consecrating their virginity to the Lord. Paul, in this case, would invite them not to persevere in this commitment if they did not feel capable of keeping their virginity.

to marry so that his fiancée may remain a virgin, he does better. ³⁸ So then, he who marries does well, and he who does not marry does better.

^{Rom 7:2} ³⁹ The wife is bound as long as her husband lives. If he dies, she is free to be married to whomsoever she wishes, provided that she does so in the Christian way. ⁴⁰ However, she will be happier if, following my advice, she remains as she is, and I believe that I also have the Spirit of God.

Can we share in pagan customs?

8 ¹ Regarding meat from the offerings to idols, we know that all of us have knowledge but knowledge puffs up, while love builds. ² If anyone thinks that he has knowledge, he does not yet know as he should know, ³ but if someone loves (God), he has been known (by God).

^{13:12 Gal 4:9} ⁴ Can we, then, eat meat from offerings to the idols? We know that an idol is without existence and that there is no God but one. ⁵ People speak indeed of other gods in heaven and on earth and, in this sense, there are many gods and lords. ⁶ Yet for us, there is but one God,

• **8.1** We live in a pluralist society, where many do not share our faith and wonder sometimes if we should take part in their feasts or activities that are not in harmony with our faith. For example, how to deal with relatives or neighbors of another religion. What a married woman may do when her husband does not share her scruples. May a person belong to a group or party when many of its members are opposed to the Church? This is the problem that Paul deals with when answering about meat sacrificed to idols. The discussion begun here continues in paragraph 10:23–11:1.

There were many sacrifices of animals in the pagan temples. After the sacrifices, in a room of the temple a banquet was celebrated at which the meat of the victims was served. Christians were often invited to these banquets by their pagan friends. On other occasions, meat from these sacrifices was offered to them in the homes of their pagan friends. Even in the public market, most of the meat was from animals offered to idols.

Paul does not want the Christians to become a group of fanatics keeping themselves apart from society. Although it is true that offering sacrifice to idols is a sin, not for that reason is the

the Father, from whom everything comes, and to whom we go. And there is one Lord, Christ Jesus, through whom everything exists and through him we exist.

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

⁸ It is not food that brings us closer to God. If we eat, we gain nothing, and if we do not eat, we do not lose anything. ⁹ We are free, of course, but let not your freedom cause others, who are less prepared, to fall. ¹⁰ What if others with an unformed conscience see you, a person of knowledge, sitting at the table in the temple of idols? Will not their weak conscience, because of your example, move them to eat also?

¹¹ Then with your knowledge you would have caused your weak brother or sister to perish, the one for whom Christ died. ¹² When you disturb the weak conscience of your brother or sister and sin against them, you sin against Christ himself. ¹³ Therefore, if any food

meat unclean. False gods do not exist and have no power. Besides Jesus said that it is not what enters into a person that makes him unclean, but what comes out of his heart (Mk 7:15).

Knowledge puffs up, while love builds (v. 1). Christians with an informed conscience could perfectly well eat of that meat, knowing it was not sinful. However it was their duty to respect the opinion of others and so avoid scandalizing those unable to understand their reasons.

In 8:2 the words in brackets were most probably added later. Here, Paul contrasts the knowledge of God we can acquire and express by means of words and ideas, and another more authentic riches that is God's presence to the one he *knows* and treats in a special way.

In verses 8:10, 11 and 12, Paul speaks of those of *weak* or *unformed* conscience, meaning the believers who have not yet had sufficient religious instruction or who have been badly instructed. They think that something is sinful when in reality it is not; or they are weak and follow others when their conscience reproaches them for doing so.

What if others with an unformed conscience see you, a person of knowledge, sitting at the table in the temple of the idols (v. 10). This is more serious. Some in the community already

12:4
Mt
23:8
Eph
4:5

Rom
14

Mt
18:5

Rom
14:9

will bring my brother to sin, I shall never eat this food lest my brother or sister fall.

Renouncing one's own rights: the example of Paul

6:12
15:8
2Cor
3:3
9[•] ¹As for me, am I not free? I am an apostle and I have seen Jesus, the Lord, and you are my work in the Lord. ²Although I may not be an apostle for others, at least I am one for you. You are, in the Lord, evidence of my apostleship.

Mt
10:10
Lk
8:2
Acts
18:3
2Cor
11:7
1Thes
2:9
³Now this is what I answer to those who criticize me: ⁴Have we not the right to be fed? ⁵Have we not the right to bring along with us a sister as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? ⁶Am I the only one, with Barnabas, bound to work?

Dt
20:6
2Tim
4:4
Dt
25:4
What soldier goes to war at his own expense? ⁷What farmer does not eat from the vineyard he planted? Who tends a flock and does not drink from its milk? ⁸Are these rights only accepted human practice? No. The Law says the same. In the Law of Moses it is written: *Do not muzzle the ox which threshes grain.* ⁹Does this mean that God is concerned with oxen, ¹⁰or rather with us? Of course it applies to us. For our sake it was written that no one plows without expecting a reward for

plowing, and no one threshes without hoping for a share of the crop. ¹¹Then, if we have sown spiritual riches among you, would it be too much for us to reap some material reward? ¹²If others have had a share among you, we could have it all the more.

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

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

¹⁹So, feeling free with everybody, I

Rom
15:27
Gal
6:6

Dt
18:1

Lk
10:7

2Cor
11:10

Acts
26:19
2Cor
5:14

follow a path that will be denounced by John in Revelation (2:23), those who later would be known as the "Nicolaites." They wanted to be very open and not separate from the non-Christians around them, so they preferred not to manifest their convictions. Finally one could not tell what truth they were witnesses to. In 10:14-22 Paul will clearly state that a Christian may not participate in such a banquet in the temple. For the present he does not say it openly, but he shows that such an attitude should be shocking for many people.

• **9.1** *Have we not the right to be fed?* In asking the Corinthians to forget their right to eat sacrificed meat, Paul gives himself as an example and tells them how he also renounces his right to be supported by the churches. The churches gave food and drink to the apostles who visited them and took care of the Christian women attending them (v. 5), as in the case of Jesus (Lk 8:2). However, to give proof of detachment,

Paul did not accept this favor and lived by the work of his hands (Acts 18:3).

I am bound to do it. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel (v. 16). As happened with Jeremiah (Jer 1) Christ the Lord began ruling the life of Paul from the day he called him.

I made myself all things to all people (v. 23). Paul gives a guideline for apostles of all times. Apostolic movements require their members to know their environment very well and the problems of their companions. Committed Christians must share the life-style and human aspirations of their companions in everything that is not sinful. Becoming like Paul, "a Greek among the Greeks," not in appearance but in reality, they will be able to express simply and in all truth their faith in Christ; in that way they will offer to those whose daily life they share, the possibility of one day finding their place in the Church. From then on it will be the entire life of the new convert with all that is linked to his culture and his milieu that will be renewed by faith.

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

Faith demands sacrifice

• ²⁴Have you not learned anything from the stadium? Many run, but only one gets the prize. Run, therefore, intending to win it, ²⁵as athletes who impose upon themselves a rigorous discipline. Yet for them the wreath is of laurels which wither, while for us, it does not wither.

²⁶So, then, I run knowing where I go. I box but not aimlessly in the air. ²⁷I punish my body and control it, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be rejected.

10 ¹Let me remind you, brothers and sisters, about our ancestors. All of them were under the cloud and all crossed the sea. ²All underwent the baptism of the land and of the sea to join Moses ³and all of them ate from the same spiritual manna ⁴and all of

them drank from the same spiritual drink. For you know that they drank from a spiritual rock following them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵However, most of them did not please God, and the desert was strewn with their bodies.

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

⁷Do not follow idols, as some of them did, and Scripture says: *The people sat down to eat and drink and stood up for orgy.* ⁸Let us not fall into sexual immorality as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand of them fell dead. ⁹And let us not tempt the Lord as some of them did, and were killed by serpents; ¹⁰nor grumble as some of them did and were cut down by the destroying angel.

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

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

• ¹⁵I address you as intelligent persons; judge what I say. ¹⁶The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion with the blood of Christ? And

• 24. Paul is now ready to tell the Corinthians that they may not share the cult of idols. To justify his position (for the Corinthians it was very strict), Paul presents two arguments:

- no racing contest is won without self-sacrifice;
- the Bible has many examples of how God punished those who practiced a cult of idols.

As athletes who impose upon themselves a rigorous discipline (v. 25). Like them, we must renounce many things that are not evil. We need discipline to be really free, whether in the use of alcohol or tobacco, or not idly waste time in front of the television or reading magazines. While the

world lures us to be spectators and consumers, we must be agents of salvation, the salt of the earth. The second paragraph recalls the example of Israel (see Ex 32 and Num 21).

The rock was Christ (10:4). The Jewish legends said that the rock mentioned in Ex 17:5 followed the Israelites in their journey. Paul does not affirm that legend as true. He only recalls it as an image of Christ, present in his Church.

• **10.15** *And the bread that we break, is it not a communion with the body of Christ?* (v. 16). Paul will return to speak of the Eucharist in 11:18. This communion through the body and

Acts
16:3
21:3

11:1
Gal
2:20
Rom
14:1
15:1

Num
14:16
Jn
6:58

Ex
32:6

Num
25:9

Num
21:5

Num
17:6

Heb
3:8
1P
4:7
1Jn
2:18

Rom
11:20
Gal
6:1
1Thes
5:24
Heb
10:23
Mt
6:13
Lk
21:36

Ex
13:21
14:22
16:4

Num
20:7

11:25
Mk
14:23

the bread that we break, is it not a communion with the body of Christ?

Rom 12:5
Eph 4:4
4:25
17 The bread is one, and so we, though many, form one body, sharing the one bread.

Rom 9:4
Gal 6:16
18 Consider the Israelites. For them, to eat of the victim is to come into communion with its altar.

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

Dt 32:17
Bar 4:7
Rev 9:20
2Cor 6:15
Dt 32:21
22 Do we want, perhaps, to provoke the jealousy of the Lord? Could we be stronger than he?

Practical solutions

6:12 • 23 Everything is lawful for me, but not everything is to my profit. Everything is lawful for me, but not everything builds up: 24 let no one pursue his own interests, but the interests of the other.

Rom 14:19
Ps 24:1
25 Eat, then, whatever is sold at the market, and do not raise questions of conscience about it. 26 Because: *the earth and whatever is on it belongs to the Lord*. 27 If someone who does not

share your faith invites you, go and eat of anything served to you without problems of conscience. 28 However, if somebody tells you that the meat is from the offerings to idols, then do not eat out of consideration for those warning you and for the sake of their conscience.

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

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

Women's dress and Mediterranean customs

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

blood of the Risen Christ, besides being a personal encounter with Christ, makes of all of us one body. *We form one body*. This does not only mean that we feel united, but that the Risen Christ unites us to himself and, so doing, gives the community new strength.

The idol is nothing. The idol in itself was just a material thing, like an image. Yet the Jews thought (and Paul also mentions it) that the cult of idols was addressed to the devils. In fact, when people are now being dragged along by crazy trends or rhythms, or attitudes, and sacrifice to their idols what their families need for survival, and make themselves dependent on "mortals," we know that in reality they are serving the devil.

• 23. *Everything is lawful for me, but not everything is to my profit* (v. 23). Paul draws the same practical deductions as in 8:1-13. Except

in the cases mentioned, where the believer refuses to share directly in something evil, the supreme rule of conduct will be to seek what is good and respect the conscience of others.

• 11.1 Is it important for a woman to wear a veil while praying in Church? Mediterranean traditions required it and perhaps the new custom originated in "mystery religions." In an earlier paragraph (9:20) Paul said he was "all for all." Here we notice that he didn't always have a fair regard for customs contrary to Jewish tradition.

Paul speaks here according to his Jewish culture, chiefly male-centered, and repeats the same arguments of Jewish teachers (vv. 5-10). Then suddenly he realizes that he is denying the equality proclaimed by Jesus and tries to turn back (vv. 11-12). By the way Paul ends the

Rom 14:14

2Thes 2:15

Eph 4:15
5:23

prophesies with his head covered, he dishonors his head. ⁵On the contrary, the woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered, does not respect her head. She might as well cut her hair. ⁶If a woman does not use a veil, let her cut her hair; and if it is a shame for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved, then let her use a veil.

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

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

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

¹⁶If some of you want to argue, let it

be known that it is not our custom nor the custom in the churches of God.

The Lord's supper

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

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

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

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

discussion, we see that he himself was aware of the weakness of his arguments.

Let us not lessen these flashes of light thrown at us by Paul: the angels participate in Christian worship (Mt 18:10 and Rev 5:8; 8:3), even our exterior bearing is in a way an active sharing in the liturgy of the Eucharist.

This paragraph helps us to understand that many things in the Church and in Christian life are no more than customs or human traditions, although they maintain among us respectable values. Those in authority, like Paul, cannot impose them on the community.

• 17. Without making any transition Paul passes to the most important act of the Christian assembly, the Eucharist. These lines are the oldest testimony relating to the Supper of the Lord and were written in the year 55 A.D., some years ahead of the Gospels.

The community gathered in a friendly house. After the supper, solemnized by the singing of the psalms, the leader of the community said a

prayer of thanksgiving, remembering the last supper of Jesus, and repeated his words to consecrate the body and blood of Christ. Then everyone received communion from the same bread and the same cup.

In 10:16 Paul recalled two aspects of the Lord's Supper:

– it is the communion of the body and blood of the Lord;
– it affirms a union of love among all: *we form one body*.

Here Paul denounces the Corinthians for their sin with regard to these two points.

Each one eats at once his own food to avoid sharing with those who are poorer, or to evade the company of certain persons. We can imagine that the groups spontaneously formed and occupied various rooms in the same house: actually each one joined the group from his own milieu. Perhaps the buffet is more promising where the rich are, while the poor are in the yard.

Another is getting drunk and therefore not disposed to receive the body of Christ.

Gen
1:27

Gen
2:21-
23
1Tim
2:13

1:11

2Tim
2:19

Lk
22:14

Ex
24:8
Jer
31:31

is the new Covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of me.”²⁶ So, then, whenever you eat of this bread and drink from this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes.

Mt
26:29
Rev
22:20

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

Heb
6:6
10:29

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

2Cor
13:5

³⁰ This is the reason why so many among you are sick and weak and several have died. ³¹ If we examined and corrected ourselves, the Lord would not have to exercise judgment against us.

Rom
14:22
Heb
12:7

³² The Lord’s strokes are to correct us, so that we may not be condemned with this world.

³³ So then, brothers, when you gather for a meal, wait for one another ³⁴ and, if someone is hungry, let him eat in his own house. In this way you will not gather for your common condem-

nation. The other instructions I shall give when I go there.

Spiritual gifts and harmony

12^{*} ¹ With respect to spiritual gifts, I will remind you of the following.

² When you were still pagans, you were irresistably drawn to your dumb idols.

³ I tell you that nobody inspired by the Spirit of God may say, “A curse on Jesus,” as no one can say, “Jesus is the Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

Mt
16:17
Phil
2:11

⁴ There is diversity of gifts, but the Spirit is the same. ⁵ There is diversity of ministries, but the Lord is the same.

⁶ There is diversity of works, but the same God works in all.

Eph
4:11

⁷ The Spirit reveals his presence in each one with a gift that is also a service. ⁸ One is to speak with wisdom, through the Spirit. Another teaches according to the same Spirit.

1:5
2:6

⁹ To another is given faith, in which the Spirit acts; to another the gift of healing, and it is the same Spirit. ¹⁰ Another works miracles, another is a prophet, another recognizes what comes from the good or evil spirit; another speaks in

13:2

Acts
2:11
19:6

In not recognizing the Body (v. 29). This term points out at the same time:

- the one who does not distinguish consecrated bread from ordinary bread and does not receive it with due respect, as the body of Christ;
- the one who ignores his brothers and sisters in the celebration of the Eucharist. He does not recognize the body of Christ as formed by all the assembled Christians.

The Eucharist is the center and heart of the life of the Church, which is, before all else, a communion with God and with others. The Church is not only an instrument for spreading the Good News, but the place here on earth where people can already experience the union between themselves and Christ.

You are proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes (v. 26). All the Eucharists celebrated around the world each day and every minute of the day, remind us that the death of Christ fills up the time until his coming.

History cannot cease, nor civilization be stagnant as happened in past centuries. Not only does technical progress force us to advance, but also the requirements of justice springing from the death of the innocent (and here God is the innocent) destroy the established order. Jesus’ death does not allow the world to rest or have

peace. The Church reminds us of the death of Christ, not to preserve the past, but to draw from this unique event new energy for both reconciling and condemning.

This is the reason why so many among you are sick (v. 30). The Lord uses many signs to admonish us. Sometimes through personal illness; more often, through the weakness and spiritual anemia of the Church. Fulfilling the requirements for a worthy celebration of the Eucharist would be sufficient to renew the Church.

• **12.1** Let us notice the order followed by Paul: the Spirit comes after the Word, the Son. The spiritual gifts distributed in our days are the fruit of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the Church of Corinth the Holy Spirit reveals his presence by giving many believers spiritual gifts. All marvel when some of them, touched by the Spirit, begin praising God with words understood by no one. They feel still more the presence of God when a prophet reveals to some of them what is on their conscience or gives to someone a special message from God.

Paul intervenes in two ways. First to establish order. Pagans went wild in the frenzied celebration of their feasts, while the Spirit makes every-

tongues, and still another interprets what has been said in tongues. ^{Rom 12:3} ^{Eph 4:7} ¹¹ And all of this is the work of the one and only Spirit, who gives to each one as he so desires.

Comparison with the body

^{Rom 12:4} • ¹² As the body is one, having many members, and all the members, while being many, form one body, so it is with Christ. ^{Gal 3:28} ¹³ All of us, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, have been baptized in one Spirit to form one body and all of us have been given to drink from the one Spirit.

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

one more responsible. When a frenzied individual cried out something senseless or scandalous, it was proof that he was not inspired.

Paul reminds us that *the gifts of the Spirit* (sometimes called *charisms*) have several aspects. They are *gifts*, especially evident in miracles. But they are also *ministries* (v. 5), that is services, as is evident in the leading of a community. These should also be called *works*, because in them a person must not praise himself, but all must be seen as the work of God.

If Paul said that these services come from Christ, people might think that most important in the Church is the authority of those who govern in the name of Christ and at times are considered his "vicars." Yet these gifts and ministries are also related to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit blows where he pleases and multiplies, among believers of simple heart, gifts and initiatives that renew the church. The mission of the ministers (bishops, priests or lay ministers) is not only to govern and command the Church, but also to recognize the true work of the Spirit in the community.

Who gives to each one as he so desires (v. 11). The Spirit gives the Church what it needs at the right place and the right time. These paragraphs reveal the concerns of the Church of that time, very different from ours today. Now the Spirit reminds the Church of its mission in the world. Many believers possess gifts that, without being apparent in miracles, inspire their exemplary and fruitful lives. Whereas, in those

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

²² Still more, the parts of our body that we most need are those that seem to be the weakest; ²³ the parts that we consider lower are treated with much care, ²⁴ and we cover them with more modesty because they are less presentable, whereas the others do not need such attention. ²⁵ God himself arranged the body in this way, giving more honor to those parts that need it, so that the body may not be divided, but rather each member may care for the others. ²⁶ When one suffers, all of them suffer, and when one receives honor, all rejoice together.

²⁷ Now, you are the body of Christ and each of you individually is a mem-

early times, the newly converted Christians discovered that God was among them. Through gifts of prophecy, wisdom, teaching, the Church unfolded day by day the innumerable consequences of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Words of *wisdom* that indicate an attitude to adopt. Words of *knowledge* that reveal something that is hidden, or what God is about to do. *Faith* (not in the meaning we usually give it, but as in Mk 11:22) that means certitude that God wishes to do something and urges us to ask for a miracle. Thus, it was that the Church discovered God's presence within herself as well as the power issuing from the death and resurrection of Christ.

The same Spirit... the same Lord... the same God. God is the fountain of the various gifts granted to the Church and God is also the model of how diversity may be coupled with unity.

- 12. A detailed comparison with the body helps us to understand what the Church is, showing at the same time how we must complement and respect each other.

We cannot have a true community unless each of us shares in its life, placing our talents at the service of others. Even the least gifted may have riches that will be revealed at the right time. Even the misfortunes of someone may become the riches of the group that welcomes him/her. As soon as one is really committed to a Christian life, the spirit awakens in him new and some-

Rom 12:15
Eph 5:30
14:1
Acts 13:1
Eph 4:11

ber of it. ²⁸ So God has appointed us in the Church. First apostles, second prophets, third teachers. Then come miracles, then the gift of healing, material help, administration in the Church and the gift of tongues.

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

No gift higher than love

13 ¹ If I could speak all the human and angelic tongues, but had no love, I would only be sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² If I had the gift of prophecy, knowing secret things with all kinds of knowledge, and had faith great enough to remove mountains, but had no love, I would be nothing. ³ If I

Mk 11:23

times unsuspected capabilities. If we pay attention to the riches of our brothers and sisters and awaken in them the consciousness of their dignity and responsibility, we shall see a new resurgence in the Church, fruit of the Spirit. It would take too long to recall the harm done to the Church in some places because of the passivity of Christians in a clericalized church.

At the end of the paragraph Paul lists the various gifts according to their importance. First, not what appears more miraculous, but what is most constructive for the Church. That is why apostles occupy the first place. These are not only the twelve chosen by Jesus, but also those who, like them and accepted by them, are founding new communities and governing those already existing. Then, in second place, come the prophets, who not only announce words of God, but also strengthen the community with the gifts of faith and wisdom that inspire their preaching.

In the last place are those who receive the gift of speaking in tongues, although in Corinth it was as if they had already reached Heaven.

• **13.1** *I will show you a much better way* (12:31). As the Corinthians marveled at the spectacular and wonderful things worked by the Spirit, Paul tells them that the only important thing is the ability to love.

Love or charity? At the beginning both words meant the same thing. Later on, the word “charity” came to mean the help given in the form of alms, although the giving of alms alone is not real love. On the other hand, for many people, true love is only that of a man and a

gave everything I had to the poor, and even give up my body to be burned, if I am without love, it would be of no value to me. Mt 6:20

⁴ Love is patient, kind, without envy. It is not boastful or arrogant. It is not ill-mannered nor does it seek its own interest. ⁵ Love overcomes anger and forgets offenses. ⁶ It does not take delight in wrong, but rejoices in truth. ⁷ Love excuses everything, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 2Cor 13:8

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

8:2
Num 12:6,
8

woman. So it is irrelevant whether we say charity or love, but we have rather to clarify what love really is. Paul does just that in the present text.

If I could speak... if I had... To love is more important than performing miracles, more important than doing great things for others and dying for a cause, all of which can be done without love.

When I was a child. Already Paul outlines what he will explain in chapter 15 when he speaks of our life after the resurrection. Just as the caterpillar must completely change itself to become a butterfly (not merely by sprouting wings), and just as a child’s game has no sense for an adult, so will it be for our present life: work, study, love, our understanding of God and the world, the life of the Church – all will be no more than a forgotten past. Paul experienced a love of God that invaded him and divinized his least desires, and he knew it was already God’s possession of him, which would be eternal: love would never end.

Faith, hope, love (v. 13). Paul quite often joins these three “virtues,” that is the three movements in the Christian soul. In no other place does he state this more clearly than here. There is no authentic love without faith and hope.

The greatest of those is love. Sometimes this sentence is used to misrepresent what is essential to Christian life. For many say, “I do good to my neighbor, what else does God ask of me?” It would not be difficult to prove that such love is very limited, selfish and impure. It is a “love” in which divine love lives in very cramped conditions and so is unable to transform our life. We would need, first of all, great hope in a Christian

Gal 4:8
Col 1:4
1Thes 5:8
face to face. Now we know in part, but then I will know as I am known. ¹³Now we have faith, hope and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

Gifts of prophecy and tongues

14 ¹Strive, then, for love and set your hearts on spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ²The one who speaks in tongues does not speak to people, but to God, for no one understands him; the spirit makes him say things that are not understandable. ³The prophet, instead, addresses all people to give them strength, encouragement and consolation. ⁴He who speaks in tongues strengthens himself, but the prophet builds the Church.

Acts 15:32
Num 11:29
⁵Would that all of you spoke in tongues! But better still if you were all prophets. The prophet has an advantage over the one speaking in tongues, unless someone explains what was spoken, so that the community may profit. ⁶Suppose, brothers and sisters, I go to you and I speak in tongues, of what use will it be to you if I do not bring you some revelation, knowledge, prophecy or teaching?

⁷When someone plays the flute, or harp, or any musical instrument, if there are not tones and notes, who will recognize the tune? ⁸And if the bugle call is not clear, who will get ready for battle? ⁹The same with you. If your words are not understood, who will know what is said? You will be talking to the moon. ¹⁰There are many languages in the world, and each of them has meaning, ¹¹but if I cannot find any meaning in what is said, I become a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker to me.

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

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

Eph 5:19

2Cor 1:20

sense that is a passion for eternal things and then the yielding of ourselves to the Spirit who would complete his work of love in us. Love reaches its perfection when we are in God: *I will know him as he knows me*. As long as we do not see God, love is immature; this is the time when love must grow through faith and the knowledge of God's word; also through hope and perseverance as we follow Jesus poor, free and in the midst of trials.

• **14.1** It seems that the assemblies in Corinth were very disorderly. People did not wait for their turn to speak, but spoke at the same time, especially the women. Paul invites them to be silent. Those with spectacular gifts felt more important and did not respect the most elementary order. Some who pretended to be inspired spoke and acted very strangely and at times shamefully.

Paul establishes an order of priority, giving preference to those gifts that most help strengthen the Church. He compares the Church to a building. We build it when we help others to grow, to be better and more united. What makes a person better is charity, and not

the performance of extraordinary gifts and charisms, as miracles, languages and such. This is why extraordinary performances do not mean holiness; God can use anybody, even sinners, to perform for others' benefit. The truth of a religion does not rely on the fact that its preachers can heal the sick or do similar things, thereby filling stadiums and impressing large audiences. It depends on its fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles, as found in the Church.

The spirits speaking through prophets are submitted to prophets (v. 32). What comes from the Spirit always blends with what comes from a person. Those who think they are inspired must be careful not to lessen what comes from the Spirit with their own beliefs and desires. No inspiration allows us to disregard our community or rightful authority.

The verses 34-35 have from the beginning scandalized people because of their harshness towards women and in certain texts they have been removed. If they are Paul's they must be understood in the light of 11:1-16. The apostle was infallible regarding faith but no decision touching the organization of the Church whether it comes from Paul or someone else is

thanksgiving was indeed beautiful, but it was useless for others.

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

^{Eph 4:14} ²⁰Brothers and sisters, do not remain as children in your thinking. Be like infants in doing evil, but mature in your thinking. ^{Is 28:11} ²¹God says in the Law: *I will speak to this people through those talking other tongues and through lips of foreigners, but even so they will not listen to me.* ²²So, speaking in tongues is significant for those who refuse to believe, not for those who believe, while prophecy is a sign for those who believe, not for those who refuse to believe.

^{Acts 2:13} ²³Yet imagine that the whole Church is gathered together and all speak in tongues when unbelievers and uninformed people enter. What will they think? That you are crazy. ²⁴Instead, suppose that each of you speaks as a prophet; as soon as an unbeliever or an uninformed person enters, all of you call him to account and disclose his most secret thinking. ²⁵Then, falling on his face, he would be urged to worship God and declare that God is truly among you.

^{Eph 4:12} ²⁶What then shall we conclude, brothers? When you gather, each of you can take part with a song, a teaching, or a revelation, by speaking in tongues or interpreting what has been said in tongues. But let all this build up the Church.

²⁷Are you going to speak in

beyond criticism or irrevocable, even in the case when it could be at a given moment “an order of the Lord.”

• **15.1** Have we here the response to a last question of the Corinthians? Many Greeks thought that at death the immortal soul leaves the body and remains alone. Was it admitted to the paradise of souls? Did it come to the great

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

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

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

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

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

Resurrection is a fact

15 • ¹Let me remind you, brothers and sisters, of the Good News that I preached to you and which you

reservoir of souls already gone or who were to return, forgetting all the past lived on earth? Others held (as do a good number of Christians today), that all ends with death: see 1 Thes 5:13. Paul will therefore remind the Corinthians that faith in the resurrection is at the heart of the Christian message.

I remind you of the gospel. Here certainly we may speak of Good News, for death as some-

^{1Tim 3:11}

^{1Jn 4:6}

^{Gal 1:11}

received and on which you stand firm.
²By that Gospel you are saved, provided that you hold to it as I preached it. Otherwise, you will have believed in vain.

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

¹¹Now, whether it was I or they, this we preach and this you have believed.
¹²Well, then, if Christ is preached as

risen from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is empty and our belief comes to nothing. ¹⁵And we become false witnesses of God, attesting that he raised Christ, whereas he could not raise him if indeed the dead are not raised. ¹⁶If the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith gives you nothing, and you are still in sin. ¹⁸Also those who fall asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹If it is only for this life that we hope in Christ, we are the most unfortunate of all people.

Christ gave us the way

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

²⁴Then the end will come, when

thing unknown is and always has been the great burden of human life (Sir 40:1).

How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? (v. 12). Paul begins with the resurrection of Jesus as a fact: and from that he then draws consequences: our own resurrection.

We hear it said at times, even among believers that the resurrection of Jesus is not an historical fact. This is true in the sense that resurrection escapes the historical dimension. We know and we believe it because there are witnesses, and in no other way does history proceed. Nevertheless there is a vast difference: history deals with testimonies on which we have some ideas: a war, a meeting between two people, an invention. On the contrary, for the resurrection of Jesus, the witnesses can only speak of apparitions of Jesus or meetings with him. This experience led them to believe something much greater: Jesus had begun a life about which we have no idea, even sharing the power of God! We, then, in this very special case, shall believe not only what they saw but also what they believe, and that is in no way comparable with historical processes. But all the

same, Jesus' resurrection and coming in glory is a fact (see com. on Mk 16).

I have passed on to you (v. 3). Paul will not recall a tale, or a "myth," these stories full of wisdom that abounded with the Greeks. They bared an order in the world, a meaning of life, but were only stories. Today certain people speak of the resurrection in the same way. They say: "It matters little what took place, the gospels are not directly interested in what happened to Jesus, for them it was important that strange events would give courage to the disciples and the hope of another life." Paul says precisely the contrary: the resurrection of Jesus is a fact.

• 20. Whoever shares the faith of the apostles has accepted resurrection as a fact. Paul immediately goes to the consequences for us: shall we also enter another life?

All die for being Adam's (v. 22). See the commentary in Rom 5:12 concerning Adam and Christ. The myths of various religions in the past projected onto some mysterious personage our own condition, but were unable to do more than give a meaning to life. They could not

11:23
Lk
1:2
2Cor
11:23

Lk
24:27
24:34
Jn
21:15

Acts
12:17

Acts
9:3
Eph
3:8

Gal
1:13
1Tim
1:15

Mt
22:23
Acts
4:2

Acts
1:8
1:22

Rom
4:24

Rom
8:11
Col
1:18
1Thes
4:14

45-
49
Rom
5:12

Col
3:4
1Thes
4:16

Lk
19:17

Eph 1:21 Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father, after having destroyed every rule, authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign and *put all enemies under his feet*. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed will be death. ²⁷As Scripture says: *God has subjected everything under his feet*.

Ps 8:7 When we say that everything is put under his feet, we exclude, of course, the Father who subjects everything to him. ²⁸When the Father has subjected everything to him, the Son will place himself under the One who subjected everything to him. From then on, God will be all in all.

Eph 4:6 Phil 3:21 ²⁹Tell me: what are these people doing who are baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead cannot be raised, why do they want to be baptized for the dead?

Col 3:11 ³⁰As for us, why do we constantly risk our life? For death is my daily companion. ³¹I say that, brothers and sisters, before you who are my pride in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³²Was it for human interest that I fought in Ephesus like a lion tamer? If the dead are not raised, *let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die!*

2Cor 4:10 ³³Do not be deceived; bad theories

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

The body after the Resurrection

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

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

⁴²It is the same with the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in decomposition; it will be raised never more to die. ⁴³It is sown in humiliation, and it will be raised for Glory. It is buried

change it. Faith instead tells us that the Son-of-God-made-human has lived among us and lived for all of us. Let us leave aside our individualistic vision in which each one sees no more than his own destiny: for God the entire venture of creation and salvation is that of *Adam*, one and multiple at the same time. Jesus who is himself Man has lived it fully for us all.

Then the end will come, when Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father (v. 24). Here again, let us leave aside simplistic images. Let us remember that there is only one God. Here, *the Son* is the Word of God made flesh who has taken on his shoulders the whole history of humankind. He who is eternally returning to the Father from whom he is born brings to the eternity of God all creation. There will not be a re-beginning of history. God will be all in all, we will receive God from God and we will have all, finally becoming ourselves. That, surely, surpasses all we could have imagined, but Paul adds: *The last enemy to be destroyed will be death* (v. 26). John will say the same in Revelation (21:4).

Why do they want to be baptized for the

dead? (v. 29). Perhaps some of them were concerned for the fate of their parents who died without knowing the Gospel, and were baptized in their name. Paul does not give his opinion about this practice. He only takes the opportunity to argue in favor of the resurrection.

• 35. *How will the dead be raised? With what kind of body will they come?* (v. 35). Here indeed is the question we often ask: we would like to imagine, to know what we shall then be. But how can a human being imagine, know, this new world which is even now being prepared: is it not like a child still enclosed in the universe of its mother's womb, and trying to imagine the world into which it will be projected?

All that Paul can do is to throw light on the mystery by using comparisons.

What you sow is not the body of the future plant (v. 37). Jesus spoke of the grain that is sown (Jn 12:24). With this example he destroyed those primitive ideas that some people still have nowadays: that angels will come to gather the dust of the dead, that corpses will come out of their tombs... In reality, our present

in weakness, but the resurrection shall be with power. When buried it is a natural body, but it will be raised as a spiritual body. ⁴⁴For there shall be a spiritual body as there is at present a living body. ⁴⁵Scripture says that Adam, the first man, became a living being; but the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit.

Gen
2:7

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

21-
23
Dn
7:13

Gen
5:3
Phil
3:21
Rom
8:29

The day of Resurrection

⁵⁰This I say, brothers: Flesh and blood cannot share the kingdom of God; nothing of us that is to decay can reach imperishable life. ⁵¹So I want to

6:10
Jn
3:5
2Cor
5:4
1Thes
4:15

body is the grain and the risen body, the spike or ear, will not be the recombination of the actual body that is put in the earth.

Not all flesh is the same (v. 39). Paul explains that one and the same word can express many different things that have some likeness. For example, the word "light" is used to designate the very different ways in which the sun, the moon and stars, each shines with its own special color. During Paul's time the word "body" was used for many things, even to designate the sun and the stars, called "heavenly bodies." So, when it is said that the dead are raised with their own body, this does not mean with the same shape (with arms and legs and hair...) or the same life, although it will be the same person.

Just as the ear of wheat comes from a grain of wheat, it will be the same person as before, marked by all that has made him grow (the risen Christ rightly wished to show the marks of his passion on his glorious body). Since no one becomes himself alone, but in union and in relation with others, we shall know in all the fullness of their transfigured persons, those who have helped us most to develop our riches.

For there shall be a spiritual body as there is at present a living body (v. 44). Resurrection comes from what is within, it is like a transfiguration. Each one will have the body he/she deserves; a body that best expresses what he/she has become and what he/she is in God.

teach you this mystery: although not all of us will die, all of us have to be transformed, ⁵²in an instant, at the sound of the trumpet. You have heard of the last trumpet; then in the twinkling of an eye, the dead will be raised imperishable, while we shall be transformed. ⁵³For it is necessary that our mortal and perishable being put on the life that knows neither death nor decay.

Jl
2:1
Mt
24:31

Is
25:8

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

Hos
13:14
Rev
20:14

Rom
7:7

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

Jn
16:33
Rom
6:25

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

Col
1:23

Could we hope for anything more beautiful than that hope which is beautiful even in its logic? But is it certain? Paul is affirmative with all the boldness of faith. No reasoning can prove faith: only the experience of the working of the Spirit which even now is transfiguring us and will give us day by day, more than an intuition, a certitude of where we are going.

Earthly... heavenly... (vv. 45-49). We all have a double heritage: by nature we are in solidarity with the human race in the person of Adam – *man, animal and earthly* – but we also belong to this human community which mysteriously forms itself around Christ who is *Spirit, source of life* and who *comes from heaven*. Baptism has not made us pass from one to another. Moreover, faithful as we may be, our Adam will continue to grow and increase in weight, with his weakness and temptations, but at the same time our inner being will be strengthened, this embryo of a celestial person, waiting for its true birth.

Flesh and blood cannot share the kingdom of God; nothing of us that is to decay can reach imperishable life (v. 50). It is the opposition between what can only rot and decompose, and the definitive, unaltered which is proper to the world where God is (Rom 8:21). Life has its logic: persons who have chosen to enjoy the present life hardly believe in that other world.

Not all of us will die (v. 51). Paul thinks that

Commendations and greetings

Gal 2:10 **16** • ¹With regard to the collection in favor of the saints, follow the rules that I gave to the churches of Galatia. ²Every Sunday, let each of you put aside what you are able to spare, so that no collection need be made when I come. ³Once I am with you, you will choose the persons whom I may accredit with letters to take your gifts to Jerusalem. ⁴And if it seems better for me to go, they will go with me.

Mt 28:1
Acts 20:7
Rev 1:10
Acts 20:4
Acts 19:21
4:17
1Tim 4:12
2Tim 1:7
3:5
Acts 18:24

⁵I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I want to go only through Macedonia. ⁶I would like to stay with you for a while, and perhaps I will spend the winter so that you may help me on my way wherever I go. ⁷I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I really hope to stay with you, if the Lord permits. ⁸But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹because I have a door wide open here, even though there are many opponents.

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

¹²With respect to our brother

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

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

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

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

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

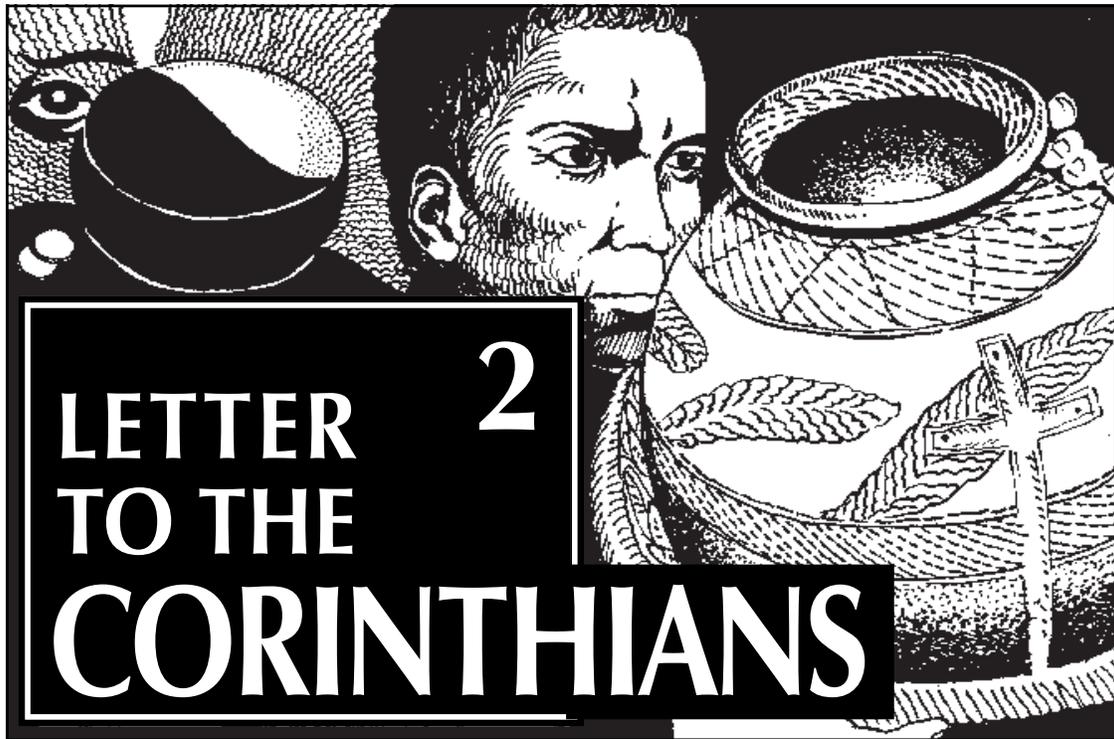
²³The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. ²⁴My love to all in Christ Jesus.

Christ is to return soon. On this supposition, he says that those who are alive when Christ returns will not have to “travel” with him to Heaven (that would be a materialist image), but will be transformed. Resurrection is not simply to live again as happened to Lazarus.

• **16.1** With respect to the collection, see Romans 15:25 and 2 Corinthians chaps. 8 & 9. *Sunday*, the first day of the Jewish week. See Acts 20: 7. During the time of Paul, Christians

began to observe Sunday, the day of Christ’s resurrection, rather than the Saturday (or Sabbath) of Moses and the Jews.

Through the list of greetings to be passed on, we can form some idea of these first believers from whom we have received the faith. We can see that in spite of their weakness the Christians of Corinth form a real Church, since it is a community where many are active and together trying to solve the problems of their life “in Jesus Christ.”



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

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

What is the content of this letter? What Paul feels with regard to the Corinthians and what he suffers from their lack of understanding. It is not much and yet it is a great deal. Paul is incapable of speaking about himself without speaking of Christ. This restless man, eager for understanding and affection, is so permeated with the love of Christ, that he cannot express a suspicion or a reproach without giving most profound sermons on faith. In trying to justify himself he writes the most beautiful pages on *evangelization* and on what it means to be an *apostle* of Christ.

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

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

Blessed be God, the source of all comfort

Rom 15:6
Eph 1:3
Is 40:1
• ³Blessed be God, the Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord, the all-merciful Father and the God of all comfort! ⁴He encourages us in all our trials, so that we may also encourage those in any trial, with the same comfort that we receive from God.

Phil 1:20
Col 1:24
⁵For whenever the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so, through Christ, a great comfort also overflows. ⁶So, if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we receive comfort it is also for you. You may experience the same comfort when you come to endure the same sufferings we endure. ⁷Our hope for you is most firm; just as you share in our sufferings, so shall you also share in our consolation.

1Cor 15:32
⁸Brothers and sisters, we want you to know some of the trials we experienced in the province of Asia. We were crushed; it was too much; it was more than we could bear and we had already

lost all hope of coming through alive. ⁹We felt branded for death, but this happened that we might no longer rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰He freed us from such a deadly peril and will continue to do so. We trust he will continue protecting us, ¹¹but you must help us with your prayers. When such a favor is obtained by the intercession of many, so will there be many to give thanks to God on our behalf.

The plans of Paul

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

¹⁵With this assurance, I wanted to go and visit you first, and this would have been a double blessing for you. ¹⁶And from there I thought of going to Macedonia and then, from Macedonia,

• **1.3** From the very beginning, Paul describes his own situation as an apostle of Christ – wandering, persecuted, ill – to the Corinthians who know how to take it easy. While they feel proud of their large community and look for brilliant preachers (as will be seen below), Paul shares in the passion of Christ. Paul suggests that they too will know the true consolation of God when it is their turn to suffer for him.

The word *comfort* will often occur in this letter. God would not be satisfied by just teaching us resignation: comfort is the experience of the presence of God, but relies in part on the signs that show him acting among us. The two go together. Jesus told us to ask so that God would answer and his responses would be a source of joy (Jn 15:24). In any case, God does not free us of trials but gives strength and perseverance to overcome them.

• **12.** The Corinthians did not take it well that Paul put off the promised visit. He feels obliged

to confess that he has passed the stage of an apostolate based on human projects. He is a man of the Spirit and does not make decisions in the same way as many others do. The Spirit in him matures his decisions and he knows that he is not alone. He will not be one of those who are precipitate in making decisions or who backpedal because they are not sure of themselves.

In him all the promises of God have come to be a Yes (v. 20). God fulfilled his promises when he sent his Son among us. Christ also did only what his Father wanted. Thus, Christ is a ‘yes’ consenting to the Father’s plan. From there, Paul draws the consequences for Christians. In baptism we say the first *yes* to Christ. At every Eucharist we repeat the same *yes*. The “amen” that we say in prayers means *yes, it is true*. The opposite of all this is sin which is the same as saying ‘no’ to Christ.

In a first outpouring (v. 22). Paul actually says: *he gave us the first payment of the Spirit*. See commentary on Ephesians 1:14.

4:7
Phil
2:27
Rom
4:17

4:15
9:12

2:17
1Cor
1:17

Phil
4:1
1Thes
2:19

of coming back to you, that you might send me on my way to Judea. ^{Mt 5:37} ¹⁷Have I planned this without thinking at all? Or do I change my decisions on the spur of the moment, so that I am between *No* and *Yes*?

¹⁸God knows that our dealing with you is not *Yes* and *No*, ¹⁹just as the Son of God, Christ Jesus, whom we – Silvanus, Timothy and I – preach to you, was not *Yes* and *No*; with him it was simply *Yes*. ^{Rev 3:14} ^{1Jn 2:27} ²⁰In him all the promises of God have come to be a *Yes*, and we also say in his name: *Amen!* giving thanks to God. ^{Rev 5:5} ^{Eph 1:13} ²¹God himself has anointed us and strengthens us with you to serve Christ; ²²he has marked us with his own seal in a first outpouring of the Spirit in our hearts.

Paul refers to a scandal

^{1P 5:2} • ²³God knows, and I swear to you by my own life, that if I did not return to Corinth, it was because I wanted to spare you. ²⁴I do not wish to lord it over your faith, but to contribute to your happiness; for regarding faith, you already stand firm.

2 ¹So I gave up a visit that would again be a distressing one. ²If I make you sad, who will make me happy if not you whom I have grieved? ³Remember what I wrote you, “May it

be that when I come I do not feel sad because of you, who should rather make me happy.” I trust in everyone and I am sure that my joy will be the joy of you all.

⁴So afflicted and worried was I when I wrote to you, that I even shed tears. I did not intend to cause you pain, but rather to let you know of the immense love that I have for you. ^{7:8} ^{Acts 20:31}

⁵If anyone has caused me pain, he has hurt not me but in some measure, (I do not wish to exaggerate) all of you. ⁶The punishment that he received from the majority is enough for him. ⁷Now you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest excessive sorrow discourage him. ⁸So I beg you to treat him with love. ^{Col 3:13}

⁹This is why I wrote to you, to test you and to know if you would obey in everything. ¹⁰The one you forgive, I also forgive. And what I forgave, if indeed I had anything to forgive, I forgave for your sake in the presence of Christ, ¹¹lest Satan take advantage of us; for we know his designs. ^{Mt 10:40} ^{Eph 4:27}

We are the fragrance of Christ

¹²So I came to Troas to preach the Gospel of Christ, and the Lord opened doors for me. ¹³However I could not be at peace because I did not find my brother Titus there, so I took leave of them and went to Macedonia. ^{1Cor 16:9}

• 23. Here Paul refers to the letters preceding this one and which we mentioned in the introduction. We referred to a previous letter that is perhaps preserved in chapters 10–13 of this “second letter.”

I do not wish to lord it over your faith (1:24): see 10:5-6. *May it be that, when I come, I do not feel sad* (2:3): see 12:21.

Paul alludes here to the triumph of the victorious Roman generals: the prisoners to be massacred later were dragged behind their chariots. Paul sees himself here as “the prisoner of Christ” (Eph 4:1). Jesus had taken him by force (1 Cor 9:16), making him his apostle. We understand these words as we do for Jeremiah (20:7): this irresistible call of God is in fact the access to a higher form of freedom.

The triumph was the occasion for offering a lot of incense: the perfume was the sign of glory for the one who was being honored rather like a god, a sign of death for the prisoners who were

there. This comparison allowed Paul to continue in another direction: *for some it smells of death* (v. 16). The Gospel divides people. Even without going deeper into the mystery they are able to appreciate the “odor,” namely the style of Christian existence. Some are especially aware of the demands of Christian life, which to them seems a *death*. Others, on the contrary, envy the mysterious force that animates believers in the midst of their trials, and letting them understand that *life* is there.

Who is worthy of such a mission? In seeing this, the apostle feels inadequate for his mission. He would like everyone to recognize Christ and the radiance of his love through him, but he is a long way from that! On the contrary, the false apostle does not even think about that, but only wishes to be approved and *to make money out of the word of God* by hiding its demands: such apostles are famous and are not persecuted by anyone.

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

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

The great dignity of Christ's ministers

3 • ¹Am I again commending myself? Or do I need to present to you letters of recommendation as some do; or should I ask you for those letters? ²You are the letter. This letter is written in your inner self, yet all can read and understand it. ³Yes, who could deny that you are Christ's letter written by us – a letter written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, carved not in slabs of stones, but in hearts of flesh.

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

⁷The ministry of the Law carved on stones brought death; it was nevertheless surrounded by glory and we know that the Israelites could not fix their eyes on the face of Moses, such was his radiance, though fleeting. ⁸How much more glorious will the ministry of the Spirit be! ⁹If there is greatness in a ministry which uses to condemn, how much more will there be in the ministry that brings holiness? ¹⁰This is such a glorious thing that in comparison the former's glory is like nothing. ¹¹That ministry was provisory and had only moments of glory; but ours endures with a lasting glory.

The veil of Moses

¹²Since we have such a great ambition, we are quite confident – ¹³unlike Moses, *who covered his face with a*

• **3.1** The preachers who oppose Paul would show *letters of recommendation* given by some community or some apostle. Whereas Paul relies on personal authority which doesn't owe anything to anyone. Christ himself made him an apostle as he said in several places.

The pagans of that time surrounded their priests with honor and esteem, and so did the Jews. Throughout the Bible the honor of teaching the Law of God is highlighted and more so the unique role of Moses, who received the Law from God on Sinai. Yet an apostle of Christ is much greater than these.

How much more glorious will the ministry of the Spirit be! (v. 8). As Paul showed in Romans 7:1-13, teaching only the Law as the Jewish priests did, was not a great help to people since, because they are sinners, they do not obey the law and deserve their punishment. Whereas Paul brings believers into live communication with Christ and his Spirit so that, from then on, they can also share in the risen life. The apostles and ministers of the Church fulfill a major role if their words and actions are helpful in uplifting people.

In verses 7-13 Paul refers to the traditions

found in the Book of Exodus (Ex 34:29-35). These highlighted Moses' glory, but Paul mentions them to prove that Christ's apostles are superior. There is a reference to Moses returning from his encounter with God with his face radiant; but Paul remarks that it did not last. Moses had to cover his face with a veil because his face was so radiant, but Paul notes that when a veil must be used, God does not yet fully reveal himself.

Paul underlines the blindness of the Jews who do not recognize Christ as the promised Savior: they have lost the key to their history and for them the Bible remains a closed book until the day when God, through Christ, gives them its true meaning (Lk 24:27; Rev 5:1). All their history should be understood as a mystery of death and resurrection. To enter into a new Covenant they had to welcome Christ without concern for their own privileges, and become his disciples together with other nations.

We are unlike Moses (v. 13). What a daring affirmation! Moses was the founder of the Jewish people and the supreme authority of the Bible! It is a fact that the least among Christians reflects with unveiled face the glory of the Lord.

1Cor
1:18Lk
2:341:12
1P
4:115:12
10:12
Acts
18:271Cor
9:2Ex
24:12
Jer
31:33
Ezk
36:26Jn
3:27Jer
31:31
Rom
2:29Ex
32:16Ex
34:29Ex
34:34

veil. Otherwise the Israelites would have seen his passing radiance fade.

Mk 4:12
Acts 28:27
Rom 10:4
Heb 8:13
Acts 15:21 ¹⁴They became blind, however; until this day, the same veil prevents them from understanding the Old Covenant and they do not realize that in Christ it is nullified. ¹⁵Up to this very day, whenever they read Moses, the veil remains over their understanding ¹⁶but, for whoever *turns to the Lord, the veil shall be removed*. ¹⁷The Lord is spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

Jn 4:24
1Cor 6:17 ¹⁸So, with unveiled faces, we all reflect the Glory of the Lord, while we are transformed into his likeness and experience his Glory more and more by the action of the Lord who is spirit.

We carry this treasure in vessels of clay

4 • ¹Since this is our ministry mercifully given to us, we do not weaken. ²We refuse to stay with half-truths through fear; we do not behave with cunning or falsify the message of God but, manifesting the truth, we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Rom 1:16
1Thes 2:4 ³In fact if the Gospel we proclaim remains obscure, it is obscure only for those who go to their own destruction.

2Thes 2:10 ⁴The god of this world has blinded the minds of these unbelievers lest they see

the radiance of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is God's image. ⁵It is not ourselves we preach, but Christ Jesus as Lord; and for Jesus' sake we are your servants. ⁶God who said, *Let the light shine out of darkness*, has also made the light shine in our hearts to radiate and to make known the Glory of God, as it shines in the face of Christ.

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

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

The Christian is the light of Christ and in earlier times those baptized were called "the enlightened."

The Lord is spirit. Paul says this twice in verses 17 and 18. He does not confuse Lord, Christ, with Holy Spirit but plays with the words *spirit* and *Spirit*. He recalls that the person who *turns to the Lord* (16) goes beyond a first stage of faith (that Paul calls *the letter*) where he found God through laws and practices. He enters the adult age of spiritual life where, through God's Spirit, we know ourselves and act towards God like sons and daughters and free persons. So Paul means: To find the Lord is to receive the Spirit and accede to the "spirit" (see Rom 2:29).

• **4.1** It is worthwhile underlining some features of the portrait of an apostle as Paul sketches it:

- We do not lose heart.
- We do not proceed with trickery nor do we falsify God's message.

- We are more than your servants.
- Let everyone discover in us the glory of God that shines in Christ's face.

- We carry the death of Jesus so that his life may be revealed in us.

- We believe and that is why we speak.

We carry this treasure in vessels of clay (v. 7). Usually, God carries out his plans by using inadequate instruments. Graham Greene became famous for his book "The Power and the Glory" in which we see a priest achieving heroic things despite his many personal faults.

For we, the living, are given up continually to death (v. 11). The apostle's death is necessary so that his work may live. When a good job has been done in one sector of the Church, there has to come the hour of persecution, or of obedience to leaders whose authority we cannot reject, in spite of the fact that they may be unjust or mistaken. Nothing grows without having died first.

Heb
1:3
1P
2:9

12:9

1Cor
15:31
Phil
3:10

Ps
116:
10

grace will come more abundantly upon you and great will be the thanksgiving for the glory of God.

We long for our heavenly dwelling

Col 3:9 • ¹⁶Therefore we are not discouraged. On the contrary, while our outer being wastes away, the inner self is renewed from day to day. ¹⁷The slight affliction that quickly passes away prepares us for an eternal wealth of glory so great and beyond all comparison. ¹⁸So we no longer pay attention to the things that are seen, but to those that are unseen, for the things that we see last for a moment, but that which cannot be seen is eternal.

Is 38:12 **5** ¹We know that when our earthly dwelling, or rather our tent, is destroyed, we may count on a building from God, a heavenly dwelling not built by human hands, that lasts forever. Rom 8:23 ²Therefore we long and groan: Why may we not put on this heavenly dwelling over that which we have? ³(Indeed, are we sure that we shall still be wearing our earthly dwelling and not be unclothed?)

⁴As long as we are in the field-tent,

• 16. Paul has just reaffirmed his faith; for a few instants he confides what he feels within himself, confronted as he is by a thousand dangers and obstacles.

The outer being... the inner self (v. 16). With these two terms Paul takes up again what he has already said in Rom 8:10-11. There, he opposes "flesh" to "spirit" as here *the outer being to the inner self*. Here he reveals this strange experience that is his: the discovery in himself of a presence of God increasingly active, and at the same time a precocious wearing away.

With that, will Paul last long enough to see the return of Christ as he hoped a few years earlier (1 Thes 4:15)? He had greatly hoped that his glorious body would cover his *earthly tent* (5:21; see 1 Cor 15:52)! Now he is doubtful: from day to day it becomes more probable that he must pass through death, of which he has a horror, share the lot of those who have had to *shed their clothing* of flesh and await the resurrection.

He has no doubt that at death he will meet Christ: compare 5:8 with Phil 1:23 and Rev 14:13. We do not cease to exist, as is said by some, until the day of our resurrection.

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

⁶So we feel confident always. We know that while living in the body, we are exiled from the Lord, ⁷living by faith, without seeing; ⁸but we dare to think that we would rather be away from the body to go and live with the Lord. ⁹So, whether we have to keep this house or lose it, we only wish to please the Lord. ¹⁰Anyway we all have to appear before the tribunal of Christ for each one to receive what he deserves for his good or evil deeds in the present life.

We proclaim the message of reconciliation

• ¹¹So we know the fear of the Lord and we try to convince people while we live openly before God. And I trust that you know in your conscience what we truly are. ¹²Once more, we do not try to

So we feel confident always (v. 6). No certitude of faith removes the horror of death; it may perhaps provide even further reasons for increasing it. Jesus experienced a strange agony before being arrested. This trial is only temporary and faith is reassuring "Who will separate us from the love of God?" (Rom 8:35-39).

• 5.11 There are many ways of understanding faith: for each one of us, one or other aspect of Christian life makes more of an impact. What Paul sees in Christ is the great messenger and artisan of reconciliation.

His first conviction is that, with the death of Christ, a new age has begun for divided humanity. *If he died for all, all have died* (v. 14), namely, the whole history and wisdom of people before him have been surpassed and now God works among us in other ways.

We do not regard anyone from the human point of view (v. 16). Paul confides something of his affective life. Those around him love him, even if they make difficulties for him, and in the Church each one has his friends, those on whom he may count. Paul loves them, but doubtless not all in the same way. To begin with, he accepts

win your esteem; we want to give you a reason to feel proud of us, that you may respond to those who heed appearances and not the reality. ¹³Now, if I have spoken foolishly, let God alone hear; if what I have said makes sense, take it for yourselves.

^{Rom 5:18}
^{6:11}
^{Rom 14:8}
^{13:4}
^{Phil 3:10} ¹⁴Indeed the love of Christ holds us and we realize that if he died for all, all have died. ¹⁵He died for all so that those who live may live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and rose again for them. ¹⁶And so from now on, we do not regard anyone from a human point of view; and even if we once knew Christ personally, we should now regard him in another way.

^{Gal 3:28}
^{6:15}
^{Eph 4:24}
^{Rom 5:10}
^{Col 1:20} ¹⁷For that same reason, the one who is in Christ is a new creature. For him the old things have passed away; a new world has come. ¹⁸All this is the work of God who in Christ reconciled us to himself, and who entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹Because in Christ God reconciled the world with

himself, no longer taking into account their trespasses and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

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

6 ¹Being God's helpers we beg you: let it not be in vain that you received this grace of God. ²Scripture says: *At the favorable time I listened to you, on the day of salvation I helped you.* This is the favorable time, this is the day of salvation.

The trials of an apostle

³We are concerned not to give anyone an occasion to stumble or criticize our mission. ⁴Instead we prove we are true ministers of God in every way by

persons with different criteria and is not guided (as are many Corinthians) by the appearance of fine speakers (v. 12). And his affectivity has been renewed in the measure that he has been possessed by Christ: he loves them as God loves them and as God would like them to be.

Even if we once knew Christ personally... (v. 16). (Paul says: "If we have known him in the flesh" or, as he was in his humanity.) He no longer sees Christ as a Galilean preacher, enclosed in the context of Jewish life, but rather dominating history. Without a doubt he is also alluding to certain adversaries who consider themselves superior to him because they have known Jesus or belong to his family. He says to them: "we must" (which means: you must) see him differently: do not see him as your cousin!

The one who is in Christ is a new creature (v. 17): first because the barriers that divide and separate people no longer exist for him (see Gal 3:27; Eph 2:14-16). Also because it is not human desires that guide him, but the Spirit of God who recreates him at every instant (Gal 5:13-21).

In Christ God reconciled the world with himself (v. 19). Many people like to say: Jesus is love. This is true, but let us not forget that this love is his response to the love of the Father who wishes to reconcile us; we must do away with the idea of an angry God whom Jesus tries to appease (Rom 3:25).

Who entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation (v. 18). Christians are not satisfied with

only singing the praises of God, and their supreme aspiration is not to find a likeable community. They do their part in the task of universal reconciliation that supposes a denunciation of injustice and sin, and the effort to overcome them. Today the Church says a great deal about this so that we may better understand our mission in the world and in the conflicts and tensions that tear our nations apart.

We present ourselves as ambassadors in the name of Christ (v. 20). This is not only true of the apostles and Paul. It is also meant for us when we go to visit the sick or the needy; when, overcoming suspicion, we approach our brother or sister to create an atmosphere of confidence, so that, shortly, we may arrive at fraternal fellowship with others who have the same problems but who, in spite of that, often remain locked in their selfishness.

He had no sin (v. 21). It is difficult to translate Paul's words: "He made sin him who did not know sin," for obviously Paul here speaks according to Hebrew culture where the same word denotes both the sin and the victim who carries the sin. Paul recalls the mystery of the cross: reconciliation is not achieved without voluntary victims who take on themselves the hatred and the sin of humankind.

• **6.3** A distinctive sign of the apostle of Christ: the contrast between the treasure entrusted to him for others, and his own existence

Eph 6:20

Is 53:5
Rom 8:3
Gal 3:13
1P 2:24
1Jn 3:5

Is 49:8

our endurance in so many trials, in hardships, afflictions, ⁵floggings, imprisonment, riots, fatigue, sleepless nights and days of hunger.

^{Rom 12:9} ^{Gal 5:22} ⁶People can notice in our upright life, knowledge, patience and kindness, action of the Holy Spirit, sincere love, ⁷words of truth and power of God. So we fight with the weapons of justice, to attack as well as to defend.

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

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

Have nothing to do with evil

^{Eph 5:8} • ¹⁴Do not make unsuitable covenants with those who do not believe: can justice walk with wickedness? Or can light coexist with darkness, ¹⁵and can there be harmony between Christ

hardly enviable and truly unenvied. Like Jesus, he is a sign of contradiction. Paul recalls what he must endure, but does not hide his pride and his conviction: *we enrich many, and we possess everything.*

The eloquent appeal beginning in verses 11-13 continues in 7:2-16. It is there we find the commentary.

• 14. This passage interrupts the flow of the discourse 6:13 continued in 7:2. What is the meaning of this sudden invitation not to have anything to do with bad people?

In the “first” letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:9) Paul recalled a previous message in which he was asking them not to mix with people of immoral behavior. It is quite possible that the

and Satan? What union can there be between one who believes and one who does not believe? ¹⁶God’s temple must have no room for idols, and we are the temple of the living God. As Scripture says; *I will dwell and live in their midst, I will be their God and they shall be my people.*

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

7 ¹Since we have such promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from all defilement of body and spirit, and complete the work of sanctification in the fear of God.

Welcome us in your hearts

• ²Welcome us in your hearts. We have injured no one, we have harmed no one, we have cheated no one. ³I do not say this to condemn you: I have just said that you are in our heart so that together we live, together we die. ⁴I have great confidence in you and I am indeed proud of you. I feel very much encouraged and my joy overflows in spite of all this bitterness.

⁵Know that when I came to Macedonia, I had no rest at all but I was afflicted with all kinds of difficulties: conflict outside and fear within. ⁶But

present passage comes from that message. Paul himself explains how we should understand these lines when he says in 1 Cor 5:10: “I did not tell you to stay away from the sinners of this world (if it were so, you would have to leave this world), but from the believers who went back to their pagan customs.”

• **7.2 Welcome us in your hearts.** Here again the affective side of Paul is revealed. This indefatigable missionary, never overcome or discouraged, was at the same time very sensitive. Paul here recalls the incident we have spoken of in the introduction. Thanks to Paul’s letter, which must have been harsh, the Corinthians were converted, followed Paul and dealt with those who attacked him.

1Cor
3:16

Lev
26:12
Ezk
37:27

Is
52:11
Jer
51:45

2S
7:14
Jer
31:9

2P
1:4

Acts
20:33

God who encourages the humble gave me comfort with the arrival of Titus, ⁷not only because of his arrival, but also because you had received him very well. He told me about your deep affection for me; you were affected by what happened, you worried about me, and this made me rejoice all the more.

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

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

^{2:13} In addition to this consolation of mine, I rejoice especially to see Titus very pleased with the way you all reassured him. ^{8:24} ¹⁴I had no cause to regret my praise of you to him. You know that I am always sincere with you; likewise my praise of you to Titus has been justified. ¹⁵He now feels much more affection for you as he remembers the

obedience of all and the respect and humility with which you received him. ¹⁶Really I rejoice for I can be truly proud of you.

The collection for those in Jerusalem

8 • ¹Now I want you to know about a gift of divine grace among the Churches of Macedonia. ²While they were so afflicted and persecuted, their joy overflowed and their extreme poverty turned into a wealth of generosity. ³⁻⁴According to their means – even beyond their means – they wanted to share in helping the saints.

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

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

¹⁰I only make a suggestion, because you were the first not only in cooperating, but in beginning this project a year ago. ¹¹So complete this work and, according to your means, carry out what

1Cor
16:5
Gal
2:10

1Cor
1:5

Mt
8:20
Phil
2:7

• **8.1** The *saints* (v. 3) are the Christians of Jerusalem. In the year 48 there was a famine in Judea and in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28) due to the poor harvest of the previous year, a sabbatical year (during which the Jews did not sow so that the earth could rest). To remedy this situation of shortage, economic aid for the Christians of Jerusalem was organized. Later, Paul promised to keep the Jerusalem community in mind during his missions among the pagans (Gal 2:10). Here, Paul exhorts the Churches in Corinth and

in the province to take up this collection that they had agreed upon.

Paul does not use the word *collection* in these chapters. Instead he speaks of the liberality and the greatness of generous giving; of the *blessed work of grace*. It is more a *gift* for the one who gives than for the one who receives.

Paul takes great care that the collection, involving large amounts, should be duly taken up. It must be collected and held by people who enjoy the confidence of the community.

result in much thanksgiving to God. ¹³This will be a test for them; they will give thanks because you obey the requirements of Christ's Gospel and share generously with them and with all. ¹⁴They shall pray to God for you and feel affection for you because the grace of God overflows in you.

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

Paul's defense and admonition

10^{*} ¹It is I, Paul, who by the humility and kindness of Christ appeal to you, the Paul "who is timid among you and bold when far away from you!"

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

⁴Our weapons for this fight are not human but they have divine power to

destroy strongholds – those arguments ⁵and haughty thoughts that oppose the knowledge of God. We compel all understanding, that they obey Christ. ⁶So I am prepared to punish any disobedience when you should show perfect obedience.

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

¹²How could I venture to equate or

• **10.1** The tone of violence in these chapters 10–13 does not fit with the reconciliation previously expressed. They may come from the letter Paul had sent before, following the incident in which various members of the Corinthian community rebelled against him.

In this extraordinary page, a few words immediately situate the discussion.

Some members of the community attack Paul's authority, feeling supported by those *who have not been able to set foot* (v. 13). Who are these people? They have the title of apostle, that is, of founders of communities, but by chance they always arrive *where others have done the work* (v. 15). People compare one "apostle" with another and Paul who never wanted to be served, who never pretended to be a great orator, or "doctor in religion" appears as a man of weak personality. *His letters are severe and strong, some say, but as he is, he has no presence and he is a poor speaker* (10:10).

Do not force me to act boldly (10:2). Paul sees himself as the apostle of the community, the one who has led them to the faith and communicated the Holy Spirit to them: no one could deny that.

Paul speaks of his power and his weapons in a threatening way. Surely the "power that destroys strongholds" is the Word of God. The Word of God gave birth to the Christian communities and gives them the power to stay united and alive in the face of opposition. The Gospel is "God's power," and when it is boldly proclaimed, the forces that oppose it collapse.

In this case, however, it is also a question of

Paul's spiritual power. Naturally, we think of Paul's conviction, the power of his word, the awareness of his mission, all of which made an impact on the Corinthians. It is also in the nature of apostles and prophets to threaten at times, on behalf of God who intervenes in an obvious way to show they are right. Recall the case with Ananias and Sapphira before Peter (Acts 5).

Paul's firm intention is to destroy *arguments and haughty thoughts which that the knowledge of God* (10:5). One might see here nothing but a rivalry between persons, but Paul knows what bothers many of them in his leadership: he does not go along with their game of petty interests and makes them live in the truth. If they do not have the courage to continue in that way, they will be nothing more than a religious group among others: they will have lost the path of the knowledge of God.

Faith is obedience (Rom 1:5): we submit to a teaching from God. That always goes together with obedience in a concrete life situation. If God has intended us to be a Church, he has necessarily wanted obedience to a hierarchy and to an established order. It is such obedience that Paul exacts.

Take note: this right to be obeyed is based on the call of Christ that has made him an apostle and on what the Spirit has done through him. When we see a multitude of preachers setting out on a mission, each one for his own church, we would at times have the right to ask who has sent them. We must also remember that it is not a question of Paul reigning over this community or several of them: he has already left to evangelize further afield (15-16).

Acts
2:42

Mt
11:29
1Cor
2:3
Phil
2:1

10:11
1Cor
4:21

6:7
Is
2:12

13:3
Jer
1:10

10:2
13:10

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

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

11 ¹May you bear with me in some little foolishness! But surely you will. ²I confess that I share the jealousy

of God for you, for I have promised you in marriage to Christ, the only spouse, to present you to him as a pure virgin. ³And this is my fear: the serpent that seduced Eve with cunning could also corrupt your minds and divert you from the Christian sincerity. ⁴Someone now comes and preaches another Jesus different from the one we preach, or you are offered a different spirit from the one you have received, with a different Gospel from the one you have accepted – and you agree!

⁵I do not see how I am inferior to those super-apostles. ⁶Does my speaking leave much to be desired? Perhaps, but not my knowledge, as I have abundantly shown to you in every way.

Paul commends the apostle Paul

⁷Perhaps my fault was that I humbled myself in order to uplift you, or that I gave you the Gospel free of charge. ⁸I called upon the services of other churches and served you with the support I received from them. ⁹When I was with you, although I was in need, I did not become a burden to anyone. The friends from Macedonia gave me what I needed. I have taken care not to be a burden to you in anything and I will continue to do so. ¹⁰By the truth of

• **11.7** In chapters 11 and 12, Paul will compare himself to the “apostles” who managed to be appreciated by the Corinthians, and on which his opponents are relying. Paul wants not to treat them as equal to equal: he is conscious of who he is, he can judge them. A dangerous position, even for someone who believes he is truly inspired by God! And yet, see 1 Cor 2:14-15.

To begin with, Paul is sure of a direct call from Christ: this contact with the risen Jesus has given him a transforming presence of Christ. He knows that his criteria, his decisions, his prophetic intuition have bypassed his adversaries. It is precisely because he has reached a superior level of life in the Spirit that he feels free vis-à-vis the “religious obligations” that are given such importance, even first place, by his opponents: compare paragraph 11:4-6 with Gal 2:6-10 and 5:7-12; see also 1 Thes 3:2-11.

Their attachment to the observance of the Jewish Law does not come from a different, legitimate view of matters of faith. They hold to

it, because in their own lives, they have not discovered the best of Christian experience. Jesus had already shown, as in the case of the Pharisees that strict observance of religious rites comes from a lack of true faith (Mk 7:6). Whoever has the experience of life in the Spirit, shocks, without wishing to do so, any “religious” people and such was the case of Paul in the Church.

In 11:22-30, Paul speaks of his labors and the risks he has taken, the persecutions he has known. He does not do this to be well thought of. He wants to show others, and remind himself, that he is gifted with an exceptional grace. All are called to follow Jesus and carry his cross, all are called to evangelize. Why is it that so few undertake the true work of evangelization among “those who are afar,” as Jesus and Paul did? That in itself is a grace, and those who have not received it do not perceive the calls and miss the occasions. Paul intends to remain inimitable, not through vainglory but in fidelity to the way on which Christ has placed him.

Rom
12:3
Col
1:25

Rom
15:20

Jer
9:23
1Cor
1:31

Jn
3:29
Eph
5:27
Rev
21:2

Gen
3

Gal
1:6

12:11
1Cor
2:1

Acts
18:3
1Cor
9:12

Phil
4:15

Christ within me, I will let no one in the land of Achaia stop this boasting of mine.

^{2:17 Phil 3:2} ¹¹Why? Because I do not love you? God knows that I do! ¹²Yet I do and I will continue to do so to silence any people anxious to appear as equal to me: this is my glory. ¹³In reality, they are false apostles, deceivers disguised as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴It is not surprising: if Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, ¹⁵his servants can easily disguise themselves as ministers of salvation, ^{12:6}until they receive what their deeds deserve.

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

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

^{Rom 11:1 Phil 3:4 Gal 1:13} Better than they with my numerous labors. Better than they with the time spent in prison. The beatings I received are beyond comparison. How many

times have I found myself in danger of death! ²⁴Five times the Jews sentenced me to thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with a rod, once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked, and once I spent a night and a day adrift on the high seas.

Dt
25:2
Acts
16:22

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

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

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

Acts
9:22-
25

Extraordinary graces

12 ¹It is useless to boast; but if I have to, I will go on to some visions and revelations of the Lord.

²I know a certain Christian: fourteen years ago he was taken up to the third heaven. ³Whether in the body or out of

Ex
33:20
Rev
1:17

APOSTOLATE AND CONTEMPLATION

• **12.1** Here Paul briefly alludes to the ecstasies through which he has been formed anew. The word ecstasy seems to many people rather eccentric; for others it is only appropriate for contemplative living apart from the world. It is quite true that ecstasy, if genuine, is relevant to contemplative life. But what is contemplation?

By "contemplation" we often understand the time given to meditation on the things of God and the discovery of his presence in our lives. In this sense we oppose contemplation to action,

or we say that both should go together. Yet the word "contemplation" also and more rightly denotes a new stage in spiritual life where the relationship between our spirit and God are profoundly changed.

In this contemplation, it is not we who discover God or who establish ourselves in silence. God is the one who imposes his presence, who, in us, gives birth to our response. Contemplation is a gift of God; it is a way of knowing God, of being guided, reformed by him that is different from what the majority of Christians experience. It is

the body, I do not know, God knows. But I know that this man, whether in the body or out of the body – I do not know, God knows – ⁴was taken up to Paradise where he heard words that cannot be told: things which humans cannot express.

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

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

¹¹I have acted as a fool but you forced me. You should have been the ones commending me. Yet I do not feel outdone by those super-apostles,

not exceptional. The transforming and sovereign action of the Spirit is there more efficacious, leading always to the same end: the individual no longer belongs to himself.

This contemplation may be given to those who have retired to convents to answer a call from God; it may be given to those who live the normal life of most people; it is given to apostles. Differing from the practice of transcendental meditation and recollection that come from the East, it eludes our efforts; it is not a matter of leading either a more active or a more retired life. What is essential is that God has taken possession of our liberty (see Jer 1:5).

If Paul has been the apostle we know, if he has had an exceptional understanding of the Christian mystery, it is because he has been a great contemplative – in the sense we have just given. The ecstasies about which he has spoken correspond to the early years following his conversion (see Acts 22:6 and 17); they are proper to an advanced stage of contemplative life, but not the last, which is total and constant union with God.

I was given a thorn in my flesh. Many

¹²even though I am nothing. All the signs of a true apostle are found in me: patience in all trials, signs, miracles and wonders.

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

This is my third visit to you

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

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

¹⁹Perhaps you think that we are again apologizing; but no: we speak in Christ and before God, and I do this for you, dear friends, to build you up. ²⁰I

hypotheses have been offered on what this *thorn* could be: an illness perhaps (2 Cor 1:8; Gal 4:13) of which the unforeseen relapses reduced him to powerlessness? Or a temptation of the “flesh,” a late consequence of his moral education as rigid as the commandments of the Law? What is certain is that we all aspire to a state of peace in which we feel sure of ourselves, but God for his part, whatever the richness of his gifts, refuses to grant it (1 Cor 2:5; 4:7).

• 14. Paul ends his letter in affirming his authority. Jesus had spoken of a testimony coming both from the apostles and the Holy Spirit; in the same way Paul ends his defense appealing to a discernment which will be the work of the Spirit: *verify, examine, recognize*. Without a doubt it should be the same in the Church and at all levels; we cannot resolve conflicts or decide on orientation by arguments or votes only. We must necessarily have, besides reflection, times of silence, of true prayer and listening to the word of God.

Notice the “trinitarian” formula in 13:13.

1Cor
2:4
1Thes
1:5

Phil
2:17

Mt
26:39

Is
40:29

Col
1:24

2:17
3:1

Rom 1:29
Gal 5:20
fear that if I go and see you, I might not find you as I would wish, and you in turn, might not find me to your liking. I might see rivalries, envy, grudges, disputes, slanders, gossip, conceit, disorder. ²¹ Let it not be that in coming again to you, God humble me because of you and I have to grieve over so many of you who live in sin, on seeing that they have not yet given up an impure way of living, their wicked conduct and the vices they formerly practiced.

Dt 19:15
Mt 18:16
1Tim 5:19
Rom 6:8
13 ¹This will be my third visit to you. *Any charge must be decided upon by the declaration of two or three witnesses.* ²I have said and I say again, being still far away, just as I did on my second visit I say to you who lived in sin as well as to the rest: when I return to you, I will not have pity. ³You want to know if Christ is speaking through me? So you will. He is not used to dealing weakly with you, but rather he acts with power. ⁴If he was crucified in his weakness, now he lives by the strength of God; and so we are weak with him, but we will be well alive with him, because God acts powerfully with you.

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

⁷We pray God that you may do no wrong, not that we wish to be acknowledged but we want you to do right, even if in this we appear to have failed. ⁸For we do not have power against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹We rejoice if we are weak while you are strong, for all we hope is that you become perfect. ¹⁰This is why I am writing now, so that when I come I may not have to act strictly and make use of the authority the Lord has given me for building up and not for destroying.

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

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

1Cor
11:28
Gal
6:4

4:10
1Cor
13:6

10:8
Jer
1:10

Phil
3:1
4:4

1Cor
16:20
1Thes
5:26

Phil
2:1