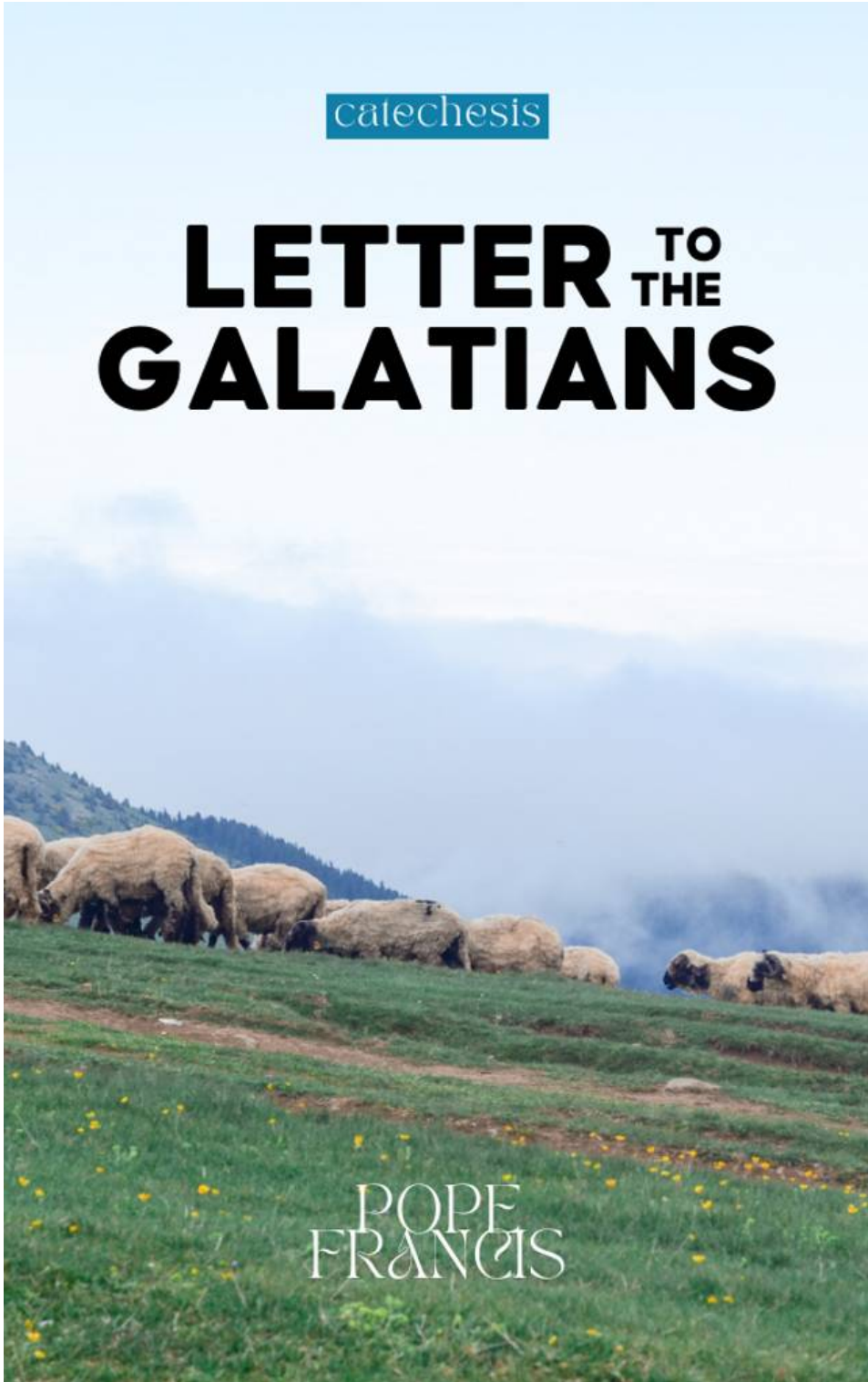


catechesis

LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

POPE
FRANCIS



Pope Francis

CATECHESIS ON THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

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1. Introduction

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

After the long itinerary dedicated to prayer, today we begin a new series of catechesis. I hope that with this itinerary of prayer we have succeeded in praying a little better, praying a little more. Today I would like to reflect on certain themes proposed by the Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Galatians. It is a very important Letter, I would even say decisive, not only for getting to know the Apostle better, but above all to consider certain topics that he addresses in depth, showing the beauty of the Gospel. In this Letter, Paul makes many biographical references that allow us to understand his conversion and his decision to place his life at the service of Jesus Christ. He also deals with certain themes that are very important for the faith, such as freedom, grace and the Christian way of life, which are extremely topical because they touch on many aspects of the life of the Church today. This letter is very topical. It seems to be written for our times.

The first feature that emerges from this Letter is the great work of evangelization carried out by the Apostle, who had visited the communities of Galatia at least twice during his missionary journeys. Paul addresses the Christians of that territory. We do not know exactly which geographical area he is referring to, nor can we state with certainty the date on which he wrote this Letter. We do know that the Galatians were an ancient Celtic population who, after many vicissitudes, had settled in the extensive region of Anatolia that had as its capital the city of Ancyra, today Ankara, the capital of Turkey. Paul relates only that, due to illness, he was obliged to stay in that region (cf. *Gal* 4:13). In the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Luke instead finds a more spiritual motivation. He says that “they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia” (16:6).

The two facts are not contradictory: rather, they indicate that the path of evangelization does not always depend on our will and plans, but requires a willingness to allow ourselves to be shaped and to follow other paths that were not foreseen. Among you there is a family who greeted me: they say that they have to learn Latvian, and I don't know what other language, because they will go as missionaries to those lands. Still today the Spirit continues to bring many missionaries to leave their homeland and to go to another country to carry out their mission. What we do see, however, is that in his tireless work of evangelization, the Apostle succeeded in founding several small communities scattered throughout the region of Galatia. When Paul arrived in a city, in a region, he did not build a great cathedral immediately, no. He created small

communities that are the leaven of our Christian culture today. He began by making small communities. And these small communities grew, they grew and they went forward. Today, too, this pastoral method is used in every missionary region. I received a letter last week, from a missionary in Papua New Guinea, telling me that he is preaching the Gospel in the forest, to people who do not even know who Jesus Christ was. It is beautiful! One begins by forming small communities. Even today this method is the evangelization method of the first evangelization.

What we ought to note is Paul's pastoral concern, which is all aflame. After founding these Churches, he became aware of a great danger to their growth in faith — pastors are like fathers or mothers who are immediately aware of dangers to their children. They grow, and dangers emerge. As someone said, "the vultures come to wreak havoc in the community". Indeed, some Christians who had come from Judaism had infiltrated, and began to sow theories contrary to the Apostle's teaching, even going so far as to denigrate him. They began with doctrine — "No to this, yes to that", and then they denigrated the Apostle. It is the usual method: undermining the authority of the Apostle. As we can see, it is an ancient practice to present oneself at times as the sole possessor of the truth — the pure — and to aim at belittling the work of others, even with slander. These opponents of Paul argued that even the Gentiles had to be circumcised and live according to the rules of Mosaic Law. They went back to the previous observances, those that had been superseded by the Gospel. The Galatians, therefore, would have had to renounce their cultural identity in order to submit to the norms, prescriptions and customs typical of the Jews. Not only that, those adversaries argued that Paul was not a true apostle and therefore had no authority to preach the Gospel. And we often see this. Let us think about how, in some Christian communities or dioceses, first they begin with stories, and then they end up discrediting the priest or the bishop. It is precisely the way of the evil one, of these people who divide, who do not know how to build. And in this Letter to the Galatians we see this process.

The Galatians found themselves in a situation of crisis. What were they to do? To listen and follow what Paul had preached to them, or to listen to the new preachers who accused him? It is easy to imagine the state of uncertainty that filled their hearts. For them, having come to know Jesus and believe in the work of salvation accomplished by his death and resurrection, was truly the beginning of a new life, a life of freedom. They had embarked on a path that allowed them to be free at last, despite the fact that their history was interwoven with many forms of violent slavery, not least that which had subjected them to the emperor of Rome. Therefore, faced with criticism from the new preachers, they felt lost and they felt uncertain about how to behave: "But who is right? This Paul, or these people who now come teaching other things? Whom should I listen to?" In short, there really was a lot at stake!

This situation is not far removed from the experience of many Christians today. Indeed, today too there is no shortage of preachers who, especially through the new means of communication, can disturb communities. They present themselves not primarily to announce the Gospel of God who loves man in Jesus, Crucified and Risen, but to insist, as true "keepers of the truth" — so they call themselves — on the best way to be Christians. And they strongly affirm that the true Christianity is the one they adhere to, often identified with certain forms of

the past, and that the solution to the crises of today is to go back so as not to lose the genuineness of the faith. Today too, as then, there is a temptation to close oneself up in some of the certainties acquired in past traditions. But how can we recognize these people? For example, one of the features of this way of proceeding is inflexibility. Faced with the preaching of the Gospel that makes us free, that makes us joyful, these people are rigid. Always the rigidity: you must do this, you must do that.... Inflexibility is typical of these people. Following the teaching of the Apostle Paul in his *Letter to the Galatians* will help us understand which path to follow. The path indicated by the Apostle is the liberating and ever-new path of Jesus, Crucified and Risen; it is the path of proclamation, which is achieved through humility and fraternity — the new preachers do not know what humility is, what fraternity is. It is the path of meek and obedient trust — the new preachers know neither meekness nor obedience. And this meek and obedient way leads forward in the certainty that the Holy Spirit works in the Church in every age. Ultimately, faith in the Holy Spirit present in the Church carries us forward and will save us.

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2. Paul, the true apostle

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

We are delving into the *Letter to the Galatians*, a little at a time. We have seen that these Christians find themselves in conflict on how to live the faith. The Apostle Paul begins writing his Letter by reminding them of their past relationship, his unease at being far from them, and the unchanging love he retains for each one of them. However, he does not fail to point out his concern that the Galatians should follow the correct path: it is the concern of a father, who has generated the communities in the faith. His intention is very clear: it is necessary to reaffirm the novelty of the Gospel, which the Galatians received through his preaching, to build the true identity on which to base their existence. And this is the principle: to reaffirm the newness of the Gospel, which the Galatians had received from the Apostle.

We immediately discover that Paul has a profound knowledge of the mystery of Christ. From the beginning of his Letter he does not follow the shallow arguments used by his detractors. The Apostle “flies high” and shows us, too, how to behave when conflicts arise within the community. Only towards the end of the Letter, in fact, is it made explicit that at the heart of the diatribe is the question of circumcision, hence of the main Jewish tradition. Paul chooses the path of going deeper, because what is at stake is the truth of the Gospel and the freedom of Christians, which is an integral part of it. He does not stop at the surface of problems, of conflicts, as we are often tempted to do in order to find an immediate solution that gives us false hope that everyone can agree with a compromise. Paul loves Jesus and knows that Jesus is not a man-God of compromises. This is not how the Gospel works, and the Apostle chooses to take the more challenging route. He writes: “Am I now seeking the favour of men, or of God’s?”. He does not try to make peace with everyone. And he continues: “Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10).

Firstly, Paul feels it is his duty to remind the Galatians that he is a true apostle not by his own merit, but by God’s call. He recounts the story of his vocation and conversion, which coincided with the apparition of the Risen Christ during the journey to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1-9). It is interesting to observe what he affirms of his life prior to that event: “I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal 1:13-14). Paul dared to affirm that in Judaism he surpassed all others, he was a truly zealous

Pharisee, “as to righteousness under the law blameless” (Phil 3:6). Twice he emphasises that he was a defender of the “traditions of the fathers” and a “staunch upholder of the law”. This is the story of Paul.

On the one hand, he insists in underlining that he had fiercely persecuted the Church and that he had been a “blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence” (cf. 1 Tim 1:13). He spares no adjectives: he describes his own self in this way. On the other hand, he highlights God’s mercy towards him, which led him to experience a radical transformation, well known to all. He writes: “I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; they only heard it said, ‘He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith’” (Gal 1:22-23). He converted, he changed, he changed his heart. Paul thus highlights the truth of his vocation through the striking contrast that had been created in his life: from being a persecutor of Christians for not observing the traditions and the law, he was called to become an apostle to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But we see that Paul is free: he is free to proclaim the Gospel and he is also free to confess his sins. “I was like that”: it is the truth that gives freedom to the heart, and it is the freedom of God.

Thinking back on his story, Paul is full of wonder and gratitude. It is as if he wanted to tell the Galatians that he could have been anything but an apostle. He had been brought up as a boy to be a blameless observer of Mosaic Law, and circumstances had led him to fight the disciples of Christ. However, something unexpected had happened: God, by His grace, had revealed to him His Son who had died and rose again, so that he could become a herald among the Gentiles (cf. Gal 1:15-16).

How inscrutable are the ways of the Lord! We experience this every day, but especially if we think back to the times when the Lord called us. We must never forget the time and the way in which God entered our lives: let us keep fixed in our hearts and minds that encounter with grace, when God changed our existence. How often, in the face of the Lord’s great works, does the question spontaneously arise: but how is it possible that God uses a sinner, a frail and weak person, to do his will? And yet, none of this happens by chance, because everything has been prepared in God’s plan. He weaves our history, the story of each one of us: he weaves our history and, if we correspond with trust to his plan of salvation, we will become aware of it. The calling always implies a mission to which we are destined; that is why we are asked to prepare ourselves seriously, knowing that it is God himself who sends us, it is God himself who supports us with his grace. Brothers and sisters, let us allow ourselves to be led by this awareness: the primacy of grace transforms existence and makes it worthy of being placed at the service of the Gospel. The primacy of grace covers all sins, changes hearts, changes lives, and makes us see new paths. Let us not forget this.

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3. There is just one Gospel

Brothers and sisters, good morning!

When it comes to the Gospel and the mission to evangelise, Paul is enthusiastic, he comes out of himself. He seems to see nothing other than this mission that the Lord has entrusted to him. Everything in him is dedicated to this proclamation, and he has no interest other than the Gospel. It is Paul's love, Paul's interest, Paul's profession: to proclaim. He even goes so far as to say: 'Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the Gospel' (1 Cor 1:17). Paul interprets his whole existence as a call to evangelise, to make Christ's message known, to make the Gospel known: "Woe to me", he says, "if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). And writing to the Christians of Rome, he presents himself simply as follows: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, an apostle by calling, chosen to proclaim the Gospel of God" (Rom 1:1). This is his vocation. In short, he is aware that he has been "set apart" to bring the Gospel to all, and he cannot but devote himself with all his strength to this mission.

One can therefore understand the sadness, the disappointment and even the bitter irony of the Apostle towards the Galatians, who in his eyes are taking the wrong path, which will lead to them to a point of no return: they have taken the wrong path. The pivot around which everything revolves is the Gospel. Paul does not think of the "four Gospels", as is natural for us, Indeed, while he is sending this Letter, none of the four Gospels had yet been written. For him the Gospel is what he preaches, what is called the *kerygma*, that is, the proclamation. And what proclamation? That of the death and resurrection of Jesus as the source of salvation. A Gospel that is expressed in four verbs: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (1 Cor 15: 3-5). This is Paul's proclamation, the proclamation that gives life to all. This Gospel is the fulfilment of the promises and the salvation offered to all men. Whoever accepts it is reconciled to God, is welcomed as a true son, and receives the inheritance of eternal life.

Faced with such a great gift to the Galatians, the Apostle cannot explain why they might think of accepting another "gospel", perhaps more sophisticated, more intellectual, I don't know ... but another "gospel". It should be noted, however, that these Christians have not yet abandoned the Gospel announced by Paul. The Apostle knows that they are still in time not to take a false step, but he warns them strongly, very strongly. His first argument points directly to the fact that the preaching carried out by the new missionaries - those who bring novelty, who preach - cannot be the Gospel. On the contrary, it is a proclamation that distorts the true Gospel because it prevents them from attaining the freedom acquired by

arriving at faith - this is the key word, isn't it? - it prevents them from reaching the freedom acquired by coming to faith. The Galatians are still "beginners" and their disorientation is understandable. They do not yet know the complexities of the Mosaic Law and their enthusiasm in embracing faith in Christ leads them to listen to these new preachers, deluding themselves that their message is complementary to Paul's. And it is not.

However, the Apostle, cannot risk compromises on such decisive ground. The Gospel is only one and that is what he proclaimed; there can be no other. Beware! Paul does not say that the true Gospel is his because it was he who announced it, no! He does not say this. This would be presumptuous, it would be boastful. Rather, he affirms that "his" Gospel, the same one that the other Apostles were proclaiming elsewhere, is the only authentic one, because it is that of Jesus Christ. He thus writes: "I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (*Gal 1:11*). We can understand why Paul uses very harsh terms. Twice he uses the expression "anathema", which indicates the need to keep far from the community that which threatens its foundations. And this new "gospel" threatens the foundations of the community. In short, on this point the Apostle leaves no room for negotiation: one cannot negotiate. With the truth of the Gospel, one cannot negotiate. Either you receive the Gospel as it is, as it was announced, or you receive any other thing. But you cannot negotiate with the Gospel. One cannot compromise. Faith in Jesus is not a bargaining chip: it is salvation, it is encounter, it is redemption. It cannot be sold off cheaply.

This situation described at the beginning of the Letter seems paradoxical, because all those involved seem to be animated by good feelings. The Galatians who listen to the new missionaries think that by circumcision they will be even more devoted to the will of God and thus be even more pleasing to Paul. Paul's enemies seem to be inspired by fidelity to the tradition received from the fathers and believe that genuine faith consists in observing the Law. In the face of this supreme fidelity, they even justify their insinuations and suspicions about Paul, who is considered unorthodox with regard to tradition. The Apostle himself is well aware that his mission is of a divine nature - it was revealed by Christ Himself, to him - and therefore he is moved by total enthusiasm for the novelty of the Gospel, which is a radical novelty, not a fleeting novelty: there are no "fashionable" gospels, the Gospel is always new, it is newness. His pastoral anxiety leads him to be severe, because he sees the great risk facing young Christians. In short, in this labyrinth of good intentions it is necessary to disentangle oneself in order to grasp the supreme truth that is most consistent with the Person and preaching of Jesus and His revelation of the Father's love. This is important: knowing how to discern. Very often we have seen throughout history, and we even see this today, some movements that preach the Gospel in their own way, sometimes with real and genuine charisms; but then they take it too far and reduce all the Gospel to a "movement". And this is not Christ's Gospel: this is the Gospel of the founder and yes, it may help at the beginning, but in the end it does not bear fruit with deep roots. For this reason, Paul's clear and decisive word was salutary for the Galatians and is salutary for us too. The Gospel is Christ's gift to us, He Himself revealed it to us. It is what gives us life. Thank you.

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4. The Mosaic Law

Brothers and sisters, good morning!

“Why the law?” (Gal 3:19). This is the question that we want to deepen today, continuing with Saint Paul, to recognize the newness of the Christian life enlivened by the Holy Spirit. But if the Holy Spirit exists, if Jesus exists who redeemed us, why the law? And this is what we must reflect on today. The Apostle writes: “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Gal 5:18). Instead, Paul’s detractors sustained that the Galatians had to follow the Law to be saved. They were going backward. They were nostalgic for times gone by, of the times before Jesus Christ. The Apostle is not at all in agreement. These were not the terms he had agreed on with the other Apostles in Jerusalem. He remembers very well Peter’s words when he said: “Why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (Acts 15:10). The dispositions that had emerged in that ‘first council’ – the first ecumenical council was the one that took place in Jerusalem – and the dispositions that emerged were very clear. They said: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us [the apostles] to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols [that is, idolatry] and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity” (Acts 15:28-29). Some of the things touched on worshipping God, and idolatry, and some things regarding the way of understanding life at that time.

When Paul speaks about the Law, he is normally referring to the Mosaic Law, the law given by Moses, the Ten Commandments. It was in relationship to, it was on the way, it was a preparation, it was related with the Covenant that God had established with his people. According to various Old Testament texts, the Torah – that is, the Hebrew term used to indicate the Law – is the collection of all those prescriptions and norms the Israelites had to observe by virtue of the Covenant with God. An effective synthesis of what the Torah is can be found in this text of Deuteronomy, that says this: “The Lord will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (30:9-10). So, the observance of the Law guaranteed to the people the benefits of the Covenant and guaranteed a particular bond with God. This people, this population, this person, they are connected with God and they make it seen, this union with God, in the fulfillment, in the observance of the Law. In making the Covenant with Israel, God offered them the Torah, the Law, so they could understand his will and live in justice. We have to think that at that time, a Law like this was necessary, it was a tremendous gift that God gave his people. Why? Because at that time paganism was everywhere, idolatry was everywhere and

human behaviour was a result of idolatry. Because of this, the great gift God gave his people is the law, so they could persevere. Several times, especially in the prophetic books, it is noted that not observing the precepts of the Law constituted a real betrayal of the Covenant, provoking God's wrath as a consequence. The connection between the Covenant and the Law was so close that the two realities were inseparable. The Law is the way a person, a people express that they are in covenant with God.

So, in light of all this, it is easy to understand how well those missionaries who had infiltrated the Galatians found such fair game by sustaining that adhering to the Covenant also included observing the Mosaic Law as it was done at that time. Nevertheless, precisely regarding this point, we can discover Saint Paul's spiritual intelligence and the great insights he expressed, sustained by the grace he received for his evangelizing mission.

The Apostle explains to the Galatians that, in reality, the Covenant and the Law are not linked indissolubly – the Covenant with God and the Mosaic Law. The first element he relies on is that the Covenant established by God with Abraham was based on faith in the fulfillment of the promise and not on the observance of the Law that did not yet exist. Abraham began his journey centuries before the Law. The Apostle writes: "This is what I mean: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward [with Moses], does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God [with Abraham when he called him], so as to make the promise void". This word is very important. The people of God, we Christians, we journey through life looking toward a promise, the promise is what attracts us, it attracts us to move forward toward the encounter with the Lord. "For if the inheritance is by the law, it is no longer by promise [that came before the Law, the promise to Abraham]; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise" (*Gal 3:17-18*), then the Law came four hundred and thirty years after. With this reasoning, Paul reached his first objective: the Law is not the basis of the Covenant because it came later, it was necessary and just, but prior to that there was the promise, the Covenant.

Such an argument disqualifies all those who sustain that the Mosaic Law was a constitutive part of the Covenant. No, the Covenant comes first, and the call came to Abraham. The Torah, the Law, in fact, was not included in the promise made to Abraham. Having said this, one should not think, however, that Saint Paul was opposed to the Mosaic Law. No, he observed it. Several times in his Letters, he defends its divine origin and says that it possesses a well-defined role in the history of salvation. The Law, however, does not give life, it does not offer the fulfillment of the promise because it is not capable of being able to fulfill it. The Law is a journey, a journey that leads toward an encounter. Paul uses a word, I do not know if it is in the text, a very important word: the law is the "pedagogue" toward Christ, the pedagogue toward faith in Christ, that is, the teacher that leads you by the hand toward the encounter (cf. *Gal 3:24*). Those who seek life need to look to the promise and to its fulfillment in Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters, this first exposition of the Apostle to the Galatians presents the radical newness of the Christian life: all those who have faith in Jesus Christ are called to live in the Holy Spirit, who liberates from the Law and, at the same time, brings it to fulfillment according to the commandment of love. This is very important. The Law leads us to Jesus. But one of you might say to me: "But, Father, just one thing: does this mean that if I pray the Creed, I do not need to

observe the commandments?” No, the commandments are valid in the sense that they are “pedagogues” [teachers] that lead you toward the encounter with Christ. But if you set aside the encounter with Jesus and want to go back to giving greater importance to the commandments, this was the problem of these fundamentalist missionaries who had infiltrated the Galatians to confuse them.

May the Lord help us to journey along the path of the commandments but looking toward the love of Christ, with the encounter with Christ, knowing that the encounter with Jesus is more important than all of the commandments.

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5. The propedeutic value of the Law

Brothers and sisters, good morning!

Saint Paul, who loved Jesus and had clearly understood what salvation was, taught us that the “children of the promise” (*Gal 4:28*) — that is all of us, justified by Jesus Christ — are not bound by the Law, but are called to the demanding lifestyle of the freedom of the Gospel. The Law however exists. But it exists in another way: the same Law, the Ten Commandments, but in another way, because it could no longer be justified by itself once the Lord Jesus had come. And therefore, in today’s catechesis I would like to explain this. And we ask: what, according to the Letter to the Galatians, is the role of the Law? In the passage we heard, Paul says that the Law was like a *pedagogue*. It is a beautiful image, that of the pedagogue we spoke about during the last audience, an image that deserves to be understood in its correct meaning.

The Apostle seems to suggest to Christians that they divide the history of salvation into two parts, and also his personal story. There are two periods: before becoming believers in Christ Jesus and after receiving the faith. At the centre is the event of Jesus’ death and resurrection, which Paul preached in order to inspire faith in the Son of God, the source of salvation, and in Christ Jesus we are justified. Therefore, starting from faith in Christ there is a “before” and an “after” with regard to the Law itself, because the Law exists, the Commandments exist, but there is one attitude before the coming of Jesus, and another one afterwards. The previous history is determined by being “under the Law”. And those who followed the path of the Law were saved, they were justified; the subsequent one, after the coming of Jesus, is to be lived by following the Holy Spirit (cf. *Gal 5:25*). This is the first time that Paul uses this expression: to be “*under the Law*”. The underlying meaning implies the idea of a negative servitude, typical of slaves: to be “under”. The Apostle makes it explicit by saying that when one is “under the Law” it is as if one is “watched” and “locked up”, a kind of preventive custody. This period, Saint Paul says, has lasted a long time — from Moses, to the coming of Jesus — and is perpetuated as long as one lives in sin.

The relationship between the Law and sin will be explained in a more systematic way by the Apostle in his Letter to the Romans, written a few years after the one to the Galatians. In summary, the Law leads to the definition of the transgression and to making people aware of their own sin: “You have done this, and so the Law — the Ten Commandments — say this: you are in sin”. Indeed, as common experience teaches, the precept ends up stimulating the transgression. In the Letter to the Romans he writes: “While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us

captive” (*Rom 7:5-6*). Why? Because the justification of Jesus Christ has come. Paul succinctly expresses his vision of the Law: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law” (*1 Cor 15:56*). A dialogue: you are under the law, and you are there with the door open to sin.

In this context, the reference to the pedagogical role played by the law makes total sense. But the Law is the pedagogue that leads you where? To Jesus. In the school system of antiquity, the pedagogue did not have the function we attribute to him today, namely that of supporting the education of a boy or a girl. At the time he was instead a slave whose task was to accompany the master’s son to the teacher and then bring him home again. He was thus to protect him from danger and watch over him to ensure he did not behave badly. His function was rather disciplinary. When the boy became an adult, the pedagogue ceased his duties. The pedagogue to whom Paul refers was not the teacher, but the one who accompanied his ward to school, who watched over the boy and brought him back home.

Referring to the Law in these terms enables Saint Paul to clarify the role it played in the history of Israel. The *Torah*, that is, the Law, was an act of magnanimity by God towards his people. After the election of Abraham, the other great act was the Law: laying down the path to follow. It certainly had restrictive functions, but at the same time it had protected the people, it had educated them, disciplined them and supported them in their weakness, especially by protecting them from paganism; there were many pagan attitudes in those times. The Torah says: “There is only one God and He has set us on our way”. An act of goodness by the Lord. And certainly, as I said, it had restrictive functions, but at the same time it had protected the people, had educated them, had disciplined them and it had supported them in their weakness. And this is why the Apostle goes on to describe the minor age. And he says: “The heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe” (*Gal 4: 1-3*). Hence, the Apostle’s conviction is that the Law certainly possesses a positive function — as a pedagogue moving forward — but it is a function that is limited in time. Its duration cannot be extended too far because it is linked to the maturation of individuals and their choice of freedom. Once one has come to faith, the Law exhausts its propaedeutic value and must give way to another authority. What does this mean? That after the Law we can say, “We believe in Jesus Christ and do what we want”? No! The Commandments exist, but they do not justify us. What justifies is Jesus Christ. The Commandments must be observed, but they do not give us justice; there is the gratuitousness of Jesus Christ, the encounter with Jesus Christ that freely justifies us. The merit of faith is receiving Jesus. The only merit: opening the heart. So what do we do with the Commandments? We must observe them, but as an aid to the encounter with Jesus Christ.

This teaching on the value of the law is very important, and deserves to be considered carefully so as not to fall into misunderstandings and take false steps. It will do us good to ask ourselves whether we still live in the period in which we need the Law, or if instead we are fully aware of having received the grace of becoming children of God so as to live in love. How do I live? In the fear that if I do not do this, I will go to hell? Or do I live with that hope too, with that joy of the gratuitousness of salvation in Jesus Christ? It is a good question. And also a second

one: do I scorn the Commandments? No. I observe them, but not as absolutes, because I know that it is Jesus Christ who justifies me.

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6. The dangers of the Law

Brothers and sisters, good morning!

The Letter to the Galatians reports a rather surprising fact. As we have heard, Paul says that he reproached Cephas, or Peter, in front of the community at Antioch, because his behaviour was not that good. What had happened that was so serious that Paul felt obliged to address Peter in such harsh terms? Was Paul perhaps exaggerating, allowing his character to get in the way without knowing how to control himself? We will see that this is not the case, but that, yet again, what was at stake was the relationship between the Law and freedom. And we must return to this often.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul deliberately mentions this episode that had taken place years before in Antioch. He wanted to remind the Christians of those communities that they were absolutely not to listen to those who were preaching that it was necessary to be circumcised, and therefore be “under the Law” with all of its prescriptions. Let us recall that it was these fundamentalist preachers who had gone there and were creating confusion, and had even robbed that community of their peace. The object of the criticism regarding Peter was his behaviour when sitting down to table. For a Jew, the Law prohibited eating with non-Jews. But Peter himself, in another circumstance, had gone to the house of Cornelius the centurion in Caesarea, knowing that he was transgressing the Law. At that time he had said: “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Once he returned to Jerusalem, the circumcised Christians, who were faithful to the Mosaic Law, reproached Peter for his behaviour. He, however, justified himself saying: “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’. If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:16-17). Let us remember that the Holy Spirit had come at that time into Cornelius’ house when Peter went there.

Something similar had also taken place in Antioch in Paul’s presence. First, Peter had been eating with the Christians of pagan origin without any difficulty; however, when some circumcised Christians from Jerusalem arrived in the city — those who were originally Jews — he then no longer did so, because he did not want to incur their criticism. This was the error — he paid more attention to criticism, to making a good impression. And this was serious in Paul’s eyes, also because other disciples imitated Peter, first among them Barnabas who, with Paul, had evangelized precisely the Galatians (cf. *Gal* 2:13). In so doing, without wanting to, Peter, who was a bit here and a bit there, not clear, not transparent,

was, in fact, creating an unjust division within the community: “I am pure.... I am following this line.... I have to do this ... this cannot be done...”.

In his reproach — and this is the heart of the problem — Paul uses a term that allows us to enter into the merit of his reaction: *hypocrisy* (cf. *Gal 2:13*). This is a word that is repeated many times: hypocrisy. I think we all understand what it means.... The observance of the Law on the part of Christians led to this hypocritical behaviour that the apostle wanted to counter forcefully and convincingly. Paul was upright, he had his defects — many of them ... his character was terrible — but he was upright. What is hypocrisy? When we say, “Be careful, that person is a hypocrite”, what are we trying to say? What is hypocrisy? It can be called the *fear of the truth*. Hypocrites are afraid of the truth. They prefer to pretend rather than be themselves. It is like applying makeup on your soul, like putting makeup on your behaviour, putting makeup on how to proceed: it is not the truth. “I am afraid of proceeding as I am and I put make up on my behaviour”. To pretend hinders the courage to openly speak the truth; and thus, the obligation to speak the truth at all times, everywhere and in spite of anything, can easily be escaped. Pretending leads to this: to half-truths. And half-truths are a sham because the truth is the truth or it is not the truth. But half-truths are a way of acting that is not true. We prefer, as I said, to pretend rather than to be ourselves, and this pretence hinders the courage to openly speak the truth. And thus, we escape the duty — and this is a commandment — to always speak the truth, to say it everywhere and in spite of anything. And in an environment where interpersonal relations are lived under the banner of formalism, the virus of hypocrisy easily spreads. That smile that does not come from the heart. Trying to be on good terms with everyone, but with no one.

In the Bible, there are several examples where hypocrisy is contested. A beautiful testimony to counter hypocrisy is that of the elderly Eleazar who was asked to pretend to eat meat sacrificed to the pagan deities in order to save his own life: to pretend that he was eating it when he was not eating it. Or to pretend he was eating pork but his friends had prepared something else. But that God-fearing man replied: “Such pretence is not worthy of our time of life, lest many of the young should suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year has gone over to an alien religion, and through my pretence, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they should be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age” (2 Mac 6:24-25). An honest man: he did not take the path of hypocrisy! What a beautiful episode on which to reflect to distance ourselves from hy-poc-ri-sy! The Gospels, too, report several situations in which Jesus strongly reproaches those who externally appear just, but who internally are filled with falsity and iniquity (cf. Mt 23:13-29). If you have some time today, pick up the twenty-third chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew and see how many times Jesus says: “hypocrites, hypocrites, hypocrites”, and thus reveals what hypocrisy is.

Hypocrites are people who pretend, flatter and deceive because they live with a mask over their faces and do not have the courage to face the truth. For this reason, they are not capable of truly loving: a hypocrite does not know how to love. They limit themselves to living out of egoism and do not have the strength to show their hearts transparently. There are many situations in which hypocrisy is at work. It is often hidden in the work place where one appears to be friends with one’s colleagues, while competition leads them to stab them in the back. In politics, it is not unusual to find hypocrites who live one way in public and

another way in private. Hypocrisy in the Church is particularly detestable; and unfortunately, hypocrisy exists in the Church and there are many hypocritical Christians and ministers. We should never forget the Lord's words: "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil" (*Mt 5:37*).

Brothers and sisters, today, let us think about the hy-poc-ri-sy that Paul condemns, and that Jesus condemns: hy-poc-ri-sy. And let us not be afraid to be truthful, to speak the truth, to hear the truth, to conform ourselves to the truth. In this way, we will be able to love. A hypocrite does not know how to love. To act other than truthfully means jeopardizing the unity of the Church, that unity for which the Lord himself prayed.

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7. Foolish Galatians

We will continue the explanation of the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians. This explanation is not something new, something that is mine: what we are studying is what Saint Paul says in a very serious conflict with the Galatians. And it is also the Word of God, because it entered the Bible. They are not things that someone makes up: no. It is something that happened in that time and which can repeat itself. And in fact, we have seen that this has repeated itself in history. This is simply a catechesis on the Word of God expressed in the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians; nothing else. This must always be kept in mind. And in the previous catecheses we saw how the Apostle Paul shows the first Christians of Galatia how dangerous it is to leave the path they started to travel by welcoming the Gospel. Indeed, the risk is that of giving in to formalism, which is one of the temptations that leads to hypocrisy, which we spoke about last time. Giving in to formalism, and denying the new dignity they received: the dignity of those redeemed by Christ. The passage we have just heard is the beginning of the second part of the Letter. So far, Paul has spoken of his life and his vocation: of how God's grace transformed his existence, placing it completely at the service of evangelisation. At this point, he directly challenges the Galatians: he places before them the choices they have made and their current condition, which could nullify the experience of grace they had lived.

And the terms the Apostle uses to address the Galatians are certainly not polite: we have heard them. In the other Letters it is easy to find expressions such as "brothers" or "dear friends"; not here, because he is angry. He says "Galatians" generically and, on no less than two occasions, calls them "foolish", which is not a polite term. Foolish, senseless, and many things he can say... He does so not because they are not intelligent, but because, almost without realizing it, they risk losing the faith in Christ that they had received with so much enthusiasm. They are foolish because they are unaware that the danger is that of losing the valuable treasure, the beauty, of the newness of Christ. The Apostle's wonder and sadness are clear. Not without bitterness, he provokes those Christians into remembering his first proclamation, with which he offered them the possibility of attaining a new, hitherto unhopd-for freedom.

The Apostle poses questions to the Galatians, with the intention of shaking up their consciences: this is why he is so forceful. They are rhetorical questions, because the Galatians are well aware that their coming to faith in Christ was the fruit of the grace received through the preaching of the Gospel. He takes them back to the starting point of the Christian vocation. The word they had heard from Paul focused on God's love, fully manifested in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul could not have found a more convincing expression than what he had probably repeated to them several times in his preaching: "it is no longer I who

live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2: 20). Paul did not want to know anything other than the crucified Christ (cf. 1 Cor 2: 2). The Galatians must look to this event, without letting themselves be distracted by other proclamations. In short, Paul’s intention is to put pressure on Christians so that they could realise what was at stake, so they would not allow themselves to be enchanted by the voice of the sirens who wanted to lead them to a religiosity based solely on the scrupulous observance of precepts. Because they, the new preachers who had arrived there in Galatia, had convinced them that they should turn back and also return to the precepts they had observed and that led to perfection before the coming of Christ, which is the gratuitousness of salvation.

Besides, the Galatians understood very well what the Apostle was referring to. They certainly had experience of the action of the Holy Spirit in their communities: as in the other Churches, charity and the various charisms had manifested themselves among them too. When put to the test, they had to answer that what they had experienced was the fruit of the newness of the Spirit. At the beginning of their coming to faith, therefore, was the initiative of God, not of men. The Holy Spirit had been the agent of their experience; to put him in the background now in order to give primacy to their own works — namely, the fulfilment of the precepts of the Law — would be foolhardy. Holiness comes from the Holy Spirit and is the gratuitousness of redemption by Jesus: this justifies us.

In this way, Saint Paul invites us too to reflect: how do we live our faith? Does the love of Christ, crucified and risen again, remain at the centre of our daily life as the wellspring of salvation, or are we content with a few religious formalities to salve our consciences? How do we live our faith? Are we attached to the precious treasure, to the beauty of the newness of Christ, or do we prefer something that attracts us momentarily but then leaves us empty inside? The ephemeral often knocks at the door during our days, but it is a sad illusion, which makes us give in to superficiality and prevents us from discerning what is truly worth living for.

Brothers and sisters, let us however keep the certainty that, even when we are tempted to turn away, God still continues to bestow his gifts. Throughout history, even today, things happen that resemble what happened to the Galatians. Even today, people come and harangue us, saying, “No, holiness is in these precepts, in these things, you must do this and that”, and propose an inflexible religiosity, the inflexibility that takes away from us that freedom in the Spirit that Christ’s redemption gives us. Beware of the rigidity they propose to you: be careful. Because behind every inflexibility there is something bad, which is not the Spirit of God. And for this reason, this Letter will help us not to listen to these somewhat fundamentalist proposals that set us back in our spiritual life, and will help us go ahead in the paschal vocation of Jesus. This is what the Apostle reiterates to the Galatians, reminding them that the Father “supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you” (3:5). He speaks in the present tense, he does not say “the Father has supplied you with the Spirit”, chapter 3, verse 5, no: he says — “supplies”; he does not say, “has worked”, he says “works”. For, despite all the difficulties we may pose to his action, also despite our sins, God does not abandon us but rather abides with us in his merciful love. God is always near us with his kindness. He is like that father who went up to the terrace every day to see if his son was returning: the love of the Father never tires of us. Let us ask for the wisdom to always be aware of this reality, and to turn away the fundamentalists

who propose to us a life of artificial asceticism, far removed from the resurrection of Christ. Asceticism is necessary, but wise asceticism, not artificial.

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8. We are children of God

Brothers and sisters, good morning!

Let us continue our journey in deepening the faith – our faith – in the light of the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians. The Apostle is insistent with those Christians so they would not forget the novelty of God’s revelation that had been proclaimed to them. Completely in agreement with the evangelist John (cf. *1 Jn* 3:1-2), Paul emphasises that faith in Jesus Christ has allowed us to truly become children of God and also his heirs. We Christians often take for granted this reality of being God’s children. Instead, it is good to remember with gratitude the moment in which we became such, the moment of our baptism, so as to live the great gift we received with greater awareness. If I were to ask you today, “which of you knows the exact date of your baptism?” I do not think there would be too many hands raised.... Yet, it is the day on which we were saved, it is the day on which we became children of God. Now, those who do not know it should ask their godparents, their dad, their mom, an uncle, an aunt: “When was I baptised”? And that day should be remembered each year: it is the day on which we became children of God. Agreed? Will you all do this? [Response from the crowd.] Eh, it is a so-so “yes.” [Laughter]. Let us proceed.

In fact, once “faith has come” in Jesus Christ (v. 25), a radically new condition was created that leads to divine sonship. The sonship of which Paul speaks is no longer a general one involving all men and women insofar as they are sons and daughters of the same Creator. No, in the passage we have heard, he affirms that faith allows us to be children of God “*in Christ*” (v. 26). This is what is new. This “in Christ” is what makes the difference. Not just children of God, like everyone: all men and women are children of God, all of them, regardless of the religion we embrace. No. But “*in Christ*”, this is what makes the difference for Christians, and this happens only by participating in Christ’s redemption, and in us in the sacrament of baptism: this is how it begins. Jesus became our brother, and by his death and resurrection he has reconciled us with the Father. Anyone who accepts Christ in faith, has “put on” Christ and his filial dignity through baptism (cf. v. 27). This is what it says in verse 27.

In his Letters, Saint Paul makes reference to baptism more than one time. For him, to be baptized was the same as taking part effectively and truly in the mystery of Jesus. For example, in the *Letter to the Romans*, he would even go so far as to say that in baptism we have died with Christ and have been buried with him so as to live with him (cf. 6:3-14). Dead with Christ, buried with him so as to live with him. This is the grace of baptism: to participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism, therefore, is not merely an external rite. Those who receive it are transformed deep within, in their inmost being, and possess

new life, which is precisely what allows them to turn to God and call on him with the name of “Abba,” that is, “daddy.” “Father?” No: “daddy” (cf. *Gal* 4:6).

The Apostle audaciously confirms that the identity received with baptism is so completely new that it prevails over the differences that exist on the *ethnic-religious* level. That is, he explains it thus: “There is neither Jew nor Greek”, even on the social plain, “there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female” (*Gal* 3:28). We often read these expressions way too quickly, without grasping the revolutionary value they possess. For Paul, to write to the Galatians that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek” was equivalent to an authentic subversion in the ethnic-religious sphere. By the fact of belonging to a chosen people, the Jew was privileged over the pagan (cf. *Rom* 2:17-20). – as the Letter to the Romans says, chapter 2, verses 17 to 20; Paul himself affirms this (cf. *Rom* 9:4-5). It is not surprising, therefore, that this new teaching by the Apostle could sound heretical. “What, everyone equal? We are different!” It sounds a bit heretical, doesn’t it? Even the second set of equalities, between those who were “free” and those who were “slaves,” introduced a shocking perspective. The distinction between slaves and free citizens was vital in ancient society. By law, free citizens enjoyed all rights, while the human dignity of slaves was not even recognized. This happens even today. There are many people in the world, many, millions, who do not have the right to eat, who do not have the right to education, who do not have the right to work. They are the new slaves. They are the ones who live on the margins, who are exploited by everyone. Slavery exists even today – let us think a little bit about this. Human dignity is denied to these people. They are slaves. Thus, finally, equality in Christ overcomes the social differences between the two sexes, establishing an equality between man and woman which was revolutionary at the time and which needs to be reaffirmed even today. This needs to be reaffirmed even today. How many times we hear expressions that denigrate women! How often we hear: “But no, do not do anything, those are women’s concerns.” But, look, men and women have the same dignity. And it has happened in history, even today, a type of slavery of women: women do not have the same opportunities as men. We have to read what Paul says: we are equal in Christ Jesus.

As we can see, Paul confirms the profound unity that exists between all the baptized, in whatever condition they are bound to, whether men or women – equal because every one of them is a new creature *in Christ*. Every distinction becomes secondary to the dignity of being children of God, who, through his love, creates a real and substantial equality. Everyone, through Christ’s redemption and the baptism we have received, we are all equal: children of God. Equal.

Brothers and sisters, we are, therefore, called in a more positive way to live a new life that roots its foundational expression in being children of God. Equal because we are children of God; and children of God because Christ redeemed us and we attained this dignity through baptism. It is decisive even for all of us today to rediscover the beauty of being children of God, to be brothers and sisters among ourselves, because we have been united *in Christ*, who redeemed us. The differences and contrasts that separation creates should not exist among believers in Christ. And one of the apostles, in the Letter of James, says this: “Be aware about differences, because it is not right that when someone enters the assembly (that is, the Mass) wearing a gold ring and well-dressed, ‘Ah, come up here, up here!’, and you give him one of the front seats. Then, if someone else enters,

obviously poor, who can just about cover himself and you see he is poor, poor, poor, 'Oh, yeah, you can go over there in the back'." We create these differences, many times unconsciously so. No, we are equal! Rather, our vocation is that of making concrete and evident the call to unity of the entire human race (cf Conc. Ecum. Vat. II, Cost. *Lumen gentium*, 1). Everything that exacerbates the differences between people, often causing discrimination – all of this, before God, no longer has any basis, thanks to the salvation effected in Christ. What is important is that faith that operates according to the path of unity indicated by the Holy Spirit. And our responsibility is that of journeying decisively on along this path of equality, but an equality that is sustained, that was created by the redemption of Jesus. And do not forget when you go home: "When was I baptized?" Inquire about it so as to always have the date in mind. And when the date comes, it can be celebrated. Thank you.

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9. Life of faith

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

On our journey to better understand Saint Paul's teaching, today we will encounter a difficult but important topic: justification. What is justification? We, who were sinners, have become just. Who justified us? This process of change is justification. We, before God, are just. It is true, we have our personal sins. But fundamentally, we are just. This is justification. There has been a lot of discussion on this topic, to find the interpretation that best corresponds to the Apostle's thought and, as often happens, these discussions even ended up in contradicting positions. In the *Letter to the Galatians*, just as in the Letter to the Romans, Paul insists on the fact that justification comes through faith in Christ. "But, Father, I am just because I keep to all the Commandments!" Yes, but justification does not come from that. It comes before that. Someone justified you, someone made you just before God. "Yes, but I am a sinner!" Yes, you are justified, but a sinner. But fundamentally, you are just. Who justified you? Jesus Christ. This is justification.

What is hidden behind the word "justification" that is so decisive for the faith? It is not easy to arrive at an exhaustive definition, but taking Paul's thought as a whole, we can simply say that justification is the consequence of "God's merciful initiative of offering forgiveness" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1990). And this is our God, so very good, merciful, patient, full of mercy, who continually grants pardon, continually. He forgives, and justification is God who forgives everyone first in Christ. God's mercy grants forgiveness. In fact, God, through Jesus' death — and we have to underscore this: through Jesus' death — destroyed sin and definitively granted us his pardon and salvation. Thus justified, sinners are welcomed by God and reconciled with him. It is like a return to the original relationship between the Creator and the creature, before the disobedience of sin intervened. The justification wrought by God, therefore, allows us to recuperate the innocence lost through sin. How does justification happen? Responding to this question means discovering another novelty in Saint Paul's teaching: that justification comes through grace. Only through grace: we are justified because of pure grace. "But can I not go to the judge and pay so that he can justify me, like some people do"? No. You cannot pay for this. Someone paid for all of us: Christ. And from Christ, who died for us, comes that grace that the Father gives to everyone: Justification comes through grace.

The Apostle is always mindful of the experience that changed his life: his meeting with the Risen Jesus on the way to Damascus. Paul had been a proud, religious and zealous man, convinced that justification consisted in the scrupulous observance of the precepts of the law. Now, however, he has been conquered by Christ, and faith in Him has completely transformed him, allowing him to

discover a truth that had been hidden: we do not become just through our own effort, no, it is not us, but it is Christ, with his grace, who makes us just. So, Paul was willing to renounce everything that had made him rich before, in order to be fully aware of the mystery of Jesus (cf. *Ph* 3:7), because he had discovered that only God's grace had saved him. We have been justified, we have been saved, through pure grace, not because of our own merits. And this gives us great trust. We are sinners, yes; but we live our lives with this grace of God that justifies us each time we ask forgiveness. But he does not justify us in that moment: we have already been justified, but he comes to forgive us again.

For the Apostle, faith has an all-encompassing value. It touches every moment and every aspect of a believer's life: from baptism to our departure from this world, everything is informed by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus who gives salvation. Justification through faith underlines the priority of the grace that God offers without distinction to those who believe in his son.

We must not, however, conclude that, for Paul, the Mosaic Law had lost its value; rather, it remains an irrevocable gift from God. It is, the Apostle writes, "holy" (*Rm* 7:12). Even for our spiritual life, observing the Commandments is essential. But here too, we cannot count on our efforts: the grace of God that we receive in Christ is fundamental. That grace that comes from the justification given to us by Christ who already paid for us. From him, we receive that gratuitous love that allows us, in our turn, to love in concrete ways.

In this context, it is good to recall the teaching of the Apostle James, who wrote: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone". It seems to be the contrary, but it is not the contrary. "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead" (*Jas* 2:24, 26). If justification does not bear fruit with our works, then it will just remain there, buried, as if dead. It is there, but we must activate it with our works. This is how James' words complement Paul's teaching. For both, therefore, the response of faith demands that we be active in our love for God and in our love of neighbour. Why "active in that love"? Because that love saved all of us, it freely justified us, gratis!

Justification incorporates us into the long history of salvation that demonstrates God's justice: faced with our continual falls and inadequacies, he did not give up, but wanted to make us just and he did so through grace, through the gift of Jesus Christ, of his death and resurrection. Sometimes I have said, how God acts, what his style is. And I said it with three words: God's style is nearness, compassion and tenderness. He always draws near to us, is compassionate and tender. And justification is precisely God's greatest nearness with us, men and women, God's greatest compassion for us men and women, the Father's greatest tenderness. Justification is this gift of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ that makes us free. "But, Father, I am a sinner, I have robbed..." Yes. But fundamentally, you are just. Allow Christ to effect that justification. We are not fundamentally *condemned* no, we are *just*. Allow me to say, we are *saints*, fundamentally. But then, by our actions, we become sinners. But, fundamentally, we are saints: let us allow Christ's grace to come and this justice, this justification will give us the strength to progress. Thus, the light of faith allows us to recognize how infinite God's mercy is, his grace that works for our good. But that same light also makes us see the responsibility that has been entrusted to us to cooperate with God in his work of salvation. The power of grace needs to be coupled with our works of

mercy which we are called to live to bear witness to how tremendous God's love is. Let us move ahead with this trust: we have all been justified, we are just in Christ. We must effect that justice with our works.

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10. Christ has set us free

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we are resuming our reflection on the Letter to the Galatians in which Saint Paul wrote immortal words on Christian freedom. What is Christian freedom? Today, we will reflect on this topic: Christian freedom.

Freedom is a treasure that is truly appreciated only when it is lost. For many of us who are used to living in freedom, it often appears to be an acquired right rather than a gift and a legacy to be preserved. How many misunderstandings there are around the topic of freedom, and how many different views have clashed over the centuries!

In the case of the Galatians, the Apostle could not bear that those Christians, after having known and accepted the truth of Christ, allowed themselves to be attracted to deceptive proposals, moving from freedom to slavery: from the liberating presence of Jesus to slavery to sin, to legalism, and so forth. Even today, legalism is one of our problems for many Christians who take refuge in legalism, in sophistry. Paul therefore invites the Christians to remain firm in the freedom they had received in baptism, without allowing themselves to be put once again under the “yoke of slavery” (*Gal 5:1*). He is rightly protective of this freedom. He is aware that some “false brethren” — this is what he calls them — have crept into the community to “spy out” — this is what he writes — “our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” (*Gal 2:4*) — to turn backward. And Paul cannot tolerate this. A proclamation that would preclude freedom in Christ would never be evangelical. It might be Pelagian or Jansenist or something like that, but not evangelical. One can never force in the name of Jesus; one cannot make anyone a slave in the name of Jesus who makes us free. Freedom is a gift which was given to us at baptism.

But Saint Paul’s teaching about freedom is, above all, positive. The Apostle proposes Jesus’ teaching that we find in the Gospel of John as well: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (8:31-32). The call is thus above all to remain in Jesus, the source of truth who makes us free. Christian freedom, therefore, is founded on two fundamental pillars: first, the grace of the Lord Jesus; second, the truth that Christ reveals to us and which is he himself.

First of all, it is a *gift from the Lord*. The freedom that the Galatians had received — and we, like them, at our baptism — is the fruit of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Apostle concentrates his entire preaching on Christ, who had liberated him from the bonds of his past life: only from Him do the fruits of the new life

according to the Spirit flow. In fact, the truest freedom, that from slavery of sin, flows from the Cross of Christ. We are freed from the slavery of sin by the Cross of Christ. God placed the source of the liberation of the human person precisely there where Jesus allowed himself to be nailed, making himself a slave. This never ceases to amaze us: that the place where we are stripped of every freedom, that is, death, might become the source of freedom. But this is the mystery of God's love! It is not easily understood, but rather lived. Jesus himself had proclaimed it when he said: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (Jn 10:17-18). Jesus achieves complete freedom by giving himself up to death; He knows that only in this way could he obtain life for everyone.

Paul, we know, had experienced first-hand this mystery of love. This is why he says to the Galatians, using an extremely bold expression: "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:19). In that act of supreme union with the Lord, he knew he had received the greatest gift of his life: freedom. On the Cross, in fact, he had nailed "the flesh with its passions and desires" (5:24). We understand how much faith filled the Apostle, how great was his intimacy with Jesus. And while, on the one hand, we feel that we are lacking this, on the other hand, the Apostle's testimony encourages us to progress in this life of freedom. The Christian is free, should be free, and is called not to return to being a slave of precepts and strange things.

The second pillar of freedom is *the truth*. In this case as well, it is necessary to remember that the truth of faith is not an abstract theory, but the reality of the living Christ, who directly touches the daily and overall meaning of personal life. How many people there are who have never studied, who do not even know how to read and write, but who have understood Christ's message well, who have this wisdom that makes them free. It is Christ's wisdom that entered through the Holy Spirit at baptism. How many people do we find who live the life of Christ more than great theologians, for example, offering a tremendous witness of the freedom of the Gospel. Freedom makes one free to the extent to which it transforms a person's life and directs it toward the good. In order to be truly free, we not only need to know ourselves on the psychological level, but above all to practice truth in ourselves on a more profound level — and there, in our heart, open ourselves to the grace of Christ. Truth must disturb us — let us return to this extremely Christian word: restlessness. We know that there are Christians who are never restless: their lives are always the same, there is no movement in their hearts, they lack restlessness. Why? Because restlessness is a sign that the Holy Spirit is working inside us and freedom is an active freedom, that comes from the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is why I say that freedom must disturb us, it must constantly question us, so that we might move ever deeper into what we really are. In this way we will discover that the journey of truth and freedom is an arduous one that lasts a lifetime. Remaining free is arduous, it is a struggle; but it is not impossible. Take courage, let us make progress regarding this, it will be good for us. It is a journey in which the Love that comes from the Cross guides and sustains us: the Love that reveals truth to us and grants us freedom. And this is the way to happiness. Freedom makes us free, it makes us joyful, it makes us happy.

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11. Christian freedom, universal leaven of liberation

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In our itinerary of catechesis on the Letter to the Galatians, we have been able to focus on what was for Saint Paul the core of freedom: the fact that, with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been freed from the slavery of sin and of death. In other words, we are free because we have been freed, freed by grace — not by payment, freed by love, which becomes the supreme and new law of Christian life. Love: we are free because we were liberated freely. This, in fact, is the key point.

Today I would like to emphasise how this novelty of life opens us up to welcoming every people and culture, and at the same time, opens every people and culture to a greater freedom. In fact, Saint Paul says that for those who follow Christ, it no longer matters if they are Jewish or pagan. The only thing that matters is “faith working through love” (*Gal 5:6*). To believe that we have been freed, and to believe in Jesus Christ who freed us: this is faith working through love. Paul’s detractors — those fundamentalists who had arrived there — attacked him over this novelty, claiming that he had taken this position out of pastoral opportunism, or rather to “please everyone”, minimizing the demands received from his narrower religious tradition. It is the same argument of today’s fundamentalists: history always repeats itself. As we can see, the criticism of every evangelical novelty is not only of our time, but has a long history behind it. Paul, however, does not remain silent. He responds with *parrhesia* — it is a Greek word that indicates courage, strength — and he says, “Am I now seeking the favour of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ” (*Gal 1:10*). Already in his first Letter to the Thessalonians he had expressed himself in similar terms, saying that in his preaching he had never used “words of flattery ... or a cloak for greed; ... nor did we seek glory from men” (*1 Th 2:5-6*), which are the paths of “faking”; a faith that is not faith, it is worldliness.

Paul’s thinking yet again shows an inspired depth. To welcome faith for him involves renouncing not the heart of cultures and traditions, but only that which may hinder the newness and purity of the Gospel. Because the freedom obtained through the death and resurrection of the Lord does not enter into conflict with cultures or with the traditions we have received, but rather introduces into them a new freedom, a liberating novelty, that of the Gospel. Indeed, the liberation obtained through baptism enables us to acquire the full dignity of children of God, so that, while we remain firmly anchored in our cultural roots, at the same

time we open ourselves to the universalism of faith that enters into every culture, recognises the kernels of truth present, and develops them, bringing to fullness the good contained in them. To accept that we have been liberated by Christ — his passion, his death, his resurrection — is to accept and bring fullness also to the different traditions of each people. The true fullness.

In the call to freedom, we discover the true meaning of the inculturation of the Gospel. What is this true meaning? Being able to announce the Good News of Christ the Saviour respecting the good and the true that exist in cultures. It is not an easy thing! There are many temptations to seek to impose one's own model of life as though it were the most evolved and the most appealing. How many errors have been made in the history of evangelisation by seeking to impose a single cultural model! Uniformity as a rule of life is not Christian! Unity yes, uniformity no! At times, even violence was not spared in order to make a single point of view prevail. Think of wars. In this way, the Church was deprived of the richness of many local expressions that the cultural traditions of entire peoples bring with them. But this is the exact opposite of Christian freedom! For example, I am reminded of the approach to the apostolate established in China with Father Ricci, or in India with Father De Nobili... [Some said] "No, this is not Christian!" Yes, it is Christian, it is in the culture of the people.

In short, Paul's vision of freedom is entirely enlightened and rendered fruitful by the mystery of Christ, who in his incarnation — as the Second Vatican Council recalls — united himself in a certain way with every person (cf. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 22). And this means there is not uniformity, instead there is variety, but a united variety. Hence the duty to respect the cultural origin of every person, placing them in a space of freedom that is not restricted by any imposition dictated by a single predominant culture. This is the meaning of calling ourselves Catholics, of speaking of the Catholic Church. It is not a sociological denomination to distinguish ourselves from other Christians; Catholic is an adjective that means universal: catholicity, universality. The universal, that is Catholic, means that the Church contains in herself, in her very nature, an openness to all peoples and cultures of all times, because Christ was born, died and rose again for everyone.

Culture, after all, is by its very nature in continual transformation. Think about how we are called to proclaim the Gospel in this historical moment of great cultural change, where an ever more advanced technology seems to have the upper hand. If we were to speak of faith as we did in previous centuries, we would run the risk of no longer being understood by the new generations. The freedom of Christian faith — Christian freedom — does not indicate a static vision of life and culture, but rather a dynamic vision, a vision that is dynamic even in tradition. Tradition grows, but always with the same nature. Let us not claim, therefore, to possess freedom. We have received a gift to take care of. Rather, it is freedom that asks each one of us to be constantly on a journey, oriented towards its fullness. It is the condition of pilgrims; it is the state of wayfarers, in continual exodus: liberated from slavery so as to walk towards the fullness of freedom. And this is the great gift that Jesus Christ gave us. The Lord has liberated us from slavery freely, and has set us on the path to walk in full freedom.

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12. Freedom is realised in love

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

These days we are talking about the freedom of faith, listening to the Letter to the Galatians. But I was reminded of what Jesus said about the spontaneity and freedom of children, when this child had the freedom to approach and move around as if he were at home... And Jesus tells us: “You too, if you do not behave like children, will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven”. The courage to approach the Lord, to be open to the Lord, to not fear the Lord: I thank this child for the lesson he has given us all. And may the Lord help him in his limitation, in his growth, because he has given this testimony that came from his heart. Children do not have an automatic translator from the heart to life: the heart takes the lead.

With his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul gradually introduces us to the great novelty of faith. Slowly. It is truly a great novelty because it does not merely renew a few aspects of life, but rather it leads us into that “new life” that we received with Baptism. There the greatest gift, that of being children of God, was poured upon us. Reborn in Christ, we passed from a religiosity made up of precepts to a living faith, which has its centre in communion with God and with our brothers and sisters, that is, in love. We have passed from the slavery of fear and sin to the freedom of God’s children. Here, again, is the word *freedom*.

Today we will try to better understand what the heart of this freedom is for the Apostle. Paul states that it is anything but an “opportunity for the flesh” (*Gal 5:13*): freedom, therefore, is not a libertine way of living, according to the flesh or according to instincts, individual desires or one’s own selfish impulses; on the contrary, the freedom of Jesus leads us to be, the Apostle writes, “servants of one another” (*ibid.*). But is this slavery? Yes, freedom in Christ has an element of slavery, a dimension that leads us to service, to living for others. True freedom, in other words, is fully expressed in love. Yet again, we find ourselves faced with the paradox of the Gospel: we are free in serving, not in doing whatever we want. We are free in serving, and freedom comes from there; we find ourselves fully to the extent to which we give ourselves. We find ourselves fully to the extent to which we give ourselves, to which we have the courage to give ourselves; we possess life if we lose it (cf. *Mk 8:35*). This is pure Gospel.

But how can this paradox be explained? The Apostle’s answer is as simple as it is demanding: “through love” (*Gal 5:13*). There is no freedom without love. The selfish freedom of doing what I want is not freedom, because it turns in on itself, it is not fruitful. It is Christ’s love that has freed us and it is love that also frees us from the worst slavery, that of the self; therefore, freedom increases with love. But beware: not with self-indulgent love, with the love of soap operas, not with

the passion that simply seeks what we want and like, but with the love we see in Christ, charity: this is the love that is truly free and freeing. It is the love that shines in gratuitous service, modelled on that of Jesus, who washes the feet of his disciples and says: “I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (*Jn* 13:15). Serving one another.

Therefore, for Paul freedom is not “doing what you want and what you like”. This type of freedom, without a goal and without points of reference, would be an empty freedom, a freedom of the circus: it is not good. And indeed, it leaves emptiness within: how often, after following instinct alone, do we realise that we are left with a great emptiness inside and that we have used badly the treasure of our freedom, the beauty of being able to choose true goodness for ourselves and for others. Only this freedom is complete, concrete, and inserts us into real everyday life. True freedom always frees us, whereas when we exercise that freedom of “what we like and do not like”, we remain empty, in the end.

In another letter, the First to the Corinthians, the Apostle responds to those who supported an incorrect idea of freedom. “All things are lawful”, they say. Yes, “but not all things are helpful”, Paul replies. “All things are lawful, but not all things build up”, the Apostle answers. He then adds: “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour” (*1 Cor* 10:23-24). This is the rule for unmasking any type of selfish freedom. Paul puts the need for love even before those who are tempted to reduce freedom only to their own tastes. Freedom guided by love is the only one that sets others and ourselves free, that knows how to listen without imposing, that knows how to love without coercing, that builds and does not destroy, that does not exploit others for its own convenience and does good without seeking its own benefit. In short, if freedom is not at the service — this is the test — if freedom is not at the service of good, it runs the risk of being barren and not bearing fruit. On the other hand, freedom inspired by love leads towards the poor, recognising the face of Christ in their faces. Therefore, this service to one another allows Paul, writing to the Galatians, to emphasise something that is by no means secondary: thus, speaking of the freedom that the other Apostles gave him to evangelise, he underlines that they recommended only one thing: to remember the poor (cf. *Gal* 2:10). This is interesting. When, following that ideological battle between Paul and the Apostles, they came to an agreement, what did the Apostles say to him?: “Go ahead, go ahead and do not forget the poor”, that is, may your freedom as a preacher be a freedom at the service of others, not for yourself, to do as you please.

We know, however, that one of the most widespread modern conceptions of freedom is this: “my freedom ends where yours begins”. But here the relationship is missing! It is an individualistic vision. Instead, those who received the gift of freedom brought about by Jesus cannot think that freedom consists in keeping away from others, seeing them as a nuisance; they cannot regard human beings as cooped up in themselves, but always as part of a community. The social dimension is fundamental for Christians, and it enables them to look to the common good and not to private interest.

Especially in this moment in history, we need to rediscover the communitarian, not individualistic, dimension of freedom: the pandemic has taught us that we need each other, but it is not enough to know this; we need to choose it in a tangible way, every day, to decide on that path. Let us say and believe that others

are not an obstacle to my freedom, but rather they are the possibility to fully realise it. Because our freedom is born from God's love and grows in charity.

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13. The fruit of the Spirit

Saint Paul's preaching is completely centred on Jesus and his Paschal Mystery. In fact, the Apostle presents himself as a proclaimer of Christ, and Christ crucified (cf. *1 Cor* 2:2). He reminds the Galatians, tempted to base their religiosity on the observance of precepts and traditions, that the centre of salvation and faith is the death and resurrection of the Lord. He does so by placing before them the reality of the cross of Jesus. He writes thus: "Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?" (*Gal* 3:1). Who has bewitched you so that you would move away from Christ Crucified? It is an awful moment for the Galatians.

Today, there are many who seek religious security rather than the living and true God, focusing on rituals and precepts instead of embracing the God of love with their whole being. And this is the temptation of the new fundamentalists, of those who seem to be afraid of the path to be taken and who do not move forward but backwards because they feel more secure: they seek the security of God and not the God of security. This is why Paul asks the Galatians to return to what is essential, to God who gives us life in Christ crucified. He testifies to this in the first person: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (*Gal* 2:20). And towards the end of the Letter, he affirms: "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:14).

If we lose the thread of spiritual life, if a thousand problems and thoughts assail us, let us heed Paul's advice: let us place ourselves before Christ Crucified, let us begin again from Him. Let us take the Crucifix in our hands, holding it close to our heart. Or let us pause in adoration before the Eucharist, where Jesus is Bread broken for us, Crucified, Risen, the power of God who pours out his love into our hearts.

And now, still guided by Saint Paul, let us take a further step. Let us ask ourselves: what happens when we meet Jesus Crucified in prayer? The same thing that happened under the cross: Jesus gave up his Spirit (cf. *Jn.* 19:30), that is, he gave his own life. And the Spirit which flows forth from Jesus' Passover is the origin of spiritual life. It is he who changes our hearts: not our works. It is he who changes our heart, not the things that we do, but the action of the Holy Spirit in us changes our heart! It is he who guides the Church and we are called to be obedient to his action, that blows where and how he wills. After all, it was precisely the awareness that the Holy Spirit had descended over everyone, and that his grace was at work without any exclusion, that convinced even the most reluctant of the Apostles that the Gospel was meant for everyone and not for a privileged few. And those who seek security, the small group, the things that were clear as they were back then, they distance themselves from the Spirit, they do not permit the

freedom of the Spirit to enter into them. Thus, the life of the community is regenerated in the Holy Spirit; and it is always thanks to him that we nourish our Christian lives and continue to engage in our spiritual battle.

It is precisely the spiritual combat that is another important teaching in the Letter to the Galatians. The Apostle presents two opposing fronts: on the one side, the “works of the flesh”, and on the other, the “fruit of the Spirit”. What are the works of the flesh? They are behaviours that are contrary to the Spirit of God. The Apostle calls them works of the flesh not because there is something wrong or bad about our human bodies. Indeed, we have seen how much he insisted on the reality of the human flesh that Christ brought to the cross! Flesh is a word that indicates the person’s earthly dimension, closed in on itself in a horizontal existence, where worldly instincts are followed and the door to the Spirit, who lifts us up and opens us up to God and others, is closed. But the flesh also reminds us that everything ages, that all things pass, wither, while the Spirit gives life. Thus, Paul lists the works of the flesh which refer to the selfish use of sexuality, to magical practices connected with idolatry and to all that undermines interpersonal relationships such as “enmity, jealousy, dissension, divisions, factions, envy...” (cf. *Gal 5:19-21*). All of this is the fruit — let’s say — of the flesh, of behaviour that is solely human, “sickly” human. Because humans have their values, but all this is “sickly” human.

The fruit of the Spirit, instead, is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (*Gal 5:22-23*), as Paul says. Christians, who in baptism have “put on Christ” (*Gal 3:27*), are called to live as such. It can be a good spiritual exercise, for example, to read Saint Paul’s list and take a look at our own behaviour to see if it corresponds, if our life is truly in accordance with the Holy Spirit, if it bears these fruits. Does my life bear these fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control? For example, the first three that are listed are love, peace and joy: a person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells can be recognized by these traits. A person who is at peace, who is joyful and who loves. With these three traits, the action of the Spirit can be seen.

The Apostle’s teaching poses quite a challenge for our communities too. Sometimes, those who approach the Church get the impression that they are dealing with a dense mass of rules and regulations: but no, this is not the Church! This can be any association. But, in reality, the beauty of faith in Jesus Christ cannot be grasped on the basis of so many commandments or of a moral vision developed in many layers which can make us forget the original fruitfulness of love nourished by prayer which brings peace and joyful witness. In the same way, the life of the Spirit, expressed in the Sacraments, cannot be suffocated by a bureaucracy that prevents access to the grace of the Spirit, the initiator of the conversion of heart. And how often, we ourselves, priests or bishops, follow so much bureaucracy to give a sacrament, to welcome people, so that people say: “No, I do not like this”, and they go away, and many times they do not see in us the power of the Spirit who regenerates, who makes us new. We therefore have the great responsibility of proclaiming Christ crucified and risen, enlivened by the breath of the Spirit of love. For it is this Love alone that possesses the power to attract and change the human heart.

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14. Walking according to the Spirit

In the passage from the Letter to the Galatians we have just heard, Saint Paul exhorts Christians to *walk according to the Holy Spirit* (cf. 5:16, 25), there is a style: *to walk according to the Holy Spirit*. In effect, to believe in Jesus means to follow him, to go behind him along his way, just as the first disciples did. And at the same time, it means avoiding the opposite way, that of selfishness, of seeking one's own interests, which the Apostle calls the "desires of the flesh" (v. 16). The Spirit is the guide for this journey along the way of Christ, a wonderful but also difficult journey that begins in Baptism and lasts our entire lives. Let us think of it as a long excursion on the mountain heights: it is breath-taking, the destination is attractive, but it requires a lot of effort and tenaciousness.

This image can be helpful to understand the merit of the Apostle's words: "to walk by the Spirit", "to be led" by Him. They are expressions that indicate an action, a movement, a dynamism that prevents us from halting at the first difficulties, but elicits confidence in the power "coming from above" (*Shepherd of Hermas*, 43, 21). Walking along this path, the Christian acquires a positive vision of life. This does not mean that the evil present in the world disappears, or that the negative impulses of our selfishness and pride diminish. Rather, it means that belief in God is always stronger than our resistance and greater than our sins. And this is important!

As he exhorts the Galatians to follow this path, the Apostle places himself on their level. He abandons the verb in the imperative — "walk" (v. 16) — and uses the indicative "we": "let us walk also by the Spirit" (v. 25). That is to say: let us walk along the same line and let us be led by the Holy Spirit. It is an exhortation, a way of exhorting. Saint Paul feels this exhortation is necessary for himself as well. Even though he knows that Christ lives in him (cf. 2:20), he is also convinced that he has not yet reached the goal, the top of the mountain (cf. *Phil* 3:12). The Apostle does not place himself above his community. He does not say: "I am the leader; you are those others; I have reached the top of the mountain and you are on the way". He does not say this, but rather places himself in the midst of everyone's journey, in order to provide a concrete example of how necessary it is to obey God, corresponding ever more and ever better to the Spirit's guidance. And how beautiful it is when we find pastors who journey with their people, who do not separate themselves from them. This is very beautiful. It is good for the soul.

This walking "by the Spirit" is not only an individual task: it also concerns the community as a whole. In fact, it is exciting, but demanding, to build up the community according to the way indicated by the Apostle. The "desires of the flesh", "the temptations", — let us put it this way —, that we all have, that is, our jealousies, prejudices, hypocrisies and resentments continue to make themselves

felt, and having recourse to a rigid set of precepts, can be an easy temptation. But doing this would mean straying from the path of freedom, and instead of climbing to the top, it would mean returning towards the bottom. In the first place, journeying along the way of the Spirit requires giving space to grace and charity. To make space for God's grace, not being afraid. After making his voice heard in a severe way, Paul invites the Galatians to bear each other's difficulties, and if someone should make a mistake, to use gentleness (cf. 5:22). Let us listen to his words: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (6:1-2). An attitude that is quite different from gossiping, No, this is not according to the Spirit. What is according to the Spirit is being gentle with a brother or sister when correcting him or her and keeping watch over ourselves with humility so as not to fall into those sins.

In effect, when we are tempted to judge others badly, as often happens, we must firstly reflect on our weaknesses. How easy it is to criticise others! But there are people who seem to have a degree in gossip. They criticise others every day. Take a look at yourself! It is good to ask ourselves what drives us to correct a brother or a sister, and if we are not in some way co-responsible for their mistake. In addition to giving us the gift of gentleness, the Holy Spirit invites us to be in solidarity, to bear other's burdens. How many burdens there are in a person's life: illness, lack of work, loneliness, pain...! And how many other trials that require the proximity and love of our brothers and sisters! The words of Saint Augustine when he commented on this same passage can also help us: "Therefore, brothers, if a man has been caught out in some wrongdoing, [...] correct him in a spirit of gentleness. And if you raise your voice, love within. If you encourage, if you present yourself as a father, if you reprove, if you are severe, love" (cf. Sermon 163/B 3). Love always. The supreme rule regarding fraternal correction is love: to want the good of our brothers and sisters. It is a matter of tolerating the problems of others, the defects of others in the silence of prayer, so as to find the right way to help them to correct themselves. And this is not easy. The easiest path is to gossip. Talking behind someone else's back as if I am perfect. And this should not be done. Gentleness. Patience. Prayer. Proximity.

Let us walk with joy and patience along this path, allowing ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit.

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15. Let us not grow weary

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

We have reached the end of the catecheses on the *Letter to the Galatians*. We could have reflected on so much other content found in this writing of Saint Paul! The Word of God is an inexhaustible font. And in this Letter, the Apostle spoke to us as an evangeliser, as a theologian and as a pastor.

The holy Bishop Ignatius of Antioch used a beautiful expression when he wrote: “There is then one Teacher, who spoke and it was done; while even those things which He did in silence are worthy of the Father. He who possesses the word of Jesus, is truly able to hear even His very silence” (*Epistle to the Ephesians*, 15, 1-2). We can say that the Apostle Paul was capable of giving voice to this silence of God. His most original intuitions help us discover the astounding newness contained in the revelation of Jesus Christ. He was a true theologian who contemplated the mystery of Christ and transmitted it with his creative intelligence. And he was also capable of exercising his pastoral mission towards a lost and confused community. He did this with different methods: from time to time he used irony, firmness, gentleness... He revealed his own authority as an apostle, but at the same time he did not hide the weaknesses of his character. The strength of the Spirit had truly entered his heart: his meeting with the Risen Christ conquered and transformed his whole life, and he spent it entirely at the service of the Gospel.

Paul never thought of Christianity in irenic terms, lacking edge and energy — on the contrary. He defended the freedom Christ brought with such passion that it still moves us today, especially if we think of the suffering and loneliness he must have endured. He was convinced that he had received a call to which he alone could respond; and he wanted to explain to the Galatians that they too were called to that freedom which liberated them from every form of slavery because it made them heirs of the ancient promise and, in Christ, children of God. And aware of the risks that this concept of freedom brought, he never minimised the consequences. He was aware of the risks that Christian freedom brought. But he did not minimise the consequences. With *parrhesia*, that is, courageously, he repeated to the believers that freedom is in no way equal to libertinism, nor does it lead to forms of presumptuous self-sufficiency. Rather, Paul placed freedom in love’s shadow and based its consistent exercise on the service of charity. This entire vision was set within the horizon of a life according to the Holy Spirit that brings to fulfilment the Law given by God to Israel and prevents from falling back into the slavery of sin. The temptation is always to go backward. One definition of Christians found in the Scripture says that *we Christians are not the type of people who go backward*, who turn back. This is a beautiful definition. And the

temptation is to turn back to be more secure; to turn back to the Law, disregarding the new life of the Spirit. This is what Paul teaches us: the fulfilment of the true Law is found in this life of the Spirit that Jesus gave us. And this life of the Spirit can only be lived in freedom; Christian freedom. And this is one of the most beautiful things.

At the end of this catechetical journey, it seems to me that a twofold attitude could arise within us. On the one hand, the Apostle's teaching generates *enthusiasm* in us; we feel drawn to follow immediately the way of freedom, to "walk by the Spirit", to always walk by the Spirit: it makes us free. On the other hand, we are aware of our limitations because we experience first-hand every day how difficult it is to be docile to the Spirit, to facilitate his beneficial action. Then the *tiredness that dampens enthusiasm*, can set it. We feel discouraged, weak, sometimes marginalised with respect to a worldly life-style. Saint Augustine, referring to the Gospel episode of the storm on the lake, suggests how to react in this situation. This is what he says: "The faith of Christ in your heart is like Christ in the boat. You hear insults, you wear yourself out, you are upset, and Christ sleeps. Wake Christ up, rouse your faith! Even in tribulation you can do something. Rouse your faith. Christ awakes and speaks to you... Therefore, wake Christ up... Believe what has been said to you, and there will be tremendous calm in your heart" (cf. Sermon 63). In difficult moments, as Saint Augustine says here, we are like in the boat at the moment of the storm. And what did the apostles do? They woke Christ up who was sleeping during the storm; but he was present. The only thing we can do in terrible moments is to wake up Christ who is within us, but "sleeps" like [he did] in the boat. It is exactly like this. We must wake up Christ in our hearts and only then will we be able to contemplate things with his eyes for he sees beyond the storm. Through that serene gaze, we can see a panorama that we cannot even glimpse on our own.

In this challenging but captivating journey, the Apostle reminds us that we cannot allow ourselves any tiredness when it comes to doing good. Do not grow tired of doing good. We have to trust that the Spirit always comes to assist us in our weakness and grants us the support we need. Let us, therefore, learn to invoke the Holy Spirit more often! Some might say: "how is the Holy Spirit invoked? I know how to pray to the Father with the Our Father; I know how to pray to Our Lady with the Hail Mary, I know how to pray to Jesus with the Prayer to His Holy Wounds. But to the Spirit? What is the prayer to the Holy Spirit"? The prayer to the Holy Spirit is spontaneous: it has to come from your heart. In moments of difficulty, you have to say: "Come, Holy Spirit". This is the key word: "Come". But you have to say it yourself in your own style, in your own words. Come, because I find myself in difficulty. Come, because I am in obscurity, in the dark. Come, because I do not know what to do. Come, because I am about to fall. Come. Come. This is the Holy Spirit's word to call upon the Spirit. Let us learn to invoke the Holy Spirit often. We can do this with simple words at various moments during the day. And we can carry with us, perhaps inside the Gospel in our pocket, the beautiful prayer the Church recites on Pentecost: "Come, come Holy Spirit, / And from your celestial home / Shed a ray of light divine! / Come, come, Father of the poor! / Come, Source of all our store! / Come, within our bosoms shine! / You, of comforters the best; / You the soul's most welcome Guest; / Sweet refreshment... ". Come. And so it continues, it is a very beautiful prayer. The core of the prayer is "come", as Our Lady and the Apostles prayed after Jesus had ascended into Heaven. They were alone in the Upper Room and invoked the Spirit. It will be

good for us to often pray: *Come, Holy Spirit*. And with the presence of the Spirit, we will protect our freedom. We will be free, free Christians, not attached to the past in the bad sense of the word, not chained to practices, but free with the Christian freedom, the kind that makes us grow. This prayer will help us walk in the Spirit, in freedom and in joy because when the Holy Spirit comes, joy, true joy comes. May the Lord bless you. Thank you.

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