**PORTRAIT OF PAUL OF TARSUS**

**APOSTLE OF CHRIST JESUS**

**INTRODUCTION**

**In this portrait of the Apostle Paul, first we shall attempt to highlight what he says about himself through some passages of his letters. Next, we shall attempt, to the greatest possible extent, to enter the abyss of his heart completely immersed in the heavenly Father, entirely filled with Christ and with his grace, perpetually moved by the Holy Spirit, totally planted in the heart of the Church, on an uninterrupted mission, so that everybody, the Jews and the Gentiles, may hear the Gospel of Salvation, that, for the Apostle, is Christ Jesus alone and Him crucified. Those who live on weak, frail, erroneous, heretical thoughts, either about the Father or about Christ Jesus, either about the Holy Spirit, or about the Church, or about the mission of salvation and of redemption in favour of all men, those people will always have misguided, false, liar thoughts about this Apostle of the Lord, who has consecrated his every breath and every atom, both of the soul, and of the body, and of the spirit, to the charity and to the truth of Christ, the Crucified and the Risen, who pours his blood on the cross to deliver every man from the heavy slavery of sin and of Satan, from which no one will never be able to escape with his own strength. Whoever has false thoughts about his Apostle has them because he has false thoughts about the mystery of the Father, of the Incarnated Word, of the Holy Spirit, of the Church, of the evangelizing mission, of man himself. May the Apostle Paul give us a ray of his light to be able to catch some particle of his heart. The benefits will be extremely great and universal.**

**WHAT THE APOSTLE PAUL SAYS ABOUT HIMSELF**

**In this first part, we shall proceed Letter after Letter. From each letter, we shall draw only what the Apostle Paul says about his person, every other truth will be ignored. This first approach will immediately allow us to have a quite clear vision of the complexity of the mystery surrounding him and in which he lets himself be immersed. Only after that, we will open ourselves up to some considerations and meditations; however, with no pretence of completeness or of being comprehensive or perfect.**

1. **IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS**

***For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: for Jew first, and then Greek. For in it is revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous by faith will live. (Rm 1, 16.-17)***

***I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie; my conscience joins with the holy Spirit in bearing me witness that I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and separated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kin according to the flesh. They are Israelites; theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; theirs the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, is the Messiah. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen. (Rm 9, 1-5)***

***Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God on their behalf is for salvation. I testify with regard to them that they have zeal for God, but it is not discerning. For, in their unawareness of the righteousness that comes from God and their attempt to establish their own (righteousness), they did not submit to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for the justification of everyone who has faith. (Rm 10, 1-4)***

***I myself am convinced about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to admonish one another. But I have written to you rather boldly in some respects to remind you, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in performing the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering up of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast in what pertains to God. For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to lead the Gentiles to obedience by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit (of God), so that from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum I have finished preaching the gospel of Christ. Thus I aspire to proclaim the gospel not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on another's foundation, but as it is written: "Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand." That is why I have so often been prevented from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any opportunity in these regions and since I have desired to come to you for many years, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be sent on my way there by you, after I have enjoyed being with you for a time. Now, however, I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the holy ones. For Macedonia and Achaia have decided to make some contribution for the poor among the holy ones in Jerusalem; they decided to do it, and in fact they are indebted to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to serve them in material blessings. So when I have completed this and safely handed over this contribution to them, I shall set out by way of you to Spain; and I know that in coming to you I shall come in the fullness of Christ's blessing. I urge you, (brothers,) by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in the struggle by your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the disobedient in Judea, and that my ministry for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the holy ones, so that I may come to you with joy by the will of God and be refreshed together with you. The God of peace be with all of you. Amen. (Rm 15, 14-33)***

1. ***IN THE FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS***

***I give thanks (to God) that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. (I baptized the household of Stephanas also; beyond that I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the learning of the learned I will set aside." Where is the wise one? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made the wisdom of the world foolish? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not come to know God through wisdom, it was the will of God through the foolishness of the proclamation to save those who have faith. For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. (1Cor 1, 14-25)***

***When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive (words of) wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1Cor 2, 1-5)***

***Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Now it is of course required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. It does not concern me in the least that I be judged by you or any human tribunal; I do not even pass judgment on myself; am not conscious of anything against me, but I do not thereby stand acquitted; the one who judges me is the Lord. Therefore, do not make any judgment before the appointed time, until the Lord comes, for he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will manifest the motives of our hearts, and then everyone will receive praise from God. I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, so that you may learn from us not to go beyond what is written, so that none of you will be inflated with pride in favor of one person over against another. Who confers distinction upon you? What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it? You are already satisfied; you have already grown rich; you have become kings without us! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we also might become kings with you. For as I see it, God has exhibited us apostles as the last of all, like people sentenced to death, since we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and human beings alike. We are fools on Christ's account, but you are wise in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clad and roughly treated, we wander about homeless and we toil, working with our own hands. When ridiculed, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we respond gently. We have become like the world's rubbish, the scum of all, to this very moment. (1Cor 4,1-13)***

***Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? Although I may not be an apostle for others, certainly I am for you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. My defense against those who would pass judgment on me is this. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a Christian wife, as do the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Kephas? Or is it only myself and Barnabas who do not have the right not to work? Who ever serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating its produce? Or who shepherds a flock without using some of the milk from the flock? Am I saying this on human authority, or does not the law also speak of these things? It is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is God concerned about oxen, or is he not really speaking for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope, and the thresher in hope of receiving a share. If we have sown spiritual seed for you, is it a great thing that we reap a material harvest from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? Yet we have not used this right. On the contrary, we endure everything so as not to place an obstacle to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who perform the temple services eat (what) belongs to the temple, and those who minister at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel. I have not used any of these rights, however, nor do I write this that it be done so in my case. I would rather die. Certainly no one is going to nullify my boast. If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it! If I do so willingly, I have a recompense, but if unwillingly, then I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my recompense? That, when I preach, I offer the gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.***

***Although I am free in regard to all, I have made myself a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew to win over Jews; to those under the law I became like one under the law - though I myself am not under the law - to win over those under the law. To those outside the law I became like one outside the law - though I am not outside God's law but within the law of Christ - to win over those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it. Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Thus I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified. (1Cor 9,1-27)***

***If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1Cor 13,1-13)***

***Now I am reminding you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand. Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Kephas, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God (that is) with me. Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed. But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty (too) is our preaching; empty, too, your faith. Then we are also false witnesses to God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all. (1Cor 15,1-19)***

1. ***IN THE SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS***

***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. For as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow. If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; if we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement, which enables you to endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is firm, for we know that as you share in the sufferings, you also share in the encouragement. We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction that came to us in the province of Asia; we were utterly weighed down beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, we had accepted within ourselves the sentence of death, that we might trust not in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. He rescued us from such great danger of death, and he will continue to rescue us; in him we have put our hope (that) he will also rescue us again, as you help us with prayer, so that thanks may be given by many on our behalf for the gift granted us through the prayers of many. For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you, with the simplicity and sincerity of God, (and) not by human wisdom but by the grace of God. For we write you nothing but what you can read and understand, and I hope that you will understand completely, as you have come to understand us partially, that we are your boast as you also are ours, on the day of (our) Lord Jesus. With this confidence I formerly intended to come to you so that you might receive a double favor, namely, to go by way of you to Macedonia, and then to come to you again on my return from Macedonia, and have you send me on my way to Judea. So when I intended this, did I act lightly? Or do I make my plans according to human considerations, so that with me it is "yes, yes" and "no, no"? As God is faithful, our word to you is not "yes" and "no." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed to you by us, Silvanus and Timothy and me, was not "yes" and "no," but "yes" has been in him. For however many are the promises of God, their Yes is in him; therefore, the Amen from us also goes through him to God for glory. But the one who gives us security with you in Christ and who anointed us is God; he has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment. But I call upon God as witness, on my life, that it is to spare you that I have not yet gone to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith; rather, we work together for your joy, for you stand firm in the faith. (2Cor 1, 3-24)***

***For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Working together, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says: "In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you." Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We cause no one to stumble in anything, in order that no fault may be found with our ministry; on the contrary, in everything we commend ourselves as ministers of God, through much endurance, in afflictions, hardships, constraints, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, vigils, fasts; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love, in truthful speech, in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness at the right and at the left; through glory and dishonor, insult and praise. We are treated as deceivers and yet are truthful; as unrecognized and yet acknowledged; as dying and behold we live; as chastised and yet not put to death; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing and yet possessing all things. (2Cor 5, 14-6.10)***

***If only you would put up with a little foolishness from me! Please put up with me. For I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God, since I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts may be corrupted from a sincere (and pure) commitment to Christ. For if someone comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it well enough. For I think that I am not in any way inferior to these "superapostles." Even if I am untrained in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.  Did I make a mistake when I humbled myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I plundered other churches by accepting from them in order to minister to you. And when I was with you and in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my needs. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. By the truth of Christ in me, this boast of mine shall not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! And what I do I will continue to do, in order to end this pretext of those who seek a pretext for being regarded as we are in the mission of which they boast. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, who masquerade as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan masquerades as an angel of light. So it is not strange that his ministers also masquerade as ministers of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. I repeat, no one should consider me foolish; but if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. What I am saying I am not saying according to the Lord but as in foolishness, in this boastful state. Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. For you gladly put up with fools, since you are wise yourselves. For you put up with it if someone enslaves you, or devours you, or gets the better of you, or puts on airs, or slaps you in the face. To my shame I say that we were too weak! But what anyone dares to boast of (I am speaking in foolishness) I also dare. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I am talking like an insane person.) I am still more, with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, far worse beatings, and numerous brushes with death. Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep; on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fastings, through cold and exposure. And apart from these things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is led to sin, and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus knows, he who is blessed forever, that I do not lie. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus, in order to seize me, but I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands. (2Cor 11,1-33).***

***I must boast; not that it is profitable, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know someone in Christ who, fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows), was caught up to the third heaven. And I know that this person (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows) was caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable things, which no one may utter. About this person I will boast, but about myself I will not boast, except about my weaknesses. Although if I should wish to boast, I would not be foolish, for I would be telling the truth. But I refrain, so that no one may think more of me than what he sees in me or hears from me because of the abundance of the revelations. Therefore, that I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong. I have been foolish. You compelled me, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I am in no way inferior to these "superapostles," even though I am nothing. The signs of an apostle were performed among you with all endurance, signs and wonders, and mighty deeds. In what way were you less privileged than the rest of the churches, except that on my part I did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong! Now I am ready to come to you this third time. And I will not be a burden, for I want not what is yours, but you. Children ought not to save for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your sakes. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? But granted that I myself did not burden you, yet I was crafty and got the better of you by deceit. Did I take advantage of you through any of those I sent to you? I urged Titus to go and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? And in the same steps? Have you been thinking all along that we are defending ourselves before you? In the sight of God we are speaking in Christ, and all for building you up, beloved. For I fear that when I come I may find you not such as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; that there may be rivalry, jealousy, fury, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness they practiced. (2 Cor 12, 1-21)***

***This third time I am coming to you. "On the testimony of two or three witnesses a fact shall be established." I warned those who sinned earlier and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not be lenient, since you are looking for proof of Christ speaking in me. He is not weak toward you but powerful in you. For indeed he was crucified out of weakness, but he lives by the power of God. So also we are weak in him, but toward you we shall live with him by the power of God. Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless, of course, you fail the test. I hope you will discover that we have not failed. But we pray to God that you may not do evil, not that we may appear to have passed the test but that you may do what is right, even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we are weak but you are strong. What we pray for is your improvement. I am writing this while I am away, so that when I come I may not have to be severe in virtue of the authority that the Lord has given me to build up and not to tear down. Finally, brothers, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the holy ones greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you. (2Cor 13, 1-13)***

***D. IN THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS***

***Paul, an apostle not from human beings nor through a human being but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins that he might rescue us from the present evil age in accord with the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. I am amazed that you are so quickly forsaking the one who called you by (the) grace (of Christ) for a different gospel (not that there is another). But there are some who are disturbing you and wish to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach (to you) a gospel other than the one that we preached to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone preaches to you a gospel other than the one that you received, let that one be accursed! Am I now currying favor with human beings or God? Or am I seeking to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ.  Now I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. For I did not receive it from a human being, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it, and progressed in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my race, since I was even more a zealot for my ancestral traditions. But when (God), who from my mother's womb had set me apart and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; rather, I went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to confer with Kephas and remained with him for fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles, only James the brother of the Lord. (As to what I am writing to you, behold, before God, I am not lying.) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown personally to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only kept hearing that "the one who once was persecuting us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." So they glorified God because of me. (Gal 1, 1-24)***

***Then after fourteen years I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. I went up in accord with a revelation, and I presented to them the gospel that I preach to the Gentiles - but privately to those of repute - so that I might not be running, or have run, in vain. Moreover, not even Titus, who was with me, although he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised, but because of the false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, that they might enslave us -  to them we did not submit even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain intact for you. But from those who were reputed to be important (what they once were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) - those of repute made me add nothing. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter to the circumcised, for the one who worked in Peter for an apostolate to the circumcised worked also in me for the Gentiles, and when they recognized the grace bestowed upon me, James and Kephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas their right hands in partnership, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, we were to be mindful of the poor, which is the very thing I was eager to do. And when Kephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he clearly was wrong. For, until some people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to draw back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcised. And the rest of the Jews (also) acted hypocritically along with him, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not on the right road in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Kephas in front of all, "If you, though a Jew, are living like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" We, who are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles, (yet) who know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves are found to be sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? Of course not! But if I am building up again those things that I tore down, then I show myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing. (Gal 2, 1-21)***

***O stupid Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? (Gal 3, 1)***

***See with what large letters I am writing to you in my own hand! It is those who want to make a good appearance in the flesh who are trying to compel you to have yourselves circumcised, only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those having themselves circumcised observe the law themselves; they only want you to be circumcised so that they may boast of your flesh. But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation. Peace and mercy be to all who follow this rule and to the Israel of God. From now on, let no one make troubles for me; for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. (Gal 6, 11-18)***

***E. FROM THE LETTER TO THE EPHESINIANS***

***Therefore, I, too, hearing of your faith in the Lord Jesus and of your love for all the holy ones, do not cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of (your) hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might (Eph 1, 15-19)***

***Because of this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ (Jesus) for you Gentiles - if, as I suppose, you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, (namely, that) the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly earlier. When you read this you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to human beings in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this I became a minister by the gift of God's grace that was granted me in accord with the exercise of his power. To me, the very least of all the holy ones, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inscrutable riches of Christ, and to bring to light [for all] what is the plan of the mystery hidden from ages past in God who created all things, so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the principalities and authorities in the heavens. This was according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness of speech and confidence of access through faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over my afflictions for you; this is your glory. For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3, 1-19)***

***F) IN THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS***

***Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and ministers: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right that I should think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart, you who are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. I want you to know, brothers, that my situation has turned out rather to advance the gospel so that my imprisonment has become well known in Christ throughout the whole praetorium and to all the rest, and so that the majority of the brothers, having taken encouragement in the Lord from my imprisonment, dare more than ever to proclaim the word fearlessly. Of course, some preach Christ from envy and rivalry, others from good will. The latter act out of love, aware that I am here for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not from pure motives, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment. What difference does it make, as long as in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed? And in that I rejoice. Indeed I shall continue to rejoice, for I know that this will result in deliverance for me through your prayers and support from the Spirit of Jesus Christ. My eager expectation and hope is that I shall not be put to shame in any way, but that with all boldness, now as always, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, (for) that is far better. Yet that I remain (in) the flesh is more necessary for your benefit. And this I know with confidence, that I shall remain and continue in the service of all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your boasting in Christ Jesus may abound on account of me when I come to you again. Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear news of you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind struggling together for the faith of the gospel, not intimidated in any way by your opponents. This is proof to them of destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For to you has been granted, for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him. Yours is the same struggle as you saw in me and now hear about me (Phil 1, 1-30)***

***Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. Writing the same things to you is no burden for me but is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil workers! Beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, we who worship through the Spirit of God, who boast in Christ Jesus and do not put our confidence in flesh, although I myself have grounds for confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he can be confident in flesh, all the more can I. Circumcised on the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee, in zeal I persecuted the church, in righteousness based on the law I was blameless. (But) whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection and (the) sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ (Jesus). Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3, 1-14)***

***I rejoice greatly in the Lord that now at last you revived your concern for me. You were, of course, concerned about me but lacked an opportunity. Not that I say this because of need, for I have learned, in whatever situation I find myself, to be self-sufficient. I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me. Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress. You Philippians indeed know that at the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, not a single church shared with me in an account of giving and receiving, except you alone. For even when I was at Thessalonica you sent me something for my needs, not only once but more than once. It is not that I am eager for the gift; rather, I am eager for the profit that accrues to your account. I have received full payment and I abound. I am very well supplied because of what I received from you through Epaphroditus, "a fragrant aroma," an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen. (Eph 4, 10-20)***

***G) IN THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS***

***Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church, of which I am a minister in accordance with God's stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God, the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. But now it has been manifested to his holy ones, to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory. It is he whom we proclaim, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. For this I labor and struggle, in accord with the exercise of his power working within me. (Col 1, 24-29)***

***For I want you to know how great a struggle I am having for you and for those in Laodicea and all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged as they are brought together in love, to have all the richness of fully assured understanding, for the knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this so that no one may deceive you by specious arguments. For even if I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing as I observe your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. (Col 2, 1-5)***

***H) IN THE FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS***

***For you yourselves know, brothers, that our reception among you was not without effect. Rather, after we had suffered and been insolently treated, as you know, in Philippi, we drew courage through our God to speak to you the gospel of God with much struggle. Our exhortation was not from delusion or impure motives, nor did it work through deception. But as we were judged worthy by God to be entrusted with the gospel, that is how we speak, not as trying to please human beings, but rather God, who judges our hearts. Nor, indeed, did we ever appear with flattering speech, as you know, or with a pretext for greed - God is witness -  nor did we seek praise from human beings, either from you or from others, although we were able to impose our weight as apostles of Christ. Rather, we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children. With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us. You recall, brothers, our toil and drudgery. Working night and day in order not to burden any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers. As you know, we treated each one of you as a father treats his children, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you conduct yourselves as worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory. And for this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe. For you, brothers, have become imitators of the churches of God that are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you suffer the same things from your compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us; they do not please God, and are opposed to everyone, trying to prevent us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved, thus constantly filling up the measure of their sins. But the wrath of God has finally begun to come upon them. Brothers, when we were bereft of you for a short time, in person, not in heart, we were all the more eager in our great desire to see you in person. We decided to go to you - I, Paul, not only once but more than once - yet Satan thwarted us. For what is our hope or joy or crown to boast of in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming if not you yourselves? For you are our glory and joy. (1Ts 2, 1-20)***

***That is why, when we could bear it no longer, we decided to remain alone in Athens and sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one be disturbed in these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For even when we were among you, we used to warn you in advance that we would undergo affliction, just as has happened, as you know. For this reason, when I too could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had put you to the test and our toil might come to nothing. (1Ts 3, 1-15)***

***I) IN THE FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY***

***Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, my true child in faith: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I repeat the request I made of you when I was on my way to Macedonia, that you stay in Ephesus to instruct certain people not to teach false doctrines or to concern themselves with myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the plan of God that is to be received by faith. The aim of this instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk, wanting to be teachers of the law, but without understanding either what they are saying or what they assert with such assurance. We know that the law is good, provided that one uses it as law, with the understanding that law is meant not for a righteous person but for the lawless and unruly, the godless and sinful, the unholy and profane, those who kill their fathers or mothers, murderers, the unchaste, practicing homosexuals, kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is opposed to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. I am grateful to him who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me trustworthy in appointing me to the ministry. I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and an arrogant man, but I have been mercifully treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief. Indeed, the grace of our Lord has been abundant, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost. But for that reason I was mercifully treated, so that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life. To the king of ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1Tm 1, 1-17)***

***L) IN THE SECOND LETTER TO TIMOTHY***

***Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God for the promise of life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my dear child: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I am grateful to God, whom I worship with a clear conscience as my ancestors did, as I remember you constantly in my prayers, night and day. I yearn to see you again, recalling your tears, so that I may be filled with joy, as I recall your sincere faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and that I am confident lives also in you. For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control. So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began, but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed preacher and apostle and teacher. On this account I am suffering these things; but I am not ashamed, for I know him in whom I have believed and am confident that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day. Take as your norm the sound words that you heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard this rich trust with the help of the holy Spirit that dwells within us. You know that everyone in Asia deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the family of Onesiphorus because he often gave me new heart and was not ashamed of my chains. But when he came to Rome, he promptly searched for me and found me. May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day. And you know very well the services he rendered in Ephesus. (2Tm 1, 1-18)***

***So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And what you heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well. Bear your share of hardship along with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. To satisfy the one who recruited him, a soldier does not become entangled in the business affairs of life. Similarly, an athlete cannot receive the winner's crown except by competing according to the rules. The hardworking farmer ought to have the first share of the crop. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David: such is my gospel, for which I am suffering, even to the point of chains, like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory. This saying is trustworthy: If we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him he will deny us. If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. (2 Tm2, 1-13)***

***For I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance. Try to join me soon, for Demas, enamoured of the present world, deserted me and went to Thessalonica, Crescens to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Luke is the only one with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is helpful to me in the ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak I left with Carpus in Troas, the papyrus rolls, and especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. You too be on guard against him, for he has strongly resisted our preaching. At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen. (2Tm 4, 6-18)***

***I give thanks to my God always, remembering you in my prayers, as I hear of the love and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus and for all the holy ones, so that your partnership in the faith may become effective in recognizing every good there is in us that leads to Christ. For I have experienced much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the holy ones have been refreshed by you, brother. Therefore, although I have the full right in Christ to order you to do what is proper, I rather urge you out of love, being as I am, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus. I urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment, who was once useless to you but is now useful to (both) you and me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I should have liked to retain him for myself, so that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel, but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary. Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord. So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me. And if he has done you any injustice or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, write this in my own hand: I will pay. May I not tell you that you owe me your very self. Yes, brother, may I profit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. With trust in your compliance I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. At the same time prepare a guest room for me, for I hope to be granted to you through your prayers. (Phil 1, 4-22)***

***N) FIRST NARRATION IN THE SANHEDRIN IN JERUSALEM***

***"My brothers and fathers, listen to what I am about to say to you in my defense." When they heard him addressing them in Hebrew they became all the more quiet. And he continued, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city. At the feet of Gamaliel I was educated strictly in our ancestral law and was zealous for God, just as all of you are today. I persecuted this Way to death, binding both men and women and delivering them to prison. Even the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify on my behalf. For from them I even received letters to the brothers and set out for Damascus to bring back to Jerusalem in chains for punishment those there as well. "On that journey as I drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from the sky suddenly shone around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' I replied, 'Who are you, sir?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazorean whom you are persecuting.' My companions saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who spoke to me. I asked, 'What shall I do, sir?' The Lord answered me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything appointed for you to do.' Since I could see nothing because of the brightness of that light, I was led by hand by my companions and entered Damascus. "A certain Ananias, a devout observer of the law, and highly spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me and stood there and said, 'Saul, my brother, regain your sight.' And at that very moment I regained my sight and saw him. Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors designated you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the sound of his voice; for you will be his witness before all to what you have seen and heard. Now, why delay? Get up and have yourself baptized and your sins washed away, calling upon his name.' "After I had returned to Jerusalem and while I was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord saying to me, 'Hurry, leave Jerusalem at once, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' But I replied, 'Lord, they themselves know that from synagogue to synagogue I used to imprison and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I myself stood by giving my approval and keeping guard over the cloaks of his murderers.' Then he said to me, 'Go, I shall send you far away to the Gentiles.'" (Act 22, 1-21)***

***O) SECOND NARRATION BEFORE THE KING AGRIPPA***

***Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You may now speak on your own behalf." So Paul stretched out his hand and began his defense. "I count myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am to defend myself before you today against all the charges made against me by the Jews, especially since you are an expert in all the Jewish customs and controversies. And therefore I beg you to listen patiently. My manner of living from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my people and in Jerusalem, all (the) Jews know. They have known about me from the start, if they are willing to testify, that I have lived my life as a Pharisee, the strictest party of our religion. But now I am standing trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors. Our twelve tribes hope to attain to that promise as they fervently worship God day and night; and on account of this hope I am accused by Jews, O king. Why is it thought unbelievable among you that God raises the dead? I myself once thought that I had to do many things against the name of Jesus the Nazorean, and I did so in Jerusalem. I imprisoned many of the holy ones with the authorization I received from the chief priests, and when they were to be put to death I cast my vote against them. Many times, in synagogue after synagogue, I punished them in an attempt to force them to blaspheme; I was so enraged against them that I pursued them even to foreign cities. "On one such occasion I was traveling to Damascus with the authorization and commission of the chief priests. At midday, along the way, O king, I saw a light from the sky, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my traveling companions. We all fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad.' And I said, 'Who are you, sir?' And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Get up now, and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness of what you have seen (of me) and what you will be shown. I shall deliver you from this people and from the Gentiles to whom I send you, to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may obtain forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been consecrated by faith in me.' "And so, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. On the contrary, first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem and throughout the whole country of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached the need to repent and turn to God, and to do works giving evidence of repentance. That is why the Jews seized me (when I was) in the temple and tried to kill me. But I have enjoyed God's help to this very day, and so I stand here testifying to small and great alike, saying nothing different from what the prophets and Moses foretold, that the Messiah must suffer and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles." While Paul was so speaking in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "You are mad, Paul; much learning is driving you mad." But Paul replied, "I am not mad, most excellent Festus; I am speaking words of truth and reason. The king knows about these matters and to him I speak boldly, for I cannot believe that (any) of this has escaped his notice; this was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe." Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You will soon persuade me to play the Christian." Paul replied, "I would pray to God that sooner or later not only you but all who listen to me today might become as I am except for these chains." Then the king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and the others who sat with them. And after they had withdrawn they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing (at all) that deserves death or imprisonment." And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." (Act 26, 1-32)***

**WHO IS THE APOSTLE PAUL**

**Now that we know what the Apostle says about himself – much news has been left out since it is brief – we shall attempt some meditations or considerations in order to enter his heart. In our view, the heart of the Apostle Paul is an excellent way to reach the heart of Christ Jesus and, from the heart of Christ Jesus, to reach the heart of the Father, always under the mighty guidance of the Holy Spirit, though. Without the Spirit of the Lord one will never be able to say anything about the heart of Paul, for only the Spirit knows this heart and He alone can introduce into it, and He alone can enlighten us to understand what we see and observe. In this second part we also need the help of the Virgin Mary, The One of whom the Son of the Most High was born. May She who knows Christ the Lord accompany us so that not even one only vain or ignorant word about her Son come out of our mouth. May all things be rather most pure truth.**

**1. COR PATRIS COR PAULI**

**The heart of the Father is the heart of Paul. Where do we draw this truth from? From every word the Apostle Paul pronounces about Christ the Lord. Only he who knows the heart of the Father, only he who lives with the heart of the Father, may speak about Christ Jesus the way he speaks about Him in the Letter to the Romans, in the Letter to the Ephesians, in the Letter to the Philippians, in the Letter to the Colossians and in each of his Letter. God has no beginning. He is since eternity and for eternity. We may affirm – without anybody saying a word – that the Apostle Paul has reached the sources with no sources of God’s eternity and it is in these sources with no sources that he reads the entire mystery of the Incarnated Word in the heart of the Father, when the Word was only the Only Begotten Son of God. Only two passages are enough to justify our affirmation that the heart of the Father is the heart of Paul. Indeed, not only does Paul speak about Christ Jesus with the heart of the Father, he also loves him with the heart of the Father: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved. In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth. In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the one who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ. In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised holy Spirit, which is the first installment of our inheritance toward redemption as God's possession, to the praise of his glory.* (Eph. 1, 3-14)**

***He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross (through him), whether those on earth or those in heaven*. (Col. 1, 13-20)**

**Paul loves Christ with the heart of the Father. How does the Father love Christ Jesus? The Father loves his Son so much to appoint Him the Alpha and the Omega of everything that is out of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. The Son is the Creator, the life, the light of universe. He is also the Lord of universe. Everything is ruled by Him. Nothing is hidden from his might that is universal and eternal. He is the Judge of every man. Everybody will have to appear before Him to offer themselves before his judgement that is eternal and irrevocable. He is the Redeemer of every man, the Saviour, the Life, the Truth, the Grace, the Peace, the Light, the Justice, the Holiness, the Mercy, the Forgiveness, the Glorious resurrection. Christ is everything for every man and everything is in Christ. Why does Paul work hard and fight? So that every man may love Christ Jesus in the same way as the Father loves Him. Now no one might ever have Christ Jesus at heart in such a high and divine way, if the heart of the Father does not beat in his chest. The more Paul grows in the heart of the Father and the heart of the Father grows in his heart and the more the love for Christ grows in him and the stronger his missionary zeal is, so that the entire world may know, receive, love Christ Jesus in the same way as the Father loves Him. He will love Him like the Father, if he appoints him as the only Lord of his life. The one who does not know how great the love of the Father for Christ Jesus, for his loved Son, is will never know how great the love of Paul for Christ Jesus is. In the history of the evangelizing mission, the Father loves Christ with the heart of Paul and Paul loves Christ with the heart of the Father. Mystery of one only heart. For the love of Christ, Paul consecrates all himself to the gift of Christ to every man. The Word of Jesus the Lord is fulfilled in Paul: “*I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth. "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.* (Jn 17, 15-23) The Apostle Paul sees Christ Jesus from the abyss of the heart of the Father and he loves Him from the same abyss of this heart. Truth and love in him are perfect. Every other perfection arises from this perfection. The mission, too, is perfect in reason of this perfect love. Imperfect love for Christ, always-imperfect love for the evangelizing mission. Void love for Christ, the love for the evangelizing mission is void, too.**

**2. COR CHRISTI COR PAULI**

**The heart of Christ is the heart of Paul. This truth is neither of argumentation nor of theological deduction. It is most pure revealed truth: *I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me*. (Gal 2, 19-20) If the heart of Paul is the heart of Christ, in the heart of Paul there is the same love of Christ for his Father and the same love of Christ for every man. What does the love of Christ for every man consist of? That of the Father for every man is love of salvation, redemption, adoptive sonship, participation of his divine nature, new birth and vocation to join the blessed eternity. To love man as the Father loves him and as Christ Jesus also loves him in the Father, with the Father, through the Father, the Apostle Paul consumes all himself, he devotes himself entirely: *I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your sakes. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? - Ego autem libentissime inpendam et superinpendar ipse pro animabus vestris (2Cor 12,15).* Has Christ Jesus not physically devoted all himself to the soul of every man? Might the Apostle Paul ever allow himself that a vice or other imperfection of his flesh may decrease or prevent him from giving all himself for the souls to save, to redeem, to bring to justification, to hand over to Christ, to make them his body and his blood? The fact that today we are no longer with the heart of Christ in our heart is attested by the complete disinterest for the salvation of the souls. By now, because of a terrible heresy stating that souls are all already saved, and that spending resources for them is of no use, one entirely and only deals with the body of man. And thus doing, one abandons either soul and body under the heavy slavery of Satan and of sin. Then one cries out against the sin of man, and one asks the man, who lives right under the rule of sin, not to commit it again. If that is not spiritual and doctrinal ignorance, I do not believe there may be more ignorance and more foolishness in the world. If man could deliver himself from the slavery of sin, Christ would be of no use to him. Instead, Christ is the Deliverer from every slavery that makes man a killer of man in thousands of ways and through many ways. But the world also sees the sin of man and it also thinks that a law of man is enough to defeat sin. It does not know that law does not change nature. Law leaves nature as it is. It is as if we stay and contemplate a giant boulder rolling down the mountain and we immediately write a law on it so that it may finish its race. The law written by man will never modify Newton’s law, that is law by nature. No man will never write any laws for the nature hoping that it observes them. This is also true for man’s nature. Our heavenly Father writes his Law for the nature. First, He writes them according to the truth He has created in nature himself. In second place, while He writes the Laws of nature according to the truth of nature, He always pours every grace over man so that he may observe them. In Christ Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, grace is so mighty to regenerate the nature making it a new creature. Moreover, this new creature is filled with the Holy Spirit and with every grace with no measure. Here is what is lacking in the disciple of Jesus today: the heart of Christ. Lacking the heart of Christ, he lacks the love of Christ for the salvation of the souls. He lacks the heart of Christ to love the Father as Christ loves him. The barrenness of our heart attests that the heart of Christ is not in us. Whoever wants to love like Christ must ask Christ to give him his heart, perennially enlivened and renewed, strengthened and recreated by the Holy Spirit. It is an uninterrupted prayer that shall be raised from all his being.**

**3. COR SPIRITUS SANCTI COR PAULI**

**The heart of the Holy Spirit is the heart of Paul. Neither for this truth should we insist with highly theological argumentations and deductions. It is enough to read three passages from his Letters. The first from the First Letter to the Corinthians, the second and the third from the Letter to the Ephesians: *This God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God. Among human beings, who knows what pertains to a person except the spirit of the person that is within? Similarly, no one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God. And we speak about them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit, describing spiritual realities in spiritual terms. Now the natural person does not accept what pertains to the Spirit of God, for to him it is foolishness, and he cannot understand it, because it is judged spiritually. The spiritual person, however, can judge everything but is not subject to judgment by anyone. For "who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to counsel him?" But we have the mind of Christ.* (1Cor2, 10-16)**

***Therefore, I, too, hearing of your faith in the Lord Jesus and of your love for all the holy ones, do not cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of (your) hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might (Eph 1, 15-19)* *For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3, 14-19)***

**What is the work of the Holy Spirit in the Apostle Paul? First, the Holy Spirit has granted him to see with his eyes not only every community created by him, but also every single person being part of that community. The Apostle sees the good and the evil, the good that might grow and develop, but also the evil, not just in the present moment, but also in the most serious damages it will provoke if one does not place a wall of fire of most pure truth around it. The Apostle also knows which words to address to every Community and to each single member of it, as well. We can attest that the Holy Spirit really has given him his wisdom, his science, his fortitude, his counsel, his understanding with no measure. He has also enriched him with the piety and with the fear of the Lord. Here is why one can righteously say that the heart of the Holy Spirit is the heart of Paul, as the Holy Spirit finds his joy in working through this Apostle who has entirely handed over his life to Him. It is as if the Apostle Paul were chained to the Holy Spirit, better, more than chained. It is as if the Holy Spirit were entirely transplanted in him. The mystery surrounding this Apostle of the Lord is great. Whoever hears him hears the Holy Spirit. Whoever is enlightened by him is enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Whoever is corrected by him is corrected by the Holy Spirit. If it were not like that, one could not explain his Letters. The most pure light being in them can only be from the science and the direct knowledge of the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit knows the world of knowledge and of perfect wisdom, so also the Apostle Paul knows the world in Him, in the Holy Spirit with wisdom and perfect understanding. In the Holy Spirit, the Apostle profits from a most high science of the past, of the present, of the future, both of the creation and of Christ and of man. In the Holy Spirit, he holds the entire truth of the Old Testament, the truth he always acknowledges from the most pure light pouring out from the mystery of Christ Jesus. Wondrous, finally, is the knowledge about man the Apostle Paul has, always and only in the Holy Spirit, though. Here is what comes out from the Chapter VII of the Letter to the Romans: *What then can we say? That the law is sin? Of course not! Yet I did not know sin except through the law, and I did not know what it is to covet except that the law said, "You shall not covet." But sin, finding an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetousness. Apart from the law sin is dead. I once lived outside the law, but when the commandment came, sin became alive; then I died, and the commandment that was for life turned out to be death for me. For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it put me to death. So then the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did the good, then, become death for me? Of course not! Sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin, worked death in me through the good, so that sin might become sinful beyond measure through the commandment. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold into slavery to sin. What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I concur that the law is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. Now if (I) do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. So, then, I discover the principle that when I want to do right, evil is at hand. For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, I myself, with my mind, serve the law of God but, with my flesh, the law of sin*. (Rm 7, 7-25) If the Christian had this science today, he would not speak by falsity, by lie, by the thought of the world, by immanence. He would know who Christ is and why He is the Universal Necessary. He would also know that Jesus is the Different for eternal generation, for mediation in creation and in redemption, for gift of grace and truth, for resurrection, and why He is the Lord in whose hands the Father has placed all things. He would know that his light and his charity toward man are in proportion to the light and in the charity, in the truth and in the mercy of Jesus the Lord. Here is who Christ Jesus is for the Apostle Paul: *Jesus is the Eternal, Supernatural, Divine and Human Different. He is the Different from all that existed, exists, will exist on earth and in heaven. He is the Different in Word, in Teaching, in Command. He is the Different by Redemption, Justification, Salvation, Mediation, Revelation, everlasting Life, Truth, Grace, Light, Resurrection. He is the Different from every prophet, King, Priest come before Him among the People of the Lord. He is the different from Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremy, Ezekiel, Daniel, John the Baptist. He is the Different in Prayer. He is the Different on the Cross and in Resurrection. He is the Different in Time and in Eternity. He is the Different in Glory and in Lordship. He is the Different by Heart, Mind, Thought. He is the Different since He is. The others are not. He is the Different by Nature and by Mission. The Difference is his essence and Nature. It is reality that man does not believe in the truth of Christ Jesus. Faith depends on the acceptance of the Word, proclaimed, preached, taught. But the fact that the Christian does not believe poses serious problems. He lacks coherence between what he says he is and what he professes. Then that the Christian himself denies Christ Jesus attests that in him there has been a regression from light into darkness, from light into falsity, from righteousness into unrighteousness, from wisdom into foolishness. If to this regression one also adds the collaboration with every force opposed to Christ for his cancellation from history and from every life, then one has moved into betrayal. It is always betrayal when one hands over Jesus to those who want to crucify Him, to get rid of Him. Finally, if the Christian himself is the crucifier of Jesus, then one is devilish and satanic will. Jesus is not comparable to any existing reality. There is no Angel who can be compared to Him. Jesus is the Creator and the Lord of the Angel, as well as He is the Creator and the Lord of every man. He is the only made by God before all ages. He is the unique Only Begotten Son of the Father who made himself flesh. He is not a man who made himself God. Earth was and will always be filled with these men. Instead, He is the only true God who has made himself true man and eternally lives as true God and true man. As every man was created by Him by the will of the Father, in the Holy Spirit, so every man will have to be redeemed and justified by Him by the will of the Father, in the Holy Spirit, not out of him, though, but through Him, with Him, in Him, becoming his true body, his true life, to be manifestation of his true life among his brothers. Jesus is the eternal Necessary of humanity. He is the infinitely more Necessary than oxygen, water, loaf. More than the sun and stars. More than the sea and plants. More than the trees and animals. More than every other creature that was given to man to nourish his life. When one departs from this eternal Necessary, one is bad. The spirit is with no light, mind with no truth, heart with no love, soul with no life. The body feels this lack and suffers terribly. He seeks life where there might never be, since only Christ Jesus is the life of man. That word given by God to Jeremiah is fulfilled: “My people have forsaken me, the source of living waters; They have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water.” Christ is the source of water welling up to the eternal life. But man prefers the broken cisterns.* Jesus is the Different since eternity for eternity. Difference is his own essence. Without this difference, it is of no use for us. Either He exists or not, it is the same thing for us. Without this difference, He is as all the other men, miserable as everyone else, sinner as everyone else, slave and prisoner of sin and of Satan as everyone else.**

**4. COR ECCLESIAE COR PAULI**

**The heart of the Church is the heart of Paul. The heart of the Church is Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul lives with the heart of the Church in his heart and his entire heart is in the heart of the Church. Here is how this mystery is proclaimed in the First Letter to the Corinthians and in the Letter to the Ephesians: *There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes. As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you." Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If (one) part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way. (cf. 1Cor 12, 1-30)***

***One body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says: "He ascended on high and took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men." What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended into the lower (regions) of the earth? The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ, so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming. Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love. (cf. Eph. 4, 1-16)***

**The Apostle Paul consumes his life not to save some souls, proclaiming the Gospel to this soul and then abandoning him to himself. He works to form the body of Christ, to create the Church, to add more and more new members to the Church. He works to purify the Church, cleansing it every day in the grace of Christ, and in the wisdom and in the truth of the Holy Spirit. What the Apostle says about Christ in relation to the Church, he can say it, for this is his life. He, too, cleanses the bride of Christ every day with the blood of his soul and of his spirit and also with the blood poured out because of the numerous persecutions suffered by him for Christ and his Church. *“Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave (his) father and (his) mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband. (Eph 5, 21-33)* As Christ Jesus is the heart of the Church, so also the Apostle Paul, in Christ, with Christ, through Christ, is the heart of the Church. When one removes the heart from a person, this one dies. Even when one removes the heart from the Church, She dies. One removes the heart that is Christ, and the Church is condemned to death. This is what we are doing today. We are removing Christ from the Church and we are condemning her to live a life with an artificial heart that makes her paralyzed and motionless. But, also, when the Apostle deprives himself of the Church, the Church is condemned to a paralysis from which no life arises. As soon as Paul, heart of its communities, leaves them, the community enters the spiritual and also moral paralysis. Paul comes back, either in person or by Letter, and the community gains life again. Today, if many communities have fallen into a spiritual and moral paralysis, it is because their heart is either seriously suffering from the thoughts of earth or this heart is not even interested in his body, that is the community, in his bride that he must perennially cleanse with his body. Either the shepherds once again become heart of Christ within the community, or the community is condemned by them to the spiritual and also moral paralysis. This means to arrest its growth in an irreparable way. It becomes incapable of showing and revealing Christ Jesus who lives with the might of the Holy Spirit in it. All of this happens because one deprives it of its heart.**

**5. COR VERBI DEI COR PAULI**

**The heart of the Word of God is the heart of Paul. The Word of God has a heart and this heart is that of the Father, that of Christ Jesus, that of the Holy Spirit. These three hearts entirely live in the heart of Paul who, in his turn, gives life to the entire Scripture. Who is the Apostle Paul, then? He is the one who, living with the heart of the Father, the heart of Christ, the heart of the Holy Spirit in his heart, brings these three hearts with his heart in the Word and not only does the entire Word gain life. These little seeds of truth, of light, of prophecy, of grace, of hope, of salvation, of eternal life become great trees speaking about the Father and about the Son and about the Spirit in a more and more new and true way. With the heart of Paul poured in it, the Scripture speaks about man and about things, about time and about eternity, about truth and about falsity, about life and about death in a truly divine way. We can compare the Holy Scripture to a very little oak seed: an acorn. Who is the Apostle Paul? He is the one who, with the eyes of the Holy Spirit, sees in this very little acorn the entire majestic tree that is contained in it and all the possible developments that will happen during the growth of this tree. But he also sees the origin of this acorn and the origin is the heart of the Father, the heart of the Son, the heart of the Holy Spirit. Today we have the Scripture, but it is like a sealed tree. The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in us*: “Be irresolute, stupefied; blind yourselves and stay blind! Be drunk, but not from wine, stagger, but not from strong drink! For the LORD has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep. He has shut your eyes (the prophets) and covered your heads (the seers). For you the revelation of all this has become like the words of a sealed scroll. When it is handed to one who can read, with the request, "Read this," he replies, "I cannot; it is sealed." When it is handed to one who cannot read, with the request, "Read this," he replies, "I cannot read." (Is 29, 9-12)* Why is this happening? Because we have fallen in the temptation of being ashamed of Christ and of his most pure truth that makes the difference with every other man. We have already said that. For the Apostle Paul, Jesus is the eternal Different from whom every truth, every grace, every life comes to us. We are blind for we no longer see Christ as the Apostle Paul sees Him and, consequently, we have, of Him, of Christ, instead of the entire wheat of the Good Seed that He is, only some little pieces of chaff. Not only. We say that the little piece of chaff is the entire Seed. Paul has really given his name to the Scripture and through it all the Scripture was made living, it has spoken, has showed its divine richness, has unveiled all the powerful light enclosed to it. If we also want the Scripture to speak to hearts today, it is necessary that we do as the Apostle Paul did. We clothe ourselves with the heart of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we turn these three hearts into our heart. We give our heart, always ruled by these three hearts, to the Scripture and it will give us, as a majestic tree, all the purity and beauty of man and of vocation. Bu it will also show us the devastating effects that sin generates in man and in creation. It will unveil us every truth so that we may reach the eternal salvation. Paul has given his heart to the Scripture, and it has spoken through him without hiding anything of its mystery. Today the Scripture needs that: the heart of the Christian filled with the heart of the Father, with the heart of the Son, with the heart of the Holy Spirit to continue to speak. Without the heart of the Christian, it does not speak. The Christian is the one who speaks, instead, making it say every falsity and lie.**

**Let us conclude this brief portrait about the Apostle Paul by offering three short considerations that may help enter the heart of this true minister of Christ and true administrator of the mysteries of God.**

**6. FIRST CONSIDERATION**

**No history of any man might be inverted in one moment but through a direct intervention of the Lord. In the Apostle Paul, everything happens in one moment. A moment before he was against Christ, one moment later he is with Christ. One moment before he persecuted the Christian to death, one moment later he lets himself be persecuted to death for the name of Christ Jesus. Every man of sound rationality should attest that what happened in Paul is not possible through human ways. Instead, one must confess that everything happened for an intervention infinitively greater than his zeal for God, so great to turn this zeal against Christ into zeal for Christ and in an overly higher and stronger way. That of Paul for Christ is a zeal that has lasted for an entire life, and every day it was increasing and it increased in the measure of the persecutions. The more persecutions were violent and the stronger his zeal was. Nothing stopped him from roaming through the earth and the sea to gain someone for Christ Jesus, going from a persecution to another one. Anyone would have been dampened in some ways. Anyone would have slowed down the race. Instead, the race of Paul more and more gathered speed. His love was Christ the Lord and he ran after Him in order to reach Him.**

**In the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, the Apostle Paul reveals what the reason of his change was. On the way to Damascus, while he was going in pursuit of all those who worshipped Jesus as true God, as true Son of God, to put them into prison, a light has blinded him. A voice called him from that light. That voice has identified itself as the Lord. Not only. That light and that voice have subverted all his life. They have changed him in soul and in spirit. That Saul he was no longer existed. It is as if he had been melted in a melting pot and poured in an entirely Christic shape, with another life, another heart, another soul. In one moment, Saul has witnessed to a new true creation. The Scripture has never told such a mighty, such portentous, such abrupt event before. Let us repeat it: any person with sound rationality should confess – whether one believes or not – that the finger of God has worked at the highest of his almightiness, for only the finger of God can create such mighty deeds of conversion and of total transformation of a heart in one moment, one instant, one heartbeat. It is as if that light had reduced him to ashes and turned him into light. From that moment, Saul has become the light of Christ in the world. Paul has become the light of Christ to enlighten the mystery of Christ Jesus before every man, both the Gentiles and the Jews.**

**The testimony the Apostle Paul offers about his call before the Sanhedrin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem is true grace of the Lord. The Lord loves his people so much to desire the salvation one obtains in the confession of the name of Jesus the Lord. This is why he sends his Apostle in the Sanhedrin after many years. The Lord never withdraws his grace. After this grace, there shall not be another one. This is the last appeal before the destruction of Jerusalem. If the chiefs of the people convert, He is ready to have all army withdrawn. But we know that the Sanhedrin has refused this grace. They have not accepted it. Jerusalem was destroyed.**

**The Apostle Paul is the one who, more than anybody else, has lived the command of Jesus the Lord that appointed him light of the people, light of every nation, missionary of his truth and of his grace. He has not lived it in a peaceful way, though, but among thousands of persecutions. Here is how He narrates his painful facts in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: *To my shame I say that we were too weak! But what anyone dares to boast of (I am speaking in foolishness) I also dare. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I am talking like an insane person.) I am still more, with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, far worse beatings, and numerous brushes with death. Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep; on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fastings, through cold and exposure. And apart from these things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is led to sin, and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus knows, he who is blessed forever, that I do not lie. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus, in order to seize me,******but I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands*. (2Cor 11, 21-33)**

**The greatest sorrow suffered by the Apostle Paul was not what the Jews or the Gentiles caused for him. The strongest sorrow was the fall from faith of those he had led into the Gospel with great tiredness and sufferance. He goes by, evangelized, attracted to Christ the Lord, proclaimed the true Gospel of Christ Jesus and after some time his entire work went up into flames. Nothing remained. And he always had to return to sow the true Gospel again, without never losing heart, going astray, falling from his great zeal. Thus the Apostle Paul becomes true model of every Shepherd of Jesus the Lord in the Church of the living God. Every Shepherd must know that he sows the Gospel not on the way, not among stones, not among thorns, not on a good soil. He sows it on the sand of the sea, instead. When it seems that it is going to bear some fruit, the savage wave of heresy and of falsity immediately comes to destroy all things. What does the Apostle do, then? He begins to sow the Gospel again in those hearts devastated by the many falsities and heresies, knowing that once again the savage wave would return to devastate what he had sowed again today with great tiredness. Here is a strong warning to the Galatians who were passed to a different Gospel:** ***I am amazed that you are so quickly forsaking the one who called you by (the) grace (of Christ) for a different gospel (not that there is another). But there are some who are disturbing you and wish to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach (to you) a gospel other than the one that we preached to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone preaches to you a gospel other than the one that you received, let that one be accursed! Am I now currying favor with human beings or God? Or am I seeking to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ.  Now I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. For I did not receive it from a human being, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.  For you heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it, and progressed in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my race, since I was even more a zealot for my ancestral traditions. But when (God), who from my mother's womb had set me apart and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; rather, I went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus*. (Gal 1, 6-17) The Gospel of Paul is true as it is received directly by Jesus. The Apostle is the gift of God’s mercy to the entire world. Not only. He is also infinitively more. He is the most sublime grace made by God to the Church. Through his zeal, his love, his passion for Christ Jesus the Gospel in him has clothed itself with a new vigour, of a new strength. May the Mother of God obtain the same zeal as Paul for every Apostle of Jesus.**

**7. SECOND CONSIDERATION**

***Paul, an apostle not from human beings nor through a human being but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead* (Gal 1,1) *Then after fourteen years I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. I went up in accord with a revelation, and I presented to them the gospel that I preach to the Gentiles - but privately to those of repute - so that I might not be running, or have run, in vain*. (Gal 2, 1-2) *And when Kephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he clearly was wrong. For, until some people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to draw back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcised. And the rest of the Jews (also) acted hypocritically along with him, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not on the right road in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Kephas in front of all, "If you, though a Jew, are living like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"* (Gal 2, 11-14)**

**Paul is the sign of the ministry of God’s freedom that calls when, how and whom He wants for the proclamation and the diffusion of the message of salvation. Paul is a Pharisees by education, he comes from the school of Gamaliel, he was a Roman citizen, Hebrew by bloodline, persecutor of the Church of Christ by zeal, Apostle of the Gentiles and persecuted by love of righteousness, called by God on the way to Damascus. The Lord has made him a vessel of election. He has appointed him missionary for the proclamation of the Word of salvation and of faith redeeming in the name of Christ Jesus. However, the Twelve are the columns of truth. They are the testimonies of the Word of Christ, of what He has done and taught. There cannot be any discrepancy between his faith and the teaching of the Apostles. He wants to confront. He goes to Jerusalem. He shows them the received Revelation. He cannot take any risks of teaching doctrines of man. He is sure about it. However, he wants the confirmation and he confronts. He can proclaim the Gentiles the received Gospel. The Apostles ratify him in truth. Yours is our own truth.**

**And Paul proclaims the Gospel to the Hebrews. He proclaims it to the Gentiles. He is the Apostle of the People. He makes four missionary journeys by land and sea. He founds Christian communities. He exhorts. He rebukes. He proclaims. He warns. He purifies faith from every human infiltration and delivers it from the heaviness of man’s sin. He is in love with Christ. He wants to introduce everyone to Christ as a chaste Virgin. His is not a proclamation of the law. His is the annunciation of the love of Christ, of God the Father and of God the Holy Spirit for man. His is the invitation to man to love the Trinitarian God and the brothers, who are part of himself, body of his body, as body of the Lord through the Sacrament of Baptism. In the mystical body of Christ everyone fulfils the received mission: the Apostles as Apostles, the prophets as prophets, the evangelists as evangelists, for the Church is Church of God in the multiformity and in the variety of the received gifts. The mission in Paul is love for salvation. It is longing and élan of conversion. He wants every man to be saved. However, there is salvation if there is Word of the Lord, if there is life according to the faith in the Word.**

**To be faithful to man, Paul knows that one needs to be faithful to God. A testifying Church cannot be aside from this faithfulness. He knows it well. The constant purification of faith from any infiltration of human thought arises in him. Only the Word of God saves, if lived with immense love. The other words do not save. One runs in vain. One is like those fighters hitting air. And Paul is faithful to man for he is faithful to the Gospel of our Lord Christ Jesus. Paul is faithful for he loves his God. Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ. Yet I live, no longer I. But Christ lives in me.** **Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.** **Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus.** **Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her. And Paul loves Peter. He wants him to be perfect in the truth of the Gospel. Hypocrisy is not a law of the Gospel. The behaviour of Peter toward the purity and toward the faithfulness of the Gospel would have caused serious damages. Paul opposes. He loves him. He wants him entirely of Christ. Besides, the one who has chosen Christ cannot be afraid or ashamed of men, neither can he behave in a hypocrite way. He must have the courage of truth, for this courage is what will save man. Paul opposes Peter. He opposes because he loves him. He opposes because he wants an exemplary behaviour according to the Gospel. The community of Christ is a community where love must reign. Love is life according to the Word of the Lord, though. And does the Word of the Lord not say that if your brother sins you should tell him? Let us read both the text of the Gospel according to Matthew and the text of the Letter to Galatians: "*If your brother sins (against you), go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*. (Mt 18, 15-18) *And when Kephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he clearly was wrong. For, until some people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to draw back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcised. And the rest of the Jews (also) acted hypocritically along with him, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not on the right road in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Kephas in front of all, "If you, though a Jew, are living like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"* (Gal 2, 11-14)**

**Paul opposes Peter because the fault is fault of hypocrisy and of compromise of the purity of the Gospel. Whoever rebukes loves. Whoever opposes for the purity of the Word of God saves. One opposes for love and one rebukes for the salvation of oneself and of brothers. And Paul is necessary to the Church. He is necessary to every Church that wants to be Church of Christ, to every Church that wants to be purified, be cleansed, be made beautiful with no stain and no wrinkles for the life according to the Gospel. Paul is necessary to every Church that wants to create the unity of one only body, where obedience is obedience to faith and life is absence of hypocrisy and evil, of spirit of contention and of vainglory, of jealousy and of envy.**

**Paul is necessary to every Church that wants to live the purity of the Gospel. But Paul is grace of God. Paul is not fruit of earth. He is the called by God the Father through the means of Christ Jesus our Lord. But he is in the Church. The Church is Apostolic. The apostolic mission is certitude of truth. Paul, as living in the apostolic Church, opposes with truth. He has not gone to Jerusalem to be approved in his ministry and in his call.**

**When the Father of Heaven calls, his call cannot be subdued to man’s approval. But when the Father of Heaven calls, the man called always deals with the truth of the Gospel whose custodian is Peter and the Eleven united to Peter. When God calls and sends, the one who has the mission to shepherd and to lead into the way of the Gospel is vigilant so that one may be and may always dwell in the Word. It is his mandate and it is his duty. And the Church of the origins was vigilant. It gathered to fathom the will of God. He has approved the truth. The Holy Spirit and we have decided. Go in peace. Reassure the brothers. But the Church of the origin gathered to listen to the teaching of the Apostles, for the prayer, for the piece of loaf, in the brotherly union. All the faithful in Christ Jesus were one only heart and one only soul.**

**Paul announces the Gospel. He proclaims it to the People. He reminds it to those who, because of the frailness of their flesh, have forgotten or misinterpreted it. His heart is that of Christ. His love is love for the salvation of the world. He is the believer of the mercy and of the philanthropy of God. But mercy is not mocking God. Those who do not want to put an end to evil will not inherit the Kingdom of Heavens. For Paul, faith is not an empty feeling. Faith is life according to the Word. We are justified by faith and not by the works of the law. We are saved by our life according to the Word. Those who will be cleansed and will purify themselves from every sin will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In this regard, Paul is the upholder of the justice in God. The Lord who has given all things to man in his Son Jesus Christ so that he may be saved and live will ask all things to man and wants a reply that is an entirely yes, as in Christ it was an entirely yes to his Father who is in Heaven.**

**In Paul, there is no mercy of God and salvation at a low price, only a request for forgiveness to the Lord while living in sin and gorging oneself in the life pleasures. Paul teaches, in the most absolute faithfulness to the Gospel, that life according to faith is life according to the Word. Paul is the proclaimer of the grace and of the gifts of God. God works everything in everyone. We are the instruments and the vessels of clay in which the Lord has placed the treasures of his grace and of his mercy. Paul wants all things to be attributed to God. He bestows his gifts and He guides so that everyone may carry them out according to the grace received.**

**Thus, Paul teaches the difference among the people of God. There is the function, there is the gift, there is the exercise of the mission, there is the love according to which everyone must exercise it, there is the faithfulness to the Word of God saying to us how one needs to live to be pleasing to God. Above all, Paul is the man who has never let himself be separated from the love of Christ: neither hunger, nor nakedness, neither beating, nor dangers, neither calumnies, nor slander, neither prison nor captivity. Nothing and no one have never separated him from the love of Jesus the Lord.**

**Neither flattery nor threats. Always faithful to God to be faithful to man. He has competed well; he has finished the race; he has kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits him, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to him on that day. And Paul is necessary to the Church as Peter is necessary, as every faithful who lives the gift of God for the salvation of the world in the righteousness and in the holiness of life is necessary. Paul is necessary to the Church as everyone called by God for the proclamation of the Gospel is necessary and he is sent by Him into world so that the world may be saved through the means of the Word of the eternal life. Thus, Peter was necessary to Paul for the truth in holiness. Paul was necessary to Peter for the holiness in the truth of the Gospel. Two men and two spiritual gifts that have sanctified and made the body of Jesus the Lord, his Church, true.**

**8. THIRD CONSIDERATION**

***'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' I replied, 'Who are you, sir?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazorean whom you are persecuting.' My companions saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who spoke to me. I asked, 'What shall I do, sir?' The Lord answered me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything appointed for you to do.'* (cf. Act 22, 1-21)**

**On the way to Damascus, a light makes Paul blind and a voice shocks him in his soul. Christ is salvation for everyone who believes. Paul has believed in the mercy the Father of Heaven has granted him now, in the moment in which he was out of His grace, for he was furious and filled with zeal against those who believed in Jesus of Nazareth, appointed Messiah and Son of God, Lord and Christ, Son of David and Son of man. The grace of God moves him from inside. In one instant, it enlightens him, blinds him, changes him, converts him, saves him, cleanses him in his thoughts and in his heart. The light is sparked. For Paul the way of Damascus is the remembrance always vivid before his eyes and his mind. That way is always his present. Here, in one moment, his existence has been turned, changed, saved, redeemed, justified, oriented toward new horizons and new journeys, new paths, new ways, new people, new nations, new men and men made new. Faith in Jesus Christ, through his means, shall embrace all the world, broadening borders and spaces, combining heaven and earth and every corner of the universe.**

**That way was for Paul his truth, his death and his life, his being and his acting. His existence is that moment: *I am grateful to him who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me trustworthy in appointing me to the ministry. I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and an arrogant man, but I have been mercifully treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief. Indeed, the grace of our Lord has been abundant, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost. But for that reason I was mercifully treated, so that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life*. (cf. 1Tm 1, 1-16)**

**Here in one moment everything is consumed. Might of the divine grace, when man is at disposal and lets himself be found by his God! Paul lets himself be attracted by his Lord. The God of his Fathers is that Jesus he persecutes. Now he knows it. He obeys. What shall I do, Lord? Today the Lord shows him the new path, no longer without Him or against; no longer in a life of sin, of death, of hate, of approval of misdeeds and of stoning, in search of letters of accreditation to make the enemies of the God the Fathers prisoners. His existence is entirely new. He has not received the Baptism yet. He is not son of God, in Christ Jesus yet. He will become it soon. Light is his future. Darkness is his past blindness. Something like scales will fall from his eyes. Hananiah will baptise him. He will completely see the mystery he fought so much. May the light, which showed Paul his darkness, unveil to us, too, that obscurity surrounding our existence without Christ in his voice of eternal truth.**

**By now Paul knows that all has changed in his life. The first things have passed away. Here new things are born. He is converted. Light has enlightened him. He abandons his past. The Lord, from time to time, day after day, will show him the way to follow. *'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything appointed for you to do.'* And man begins that journey of humbleness and of obedience to his Lord. First, it was his will that chose and decided and pursued. Today he has no longer will. Every man is called by God to live that journey of conversion and of holiness for the salvation of the world. Conversion is asking God what He wants us to do to please Him, to fulfil His will, to bear fruits of eternal life around us, in us. The Lord always shows his divine will. Asking with simple and sincere heart for it to be done is to think, want, decide, fulfil only according to it. Choosing the divine will is abandoning those who were companions of journey before; it is wanting God first of all and above all, at the cost of life; it is renouncing to his own; it is not having one at all; it is not letting oneself be influenced nor be tempted by any other will.**

**Following Christ is deciding to lose life, for one is mocked, misunderstood, calumniated, beaten, reviled; since no longer as belonging to the human race, but as enemies of humanity, fearful and abominable being, from whom one needs to stay away, not to be contaminated; as lepers, to whom one cries out: *Impure! Impure!* Paul knows it. The Lord has revealed him this too. He will have to suffer a lot because of the Gospel *You have followed the persecutions that I endured. Yet from all these things the Lord delivered me. In fact, all who want to live religiously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (cf. 2Tm 3, 1-17)* The persecutor of Christ will be the persecuted for Christ. Paul chooses Christ. God has appointed him a vessel of election for the salvation of the people. He must proclaim the Gospel. But Paul does not know where, how, with whom, when. The Lord will show him at its time. Then he will make him invert ways and paths. God is the one who establishes the drawing of salvation, and not man. Man must be faithful executioner of the divine commands, letting himself be led by hand, every day, like a child, meek and humble, listening and being obedient to that voice who calls him, who sends him, who leads him, who suggests him what and how he must carry out.**

**Day after day, moment after moment, for every problem, for every new way, for any kind of thing, the Lord must always be the Lord of our life. Not even for a moment should it be ours, of our lordship and will. The decision must never be of man. I want, I decide, I work, I do. I do this or that. But what does the Lord want? Is it will of God or is it my will? Is it Lordship of Eternal or is it a human tantrum? Each of us is called to be the work of man. So that it may be of God, it is necessary that He is the one who wants it and not man; He to decide it and not us; He to bring it to an end and not our will. He wants us to convert, sanctify ourselves, be testimony of the Resurrection of his Son Jesus. It is sin, it is mocking the Lord to ask Him to show us His will when our will has already decided not to convert, not to sanctify, not to testify, not to live according to the Word of the Scripture. Our prayer is false, as it is made only with the mouth, but not with the heart.**

**On the way of Damascus, at this moment of true, real conversion that touched his heart, his soul and also his body, at this moment in which the grace of God moves and touches him in the depth of his depths, at this time of salvation, he asks the Lord to show him his will and the Lord will show it to him, so that Paul may walk, always and everywhere, on the way of the proclamation and of the testimony of Christ, so that he may make numerous people to the Lord. We must pray. We must ask for the will of the Lord to be done. But this form of prayer is difficult. The heart of man is too caught in human, too surrounded in sin, too of stone and too hardened to ask with simplicity and purity. And, besides, this is a prayer that re-establishes the right relation of Creator and creature, of Father and Son, of Teacher and disciple, of Saviour and of saved, of divine will of salvation and of mediator of the divine salvation.**

**However, we have other projects, other ways, other paths, other salvations to show the world. The way of God is not ours, neither his paths of righteousness. Without the listening of the Lord who speaks to all of us, we are all keen on building those abortions of history that will never see the light, for the light of God has not blinded us so that we may live of light. The one who has never let himself be enlightened by the light of God and has not let himself be blinded to understand the darkness of his own existence and the vanity of his heart and of his work cannot give the light to the world.**

**We must pray like Christ in the garden of olives, sweating blood, so that the Lord may let us understand his way, so that we may fulfil it. And the Church of the origins was assiduous in prayer. It was assiduous also in the listening to the teaching of the Apostles. We cannot be constant in prayer and not constant in the formation in the Word. Our prayer would not be Christian and, certainly, it is not when there is no will to be rooted in the Word of God that must orientate our life in conversion and in faithfulness. God wants our conversion. He wants one to walk together with Him with humbleness. Walking with Him is not to know where to go, unless today; it is to pray so that the strength of the Holy Spirit may become ours in the fullness of passion together with Christ the Lord. May the Mother of God help us understand, She who kept everything in her heart and meditated with the help of the Holy Spirit. The mystery needs long meditations, and the Apostle Paul is a great mystery for us.**

 ***Fr. Costantino Di Bruno***