

Sisters of Jesus Good Shepherd Pastorelle



Itinerary of the Lectio Divina
in preparation for the Seminar
on the ministry of pastoral care

WORKSHEET 1

The image of the cover:
Jesus Good Shepherd with his people (in detail)
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Place: Church in Krajn- Albania

“I forget the past and I strain ahead for what is still to come”

(Phil. 3:4-14)

1. The context

This passage from Paul is part of a letter that the Apostle addresses to the community of Philippi, in a circumstance that is particularly painful. In fact we find Paul in prison (Phil 1:13) and at the same time has to bear the difficulty and the accusation of a certain faction of judges who consider his imprisonment as something good (Phil. 1:15), animated with the spirit of contest and rivalry. While bearing all of this with much suffering, the Apostle has no regret because even without noble motives in every case the Gospel is announced.

Our passage as seen in the introduction has a tensed and polemical background, Paul claimed with force and determination that the true circumcised are those “who worship in accordance with the Spirit of God”, in contrast to those who are still putting their trust in the flesh (Phil. 3:1-4). The passage is clearly autobiographical, with the certainty that the Gospel which he announces is above all the consequence of his experience of faith flowing from his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus.

2. The text.

vv. 4b-6: Paul begins this reflection starting from his religious life which is presented as an unexceptionable under the profile of the Jewish piety. The titles that he remembers, in fact witness that no one can contest the purity and integrity of a life which before the encounter with Christ was exemplary be it by birth or by personal choice. The list of all the privileges with which he could boast is composed of seven prerogatives, three by birth: of the descent of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, and being circumcised on the eighth day according to the law; instead the other four are the consequences of his personal choice,

adherence to phariseeism, zealous persecutor against the Christian “heretics” and lastly he is irreproachable when it comes to the observance of the Law. In short, a model of piety, of devotion and of zeal. In other words he lacks nothing when it comes to the confrontation of the criticism and contestations that comes from a certain part of the community.

vv. 7-11: This session starts with the great turning point. Christ has changed everything. In the encounter with Christ, Paul was able to judge his Judaism as a loss. Using commercial vocabulary, the Apostle does not have any restraint in valuing the previous investment as a failure: loss and rubbish (*lett. waste*). It is interesting the use of the tenses of the verb “I consider/I retain” in v. 7 (I have considered) it is in perfect tense, while in v.8 (*I consider*) for two times Paul uses the present tense. The relationship is clear: the event that happened in that encounter has caused a radical and a profound change which effects are still strongly felt in the present.

This “devaluation” of his past is intimately connected to the real perception of the “sublimity of the knowledge of Christ”. It is a confrontation between the “nobility” of his past and the “richness” of his present which Paul now affirms as all loss and rubbish. The knowledge of Christ of which he talks is identified as communion with Him. It does not deal evidently of acquisition of some more notions of Him, but the experience of Christ: “For to me life is Christ, and death is gain” (Phil. 1: 21).

Paul describes the turning point that the encounter has produced, as a renouncement to follow justice, through the observance of the work of the Law, in order to accept gratuitously that which comes from faith in Christ Jesus. We can say that his movement consists in the abandonment of the observance of the Law in order to obey Christ: from observance to obedience. In this context it is very important the possessive adjective “my” Lord (v.8). A true “conversion”, is in fact the passing from considering Jesus Christ as the Lord to confessing Him as “my” Lord. Paul now affirms with extreme clarity that is

only the Risen Christ who illumines, guides, forms and orients his present and his future.

The knowledge of Christ comes with the desire to be assimilated by Him (vv. 10-11). The proof that the encounter of Paul was an authentic experience of salvation is expressed in his desire to live as Jesus and to live in Him: to know the power of His resurrection means, in fact to share in his sufferings. The Paschal mystery of Christ comes as the content and form of His existence. It is clear that Paul does not impose this project, but more profoundly he desires that it will be accomplished in him what His Lord has given him. We are not dealing with an ethical decision, no matter how important that may be, but we are in the context of a life-giving relationship which provokes and stirs the intense desire of conformation. The man who experienced being saved and loved aspires to live as the One who has saved him.

vv. 12-14: Paul now turns his gaze onward. He is aware that his journey of faith is inserted in a dynamism which progressively pushes him to run the race in order to “to capture Christ”. If it is true that Christ has seized him, he is aware of not having seized Him fully; there is still a journey to be completed. The existence of the apostle does not rest securely in the memory of the past, but the memory of the encounter spurs to seek further. The experience of salvation that is identified with the vocation that he received presupposes the effort and the commitment of the athlete who has started the race, but has not yet reached the finished line. Not even his past, no matter how heavy and distant from Christ, can constitute a trophy in this race. In other words, Paul points out the exigency of “treating his body hard” and “making it obey him” (1Cor 9:27), for fear that after having preached to others, he himself will be disqualified.

Only at the end of his life would he be able to confide to the disciple, Timothy: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2Tim. 4:7).

3. Actualization

The apostle Paul is undergoing a difficult moment in his apostolic mission. The difficulty added by the accusations which are ever more violent to his ministry have created a heavy and difficult atmosphere, and even of loneliness. In this context, in which it would be easy and even plausible to fall back on oneself, but the apostle makes memory of that day when the intense light of Christ came to break the thick darkness in which he thought to be doing the will of God, by persecuting the Christians. There is no greater darkness than those who believe to be serving God, while in reality they are hindering or absolutely fighting.

Now in prison, the memory of that encounter becomes an opportunity for reflection on his call and its significance to his ministry.

The condition of Paul suggests to us also an effective modality on how to face the difficulties and at times the oppositions that we encounter in the accompaniment of our brothers and sisters in their encounter with Christ. Pastoral charity presupposes that the apostle should have the capacity in the essential knots of his apostolate to review the salient stages of his call, to recall the memory that one time he also had an experience of encounter with the Lord and he became **“his”** Lord. He has found a treasure “full of joy” he sold everything in order to buy that field, finally he found the precious pearl of great price (cf. Mt.13:44-46). In that moment he understood that the encounter with Christ was no longer compatible with his past life, the same gifts of God now fade before the excellent Gift, who is Christ.

The apostolate can lead us to think that the Word should be above all for others, however, in reality we can be an efficacious sign only and in the measure in which we remember that we are disciples, yes, who have started the race, but have not yet reached the end. Many times it is self-sufficiency which makes our ministry sterile, as if we can live from the gain of the friendship with Christ. The Apostle is aware of the gift received, desires the accomplishment of what the Lord has started. The

goal is to become “conform” to Christ, indeed it is his desire. Faith is generated in the measure in which our life as apostles is a participation in the Paschal event of Christ. Only then can we hope for a renewal of our modalities of transmission and of spiritual accompaniment: the mouth speaks from the fullness of the heart (cf. Mt. 12:34). The life giving rapport with Christ demands care and solicitude. Paul speaks “of a race”, and this means that there is a dynamism of growth that is to be supported and an effort that need to be spurred.

Too often our initial intuition of our ministry remains “initial” and we are unable to revisit that gift, becoming victims of our project or of the role that we have cut out for ourselves within the institution.

The reflections of Paul question us, they are challenges presented to which often even with noble reasons of ministry and apostolate runs the risk of allowing ourselves be overwhelmed by a multiplicities of commitments, forgetting “the love of a time” (cf Rev. 2:4)

Let us ask the Lord in prayer to make memory of the day in which everything had its beginning, let us implore from Him the gift of being able to renew our friendship and that nothing - past or present -obstruct our race.

Praying with the Word

1. I ask the Lord the grace to make memory of the day in which everything had its beginning in order to enliven the power and the joy of the encounter with Him.
2. In the light of this memory I ask myself what diligence and care do I dedicate, today, to my rapport with Christ, so that it grows and develops till my full configuration to Him. (*Paul's race that strains ahead*)
3. There is an efficacious modality that the apostle Paul indicates, for confronting difficult moments in life, so that they become for me opportunities of reflection on the

meaning of my vocation and of the pastoral ministry that I am carrying out. What are they?

4. What is the condition for a renewal of our present modalities of the transmission of faith and of the spiritual accompaniment of the people of God that has been entrusted to us?

I write down the thoughts and sentiments that praying with the Word has evoked in me, in order not to forget them and to be able to share them with the sisters.

N.B. What I have lived in the prayer and what I have made note I forward it directly to the Superior General, in order to contribute to the preparation of the Seminar on our ministry of pastoral care.

Sharing with the community

1. We invoke the Holy Spirit
2. Together we reread the text of the meditated Word.
3. We share what each has gathered from the personal prayer.
4. We pause in silence in order to savour the joy of what each sister has shared.
5. We give thanks for the gift received.

If the community wishes to contribute to the reflection on the ministry of pastoral care, a Sister needs to take note of the essential elements of what has been shared and then send them to the Circumscription, who will collect the material in view of the Seminar and forward it to the General Government.

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