

Sisters of Jesus Good Shepherd Pastorelle



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

Worksheet 2

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

“I do everything for the sake of the Gospel”

(1Cor 9:1-27)

1. The context

“If food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again” (8:13). With this commitment Paul concluded the eighth chapter. Now he shows how to be in defence of his brother. In order not to scandalize the little ones, he renounced a right which is more relevant than simply not eating meat offered as sacrifice to the idols. Chapter nine has a clear autobiographical tone; the apostle of Jesus presents himself in his community which is divided with serious incomprehension, as the icon of Christ who lives the freedom that had been given him in the agàpe. Freedom is authentic when it is manifested in charity.

2. The text

vv. 1-14: The reflection of Paul begins with a series of urgent questions which presupposes an affirmative response. Paul is defending himself from those who put his apostolate into doubt or disagreement.

What presses him is to defend his freedom and his being apostle, in fact among the first questions is precisely on freedom, while the second on his being apostle. Paul is free because he is saved by his Lord and his existence exclusively depends on Him.

Being an apostle is founded on true encounter (I have seen the Lord) that gives him the possibility of using the privileges which are being enjoyed by the other apostles. With precision and determination Paul reminds to the community his rights. The

first concerns eating and drinking (v. 4). The community would have had to guarantee to him meals and lodging. The second if he had wanted - as the other apostles - he would have had the right to bring with him a believing woman (probably a wife) and also this must be taken care of by the community. The third consists in the right not to work (v. 6). The apostle is exempted from the obligation to work in order to earn a living. Paul affirms, therefore, with decision to exactly have the same rights as of the other apostles and he reminds that to make use of these rights is not at all an illegitimate demand. Rather it is the human custom to suggest that he who lends a service or exercise a job, has the right to enjoy the fruit of his labor (v. 7). The same word of God prescribes that those who are placed at the service of God can enjoy of that support that allows them to devote themselves exclusively to their service (vv. 8-12a).

The reasoning of the apostle seem to lead to the justification that if the community of Corinth would have provided his necessities, it would not have done anything extraordinary; rather it would have done a human and religious duty of which even the other evangelizers enjoyed legitimately. In reality, if Paul has reminded these motivations, it is for affirming that he is so free to be able to renounce the exercise of one of his rights, so that nothing can put an obstacle to the Gospel. He doesn't dispute one who practices such a right, rather confirms it, but he wants that his choice not to make use of these privileges may be recognized and accepted.

vv. 15-18: That which pushes Paul to a choice that, all the more seems radical, is in reality, a consequence of that experience of salvation that he has lived and at present moulds and forms his existence. He expresses explicitly that to recall these rights is not an "educated" because the Corinthians also regulate themselves with him according to the manner of the other evangelists (I would prefer rather to die), he has renounced you because the proclamation of the Gospel is for him a necessity (lett. anànk?).

The expression is strong, it indicates in fact, an irresistible necessity, fatal that has overwhelmed him and has totally involved him and in a permanent way. Now the same reason for his life is tied indissolubly to the cause of the Gospel, to the necessity of the proclamation of the Gospel and his recompense is to preach gratuitously.

vv. 19-27: If the cause of the Gospel is the necessity which guides irresistibly the action of Paul, then it is understood that his freedom is functional to the service. Paul doesn't envision his freedom as radical self-determination, but as condition to conform himself to Christ and as a consequence, to unconditionally serve his brothers to whom he is sent whether they are Jews or Greeks. It has to be clear that Paul does not "arrange" the Gospel to the recipients, but conforms himself to the Gospel to be able to be a servant of everybody. When one is truly free from oneself, one could truly obey and announce the Gospel in every situation and in every circumstance. Freedom is not an absolute value, but related to pastoral charity. My necessities no longer condition my choices but the necessities of the recipients: I do everything for the sake of the Gospel, so that I too may have a share in it. (v. 23).

The concluding words of Paul (vv. 24-27) remind to himself that though he was committed for a long time in the proclamation of the Gospel, he does not cease being the first listener of this announcement. The metaphor of the sport of the race and boxing are symbolic on how the evangelizer is called to preach more with life than with words. Even Paul perceive the danger that the apostolic ministry could become an "excuse" to avoid continuing a progressive journey in the identification to Christ: for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified (v. 27).

3. Actualization

The reflections of Paul are authentic thorn on the flesh of every preacher of the Gospel. In fact, they are not set on the level of rights but on love. Paul, as we have underlined in the commentary, acknowledges that what the other evangelizers accept from the community is not a will but as a consequence of their generous availability at the service of the preaching and the announcement of the Kingdom. He, instead, has made a different choice and “fights” so that just as the other, it may be recognized as legitimate.

In fact his freedom does not mean to be judgement on one who behaves differently, but an expression of the gratitude toward Him who has freed and saved him. To be free to proclaim the Gospel without any subordination, even though legitimate. The goal of this freedom is in fact, the unconditional service to the brothers of whatever culture and origin. Only he who is free can serve, free from himself and from his needs (often made by us) which could condition and limit.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle expresses in an effective way this dimension of freedom and service: “Freed from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:18). Freedom enables us, therefore, to serve and to proclaim the Gospel, always having before us the good and the growth of the persons to whom we are sent. It happens very often that “my” project, “my” quality, “my” competencies, “my” rights can become real and deceitful obstacle to the service of the brothers. It is, undoubtedly, a painful passage, and yet necessary: to know how to lay aside even the gifts that God has given us, recognizing that the fecundity of our evangelization depends exclusively in the measure in which we hand over ourselves to Him. Often it is true that we are not truly free and for this we have difficulty to serve.

In this prospective, the place and the modality of preaching become relative because what counts is my desire of conformation to Christ. To adapt myself to the Gospel, that my life may be at the complete disposition of the recipients - Jews and Greeks - is an immersion in their culture and in their hopes and expectations, in the certainty that which is authentically human belongs to Christ. To be able to say with truth: "I do everything for the sake of the Gospel".

Paul does not forget that he is a disciple and in the concluding words he perceives the danger of becoming a "professional" of the preaching of the others. There where gifts are greater, an authentic asceticism is demanded in order not to forget that there will be teachers only if they remain disciples.

4. Praying with the Word

1. Gazing at Christ I ask the grace to take into account if in my daily life "*I do everything for the sake of the gospel*", in the gratuity of one who knows she is loved and saved by Him.
2. It often happens that "my" projects, "my" qualities, "my" competencies, "my" rights can become real and devious obstacle to the ministry of pastoral care. How do I understand my freedom? Am I "interiorly free" in order to accomplish the mission that is entrusted to me or am I conditioned by the preoccupations for myself?
3. Do I recognize that the fecundity of the ministry of pastoral care depends exclusively on the measure in which I hand over myself to God? How do I live this *handing over* to the Lord in my daily life?
4. Am I aware that, while I announce the Gospel, I need to be continuously evangelized? To adapt myself to the Gospel is a true inculturation because it makes my life at the complete disposition of the recipients: am I open to their culture and to their hopes?

I write down the thoughts and sentiments which were evoked in me while praying the Word, in order not to forget them and to be able to share them with the Sisters.

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

Sharing in the community

1. We invoke the Holy Spirit
2. We reread together 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 shared.

If the community wishes to contribute to the reflection on the ministry of pastoral care, a Sister needs to take down 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 Council.

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