

Sisters of Jesus Good Shepherd Pastorelle



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

Worksheet 3

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

“I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have” (2Tim 1:6-11)

1. The context

The apostle Paul addresses this writing to the disciple and son Timothy, young leader of a community. The ministry of Timothy, as deduced by the writing as a whole, is encountering difficulty and also incomprehension that could discourage the young minister. In this context of service not easy, Paul exhorts Timothy to rediscover the deep reasons - theological - of his apostolic commitment. In the verses that precede our biblical text (vv. 4-5), Paul reminds the intense bond of affection that binds him to his son, Timothy, a spiritual bond, made even more solid by the testimony of faith which his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice gave him in his infancy and youth.

2. The text

v. 6: The exhortation of Paul opens with the memory of the consecration of Timothy, which is the origin of his ministry: *stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands*. It is evident that Timothy is undergoing a moment of difficulty, if there is the danger that this gift can be darkened. The verb to revive (stir into flame) (*anazopurein*) recalls the action to rekindle the fire under the ashes. The fire risks to be extinguished, the ministry can lose fervour and enthusiasm. Already in the first letter, the apostle solicited the disciple: *“Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you”* (1Tim. 4:14). The reason for this difficulty could be loneliness due to the separation from Paul (v. 4), or the young age of Timothy: *“Let no one have contempt for your youth”* (1Tim 4:12), perhaps also a bit of negligence in the spiritual exercise: *“Train yourself for devotion, for,*

while physical training is of limited value, devotion is valuable in every respect” (1Tim 4:8). The response to the crisis is the memory of that event, thanks to this because in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, Timothy has been constituted shepherd of the community.

v. 7: The memory of the gift received creates the conditions for an exercise of ministry that escapes from the cowardice to be on the contrary marked by strength, love and wisdom. Strength (*dynamis*) is fortitude which is a gift of the Spirit, which is not to be confused for aggressiveness. It is the *parresia* - frankness - which works great interior freedom, that drives away fear of being alone and abandoned, that gives the certainty of being accompanied and sustained by the action of the Spirit who comes to our aid in our weakness (cf. Rom 8:26). Love (*agàpe*) is oblation love of Christ, that love which becomes compassion and sharing until the gift of self, on the example of the Good Shepherd (cf. Jn. 10, Jn 13). Wisdom (*sophronusmòs*) is the wisdom of the heart, that is, the capacity to carry out an authentic discernment, having in mind and in the heart the Passover of Christ. True wisdom is the art of choosing what makes us live more closely the Passover of Christ, in order to be similar to Him in sentiments (cf. Phil 2:6-11). Besides, it is the ability to remain in the proper means, to have that equilibrium even in sentiments. Strength and love are not enough, discernment is necessary to know how to read the times, places and moments, in such a way that spending one’s life for others may not be for some time - until the exhaustion of strength - but for all life. Wisdom then becomes also the art of perseverance.

v. 8: The consequence for Timothy is “*not to be ashamed*” of that Gospel (cf. Rom 1:16) of which he is constituted herald and now sees it resplendent even in the helplessness of his teacher - Paul - who is in prison. The suffering of the apostle is not a case by chance but assimilation to Christ, suffering Messiah. Timothy is sent not to make sterile the trial he is undergoing, not to consider it an absurdity, but on the contrary, as the unequivocal

sign of authentic modality with which the Christian message finds its way hidden, often distorted in the human event: the Cross.

vv. 9-11: Paul accomplishes now, a happy detour on the content of that Gospel of which he is a herald, apostle and teacher. If it were true that an important point to come out from the crisis is the memory of the gifts received, it is also certain that the memory of the Gospel is the other pillar (gift) on which is founded the joyful experience of his own ministry. Salvation is at the same time election which grafts him not on his own abilities (works), but on the simple and certain gratuitousness of God, according to His intention and His grace. This call to salvation and election now is clearly and definitely manifested in Christ: it is the mystery that has been prepared for always, it is now resplendent in all of its strength and power. It is the Savior (*soter*) who has definitely won over death and gives us life without end. The memory of the Gospel - victory over death through Christ - gives the possibility to insert one's own human event - with its lights and shadows - in a vast horizon: "*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us.*" (Rom 8:18). The memory of the goal toward which we started our journey develops an attitude of patience and perseverance.

3. Actualization

The apostolic service and pastoral charity are space where we fructify the gift of grace which we have received. Or as the words of St. Paul witness to us, he who is sent risks falling under the heavy responsibility and the difficulty that he encounters. The same experience confirms that to the initial enthusiasm disenchantment often takes over which if not lived in faith, could become the start of many escapes and compensations that have nothing to do with our consecration and mission. Loneliness and misunderstanding within the

community and also only the coldness of the community life can wear out even the most certain and solid vocation.

Paul exhorts Timothy “to revive” the gift. This image as we have underlined in the commentary, to stir up the fire under a bed of ash, risks to be extinguished, whether for lack of air or exhaustion of the materials to be burned. It is an expression which although for its dramatization, renders the idea good of an initial outburst in which follows an inexorable and slow decline until its death. For Paul, to give air to the fire, removing the ashes, is to remember the gift of grace which we have received on the day of our consecration, to remember that effusion of grace which has constituted us ministers and apostles. It is allowing the Holy Spirit dilate in us, He who is already living and operating in us, but it risks to be mortified by the centrality of our own selves. In fact, the real enemy (the ash) of this growth are not the unfavourable circumstances but on the contrary they make our service more real and more paschal, the real enemy is I myself, or better that “I” who likes to manage in an autonomous and independent manner even the gift of God. The memory of that day reminds us that the spiritual life demands care, attention and constant vigilance. To ask with assiduousness to Christ, protection from our selves.

The memory of the Gospel is the other pillar on which the disciple builds his life and the fecundity of his pastoral action. Paul reminds that it is not in virtue of our work that we are chosen and saved, but by grace according to the design of God. The gratuitousness of the election and salvation demolishes every claim and every merit, eliminates in a definitive way every fear and apprehension, opens the heart of the apostle to gratitude, to fortitude and to charity.

The consequences for Timothy are clear: a spirit of fortitude, love and wisdom. Wisdom is the progressive assimilation of the reality of the Passover of Christ, in such a way to know how to choose in every circumstance, that which brings us closer or

farther from Him. The inevitable difficulties of every ministry will not then become situation of murmuring and discouragement, but on the contrary, a favourable occasion (*kairòs*) to reveal that it is not we but the power of the Risen Christ operates in us. To be heralds, apostles and teachers is not an academic exercise, neither are titles to elude the paschal journey, but a commitment and a desire that more than the word, life – our life – be an epiphany of the renewing strength of the Passover of Christ: “*Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.*” (Jn. 12:24-25).

4. Praying with the Word

1. With the eyes of Christ I look at the moments of crisis which I live in the ministry of pastoral care and I ask which are the causes that extinguish in me the initial enthusiasm.
2. In moments of difficulty and incomprehension what are the deep reasons that sustain my fidelity to the Lord and to the ministry entrusted to me?
3. Are there in me situations of escape or compensation before communitarian and ecclesial difficulties? What are they? Do I give in to criticism and murmuring or do I welcome the occasion to unite myself to the renewing strength of the Passover of Christ?
4. The suffering of the apostle is not a case by chance but assimilation to Christ, how do I render apostolically fruitful the trials which I experience?

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 to 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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