

# Sisters of Jesus Good Shepherd Pastorelle



## **Itinerary of Lectio Divina**

in preparation for the seminar  
on the ministry of pastoral care

**WORKSHEET 4**

*Image front cover:*  
Jesus Good Shepherd with his people (detail)  
*Artist:* Pjerin Sheldija  
*Place:* Krajn Church - Albania

**“You, then, my child, be strong  
in the grace that is in Christ Jesus”  
(2 Tm 2:1-13)**

## **1. The context.**

The passage that we are about to comment and pray, is the one that follows our previous lectio. Paul, aware of the difficulties encountered in his disciple's ministry, exhorts him to remember the gift of God received through the laying of his hands, having reminded him of the memories of his childhood and his youth that were closely linked to the witness of his mother and grandmother from who he received a solid affirmation of the faith.

The next passage is an exhortation to Timothy not to back track on the duty that has been entrusted to him. Using three imageries Paul hopes to create in the heart of his disciple an attitude of trust and patience. It's not easy to follow Paul's line of thought, but it would seem that through the exhortation he is inviting Timothy to accept his share of suffering, to take on the burden of his ministry. The concluding part of the exhortation (vv. 8-13) contains the theological motivation underlying his recommendations.

## **2. The text.**

**vv. 1-2:** Paul invites Timothy to remain anchored on the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and to pass on what he has received from Paul to trustworthy people who will be able to teach others as well. We can pick up his preoccupation for a correct and faithful handing on of the doctrine.

**vv. 3-7:** What follows is an exhortation using three symbols and metaphors: the soldier, the athlete and the farmer.

Paul begins his reflection with a verb – *sunkakopàtheson* – “share in”<sup>1</sup>; “put up with”<sup>2</sup>, which is at the heart of the exhortation.

Timothy must realize that being called to lead a community means taking on a service that makes the disciple become like Christ.

There is a burden of suffering that is “normal”, I dare say, obvious, from the moment we are called to generate in faith or to be companions in the spiritual journey.

The three images that follow explain the nature of this hard and risky apostolic service.

The minister is a “**good soldier**” of Christ. In this way, Paul warns Timothy that he must be ready for a battle. It is something risky but necessary. In the letter to the Ephesians, this idea of a battle is even more evident and hence the need to be well equipped (cf. Eph. 6:10-20). And also in 1Cor 9:7: “Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service”.

The disciple is also an **athlete**. In the first letter to the Corinthians, as a conclusion to a reflection on the meaning of his own ministry, Paul makes use of this imagery: “Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the price [...]. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one (1Cor 9:24-25). In our text what is demanded is that the athlete runs according to the rules.

Finally, the disciple is a **farmer** that works hard so as to reap the fruits from the earth. Still in 1Cor 9:7.10, Paul had used the same imagery: “Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? [...]. Whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop”.

The three professions have in common hardship and suffering, and for the soldier the added risk of losing one’s life. Notice how Paul completes these imageries with some specific details: the

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<sup>1</sup> New Revised Standard Version

<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem Bible

soldier is dedicated body and soul to the service, with no other intent than that of pleasing the person who has enlisted him; the athlete runs according to the rules to win the crown, and finally the farmer is the first to reap the fruits of his labour. In other words, for all of them there is a finishing line and a fruit to harvest.

**vv. 8-13:** The verses that conclude this reflection are like a foundation for the preceding exhortations. Paul recalls his own experience (v. 9-10) and finally puts forward an ancient Christological hymn (vv. 11-13).

After encouraging the disciple by means of the three metaphors and his experience, Paul starts from the theological perspective of the risen Jesus.

The theological reflection is a summary of the kerygma, of the history of salvation. The first and second statements insist, four times on the expression “with him”: “If we have died with him, we will also live with him, if with him we endure, we will also reign with him”. The disciple’s life is now defined solely and exclusively in relation to Christ and to the mystery of Baptism: death and resurrection. The participle “with” defines the identity of the believer (cf. Rm 6:4-5).

The third and fourth statements seem to be in contrast: “If we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful”. Grace is victorious even where the person shuts himself or herself up: if we deny Jesus, he will deny us but nevertheless, because he is faithful, he will not deny himself, he will save us.

In conclusion, the disciple is urged to read his/her life as a communion with Jesus, as a sharing in the suffering and trials of the Lord.

### **3. Actualization**

The apostle Paul knows from personal experience that ministry and spiritual accompaniment can be burdensome and can even lead to imprisonment. This very burden that could lead to

discouragement becomes, on the contrary, a way of sharing in the life of so many who persevere in their commitment, in their profession in life despite difficulties and suffering. The imageries that Paul used serve to remind us that if people work hard and suffer in order to sustain themselves at a human level, how much more will the apostle – who has being consecrated for the kingdom – not think that he/she can avoid such burden. We must reflect on the so many people who are struck by tribulations and terrible suffering: the unemployed, the people who can't afford to pay rent, the poor and those who despair. At times it seems that we are not aware of the fact that life for so many is a real struggle, even just to survive.

Such reflection can help us to re-dimension so many conflicts and anxieties that are often caused by the 'un-confessed' desire to affirm the self, even in Religious life. We look for the ideal living conditions and ministry, while so many – non Religious – in their wisdom, allow themselves to be molded by life as it comes. This is the principle of incarnation, or if you will, the spirituality of Nazareth that Charles de Foucauld lived so radically and so fruitfully.

The life of a disciple requires the strength of the soldier, the constancy of the athlete and finally the patience of the farmer. It is important, therefore, to rediscover the great gift of Christian asceticism (training) or else the gift received will die. Granted, asceticism can be dangerous and even misleading if it comes at the beginning of a journey without firstly having experienced the liberation and the consolation that come from the encounter with the risen Lord. However, asceticism is indispensable in order to guard and therefore to grow in conformation with Christ; it is always a response to the gift received.

To be apostles means to take upon oneself one's own share of trials and suffering, without falling into the trap of victimism, or 'poor me' syndrome. Life is also hardship, and for a disciple

suffering cannot be an obstacle but a condition that if lived in faith leads him/her to become like Christ.

In the times when trials seem to surpass our strength, it is the memory of God's faithfulness that will sustain us: if we are unfaithful, God, however, remains faithful!

#### 4. Praying with the Word

1. Am I aware that every commitment and every profession require hard work and suffering in order to reach their goal? More so: am I convinced that to be at the service of the Gospel requires strength, constancy and patience for fruit to be borne? What is my response to this?
2. When I am faced with the daily situations of burdens and hardships, where do I draw the strength to persevere in my pastoral ministry without giving in to discouragement?
3. Even in our Religious life, conflicts and anxieties can be camouflaged by the desire for self-affirmation. How do I train myself to value suffering and hardships so as to become ever more like Christ?
4. Do I allow myself to be fashioned by life as it presents itself, or do I take refuge in ideals of life and ministry that are far from the logic of incarnation?

I write down the thoughts and sentiments that have arisen in me while praying the Word. This will help me not to forget them and to share them with the Sisters.

*N.B.: If I wish, I can forward directly to the superior general, my experience of the prayer and the points I have jotted down. In this way I can contribute to the preparation of the seminar on our ministry of pastoral care.*

## **Community sharing**

1. Invocation of the Holy Spirit.
2. Reading of the Word.
3. Sharing of the insights received during personal prayer.
4. Moments of silence to relish what each sister has shared.
5. Thanksgiving for the gift received.

If the community wishes to contribute to the reflection on the ministry of pastoral care, ask a sister to jot down the essential elements of the sharing and send it to the Circumscription who will collect the material in view of the Seminar and forward it to the General Government.

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