

Part I
The Letter to the Colossians
"Biblical Pastoral Reflection"

Introduction

My brothers and sisters, I have been requested to share with you a reflection about the letter to the Colossians 1:27, however in Scripture, everything is intertwined and thus to better understand the above verse, we need to go to the immediate context in the letter to the Colossians, that is 1: 24-29, and begin by saying:

1. It is not the first time Saint Paul speaks of himself at the beginning of his letters (Ref: Gal: 1-2; 2 Cor 1:15-24; Phil 1:12-26) and if he does, it is to make his conduct and actions known and report on them, indicating the Gospel and those to whom he announces it are important to him.
2. His sufferings and struggles are fascinating proof of the value of the message proclaimed. It takes into account the Gospel and the existence of its recipients. For Paul, it is urgent to fight for the Colossians because it is here that the truth of the Gospel is threatened (Col 2: 4-5).
3. Two elements that attract attention in this letter are:
 - a. The repetition of the word mystery (*mysterion*) instead of gospel (*evangelio*). The question is why Paul uses this word, which at first glance may cause misunderstandings if the gospel is made to be proclaimed to all without exception.
 - b. The multiplication of the vocabulary of knowledge in connection with the mystery that is the gospel.

The paragraph of our reflection: (Col 1: 24-29)
"Paul's fight for the diffusion of the Gospel"

Verse 24

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,"

1. The sufferings of Christ are now complete. In the letter to the Colossians, there is a strong emphasis on the full, complete and actual supremacy of the glorified Christ, who lacks nothing.

2. However, the apostle speaks of the need for fulfilment of redemptive sufferings for the Church. He does not say that Christ has not fulfilled everything that had to be fulfilled, nor that He has not suffered enough. If that were so, the mediation of Christ would be imperfect. Colossians teaches the opposite: the mediation of Christ was perfect.

3. But what is still lacking, that which Paul must bring to completion, is his own itinerary, which he calls **“the tribulations of Christ in my flesh”** and which reproduces that which Christ undertook, his way of living and suffering for the proclamation of the gospel and for the Church.

4. The suffering of the apostle is for the Church. The **“for your sake”** of Paul does not mean forgetting all the events in which Christ is said to have suffered and died **for us**. The apostle does not mean to say that he adds something to the mediating and saving work of Christ because the entire letter points out that there is only one mediator and that the Colossians have been fully reconciled by Him.

5. Paul suffers for the strength and solidity of the Church, for its steadfastness, for its growth in the knowledge of the treasures manifested by God in His son. Everything that Paul does and suffers is **“for the Church”** because it is the body of the Lord, and Paul its deacon. (*diacono*)

6. It is not therefore masochism by which Paul rejoices in his suffering, but because what he supports benefits the Church and the tribulations are a necessary battle so that every person may understand the gospel and then believe and become perfect in Christ.

7. In the above verse, *ekklesia* (Church) does not designate firstly the community of believers in the region or in the city, but designates all believers spread throughout the world. Paul says that they form the ground of Christ. And therefore the Church here is perceived as a universal, cosmic, and Christian entity.

8. Paul had to understand through revelation, as indicated by Ephesians 3, that not only did the gospel contain the mediation of Christ, but also, and above all, it contains his full and definitive presence **among the Gentiles**, a universal presence, a factor of integration, unity, life and growth, to the point of making believers a singular entity defined Christologically (the Body of Christ). **Possibly here, for the first time, the Church is part of the content of the Gospel.**

9. Conclusions of verse 24:

1. The mediation of Christ for humanity was perfect;
2. We should take upon ourselves redemptive sufferings for the Church.
3. We must accept sufferings for the strength of the Church, for its firmness and its growth;
4. Trials are necessary so that human beings may understand and believe in the Gospel;
5. The Church is part of the content of the Gospel.

Verse 25

“Of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,”

1. After speaking of his sufferings and showing their purpose, Paul shows his role-service (“*diakonos*” - deacon) of the Church, with its divine vocation and its goal - the full realisation of God's Word.
 2. This is the first time that Paul declares himself "deacon" (servant) of the Church and of the gospel (Ref: 1: 23). This title of minister of the Church should not cause surprise, because Paul always interpreted his responsibility of evangelism and foundation of Christian communities as a service.
 3. If Colossians ordains Paul as the "deacon" of the Church, it must be because of the relationship between mystery (gospel) and the Church: since the gospel and the Church are joined christologically. Becoming the servant of one implies being the servant of the other.
 4. Paul forges a new expression here: “minister of the Church according to the divine office”. It is a responsibility, an obligation, a must. The emphasis is on the responsibility implied by the role received from God.
 5. The purpose is the Word of God, the Mystery that must be brought to fulfilment. Verse 23 has a spatial dimension. Until the Gospel is announced "**to every creature**", it has not reached its full realisation. But it also has a qualitative dimension as indicated in verse 28: the complete fulfilment of the Gospel has its fruits, being the perfection of every believer in Christ.
6. Conclusions of verse 25:
1. Like Paul, we must consider ourselves servants, deacons;
 2. We cannot separate the Gospel from the Church, nor the Church from

- the Gospel. They are inextricably joined;
3. We have a responsibility for the proclamation of the Word of God:
 - a. It must reach everyone because if not, it has not reached its full realisation.
 - b. It must bear fruit, namely, it should lead to the perfection of every believer in Christ.

Verse 26

“The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints.”

1. Everything is focused on mystery
2. The binomial "ages" and "generations" not only have a temporal function but also are a reference to an active subject. In this verse, the two functions should be considered temporal and of acting time and action.
3. "Now revealed" designates the final period inaugurated by the birth of Christ and has an eschatological connotation. We can say, therefore: "At this time, in the present in which we find ourselves, the mystery, the gospel, has "now been revealed," which certainly does not mean that the future dimension of mystery has disappeared, rather that the emphasis is on the "already here", the completed aspect.
4. Does “His saints” refer to all believers or only a certain group like the apostles and prophets? Admittedly, in Colossians, "His saints" refers to believers in general. But Paul certainly does not mean that all believers "the saints" have known the mystery (gospel) by direct divine revelation without the apostolic proclamation.
5. In the book of Daniel (LXX), knowledge of the Mystery comes in two ways: by direct divine revelation, or by disclosure and dissemination. God reveals his secrets only to those who have been chosen, so that later, they will make it known to the world.
6. Paul asked the Colossians to pray the Gospel be manifested as it should be transmitted. This "revelation" is none other than apostolic evangelism.
7. The apostle does not at all say in which manner the Mystery has been revealed to him by God. His intention is indeed to insist only on his responsibility and his work as announcer and proclaimer.

8. Conclusions of verse 26:

1. Like Paul, some have received direct revelation from God and others through the apostolic proclamation; but, independent of what kind of revelation each one has received, we have received a revelation, a knowledge of God;
2. There is a responsibility for action. We must make the Gospel known, it is necessary to announce it, and to spread it, here and now, in the time and space in which we live.

The central verse, 27

“To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

1. Paul, having underlined the modality of the proclamation of the Mystery (the Gospel), now gives the Christological content.
2. God, upon whose initiative depends the totality of the process of proclamation, now is mentioned by name.
 - a. God is all-powerful;
 - b. The content is Christ, with insistence on His eminent quality, the glory of Christ. In this way, the proclamation of the gospel (of mystery) and of Christ is a manifestation of divine glory. Not only is the mystery the plan of salvation that has taken flesh in Christ, but it is the plan of God who has wanted Christ to be announced and presented among the pagans and among the nations;
 - c. The recipients are the Saints, in other words are the believers who seek Christ as the Lord of life.
3. The presence of the gospel and of Christ among the nations is precisely what should be considered as the unprecedented and last manifestation.
4. We must admit that here, the presence of Christ among the nations is considered unprecedented for two reasons:
 - a. Because the pagan nations were not expecting the Messiah, Christ;
 - b. Because according to the mentality of the age, converts had to travel to Jerusalem, the Holy City. With the proclamation of Christ, salvation comes to gather the Gentiles in their own lands, to stay definitively among them, respecting the diversity of their cultures so that the nations remain, therefore, nations. This is unprecedented.

5. The Nations should not change their socio-cultural identity, it was like that before and should remain the same now and in the future. The supreme mystery is Christ among you; the presence of Christ among the nations, through the announcement, through life, is the result that attests that the design of salvation has arrived at its fulfilment

6. The Mystery is characterized by two parallel expressions, which reveal the insistence on glory.

- a. **“How great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery”**
- b. **“Christ in you, the hope of glory”**

7. This insistence on glory is obviously linked to Christ. In Christ, everything is given and manifested. The glory is that of the risen Christ, and therefore that of God, desired and awaited by all believers.

8. Conclusions of verse 27:

1. God is the author of everything;
2. We must proclaim, announce and spread the Gospel of Christ. The divine glory comes from this;
3. This divine glory must reach all nations, all peoples, respecting their idiosyncrasy;
4. The glory is the Risen Christ and therefore is the glory of God.

Verse 28

“Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ.”

1. Paul points out that the components of the proclamation, the warning and teaching of every man; through which Paul allows us to understand that evangelism is a long process, which takes a long time and occurs through exhortation, correction, admonition and patient teaching.

2. This correction and teaching should be made with all the wisdom necessary so as not to achieve negative results because giving and teaching without discernment can lead to discouragement and error.

3. In this manner, the content of the proclamation is not an abstract truth, rather is about Christ, who has loved all peoples and whom believers learn to know and love.

4. The dimension is universal: humanity as a whole. The triple repetition of “warning every man”, “teaching every man” and “present every man” indicates one point: all are invited to belong to the ecclesial body of the Saints and to live and grow in the knowledge of God and of the Mystery (the Gospel): As a consequence, the teaching and the exhortation are not limited to a small group of initiates, rather evangelism is a proposal to everyone.

5. The Books of the Wisdom of Solomon say that wisdom is available to everyone.

6. There is something surprising and wonderful about these verses. It is not just the fact that the Gospel can be lived fully in all cultures, rather that it is made in order to be proclaimed to the entire world, God did not want to make it known until the presence of Jesus Christ.

7. In fact, the purpose of evangelism is to make everyone perfect in Christ. The proclamation of the mystery (the gospel), of Christ has a purpose, which is essentially and universally salvific.

8. What is the perfection it talks about? It is the moral order which comes from the inner renewal of the believer: the perfection of believers is in Christ and is tied to His fullness and His richness.

9. The perfection to which all people are called in Christ is now possible. The perfection is not a utopia reserved for some. It talks about the perfection of the believers, of all those to whom it reaches.

10. Conclusions of verse 28:

1. Evangelism must be realised with the wisdom to avoid negative and erroneous results;
2. It is directed to the interior renewal of every believer, for all those who put hope in the Lord;
3. The gospel is for the whole world;
4. It is for all cultures, respecting each one's idiosyncrasy;
5. The end goal is salvific.

Verse 29

“For this I toil, striving with all the energy which He mightily inspires within me.”

1. But more than the labour itself, Paul emphasizes the modality of evangelism

with the energy of Christ who acts in him with power, Paul repeats that it is for this reason he tires and he fights.

2. This force is not possible except to the extent of the power of Christ. Paul points out that the proclamation of the Gospel is not within the reach of one who is weak, but one who is sustained by the power of Christ.

3. Strength and divine energy comes when Christ is put at the centre of one's life

4. Not only does Paul fight for the Churches which he founded and knows personally, he also fights for the Churches which he never visited, thus demonstrating the seriousness of the work for which he is responsible as the Apostle of the Nations and his responsibility for the entire universal Church.

5. The rhetoric of this fragment shows that Paul does not use his authority to support his own arguments. His authority is the knowledge of the mystery (gospel), the riches of Christ experienced by believers. That is to say Christology is valid in itself. It gives authority to Paul more than it receives from him, and this is the only and final argument in the letter to the Colossians.

6. Conclusions of verse 29

1. The power of evangelism is in God, in Christ;
2. Only united and supported by the strength of Christ is it possible to evangelize;
3. Our authority extends to the measure and depths in which we know Christ and the Gospel;
4. The only and definitive argument of the Church is the knowledge of Christ and this must be the only and definitive argument of every believer, every one of us;
5. Paul realised, with action, his responsibility of Apostle. What is our responsibility in the eyes of the faithful and of today's society?

Part II

This magnificent paragraph of Colossians 1: 24-29 intertwines extraordinarily, from a pastoral point of view, with Matthew 28: 16-20: The testament of Christ or the Mission.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" Jesus is the master of all things by the will of the Father.

1. Jesus speaks to the disciples, giving them instructions and the apostolic mission of the Church is condensed into these instructions; Thus in the gospel, there is a solemn message addressed to the apostles. This message has, at its centre, the mission, the universal mission: to proclaim the Gospel, which is the person and Word of Christ, throughout the whole world, to every creature.

2. **"Make disciples of all nations"** does not say that we must go to an exclusive group or an elite, but rather invites us to overcome any type of limitation and boundary.

- a. St. Paul affirms that in the Church **"there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: because you are all one in Christ Jesus."** (Gal 3:28);
- b. To make all peoples disciples is the official responsibility entrusted to the Church. The instructions have a complete character which talks to us about fullness in the Word, in action, in sending all the power, to all peoples, to save the whole world.

3. **"Go and teach them everything"** is a program with no limits.

Thus, the dynamics of mission are foundational and they maintain that disciples remain faithful and discover all that Christ commanded day by day. That is also the moral dimension of Christian life.

- a. This commandment Jesus made includes the call to grow in faith when He indicates **"Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you"** (Mt 28:20). It means that the proclamation should also seek a path of formation and maturation. Evangelism should seek growth, each human being needs more and more of Christ, and the evangelist should not be content with someone who is satisfied.
- b. It is a question of allowing oneself to be transformed in Christ by a progressive life **"according to the Spirit."** (Rom 8:5). *Evangelii Gaudium* #268 says that **"The mission is the passion for Jesus, but at the same time, a passion for His people."**

4. The instructions contained a guarantee "**I am with you always, to the close of the age**". God is with us from the beginning until the end. It is a durable presence, faithful in all things. He is at the beginning, now, and remains until the end of time.

5. This salvation is for everyone: God has evolved a way to join Himself to all humanity, at all times. He has brought us together as a community, as people and not as isolated beings.

6. From the words of the Risen Lord, the disciples, clothed in Christ, have a great mission, with the certainty of being accompanied by the Master and the Lord of a new and unheard of way. "**I am with you always to the close of the age.**" God is not absent, the Risen Christ with His Spirit cancels all loneliness of the human heart.

7. For this reason, each day, we must discover the joy of the gospel - the happiness of encountering Christ: the pleasure of announcing Him and the joy of receiving Him. It is the joy of animating the community from the presence of Christ: "**Go**". Not only a Church with open doors, but one which goes in search of the faithful, as Pope Francis repeats.

8. We need to go in search of others because Christ instructed us to undertake it. The Lord Jesus is the first protagonist who embodies this, who goes out, who calls, who chooses, who sends.

9. There are many passages in the Gospel where Jesus casts out demons and we can imagine Jesus in full action, not looking inward, rather going out, and deploying all His human and divine energies in favour of the suffering person.

10. You do not see Jesus on the margins of His own work or of His own responsibility, but rather assuming, in a perfect way, the mission for which He was sent.

11. Conclusions

1. Do we also assume our own mission, our own ecclesial responsibility without putting limits or boundaries on others?
2. Do we deploy our human energies in favour of human beings, especially the most needy?
3. Are we responsible for programs of growth and maturation in faith?
4. Do we try to lower ourselves, to descend from our position and approach others, especially the neediest?

5. Do we deploy our human energies in favour of our particular Diocese and society or do we live enclosed in on ourselves?

Part III The Eucharist

The responsibility for the universality of the Church, of which Paul is the apostle par excellence, and the responsibility to follow the instructions of the Risen Christ, the responsibility for the apostolic mission, only strengthens and grows with the Eucharist.

1. The Old Testament already symbolises a greater sign with manna, since the narrative of Exodus 16: 4 defines manna as "bread from heaven."
2. Jesus transparently reveals in John 6: 24–35 what this bread is, so much so that the expression "**that comes down from heaven**," which is repeated several times in the key speech of Capernaum, is assumed in the Creed that we recite in the liturgy: **for us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven**.
3. It is the same Jesus that explicitly identifies with the solemn self-proclamation: "**I am the bread of life**" (John 6: 35). It is Christ, then, the true manna, the perfect sign of God's love for His people.
4. Christ presents Himself in this way, as the last purpose of the constant and anxious searching of humanity. In the wilderness of history, each person is tempted by so many apparently refined and pleasant foods but the flavour, in the end, is bitter and the effect often poisonous; each person is also tempted by many disturbing sources, by contaminated water in broken cisterns as the prophet Jeremiah says: "**for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water**" (2: 13)
5. The German theologian Dorothee Sölle wrote: "**Calmly compare Christ to other great people, like Socrates, Rosa Luxemburg and Gandhi; Christ governs, commands and reigns in comparison. However it is better that you compare Him with yourself.**"
6. The words of the angel in the book of Revelation 3: 17 and 19, addressed to the Church of Laodicea in Turkey may also resound in our time: "**For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent.**"
7. Saint Ignatius of Antioch wrote this confession: "**I cannot find any pleasures**

in corruptible food. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, and to drink, I desire His blood, which is incorruptible love"

8. Brothers and sisters: we all know the formula: "**This is my body.**" "**This is my blood.**" In other words: "**This is me**". The Eucharistic food incomparably is the symbol of a vital communion, and so the disciples understood that Jesus was calling them, and He calls us now, to a deeper union with Him, to His same life, to His struggle of pain and glory that is there - in the bread made Body of Christ and in the wine made His blood.

9. The Passover wine now is the blood of Christ and it creates the complete and perfect Covenant between God and humanity. In this way, Christ makes a communion pact with the bread turned into his body and a blood pact for the New Covenant.

10. The blood of Christ: "...**is the blood which is poured out for many**", and "**many**", in the Semitic languages, is the totality. We intertwine this phrase with the instructions of the Risen Christ in Matthew 28: 18-20; and with the responsibility for the mission and the universality of the Church of which Paul is the superlative Apostle.

11. The prophet Zechariah 9:11, announces the liberation of humanity from the prison of its misery and evil, "**because of the blood of my covenant with you.**" In the Eucharist, Christ celebrates the completeness and fulfilment of that promise, because it unites God with the whole of humanity, in a full communion of love and life.

12. Finally,

- a. Let us pray, because the lungs of evangelism are prayer;
- b. Let us live in communion, because without communion, there is no evangelism and there is no Christian spirit; let us receive communion, because without communion there is neither salvation nor redemption;
- c. Let us infuse ourselves with the joys, the hopes and the anxieties of our people, with solidarity and with mercy because Christ was incarnated into history and society in order to transform them.

13. We are all called to mission, to the ecclesial responsibility that not only should pass through word but through action; a responsibility that opens to faith and to charity; that proclaims contemplation and strives for action in order to discover the permanent closeness of Christ, as He has promised: "**I am with you always until the close of the age.**"(Mt 28: 20)

14. This closeness He not only achieves with the Eucharist, His sacraments and with His always living Word, but also with our lives, our evangelism, our lowering ourselves, with our testimony and our closeness with the neediest.

15. Let us ask for the grace of not being deaf to the Word and not being dumb in our praises as the Venerable Bede (673-735) said.

16. I close with two quotations from Saint Augustine of Hippo, and one from Saint Clare of Assisi:

a) Saint Augustine said: **God, created us without us, but he did not wish to save us without us.**

b) **My burden is my love.**

c) Saint Clare said: **God thought of me; God loved me; God called me.**

Praise be to you, Jesus Christ.

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