



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 27 October 2021*

[Multimedia]

Catechesis on the Letter to the Galatians: 13. *The fruit of the Spirit*

Saint Paul's preaching is completely centred on Jesus and his Paschal Mystery. In fact, the Apostle presents himself as a proclaimer of Christ, and Christ crucified (cf. 1 *Cor* 2:2). He reminds the Galatians, tempted to base their religiosity on the observance of precepts and traditions, that the centre of salvation and faith is the death and resurrection of the Lord. He does so by placing before them the reality of the cross of Jesus. He writes thus: "Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?" (*Gal* 3:1). Who has bewitched you so that you would move away from Christ Crucified? It is an awful moment for the Galatians.

Today, there are many who seek religious security rather than the living and true God, focusing on rituals and precepts instead of embracing the God of love with their whole being. And this is the temptation of the new fundamentalists, of those who seem to be afraid of the path to be taken and who do not move forward but backwards because they feel more secure: they seek the security of God and not the God of security. This is why Paul asks the Galatians to return to what is essential, to God who gives us life in Christ crucified. He testifies to this in the first person: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (*Gal* 2:20). And towards the end of the Letter, he affirms: "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:14).

If we lose the thread of spiritual life, if a thousand problems and thoughts assail us, let us heed

Paul's advice: let us place ourselves before Christ Crucified, let us begin again from Him. Let us take the Crucifix in our hands, holding it close to our heart. Or let us pause in adoration before the Eucharist, where Jesus is Bread broken for us, Crucified, Risen, the power of God who pours out his love into our hearts.

And now, still guided by Saint Paul, let us take a further step. Let us ask ourselves: what happens when we meet Jesus Crucified in prayer? The same thing that happened under the cross: Jesus gave up his Spirit (cf. *Jn.* 19:30), that is, he gave his own life. And the Spirit which flows forth from Jesus' Passover is the origin of spiritual life. It is he who changes our hearts: not our works. It is he who changes our heart, not the things that we do, but the action of the Holy Spirit in us changes our heart! It is he who guides the Church and we are called to be obedient to his action, that blows where and how he wills. After all, it was precisely the awareness that the Holy Spirit had descended over everyone, and that his grace was at work without any exclusion, that convinced even the most reluctant of the Apostles that the Gospel was meant for everyone and not for a privileged few. And those who seek security, the small group, the things that were clear as they were back then, they distance themselves from the Spirit, they do not permit the freedom of the Spirit to enter into them. Thus, the life of the community is regenerated in the Holy Spirit; and it is always thanks to him that we nourish our Christian lives and continue to engage in our spiritual battle.

It is precisely the spiritual combat that is another important teaching in the Letter to the Galatians. The Apostle presents two opposing fronts: on the one side, the "works of the flesh", and on the other, the "fruit of the Spirit". What are the works of the flesh? They are behaviours that are contrary to the Spirit of God. The Apostle calls them works of the flesh not because there is something wrong or bad about our human bodies. Indeed, we have seen how much he insisted on the reality of the human flesh that Christ brought to the cross! Flesh is a word that indicates the person's earthly dimension, closed in on itself in a horizontal existence, where worldly instincts are followed and the door to the Spirit, who lifts us up and opens us up to God and others, is closed. But the flesh also reminds us that everything ages, that all things pass, wither, while the Spirit gives life. Thus, Paul lists the works of the flesh which refer to the selfish use of sexuality, to magical practices connected with idolatry and to all that undermines interpersonal relationships such as "enmity, jealousy, dissension, divisions, factions, envy..." (cf. *Gal* 5:19-21). All of this is the fruit — let's say — of the flesh, of behaviour that is solely human, "sickly" human. Because humans have their values, but all this is "sickly" human.

The fruit of the Spirit, instead, is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (*Gal* 5:22-23), as Paul says. Christians, who in baptism have "put on Christ" (*Gal* 3:27), are called to live as such. It can be a good spiritual exercise, for example, to read Saint Paul's list and take a look at our own behaviour to see if it corresponds, if our life is truly in accordance with the Holy Spirit, if it bears these fruits. Does my life bear these fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control? For example, the first

three that are listed are love, peace and joy: a person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells can be recognized by these traits. A person who is at peace, who is joyful and who loves. With these three traits, the action of the Spirit can be seen.

The Apostle's teaching poses quite a challenge for our communities too. Sometimes, those who approach the Church get the impression that they are dealing with a dense mass of rules and regulations: but no, this is not the Church! This can be any association. But, in reality, the beauty of faith in Jesus Christ cannot be grasped on the basis of so many commandments or of a moral vision developed in many layers which can make us forget the original fruitfulness of love nourished by prayer which brings peace and joyful witness. In the same way, the life of the Spirit, expressed in the Sacraments, cannot be suffocated by a bureaucracy that prevents access to the grace of the Spirit, the initiator of the conversion of heart. And how often, we ourselves, priests or bishops, follow so much bureaucracy to give a sacrament, to welcome people, so that people say: "No, I do not like this", and they go away, and many times they do not see in us the power of the Spirit who regenerates, who makes us new. We therefore have the great responsibility of proclaiming Christ crucified and risen, enlivened by the breath of the Spirit of love. For it is this Love alone that possesses the power to attract and change the human heart.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the young people from various countries preparing for the cop26 meeting in Glasgow, and the pilgrimage groups from the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord. God bless you!

Lastly as usual, my thoughts turn to *the elderly*, to *the sick*, to *young people* and to *newlyweds* — they are many! I encourage you to bear witness to the message of evangelical salvation that the Apostles Simon and Jude, whom we will celebrate tomorrow, witnessed with their life.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters: In our catechesis on Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians, we have seen that, for the Apostle, the heart of the Gospel is the proclamation of the mystery of Christ's cross and its revelation of God's reconciling love. By his passion, death and resurrection, Jesus has brought us redemption and new life through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Paul can thus say to

the Galatians: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”. Our prayerful contemplation of the crucified Lord, or our silent adoration before his Eucharistic presence, help us to appreciate the grandeur of our call to share in the mystery of God’s own life and love. The Christian life, lived in obedience to the promptings of the Spirit, includes what is traditionally called “spiritual combat”. We struggle to overcome what Paul calls “the works of the flesh”, in order to live in accordance with “the fruits of the Spirit”, which are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (*Gal* 5:22). In our spiritual lives, and in the life of our communities, we are called to cultivate these fruits as a witness to the new life and freedom we have received in Christ through the gift of his Holy Spirit.