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"Jesus pours out his love into our hearts"

In his 27 October general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechesis on Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians, speaking about "the fruit of the Spirit."

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Saint Paul's preaching is completely centred on Jesus and his Paschal Mystery. In fact, the Apostle presents

himself as a witness of Christ, and Christ crucified (cfr. *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 still seek religious security rather than the living and true God, focusing on rituals and precepts instead of embracing God's love with their whole being. And this is the temptation of the new fundamentalists, isn't it? Of those

who seem to be afraid to make progress, and who regress because they feel more secure: they seek the security of God and not the God of our security.... This is why Paul asks the Galatians to return to what is essential – to return to God, to the essential, not to the securities of God: to the essential – to the 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 the spiritual life, if a thousand problems and thoughts assail us, let us heed Paul’s advice: let us place ourselves in front of Christ Crucified, let us begin again from Him. Let us take the Crucifix in our hands, holding it close to our heart. Or we can even take some

time 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 another 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 gives his own life. And the Spirit which flows forth from Jesus' Passover is the origin of the spiritual life. He changes hearts: not our works. He is the one who changes the heart, not the things that we do, but the action of the Holy Spirit in us changes our heart! He guides the Church and we are called to be obedient to his action, who blows where and how he wills. Moreover, it was precisely the awareness that the Holy Spirit had descended over everyone, and that

His grace was at work without excluding anyone, 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 live “as it was 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 erroneous or bad about our human bodies. Instead, 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, following worldly instincts and closing the door to the Spirit who lifts us up and opens us up to God and others. But the flesh also reminds us that everything gets old, that it all passes, withers, while the Spirit gives life. Therefore, 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 truth – we’ll put it this way – of the flesh, of behaviour that is solely “human”, *sickly* human. Because being human has its values, but 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 we are truly living according to the Holy Spirit, if we are bearing these fruits. These fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control: does my life bear these fruits? Is it the Spirit who gives? 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 in peace, who is joyful and who loves. With these three traits, the Spirit is 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 whatever 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 from which peace and joyful witness flow. 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 conversion of heart. And how many

times 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 do not go, and many times they do not see in us the power of the Spirit who regenerates, who makes everyone new. We therefore have the huge 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. Thank you.

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