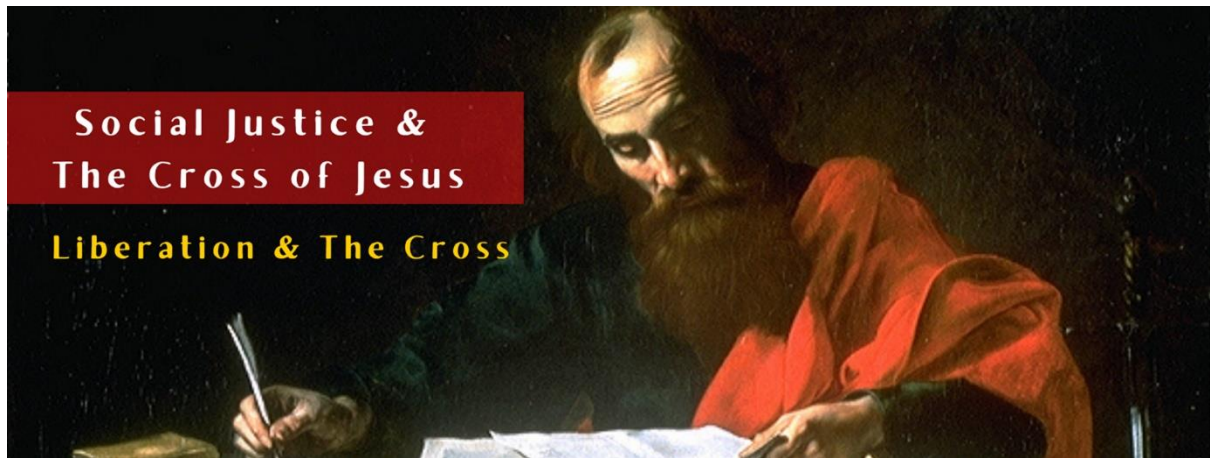


## SOCIAL JUSTICE & THE CROSS OF JESUS

### REFLECTION 2 – LIBERATION & THE CROSS



*Valentin de Boulogne's depiction of Saint Paul Writing His Epistles*

*There are so many questions to ask as we ponder the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Over these weeks we reflect on some of these dimensions in a spirituality of the Cross.*

#### SAINT PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

In this second reflection today, we draw on St Paul's Letter to the Galatians. Paul wrote "*to the churches of Galatia*" (in a region of modern-day Turkey).

He had opened their eyes and hearts to the grace and freedom of Jesus Christ. Let us pause and rejoice in his description:

*"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."* 3:27-28

Paul preached the *Good News* of Jesus.

Jesus broke down barriers of ethnic, class and gender discrimination.

Jesus liberated the Galatian Christian community, through the Good News.

But another group of early missionaries came with their own agenda, and preached compulsory circumcision to all Gentile Christians.

They required the Gentile Christians to *conform* to the requirements for Jewish Christians. These missionaries were taking away their liberty by requiring complete observance to the Law.

They were silent about the way Jesus died, because crucifixion was for criminals and suspect others.

*How could they base the centrality of the Law on complete observance when Jesus died the terrible death of criminals?*

These missionaries found it easier to focus on the Resurrection of Jesus from death, and omit the details of crucifixion.

Some biblical scholars think that the missionaries were seeking human approval from their own ethnic group, thus ensuring their own safety and acceptance.

Paul said in 6:12:

*“It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised— only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.”*

### ***How did Paul respond to this new challenge?***

In 1:6-7, he identified the threat to the communities.

*“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-, not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”*

In 1:10, he bluntly declared

*“Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please myself? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.”*

### **REFLECTING ON PAUL’S LETTER**

As we reflect on Paul’s Letter, we remember some of the temptations

- that early Church communities faced
- that Church communities faced throughout its history
- that we face today as Church.

Some of the many temptations include:

- trying to make everyone conform to one cultural way, for example, distorting the Gospel by requiring Indigenous Peoples to become European Christians
- distorting the Gospel by disempowering women in the church
- distorting the Gospel by seeking approval and favoritism from a particular group
- hindering genuine liturgical and catechetical inculturation
- seeking power by abusing others
- seeking power by abusing God’s creation
- ignoring or being silent about the crucifixion of Jesus.

### **SOLIDARITY**

#### ***Did Paul have a sense of solidarity?***

Paul emphasized the centrality of God’s love and our call to love our neighbour, and he stressed the depth of the love of Jesus for us, by Jesus suffering such a horrible and traumatic death.

He advised people in 6:2

*“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*

And he summed up the Law in 5:14

*“For the whole Law is summed up in a single commandment,  
‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ “*

Paul struggled and loved and accompanied others on their life journey.

He suffered deep pain on such journeys of solidarity.

He rejoiced with others on such journeys of solidarity.

He was imperfect. Much has been written about his faults.

He was a sinner and a saint.

In 6:14, he concluded

*“May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”*

*Today in a spirituality of the cross and social justice, how do we identify*

- *with Jesus crucified for us*
- *with the world crucified to us*
- *with ourselves crucified to the world?*

After the Resurrection of Jesus, the disciples were gifted with the Holy Spirit.

Paul reminds the Galatian Christian communities in 5:16 to *“live by the Spirit.”*

As Christians, we are called to acknowledge the pain in our world and in ourselves.

We are not alone. The Holy Spirit accompanies us and prompts us in the direction to take.

Paul identified the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22-23

*“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”*

In our work for social justice, may we be guided always by the Holy Spirit.

In love, Jesus healed and taught, inspired and challenged, celebrated joyfully and suffered deeply, befriended people and enjoyed the gift of hospitality, was crucified on the cross, was buried and rose from the dead.

Through the love of God as Trinity, may we act justly and make a difference in the world.

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