

22. July 2024

## The love of Christ constraineth us

2 Cor 5:14-20

Optional reading for the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene

*For the love of Christ constraineth us when we consider that if one man died for all, then all have died; his purpose in dying for all humanity was that those who live should live not any more for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life. From now onwards, then, we will not consider anyone by human standards: even if we were once familiar with Christ according to human standards, we do not know him in that way any longer. So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see.*

The love of Christ constrains us! This is the true motivation when, by God's grace, we have become a "new creature". This love gives rise to a holy impatience to do God's will, and to waste nothing. In this it differs from human impatience, which is incapable of waiting for things to mature and only sets short-term goals.

The urgency of Christ's love, on the other hand, keeps in mind that other exhortation of St. Paul: "*Make the best of the present time, for it is a wicked age*" (Eph 5:16). In other words, do not slumber or waste the time given to you to do the Lord's will and to do good.

We know that St. Paul was burning within himself, and that the fire of the Holy Spirit impelled him to do nothing else but proclaim "Christ crucified" (cf. 1 Cor 2:2). How deeply he had assimilated what God, in His goodness, had done for him! How deeply he recognised what Jesus had achieved for the whole of humanity! How much the love of the Lord urged him, giving him a holy restlessness and making him tireless in his service, in order to fulfil his mission in this world to the full! His zeal for the Law, which still lacked the light of God and which had led him to the point of persecuting Christians (cf. Phil 3:6), became after his conversion a genuine zeal for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He himself became a "new creature", and to this day we listen attentively to his words and heed his warnings.

This "new creature", born again in the Holy Spirit, is the great gift given to Christians. Thus, they can leave behind the old things and dedicate themselves completely to the new things that God entrusts to them. This newness consists in understanding things in the light of God and not - like the "old man" - according to merely human and therefore imperfect criteria. Inserted into Christ and remaining in Him, Christians are "new creatures", who *"are born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself"* (Jn 1:13), but of the Spirit (cf. Jn 3:8).

And it is this Holy Spirit who now impels and leads the way for this new creature. For this reason, there must not arise in her a tense and agitated attitude, nor an unhealthy pressure, which does not speak the language of the spirit but of human nature. On the other hand, a holy restlessness, imbued with the spirit of piety, can and should move us.

A holy restlessness can arise from sorrow at the sight of so many people who do not yet know and follow their Redeemer. It may increase as we remember how the Lord asked: *"When the Son of man comes, will he find any faith on earth?"* (Lk 18:8) This restlessness burns in us as we meditate on the Lord's Death on the Cross and come to know His longing for all men to embrace the graces He obtained for them by His bitter Passion and Death. We nourish it by immersing ourselves in the love of our Heavenly Father, who, in His own Son, gave us what He loves most. Holy restlessness grows as we come to know more deeply Our Lady's love for God and for us, and as we understand her great sorrow when people do not listen to her Son. It can become even more urgent when we understand the apocalyptic situation we are currently living in, and when we perceive the destructive influence of the anti-Christian spirit in the world and in the Church.

Thus, the Spirit of the Lord can awaken us and the love of Christ compel us until we are filled with this holy restlessness. This will happen even more if we advance on the path of holiness and allow the Holy Spirit to push aside the obstacles that still stand in the way of His work. Especially in those who have placed their whole life in the service of God and live a vocation of total dedication to Him, this fire can burn to the point of becoming a radiant flame that wants to illuminate everything and which nothing and no one can extinguish. This is what happened with the Apostle to the Gentiles and, of course, with Mary Magdalene, the "apostle to the apostles" whom we are celebrating today.