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LETTER TO THE ROMANS

The free gift of Redemption



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“So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.” (2 Pet 3:15b-16)

I begin today's meditation by quoting these words of Saint Peter, because, in fact, the next chapters of the Letter to the Romans are not easy to understand. Therefore, I take the liberty of summarising them and trying to convey their essential content in an understandable way. To do this, I will also draw on the comments in the Allioli-Arndt Catholic Bible. In addition, I recommend that everyone read the following chapters in their entirety to gain a more comprehensive understanding. If necessary, it is also advisable to consult additional commentaries. In the third chapter, Saint Paul begins by expounding on the privileges of the Jewish religion, which, incidentally, do not come into play if the Mosaic Law is not observed. If this happens, then they enjoy no privileges, because *‘all, Jews and Greeks alike, are under the power of sin’* (Rom 3:9).

Paul then quotes Scripture: *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood, in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

Through his reflections, St Paul wants us to understand that the works of the Law have not been able to justify anyone, since no one has been able to observe them perfectly, but only through them has man come to know what sin is. *“Just as a doctor explains the seriousness of an illness to his patient in order to induce him to desire health and, consequently, to apply the necessary remedies for recovery, so God, wanting to heal the human race, first gave it the law so that men might recognise through it the weakness and danger in*

which they found themselves, and thus be moved to long for the Saviour whom He Himself would later send them.” (Commentary from the Allioli-Arndt Bible).

St. Paul declares that God's justice has been manifested *“through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; (between Jews and Gentiles) since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus”* (Rom 3:22-24).

With the following words, Saint Paul summarises the message of the Christian faith: *“God put him (Jesus Christ) forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.”* (vv. 25-26).

The Holy Scriptures convey to us here a very beautiful term: *‘the divine forbearance.’* Without hiding the truth in any way, we are shown the extent to which human beings have fallen and continue to fall into sin, and how destructive it is. But God's goodness allows us to glimpse His heart. Moved by His love, He overlooked the time of ignorance (cf. Acts 17:30). The abyss of separation from God becomes an even greater manifestation of His unfathomable patience and love for humanity. In this context, it is important to emphasise that no one can boast. Our salvation is God's work and not our own merit.

The Allioli-Arndt Bible comments: *“The boasting of every man, whether Jew or Gentile, is inadmissible, because no one can appeal to the observance of a law that prescribes works and believe himself justified by it. In the first place, neither one nor the other has observed the law, and in the second place, justification does not come from the law of works, but from the law of faith. A law of works would always be a reason for someone to appeal to it and boast of fulfilling it. The law of faith, on the other hand, calls us to take refuge in Christ in order to attain the righteousness that is valid before God and to receive the divine grace that enables us to fulfil His will.”*

It continues further on: *“Justification does not consist solely in being declared righteous without inner transformation, but in a true remission of sins, sanctification and renewal of the inner man, so that we pass from being enemies of God to being His friends and heirs of eternal life. This justification is granted to us as an undeserved grace.”*

Let us conclude, then, with a brief summary: God offers us salvation in Christ as a free gift. No one has earned it. This is true for Jews as well as for all people.

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/gods-measure-2/>