

13 June 2026  
THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS  
“Introduction”

Following the series on Saint Joan of Arc and two texts from our archive of biblical meditations, I would now like to turn to the reflection on another letter from the New Testament. It is the Letter to the Church in Philippi. It comes from Saint Paul, the beloved Apostle to whom we owe so much regarding the spread of the Gospel. He was an untiring worker in the vineyard of His Lord and even labored more than the other Apostles, as he himself testifies (cf. 1 Cor 15:10).

Since my conversion, I have held this holy Apostle in great affection. Many elements come together that deeply impress me and awaken great gratitude. First, there is his extraordinary conversion—from a persecutor of Christ to a herald of the message of salvation. I am moved by the way he placed his life entirely under the obedience of Christ. Furthermore, through the perseverance he shows in proclaiming the Gospel and building up the churches, he is a great role model. We know from his own words what heavy burdens he had to bear (2 Cor 11:23–27), and we are touched by how great his love for the Lord was, enabling him to endure all this and not give up.

Certainly, it was the grace of God that carried him, but it also asks for our consent so that the Lord’s plan may unfold. I was also moved by the fact that he stood firmly against Saint Peter when the latter was in danger of making false compromises (Gal 2:11–14).

What more could one list? One hardly comes to an end, because the life of Christ is reflected so richly in Paul. Let us think only of the theological insights he conveyed to us so that we might better understand salvation in Christ (cf. Acts 10:42–43), his admirable certainty that he would be with the Lord in eternity, and his love for the churches, which inclined him to remain on earth rather than already set out into eternity with the Lord, as well as his martyrdom (cf. Phil 1:23–25) ...

The grace of God worked powerfully in him, so that the Church still lives today from his writings and from the wisdom contained in them. When we sing the hymn of praise to the Apostle to the Gentiles, we above all praise and honor the One who sent him. Saint Paul is a wonderful Apostle and teacher to us, a friend and role model. In many ways, he shows us that for the sake of Jesus and His calling, one can leave everything behind and live only for and in the Lord.

Many of his words deserve to be taken deeply to heart, for in them the Holy Spirit speaks to us. Thus I entrust to him my attempts to make his Letter to the Philippians bear fruit.

The church in Philippi (Macedonia) was the first church Paul founded in Europe. He remained connected to it always and also allowed himself to be supported by it. He wrote this letter from prison. Some think he wrote it in Ephesus; others assume he composed it during his imprisonment in Rome. The letter is also called the “*Letter of Joy*.” May it awaken in us a deeper joy in God.

After the introduction, Paul writes:

*“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel thus about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.”* (Phil 1:3–7).

Already in the first lines of the letter, he speaks of the joy with which he offers his prayer for the church. Evidently, a heartfelt bond in the Lord had developed with the first church in Europe, a bond that grew ever stronger and remained. The Apostle thinks with gratitude of his spiritual children and sees what the Lord has accomplished in them and how they have responded to the invitation of love. It is Paul’s hope and confidence that it will not remain merely with the encouraging beginning, but that the Holy Spirit will also bring the work to completion. This is a legitimate concern, for the path of discipleship requires perseverance. A flame that blazes up quickly can easily be extinguished again if it finds no nourishment to become a lasting fire of love.

Once again, Paul assures the church of his love and then points out the direction of his prayer:

*“For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.<sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.”* (Phil 1:8–9)

We see that Paul asks for the right things in his prayers. Love must grow and mature. It must not remain stagnant or even grow cold. This happens through faithful prayer,

working on one's own heart, through good works, through the worthy reception of the sacraments, and through the intimate exchange of love with the Lord. All of this— together with the internalization of the Word of God—will help the knowledge of Christ to grow, which surpasses all understanding.