

18 June 2026
THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS
"The gift of faith"

After reflecting on the passage from the Letter to the Philippians yesterday, the Apostle Paul goes on to speak with great affection about his colleague Timothy, whom he regards as a son in Christ and whom he wishes to send to the community in Philippi. The warmth of these verses (Philippians 2:19–22) is striking and reveals much about the Apostle's heart. He also intends to send Epaphroditus, who nearly died for the Gospel. However, he recovered to the joy and comfort of all (vv. 25–27). Paul's longing to visit the community in Philippi in person is evident in several passages of the epistle (Phil 1:27; 4:1). *"I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself shall come also."* (Phil. 2:24)

The apostle then returns to offer guidance to the young community. On this occasion, it is first of all a warning:

Phil 3:2–9

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

The young community was threatened from various fronts. The Jews often referred to Gentiles as "dogs." However, the threat did not come only from them. Judaizing Christians also posed a challenge to the community in Philippi: they insisted that new disciples must submit to the Jewish Law. In doing so, they endangered the new conviction to which the early Church had come—that Gentiles did not first have to submit to the Law in order to embrace faith in Christ. Thus the preaching of the Judaizers caused confusion within the communities.

In this context Paul is compelled to explain once again that the physical circumcision of the Jews now has a spiritual dimension. It is a matter of placing trust in the Person of the Redeemer and not in works performed by human beings. This is an essential doctrine of the Church, which we owe in large part to the insight of the Apostle Paul: faith is a gift.

It is a theological virtue, and God grants it to us, effecting our salvation. By embracing faith in Christ, we accept this gift and are called to cooperate with it. Therefore no one can boast in his own works, but only in God, who is merciful to humanity.

Paul knows this not only from a theological standpoint but also from personal experience. It was neither his merit nor his scholarship in the Scriptures that led him to recognize Jesus as Lord; rather, Jesus Himself revealed Himself to him. This is what Paul wants to remind the community when it is beset by those who place their trust in their own merits and privileges. Paul once enjoyed those privileges and many more. However, after coming to know Jesus through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, he knew he could not rely on the flesh. He was so certain of this that he considered everything else a loss compared with what he had received through Christ.

At this point it is worth pausing to reflect on how we live our faith today. Are we still aware that we are children of God and that from Him we have received the gift of faith, by which we live and from which our dignity primarily derives? Can we echo the Apostle's conviction that knowing Christ Jesus surpasses all else, or do we measure our worth as Christians by our achievements and social contributions? Is proclaiming the faith still the most important thing for us? Do we look upon those who do not yet know the faith with a deep desire for them to find Christ as well, or do we limit ourselves to works of mercy without bearing witness that these works come from God?

In other words, has our understanding of faith changed so much that the struggle for a better world—whether through environmental stewardship, political engagement, or social concern—now takes center stage? Is the transcendental dimension of faith taking a back seat to immanent concerns? Are we leaving people alone with their deepest questions about life, death, and eternity?

If so, the Apostle Paul would warn us today as severely as he did then, urging us to beware of those who would lead us down the wrong path. To him, these would be today's false teachers.

Reflection on today's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/praise-for-elijah-and-elisha/>

Reflection on today's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/our-father/>