

Don't be so foolish. (Gal 1:1-10)

* Traditionally, the Sundays between Trinity and Advent are called the Ordinary Sundays. In total, there are 25 of them in this year. The upcoming Sundays will be devoted to the teaching of Christ governing his Church and to the teaching of righteousness. The sanctuary color for Ordinary Time remains the forest green that is in agreement with the seasonable dynamics. Thinking symbolically on the sacred meaning of Ordinary Time, it can be imagined as a period of growth in maturity; in the end of time there is a final reaping which is accomplished with the blowing of trumpets, (Lev 23:24; Mat 24:31). In the meantime, the anticipation of something significant is in the air, but its future occurrence is still not the end because not everything is good and ready.

* As I know, the strategy of a short-distance race requires the dynamical start in order to enforce the necessary acceleration for a winner. So to speak, the teaching of the fundamental doctrine on the matter of our salvation in the beginning of the Ordinary Season will help shape our perception and understanding in harmony with the following lessons of this Season. Today I decided to preach the epistolary context from Galatians because it reflects perfectly on the strategic plan designed for the time of growth and reaping.

* Now let's ask the Lord of our salvation to teach us all truth so that we would have no lack of knowledge as to how to live a godly life pleasing the Lord of our salvation. Here we pray. Dear Lord, you promise to come and teach us all truth regarding sin, righteousness, salvation, grace and judgment. Here we pray, O Lord, inspire our mind and hearts to run for perfection. Teach and instruct us in obedience to your Word and forgive our failures when we fall short of your commands so that we might have hope and be renewed in strength. Lord, we pray, accomplish our salvation and reward us a blessed earthly end and with the entering into life that is without end. For to you alone belong all honor, glory and worship, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

* Friends, I noted that through the personal experiences St. Paul learned many important things regarding the blessed ministry of the Gospel, (Gal 1:11,12). For example, he mentioned in passing that right after the new churches were established over the Mediterranean region the false teachers appeared on the horizon carrying their arguments against Paul's teaching. Reflecting on this harmful process, Paul wrote Timothy, *Now the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will desert the faith and occupy themselves with deceiving spirits and demonic teachings, influenced by the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared,* (1Ti 4:1,2). Probably the apostle came across with this fact after his first campaign in Asia Minor.

* Thinking over the problem initiated by the false brothers coming after Paul to the churches of Galatia, we found there two harmful teachings. The one was spread through Judaziers;

they laid stress on the obedience to Mosaic Law as a supplement to the gospel specifically emphasizing circumcision as the means of grace. Another harmful teaching was originated by the Hellenists; they insisted that a Kyrios (Lord) is the spirit by whom people were going to join into the cosmic process of death and rebirth. As a result, Judaistic and Hellenistic doctrines threatened the true doctrine of salvation. The false took advantage of the immature Christians setting the old traditional beliefs above the divine revelation.

In addition to that, the Judaziers spread the lie about Paul that he was the ordinary teacher whom they might not listen to. Significantly, unless the poison teachings were believed and accepted by the immature in Galatia, they were powerless to bring change for the better, and they were no longer good for the kingdom of God!!! (Mat 5:13).

* As I read Paul's masterpiece, I found there the four main purposes in use. First, Paul confirmed the truth of his apostolic authority. Second, he instituted the apostolic condemnation upon the heretics who pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Third, he identified Jesus Christ as the Solo Leader of our salvation. Fourth, he set up again the true Gospel in the place of the false gospels. Lastly, I imagined what the Apostle would have pronounced about the false teaching of the Gospel we hear today. Now, let's detail Paul's teaching according to the setting above.

* Paul started his letter with assertion; "surely, I am the Apostle of Jesus Christ - the authorized teacher." He addressed this truth to the Christians who were still uncertain about his authority to make up the new teaching. According to the rule of the apostleship, Paul is the Apostle and a teacher not any less than Peter, Andrew, James, John and others by virtue of the direct call from Christ Himself. Jesus met Paul at the road to Damascus,(Act 9:3-4), and called him to the apostleship for the Gentiles, (Gal 2:8,9). After that Jesus revealed himself to him again, and Paul was taught the true Gospel. Therefore, the Gospel Paul preached to the Galatians came to him not from men or through men but it was received through a revelation of Jesus Christ, (Gal 1:12). Paul proved that this Gospel is divine because it has the power to put sinners on their knees, change sinners' behavior and replace the fear of death with the everlasting joy. The Galatians couldn't ignore this fact; they experienced its power in being changed for the better, (Gal 3:3-5).

* Now let's set a goal with respect to the institution of the apostolic condemnation. In our text the apostolic anathema pass sentence on the false teachers who in the past and present successfully led astray the immature Christians from the true Gospel. *As we said before, so now I (Paul) say again: If any one preaches to you a gospel, besides that which you have received, let him be anathema,* (Gal 1:9). Significantly, this account Paul also received not from or through men but through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

"It would be better for him (a false teacher) if a millstone was hung around his neck and he was thrown

into the sea, than that he (a false teacher) would cause one of these little ones to stumble, (Luk 17:2).

Such, in brief, is the goal of the apostolic condemnation!

* Afterwards Paul identified the bewitched Galatians as foolish. “Galatians, isn’t it actual foolishness to become the disciples of the false teachers? See, they don’t have any marks of Jesus but only circumcision. Now, I ask you, don’t you remember Jesus’ wounds on my body?, (Gal 3:1,6:17; 2Co 11:22,23), then if you remember, be not faithless, but believe me, (Joh 20:27), that it *is no longer I who live, but Christ, who loved me and gave himself for me* and for you. And what shall I say to you? Aren’t the brand-marks of your Saviour on my body any less powerful than the circumcision of those who bewitched you? (Gal 6:17). In fact, not Jesus’ wounds are powerless in me but in circumcision who teach you the false Gospel. Galatians, *do not be unbelieving, but believing, (Joh 20:27).* Your faith in Christ is the means by which you have received the power to change for the better.”

* Contrary to the false teaching regarding the salvation by works of the law, or by deceitful means, Paul gave the summary account to all who trusted and believed him. Friends, *by works of the law no one will be saved, (Gal 2:16).* Christ nullified the salvation by works of the law as useless and established the New Covenant. Christ promises the salvation to everybody who will believe in Him, (Joh 11:26). It is so obvious that a sinful nature cannot merit salvation by deeds because in this case God accepts exclusively the perfect obedience to his Law, (Gal 5:3). “Therefore, Galatians, why have you chosen to obey the false teachers in place of Christ who had perfectly fulfilled the Law and grant his righteousness to everyone who believe in him? *Notice therefore the kindness and harshness of God — harshness toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.* (Rom 11:22).

* After hearing the instructive remarks from Paul, I decided to make my own. Friends, the Letter to the Galatians is about salvation by faith alone, and by grace alone, and by Christ alone. In fact, Christ and grace are totally not from us, but faith is not foreign to us. Faith is the product of God and man’s cooperation, (Joh 6:29). To be saved we have to believe and believing Christ’s righteousness comes to our life. It comes invisibly through the forgiveness of our sins, and after a while it should be seen by the very acts of our love, patience, kindness, goodness, and so forth. Now let’s say the truth on account of the false teaching of the Gospel as it is preached today. Here is a common expression, “When sin comes into our lives, we ask God to come. When temptation strikes, we flee to His strength. Whenever we run to our Savior, no matter how far and dark the pit of sin in which we were hiding may have been, we shall hear His tender voice: “Fear not, I have redeemed thee. Thou art Mine”

Friends flee away from such kind of teaching, Paul and other Apostles didn't teach the infinite forgiveness of any sins by faith alone; instead, Scripture warns us about this illusion, (Rom 11:22). Significant, unless the infinite forgiveness is believed and accepted by some of Christians, they don't have the power to be changed for the better and saved for Christ' sake. Paul taught, if Christians sin deliberately they will not inherit the kingdom of God, (Gal 5:21; Heb 10:26,27). Therefore, who call themselves Christians but continue to conduct sexual immorality, jealousy, fits of anger, envy, drunkenness, orgies and so forth don't have the saving faith. Paul advises them to cut themselves off these sins and repent, otherwise *God will cut them off*, (Rom 11:22), and its outcome would be much, much distressful.

* In conclusion of what we've learned today we concluded that the Father loves us and gave His Son to die for us so that we have life and have it abundantly. The power of the true Gospel is good enough to change us for better, (2Th 1:3). Brothers, for this reason we ought always to give many thanks to God considering the fact of our growth in faith and love as the sign of eternal election.

Beloved let us *not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we don't give up*, (Gal 6:9).

And the work of our Lord Jesus Christ will be accomplished

in us with great outcome, to the glory

and praise of God.

Amen.