

February 1982

Word of Life

"To the weak I became weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

In carrying out his extraordinary mission, the Apostle Paul conducted his life in a particular way: he strove to become all things to all people. In fact, he tried to understand everyone, enter into the mentality of each person: to be a Jew with the Jews, and with the non-Jews - those without a law revealed by God - to be as one without the law.

Paul followed the Jewish customs whenever this served to remove barriers or to reconcile souls; but when he worked in the Greek-Roman world, he adopted the culture and way of life of that world. He wrote:

"To the weak I became weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some"

He saw before him the unlimited horizon of freedom from sin, from death, from the law, from the reign of Satan, from the barriers imposed by nationality, class and sex, from every form of domination by others, from the taboos of food and customs, and so on.

Paul himself lived this freedom, and with the Gospel he offered it to the communities he founded.

And yet in the liberating reality of Christianity that he announced, Paul recognized the need - or rather, the imperative - to become the slave of someone: of his brothers and sisters, of each neighbor.

He understood this essential duty from the example of Christ, who let himself be crucified in order to reach every person whatever his or her situation, in order to become the servant of everyone.

By becoming man, God drew close to every human being, but on the cross, he proved his solidarity with each of us sinners, with our weaknesses, our sufferings, our anguish, our ignorance, our questions, our burdens, our moments of feeling abandoned.

Paul, too, wanted to live this way, and he declared:

"To the weak I became weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some"

The purpose of your life and of each new day is to reach God - and not alone, but with your brothers and sisters. In fact, you also, as a Christian, have received a call from God similar to the one received by Paul. Like the Apostle, you too must "save" someone, must "save some at any cost."

There are those who are next to you all day long, and those you meet on the street; those with whom you speak on the phone, and those for whom you work. They may be rich or poor, men or women, fellow citizens or foreigners.

Love them all.

But this time, prefer the weakest. Make yourself weak with those who are weak in order to save them. Reach out to those who are weak in faith, indifferent or far from God, to those who profess to be atheists or who belittle religion.

If you make yourself one with them, even in their "weaknesses," you will find that Paul's apostolic method always works: you will conquer them!

Do you have a spouse who does not like the Church at all, and who enjoys spending hours watching TV? Keep him or her company whenever you can, as much as you can, taking a lively interest

in what he or she likes to watch most.

Do you have a son who has made sports the center of his life, so much so that he is not interested in anything else, and has even forgotten how to pray? Become a more avid sports fan than he is himself.

Do you have friends who love to travel, to read, to study and who have thrown to the wind all religious principles? Try to understand them by understanding their preferences and their needs and if you can, help them to find what they are seeking.

Make yourself one - with everyone, in everything, as much as you can, except in sin. In the case of anything sinful, dissociate yourself.

You will see that making yourself one with your neighbors is not time lost; it is all time gained.

One day, in the not-too-distant future, they will want to know what interests you.

And then, gratefully, they will discover, adore and love that God who has been the impetus for your Christian behavior.

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