

SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD
“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16)
A Moment of Prayer

This moment of prayer is suitable for individuals or groups. Individuals may skip the opening greeting and final blessing. While groups should follow the full outline, this service is not intended to be part of a formal liturgy like Vespers. The structure follows an hour of listening to the Word in three parts: an invocation of the Holy Spirit, a guided reading of the Letter to the Colossians, and a concluding prayer using the traditional 'Litanies in Honor of St. Paul.

PREPARING FOR PRAYER

Initial Greeting

L: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

A: Amen.

L: The love of God the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

A: And with your spirit.

Invocation of the Spirit

L: Let us invite the Holy Spirit through the harmony of two choirs, preparing our hearts to truly hear the words of Paul (Acts 16:14).

O most blessed light, flood the innermost hearts of Your faithful

Without your strength, nothing is in man, nothing is without fault

Come, Father of the poor, come, giver of gifts, come, light of hearts.

Wash what is stained, water what is arid, heal what is wounded.

Gentle Comforter, sweet guest of the soul, our sweetest relief.

Bend what is rigid, melt what is frozen, guide what is astray

In weariness, rest; in the heat, shelter; in weeping, comfort.

Grant to Your faithful, who trust only in You, Your sacred gifts.

O most blessed light, fill the innermost hearts of Your faithful

Reward our virtue, grant us a peaceful death, and give us everlasting joy. Amen.

WE PROCLAIM THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

Paul is in prison, probably in Ephesus. Timothy is close to him. From there, around 55 AD, he sends a letter. The community he addresses is that of the Colossians, where the believers are mostly pagan-Christians reached by the testimony of Epaphras, a native of the city.

OPENING

1.¹ Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy our brother,² to the saints in Colossae, our faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Receive grace and peace from God our Father, and Christ Jesus our Lord.³ Thanks be to God, the Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord!

INTRODUCTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

While giving thanks for the flourishing of faith (which "is bearing fruit and growing"), Paul outlines the reasons why he is writing the letter: to help discern true knowledge and to provide guidance for living in a way worthy of Christ. Indeed, strange philosophies risk leading believers away from the New Life, keeping them too imprisoned by an external observance that seeks to "earn" salvation

Act of Thanksgiving - We constantly pray for you,⁴ for we have known of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints. Indeed you await in hope the inheritance reserved for you in heaven,⁵ of which you have heard through the word of truth. This Gospel,⁶ already present among you, is bearing fruit and growing throughout the world, as it did among you from the day you accepted it and understood the gift of God in all its truth.

⁷ He who taught you, Epaphras, our dear companion in the service of Christ, faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,⁸ has reminded me of the love you have for me in the spirit.

The two objectives of this letter - ⁹ Because of this, from the day we received news of you, we have not ceased praying to God for you, that you may attain the full knowledge of his will through all the gifts of wisdom and spiritual understanding.

¹⁰ May your lifestyle be worthy of the Lord and completely pleasing to him. May you bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God.

¹¹ May you become strong in everything by a sharing of the Glory of God, so that you may have great endurance and persevere in joy.

Following the thanksgiving, Paul's focus shifts to the One who—above all others—occupies the heart of this letter: Christ. References to Him appear, on average, every two verses, underscoring that life finds its fullness, standard, and measure only in the Risen Lord. The variety of prepositions the author uses to highlight the root of the Christian life is striking: 'in Him' is the most frequent expression (appearing about 25 times), but we also find 'through Him' (3 times), 'for Him' (3 times), 'with Him' (4 times), and 'thanks to Him.' Christ dominates the entire landscape of human experience; He is simply 'all and in all.' From this conviction flows a hymn conceived as a solemn thanksgiving to the Father who, in Christ, is revealed as the principle, the firstborn, the foundation, the origin, and the source of all reality.

Christological Hymn - ¹² Constantly give thanks to the Father who has empowered us to receive our share in the inheritance of the saints in his kingdom of light.¹³ He rescued us

from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.¹⁴ In him we are redeemed and forgiven.

¹⁵ He is the image of the unseen God, and for all creation he is the firstborn,

¹⁶ for in him all things were created,

in heaven and on earth,

visible and invisible:

thrones, rulers, authorities, powers...

All was made through him and for him.

¹⁷ He is before all

and all things hold together in him.

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, that is the Church,

for he is the first, the first raised from the dead

that he may be the first in everything,

¹⁹ for God was pleased to let fullness dwell in him.

²⁰ Through him God willed to reconcile all things to himself,

and through him, through his blood shed on the cross,

God establishes peace,

on earth as in heaven.

The New Life is the lived experience of the living Christ within us. Paul had already articulated this truth with great solemnity in Galatians 2:20: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' This is the very mystery entrusted to the Colossians: 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.' It is from this perspective that Paul embraces the sufferings he endures; through faith, these become 'generative' sufferings that fortify and ground the faith of the Colossians, ensuring they are not led astray by deceptive reasoning.

The New Life in Christ -²¹ You yourselves were once estranged and opposed to God because of your evil deeds,²² but now God has reconciled you in the human body of his Son through his death, so that you may be without fault, holy and blameless before him.²³ Only stand firm, upon the foundation of your faith, and be steadfast in hope. Keep in mind the Gospel you have heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Paul's experience -²⁴ At present I rejoice when I suffer for you; I complete in my own flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the Church.²⁵ For I am serving the Church since God entrusted to me the ministry to make the word of God fully known.²⁶ I mean that mysterious plan that for centuries and generations remained secret, and which God has now revealed to his holy ones.

²⁷ God willed to make known to them the riches and even the Glory that his mysterious plan reserved for the pagan nations: Christ is in you and you may hope God's Glory.

²⁸ This Christ we preach. We warn and teach everyone true wisdom, aiming to make everyone perfect in Christ.²⁹ For this cause I labor and struggle with the energy of Christ working powerfully in me.

2, 1 I want you to know how I strive for you, for those of Laodicea and for so many who have not met me personally.² I pray that all may be encouraged. May you be established in love,

that you may obtain all the riches of a full understanding and know the mystery of God, Christ himself.³ For in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

⁴ So let no one deceive you with persuasive arguments.⁵ Although I am far from you, my spirit is with you and I rejoice in recalling how well-disciplined you are and how firm in the faith of Christ.

REVISITING THE OBJECTIVES

At this point, the apostle revisits the two objectives outlined at the beginning of the reading, starting with the discernment of true knowledge. This has nothing to do with human traditions; rather, it is the living experience of Christ that baptism has inaugurated in the hearts of believers. The precepts of human religiosity, which center on man, must give way to the dynamism of the New Life, which centres on Christ.

Revisiting the first objective - ⁶ If you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, let him be your doctrine.⁷ Be rooted and built up in him; let faith be your principle, as you were taught, and your thanksgiving overflowing.

⁸ See that no one deceives you with philosophy or any hollow discourse; these are merely human doctrines not inspired by Christ but by the wisdom of this world.

Living our Baptism - ⁹ For in Him dwells the fullness of God in bodily form.¹⁰ He is the head of all cosmic power and authority, and in him you have everything.¹¹ In Christ Jesus you were given a circumcision but not by human hands, which removed completely from you the carnal body:¹² I refer to baptism. On receiving it you were buried with Christ; and you also rose with him for having believed in the power of God who raised him from the dead.

¹³ You were dead. You were in sin and uncircumcised at the same time. But God gave you life with Christ. He forgave all our sins.¹⁴ He canceled the record of our debts, those regulations which accused us. He did away with all that and nailed it to the cross.¹⁵ Victorious through the cross, he stripped the rulers and authorities of their power, humbled them before the eyes of the whole world and dragged them behind him as prisoners.

Uniting oneself to Christ - ¹⁶ So, then, let no one criticize you in matters of food or drink or for not observing festivals, new moons or the Sabbath.¹⁷ These things were only shadows of what was to come, whereas the reality is the person of Christ.¹⁸ Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on humbling practices and worship of angels. In fact, they are only good to satisfy self-indulgence,¹⁹ instead of holding firmly to the head, Christ. It is he who nourishes and gives unity to the whole body by a complex system of nerves and ligaments, making it grow according to the plan of God.

²⁰ If you have really died with Christ, and are rid of the principles of the world, why do you now let yourselves be taught as if you belonged to the world?²¹ "Do not eat this, do not taste that, do not touch that..."²² These are human rules and teachings, referring to things that are perishable, that wear out and disappear.²³ These doctrines may seem to be profound because they speak of religious observance and humility and of disregarding the body. In fact, they are useless as soon as the flesh rebels.

Revisiting the second objective, the author underscores the Eucharistic dimension of the Christian life, in the original etymological sense of the word. The simple instruction to 'be thankful' is not merely a matter of social etiquette; it points to a dynamic born from the breaking of the bread, compelling us to live a life marked by a truly Eucharistic spirit. This spirit draws the entire Church into communion and fundamentally transforms our family relationships. The underlying motivation is crystal clear: 'your life is now hidden with Christ in God.'

Revisiting the second objective - 3,¹ So then, if you are risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.² Set your mind on the things that are above, not on earthly things.³ For you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.⁴ When Christ, who is your life, reveals himself, you also will be revealed with him in Glory.

Experience the New Life - ⁵ Therefore, put to death what is earthly in your life, that is immorality, impurity, inordinate passions, wicked desires and greed which is a way of worshiping idols.⁶ These are the things that arouse the wrath of God.⁷ For a time you followed this way and lived in such disorders.⁸ Well then, reject all that: anger, evil intentions, malice; and let no abusive words be heard from your lips.

⁹ Do not lie to one another. You have been stripped of the old self and its way of thinking¹⁰ to put on the new, which is being renewed and is to reach perfect knowledge and the likeness of its creator.¹¹ There is no room for distinction between Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, foreigner, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all.

Ecclesial life - ¹² Clothe yourselves, then, as is fitting for God's chosen people, holy and beloved of him. Put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience¹³ to bear with one another and forgive whenever there is any occasion to do so. As the Lord has forgiven you, forgive one another.¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love which binds everything together in perfect harmony.¹⁵ May the peace of Christ overflow in your hearts; for this end you were called to be one body. And be thankful.

¹⁶ Let the word of God dwell in you in all its richness. Teach and admonish one another with words of wisdom. With thankful hearts sing to God psalms, hymns and spontaneous praise.¹⁷ And whatever you do or say, do it in the Name of Jesus, the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Family life - ¹⁸ Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as you should do in the Lord.¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not get angry with them.²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, because that pleases the Lord.²¹ Parents, do not be too demanding of your children, lest they become discouraged.

²² Servants, obey your masters in everything; not only while they are present, to gain favor with them, but sincerely, because you fear the Lord.²³ Whatever you do, do it whole heartedly, working for the Lord, and not for humans.²⁴ You well know that the Lord will reward you with the inheritance. You are servants, but your Lord is Christ.²⁵ Every evildoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, for God does not make exceptions in favor of anyone.

4, 1 As for you, masters, give your servants what is fair and reasonable, knowing that you yourselves have a Master in heaven.

CONCLUSION AND GREETINGS

In his closing remarks, the apostle calls for a deep rootedness in God—a foundation that ensures both the spiritual maturity of believers and the global expansion of the kerygma. The various figures mentioned in the final greetings reveal a profound synergy between this letter and the epistles to the Philippians and Philemon, providing a strong internal indication that these works were composed during the same period of Paul's ministry.

Vigilance in Prayer - ² Be steadfast in prayer and even spend the night praying and giving thanks. ³ Pray especially for us and our preaching: may the Lord open a door for us that we may announce the mystery of Christ. Because of this I am in chains; ⁴ pray then that I may be able to reveal this mystery as I should.

Making the Most of Every Opportunity - ⁵ Deal wisely with those who do not belong to the Church; take advantage of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be pleasing with a touch of wit. Know how to speak to everyone in the best way.

Concluding greetings - ⁷ Tychicus will give news of me. He is our dear brother and for me a faithful assistant and fellow worker for the Lord. ⁸ I am purposely sending him to give you news of me and to encourage you. ⁹ With him I am sending Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of yours. They will tell you about everything that is happening here.

¹⁰ My companion in prison, Aristarchus, greets you, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, about whom you have already received instructions. If he calls on you, receive him warmly. ¹¹ Jesus, called Justus, also greets you. They are the only Jewish people working with me for the kingdom of God, and because of that they have been a comfort to me.

¹² Greetings from your country man Epaphras, a good servant of Christ Jesus. He constantly battles for you through his prayer that you be perfect and firm in whatever God asks of you. ¹³ I assure you that he has worked hard for you, as well as for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

¹⁴ Greetings from Luke, our dear doctor and from Demas. ¹⁵ Greet the brothers and sisters of Laodicea, and don't forget Nympha and the church that gathers in her house.

¹⁶ After reading this letter, see that it is read in the Church of the Laodiceans, and have the letter they received read in yours. ¹⁷ And say to Archipus, "Do not forget the ministry given to you in the Lord."

¹⁸ Greetings in my own hand, Paul. Remember that I am in chains. Grace be with you.

Let us pause for a few moments in silence

PRAYING THE LITANIES IN HONOUR OF ST. PAUL

L: Let us now echo the letter that Paul addressed to the Colossians, praying the Litanies composed in his honour.

These litanies carry a heroic history. They were composed in Hankow, China, by the Franciscan biblical scholar Friar Urbano de Vescovi, at the suggestion of two Pauline missionaries, Don Bertino and Don Canavero. In 1944, they were set to music by Gustavo Pellegatti of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra. Don Bertino eventually brought the original text and score to Italy, where they are now preserved in the Archive of the Society of St. Paul.

Charity of God Father,	save us
Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,	vivify us
Communication of the Holy Spirit,	sanctify us
Most Blessed Paul,	pray for us
You, who have attained the mercy of God,	pray for us
You, in whom the Son of God was revealed,	pray for us
You, who were a chosen vessel for Christ,	pray for us
You, who were appointed as preacher, apostle,	pray for us
and teacher of the Gentiles in truth,	pray for us
You who were a chosen vessel for Christ	pray for us
You, whose apostolate was confirmed by miracles and mighty deeds	pray for us
You, who were a most faithful minister of the Church	pray for us
You, who carried the Christians in your heart and in your chains,	pray for us
You, who were crucified with Christ	pray for us
You, in whom Christ lived and worked	pray for us
You, who could not be separated from the charity of Christ	pray for us
You, who have endured imprisonment and labours	pray for us
You, who have suffered wounds and dangers	pray for us
You who, while still living, were caught up to the third heaven	pray for us
You, who have glorified your ministry	pray for us
You who, having finished your mission, awaited the crown of glory	pray for us
Lamb of God, who converted Paul the persecutor	have mercy on us
Lamb of God, who crowned Paul the apostle	hear us
Lamb of God, who glorified Paul the martyr	have pity on us

Our Father...

L: You are a chosen instrument, O Saint Paul the Apostle.

A: Preacher of the truth to the whole world.

L: Let us pray.

Lord, our God, who chose the Apostle Paul to spread Your Word of life, the Word made flesh, grant that every person may be enlightened by the faith he announced before kings and

nations, and that Your Church may always manifest herself as mother and teacher of the peoples. Through Christ our Lord.

A: Amen.

Final Blessing

L: The Lord be with you.

A: And with your spirit.

L: May Almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son  and the Holy Spirit.

A: Amen.

L: Let the Word you have heard remain in your hearts; go in peace

A: Thanks be to God.