



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 6 October 2021*

[Multimedia]

Catechesis on the Letter to the Galatians - 10. *Christ has set us free*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we are taking up again our reflection on the Letter to the Galatians in which Saint Paul wrote immortal words on Christian freedom. What is Christian freedom? Today, we will reflect on this topic: Christian freedom.

Freedom is a treasure that is truly appreciated only when it is lost. For many of us who are used to being free, it often appears to be an acquired right rather than a gift and a legacy to be preserved. How many misunderstandings there are around the topic of freedom, and how many different views have clashed over the centuries!

In the case of the Galatians, the Apostle could not bear that those Christians, after having known and accepted the truth of Christ, allowed themselves to be attracted to deceptive proposals, moving from freedom to slavery: from the liberating presence of Jesus to slavery to sin, to legalism, and so forth. Even today, legalism is one of our problems for so many Christians who take refuge in legalism, in sophistry. Paul therefore invites the Christians to remain firm in the freedom they had received in baptism, without allowing themselves to be put once again under the “yoke of slavery” (*Gal 5:1*). He is rightly jealous of this freedom. He is aware that some “false brothers” – this is what he calls them – have crept into the community to “spy on” – this is what he

says – “our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” (*Gal 2:4*) – to turn backward. And Paul cannot tolerate this. A proclamation that would preclude freedom in Christ would never be evangelical. I might be Pelagian or Jansenist or something like that, but not evangelical. You can never force in the name of Jesus; you cannot make anyone a slave in the name of Jesus who makes us free. Freedom is a gift which was given to us in baptism.

But above all, Saint Paul’s teaching about freedom is positive. The Apostle proposes the teaching of Jesus that we find in the Gospel of John as well: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (8:31-32). Therefore, the call is above all to remain in Jesus, the source of truth who makes us free. Christian freedom, therefore, is founded on two fundamental pillars: first, the grace of the Lord Jesus; second, the truth that Christ reveals to us and which is He himself.

First of all, it is a *gift from the Lord*. The freedom that the Galatians had received – and we like them in our baptism – is the fruit of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Apostle concentrates his entire proclamation on Christ, who had liberated him from the bonds of his past life: only from Him do the fruits of the new life according to the Spirit flow. In fact, the truest freedom, that from slavery to sin, flows from the Cross of Christ. We are free from slavery to sin by the Cross of Christ. Right there, where Jesus allowed himself to be nailed, making himself a slave, God placed the source of the liberation of the human person. This never ceases to amaze us: that the place where we are stripped of every freedom, that is, death, might become the source of freedom. But this is the mystery of God’s love! It is not easily understood, but it is lived. Jesus himself had proclaimed it when he said: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (*Jn 10:17-18*). Jesus achieves complete freedom by giving himself up to death; He knows that only in this way could he obtain life for everyone.

Paul, we know, had experienced first-hand this mystery of love. For this reason, he says to the Galatians, using an extremely bold expression: “I have been crucified with Christ” (*Gal 2:19*). In that act of supreme union with the Lord, he knew he had received the greatest gift of his life: freedom. On the Cross, in fact, he had nailed “his flesh with its passions and desires” (5:24). We understand how much faith filled the Apostle, how great was his intimacy with Jesus. And while, on the one hand, we know this is what we are missing, on the other hand, the Apostle’s testimony encourages us to progress in this life of freedom. The Christian is free, should be free, and is called not to return to being a slave of precepts and strange things.

The second pillar of freedom is *the truth*. In this case as well, it is necessary to remember that the truth of faith is not an abstract theory, but the reality of the living Christ, who touches the daily and overall meaning of personal life. How many people there are who have never studied, who do not even know how to read and write, but who have understood Christ’s message well, who have this

freedom that makes them free. It is Christ's wisdom that has entered them through the Holy Spirit in baptism. How many people do we find who live the life of Christ better than great theologians, for example, offering a tremendous witness of the freedom of the Gospel. Freedom makes free to the extent to which it transforms a person's life and directs it toward the good. So as to be truly free, we not only need to know ourselves on the psychological level, but above all to practice truth in ourselves on a more profound level — and there, in our heart, open ourselves to the grace of Christ. Truth must disturb us – let's return to this extremely Christian word: restlessness. We know that there are Christians who are never restless: their lives are always the same, there is no movement in their hearts, they lack restlessness. Why? Because restlessness is a sign that the Holy Spirit is working inside us and freedom is an active freedom, that comes from the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is why I say that freedom must disturb us, it must constantly question us, so that we might always plunge deeper into what we really are. In this way we will discover that the journey of truth and freedom is an arduous one that lasts a lifetime. Remaining free is arduous, it is a struggle; but it is not impossible. Courage, let's make progress regarding this, it will be good for us. And it is a journey on which the Love that comes from the Cross guides and sustains us: the Love that reveals truth to us and grants us freedom. This is the way to happiness. Freedom makes us free, makes us joyful, makes us happy.

APPEAL

Yesterday, the Episcopal Conference and the Conferences of men and women religious in France received the Independent Commission's report regarding sexual abuse in the Church which was commissioned to evaluate the extent of the phenomenon of sexual aggression and violence committed against minors since 1950 to the present. Unfortunately, a considerable number was revealed. To the victims I wish to express my sadness and my pain for the traumas they have endured and my shame, our shame, my shame that for so long the Church has been incapable of putting this at the center of its concerns, assuring them of my prayers. I pray, and let us all pray together: "To God the glory, to us the shame": this is a moment of shame. I encourage the bishops and you, dear brothers who have come here to share this moment, I encourage the bishops and religious superiors to continue to do everything possible so that similar tragedies might not be repeated. I express my closeness and fatherly support to the priests in France in the face of this trial which is difficult but beneficial, and I invite the Catholics in France to assume their responsibility to guarantee that the Church might be a safe home for everyone. Thank you.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the

groups from the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord. May God bless you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters: In our continuing catechesis on Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians, we now consider the Apostle's teaching on Christian freedom. For Paul, that freedom is a gift, the fruit of our new life in Christ. Through baptism, we have been freed *from* our bondage to sin and freed *for* a life of generous love in obedience to the Gospel. Jesus tells us, "If you continue in my word... you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (*Jn* 8:31-32). Christian freedom is thus grounded in the unmerited gift of God's grace and the truth of Christ. Through his passion, death and resurrection, Christ reveals the depth of God's love, and teaches us that the total gift of ourselves in service of others, even to the point of death, is the mark of supreme freedom. The truth that Christ brings is in fact truthfulness about ourselves. Our journey along the path of Christian freedom is not easy, but guided and sustained by the love of the Crucified Lord, and by his liberating truth, we will find our ultimate fulfilment in accordance with God's saving plan.
