

Pentecost Day: Romans 8,26-30

Dear sisters and brothers,

as you know during this worship a sister and a brother from the Italian Catholic world and 9 others already members of the Methodist Church of Ghana will be welcomed in our congregation.

It is a time full of joy for all of us because it tells us that God has not finished with us and that our small church can still be a place of witness and solidarity!

Time to reflect on the passage of the Romans came to my mind a phrase that Eleanor had said in the meeting of the board of the church with the catechumens in view of the admission: "But what we can say that we differ from others as Christians?! Certainly not to the peculiarities of what we do or outward expressions ..."

"Christians in fact, neither by country, nor language, nor as to distinguish themselves from other men. Neither somewhere in the city live their exclusive, nor speak a language other than that of others, nor lead a life that is out of the law. (...)

But, although living barbarous or Greek cities, as well as to each is allotted, while acting within conforming to the customs of the place, eating and way of life, demonstrating a wonderful way and, as we all agree, paradoxical, to be citizens. Living each his own country, but as foreigners; participate in everything as citizens and fit everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is, for them, the home; for them every fatherland is a foreign land ... They live in the flesh, but not according to the flesh. Dwell on the earth, but their city is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but their lives go far beyond the law ... "(Epistle to Diognetus, chap. 5).

Foreigners are Christians, brothers and sisters, not to different language and culture, not to extravagant costumes and exotic dishes.

But then what?

If we look at what it says about the passage of Romans we have suffered a surprise!

Being foreign, so different, does not depend on us, but by a divine choice: "*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son ...*" (v. 29a).

The "pre-knowledge" of God is not a simple act of the mind, but it implies a true love relationship that involves adherence by the one or the one who is "known" and feels entrust a specific task. Knowing, for God also means "elect" or choose, to establish a relationship between the self and those he "knows".

Well, in light of what the Apostle writes, we can also clean up the word 'predestine' all deposits from deterministic and privilege exclusivist: like every vocation, the same predestination, is an appeal to human freedom because understanding what God has "made" of him, "become himself", realizing the task that has received: walking in the Spirit and be "*conformed to the image of His Son.*"

And this not only in the eschatological future, where it will carry out in full, but in today already!

Indeed, that is the purpose and the result of divine predetermination, that Christ is even now the firstborn within a large family picture, where the other members are made up of brothers and sisters on the basis of an adoption which is expressed as unexpected intimacy with her Son and his Father.

Sinners, we experienced the sin; adopted children, we had the undeserved grace of forgiveness and justification. We were chosen in Christ to be with him, 'the first fruits and the announcement' of a deliverance for all humanity because God "*desires everyone to be saved*" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Then, dear Eleonora and Lorenzo, we cannot claim of superiority, but only full of gratitude to God for having "chosen and sent" by Christ to proclaim the Good and Beautiful News "*to every creature.*"

This is the great gift of God that we are called to live in our "today", giving our testimony, always ready to respond, with gentleness and respect, *"to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you"* (1 Pt 3,15 b).

Yet before the gift of our adoption, totally free and unmerited gift of the Lord, we cannot forget the great responsibility that comes to us: we are called to respond by living "as children of light."

But this is exactly the result of that "choice" freedom of God who founded our freedom: free children of God, which he made capable of overcoming closures, selfishness, prejudice, for a fuller life; a life that is worth living.

Joy of freedom in the path of love for God, love of neighbor lived in full.

That's who are Christians, those of whom the apostle Paul writes in verse 30: *"And those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; And those whom he justified, he also glorified."*

One verse that, to put it in music, looks like a Rossini crescendo!

A verse that has the sound of a joyful hymn of praise in which each of us can find himself because, together with the awareness that the Christian is first and foremost a call, there is also insurance: in the believer, brother and sister of Christ The divine plan is implemented as of now, he is glorified!

Of course I know, brothers and sisters, this joy stride so much with the economic, social and cultural environment in which we live made up of thefts at the highest levels, great for small injustices, exploitation and creation of contemporary impoverishment of large sections of the world's population.

I know! And unfortunately it was not to be so different from the one described by the apostle in verses 18 and 22 of this chapter: there is suffering among the people, and the creation groans and travails in pain.

But it is precisely here that grows and takes shape the direction of our being called: that God would require of his sons if everything was accomplished?

In fact, all of us in our condition we participate in the suffering of creation, but we are also called to be "a sign and an announcement" of his liberation from the slavery of sin and death.

Yet even in these sons and daughters suffering and contradictions are present, and yet everything is clean and clear. So here come the man or woman that our Lord has given us to make us not feel alone and explain everything about him, the Comforter who intercedes for us with groans that words, the Holy Spirit, *ruah*, the power of God who intervenes in history.

But we do not even know what to ask and how to ask. So even in this we are not alone, because the Spirit of God comes to making sound and inspire our prayer beyond our poor words and put us in tune with God so as to face the difficulties of life that accompany the joys and make valid our testimony beyond what we can humanly do.

This, brothers and sisters, can give us greater confidence and instill a joyful force to witness because where we cannot the Lord come, because where the despair come out hope is triumphant, because where there is sin abounds grace.

Dear Eleonora and Lorenzo, maybe it is this that distinguishes the Christian and founds the community of believers, the capacity to live in the light of God's Word that proclaims: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* (2 Cor. 12,9)

Amen

Past. Mirella Manocchio