

First Letter of St. Paul to Latinos in the United States

By Mar Muñoz-Visoso

After a few days of intense work at a meeting in San Antonio, Texas, we were showered with a nice dinner at an excellent restaurant along the River Walk.

As in every good Hispanic reunion, the talk was lively and several conversations were happening at the same time. On our side of the table were a religious woman, a bishop, a priest, a layman and, yours truly, a reverend mother (of three).

At a moment in the conversation, one of them shared about his experience during the current school year teaching undergraduates about St. Paul and on the special grace that this Jubilee Year dedicated to the Apostle to the Gentiles had brought him by forcing him to reacquaint himself with the writings and the person of Paul.

Always searching for ideas, I could not resist the temptation of posing a somewhat facetious question to the group: So what would Saint Paul say today to or about Latinos in the United States?

After a brief interruption to receive the awaited food, imaginations started flowing freely. The layman, a Mexican-American with a doctorate in theology and a great deal of pastoral experience, proposed that maybe he would urge them to preserve what in their roots and culture brings them closer to God, to seek integration and participation, but to avoid adopting those elements of mainstream American culture that drive them away from their faith.

The religious sister of silver hair, whose youthful face hides well the many years of wisdom and experience she carries on her shoulders, compared the passage of 1 Corinthians that talks about love, or charity, with the Works of Mercy, Spiritual and Corporal, that we learned from the catechism. “I think Hispanics practice them more often than they realize. They contribute much to the Church in this way. I think St. Paul would invite them to do an examination of conscience using that passage from Corinthians.”

“Good idea, Sister,” I thought to myself, “When can you lead the retreat?”

Another person pointed out that St. Paul went out of his way to make us aware that through baptism, “in Christ,” we are all sons and daughters of the same Father. He also provided arguments to explain the unity and catholicity of the Church.

Much like in those times, we are still trying to figure out how unity happens in diversity one faith community at a time.

After listening to a couple more suggestions, the bishop, a native born Hispanic, who had remained silent most of the time, turned to me and said, “You could attempt to write the ‘First Letter of Saint Paul to Hispanics’ and throw in anything you’d like from his letters, really.”

“Bishop, you just gave me the perfect title for a column,” I replied, and everyone laughed wholeheartedly acknowledging he was quite right.

The wonder of God’s Word is that He can talk individually and specifically to situations in our life, or the life of the community, and shed light on them with a new message every time.

There are only a few weeks left in the Year of St. Paul. That doesn’t mean we have learned everything about him, or that we do not have time to learn at least something. If there is a purpose in celebrating these years, it is to make us hungry for more and hope that, in searching, we come across with the ever new, ever old teachings of the Word of God.

So, here: “First Letter of the Apostle Paul to Latinos in the U.S.

Beloved brothers and sisters...” (you can fill in the rest).

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