

which is necessary. Not worrying too much about the externals, the impressions, what they will say, what is in this House, what is in the other. To forget ourselves a little to live in God, to think in God, to work in God, to feel God within. Habitual recollection is needed» (APD57, no. 97).



## 5. From the Word to Life

The theme of transformation, on which we have been reflecting since the preparation of the 11th General Chapter, cannot remain just a phenomenon to be looked at, studied and described. Our reflection is intended to help us to participate in this process, to initiate it in us and support it so that it is not just a passing episode but a style of our Pauline life.

- In which areas of my life do I notice progress in the transformation of my way of thinking recommended by the documents of the Congregation?
- St Paul wrote: the grace of God “in me was not in vain”. Can I say this about myself?
- What makes it more difficult for me to transform myself “a little bit every day” with constancy?
- What inspiration does St Paul’s example give me to continue to engage in my God-ordained process of transformation?

## 6. Prayer

### *Act of resolution*

O Jesus, you are the Way which I must follow,  
the perfect Model which I must imitate;  
when I present myself on the day of judgment  
I wish to be found similar to you.

O divine Model of humility and of obedience, make me resemble you.

O perfect example of mortification and of purity, make me resemble you.

O Jesus, poor and patient, make me resemble you.

O exemplar of charity and of ardent zeal, make me resemble you.

*(The Prayers of the Pauline Family, p. 57)*

## PAUL, THE APOSTLE OF CHANGE

*The Superior General in his letter offers us examples of people chosen by God who “reveals himself to the world, accompanying all the epochal changes that the latter goes through”. After the prophet Jeremiah, he points to the apostle Paul, “With whom the Christian faith crosses the borders of the West and enters into dialogue with the pagan world”. These protagonists are not just instruments in the hands of God, but people in whom and through whom God reveals Himself, working their inner transformation.*

### 1. From the Superior General’s Letter

«Paul does not become an “apostle of Jesus Christ” overnight. If we follow the reconstruction of some scholars based on the autobiographical testimony preserved in the Letter to the Galatians (1:18; 2:1), it took seventeen years, from the experience of Damascus, for Paul to mature as an apostle of the Gentiles. Only after this long period of time – which brought about a progressive metamorphosis in Paul – will he be able to accompany one of the epochal changes in human history produced by the announcement of the Gospel. Only after seventeen years, Paul is ready to cross the door of the West which introduces him to the continent of the Gentiles, Europe (cf. R. Penna, *Paolo, da Tarso a Roma. Il cammino di un grande innovatore, 2015*). What happens in these seventeen years? Paul is “formed,” “shaped” not only by God, but also by the not always linear relationship with the first believers (including the “false brothers” who give him a hard time)...

Paul knows how to accompany change because his own life was a continuous conversion. And this was made possible by multiple experiences that brought him closer to other early believers, men and women, Jews and

Greeks, slaves and free, who would later become the trusted collaborators of his ministry. Despite, and also thanks to, all the accidents along the way. As Blessed James Alberione will say, being an apostle, for Paul, is *“burning with that double flame, with the same fire, the zeal for God and his Christ, and for men of every country”* (CISP, p. 1151). Encounters, successes, failures, misunderstandings, discussions... lead the Apostle Paul to redefine his adherence to and understanding of the Gospel, increasingly handing himself over as a docile instrument of a Gospel that surpasses him» (Annual Letter 2023-2024, 3.2 Paul, the Apostle of Change).

## **2. The encounter with the Word of God**

*In transforming a person, it is not only the ‘external’ force that acts that is important, but also the inner disposition and cooperation of that person. In St Paul, grace found fertile ground on which, thanks to the apostle’s commitment, he could bear astonishing fruit.*

«For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me» (1 Cor 15:3-10).

## **3. The Magisterium of the Church**

*God’s transforming grace wants to permeate the whole person, all his powers, all his dimensions and all his manifestations. The fruit of this process is conformity to Christ, to the point of identification with Him. It is a reality familiar and dear to us, which in Pauline spirituality we call ‘Christification’. Pope Benedict reminds us that this process also took place in Saul of Tarsus.*

«“After the extraordinary event that occurred on the road to Damascus, Saul, who was zealous in his persecution of the nascent Church, was transformed into a tireless apostle of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is clear from what happened to this extraordinary evangelizer that his transformation was not the result of long inner reflection nor even the fruit of personal effort. It was first and foremost a work of the grace of God who acted in his own inscrutable ways. This explains why, in writing to the community of Corinth a few years after his conversion, St Paul affirms, as we heard in the first passage of this Vespers: “by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain” (1 Cor 15:10). In addition, in considering attentively what happened to St Paul, one understands that the transformation he experienced in his life is not limited to the ethical level – such as conversion from immorality to morality – nor to the intellectual level – such as a change in his way of understanding reality – but, rather, is a matter of the radical renewal of his being, similar in many aspects to a rebirth. This transformation is founded on participation in the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and is described as a gradual process of conformation to him. In the light of this awareness, when St Paul was subsequently called to defend the legitimacy of his apostolic vocation and of the Gospel he proclaimed, he was to say: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20)» (Benedict XVI, *Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls*, 25 January 2012).

## **4. Thought of the Founder**

*“A little bit every day”: this rhythm of inner work, loved and practised by Maggiorino Vigolungo, was recommended by the Founder to the whole Pauline Family. It is the second face of the transformation that, besides the great breakthroughs, is achieved through a continuous, slow but steady journey.*

«Clear principles but well-penetrated truths and simple resolutions, claiming to advance a little each day, not claiming transformation almost overnight. Sanctification generally takes place by taking small but continuous steps every day. And when you take a few small steps every day you do a lot, you do a lot, because then you are like when the bricklayer slowly adds bricks well in place and gives that amount of lime and sets the bricks in that position,