

Monthly Reflection:

February 2025

St. Paul concludes his letter to the Romans by acknowledging numerous disciples, both men and women, who dedicated themselves to God's work (Rom 16:1-16). The phrases he uses to describe them and their work are striking, such as "risked their lives", "worked very hard," "outstanding among the apostles," and "tested and approved in Christ." Their love and support deeply inspired Paul in his ministry. Written in the mid-50s AD, the letter reflects a time of looming persecution under Emperor Nero. Many of those mentioned by Paul would eventually follow the example of Jesus and Paul, perfecting their faith by laying down their lives for their friends.

If someone in your Jesus Youth fellowship were to write a letter describing its members, how would they describe you? Would you be among those who stand out in faith and service? The same Lord who rescued the disciples listed by Paul from sin has also delivered us. Once they experienced the light of the Gospel dispelling the darkness in their hearts, they couldn't contain their zeal. However, as verses 17 and 18 reveal, some responded differently, causing dissension and difficulties. The Good News always evokes these two types of responses.

How enriching our Jesus Youth fellowships would be if we all responded with the dedication of Mary, Persis, Rufus, and others! Especially now, as Jesus Youth joins the universal Church in marking the 2000th anniversary of Jesus' death and resurrection, we renew our commitment to "work hard in the Lord" and make disciples of all nations.

In his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola invites us to stand before Jesus on the cross and reflect on three profound questions: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ? As we ponder these questions, what do we sense in our hearts? Are we filled with gratitude for the ways we've cooperated with His grace and worked tirelessly, or do our hearts feel heavy with sadness and regret for opportunities missed?

Has my heart ever made a firm and unwavering decision at the foot of the Cross? Am I growing in reliance on the Spirit to renew that commitment daily? Or is my heart distracted and weighed down with "dissipation, drunkenness, and the cares of this life" (Lk 21:34)?

**WORKED
HARD IN
THE LORD
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The men and women Paul mentions were ordinary people who became extraordinary through their strong choices. We too have that potential deep within us. The Spirit gently nudges us: "Will you seek first the Kingdom of God above everything else?"

To work hard in the Lord, we must sharpen our talents and charisms, equipping ourselves as we grow in the virtue of charity that moves us to share Christ with others. Our ministries should refocus on leading people to the salvation that only Jesus can offer. By redeeming our time and staying focused, we can work consistently, imitating Paul, who "toiled, striving with all the energy that God's mighty power inspired within him" (Col 1:29). There is work that exhausts us and work that renews us. The phrase "in the Lord" reminds us to rely on God's grace, which strengthens us. We often grow tired and demotivated when we try to do the Lord's work without letting Him work through us. St. Paul and the saints who have gone before us show us how to labour tirelessly with God's guidance.

Paul's dedication undoubtedly inspired those around him to work hard, and our passion and commitment can be just as contagious. While few are called to full-time ministry like Paul, most of us can follow the example of those mentioned in today's passage. The Lord calls us to stay focused on the mission He entrusted us in our families, workplaces, and communities. This requires intentionally and wisely managing our commitments and working hard in His grace. As Pope St. John Paul II reminds us, "Don't be afraid of the radicalness of His demands... If He asks much of you, it is because He knows you can give much."

