

A Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans [1a]

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Chapter 1:1-7: Paul's self-introduction and statement of the theme of the letter:

Paul calls himself 'servant of Christ, an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God'. Servant [diakonos in Greek] is Paul's self-consciousness in relation to Christ; his life is centered on Christ his master. Calling himself servant of Christ doesn't mean a slavish adherence to the master but serving Christ is the highest freedom, because Christ has come to set free humans from all bondages [Galatians 5:1]. It wasn't Paul's choice to become an Apostle but Christ chose him, called him and gave him apostleship as a gift/grace. Paul who was an enemy of Christ did not deserve his calling but 'grace of God made him what he is' [1Corinthians 15:10]. An Apostle means one who is sent. Apostles of Christ are sent with a mission/program to build a world according to Christ's vision [kingdom of God].

Servant of the Gospel of God [1:2-4]: The good news of redemption already contained in the Old Testament revelation is now made manifest in Christ, in his resurrection from the dead. Gospel holds transforming power for now and for the future of humankind. The content of the gospel of God is his Son, Jesus Christ. "Jesus Christ" is mentioned 4 times in 7 verses stating that Paul's life/mission is grounded in Christ. Paul explains that the good news of Christ has a Jewish background. Jesus was a Jew and what does that mean for relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians? Paul speaks of the two dimensions of the Son's [Jesus Christ] identity: according to Flesh and according to the Spirit that was revealed in the resurrection. 'Spirit of holiness' that Paul mentions is the Holy Spirit. Father and the Spirit were at work in the resurrection of Christ which makes resurrection a Trinitarian Event [though Paul does not explicitly say that]. A reference to this we see in Luke 10:21; 'Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, I thank you Father...you have revealed these things to the childlike...all things have been delivered to me by my Father...no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him'. The act of revealing the saving grace in the Christ-Event is a Trinitarian event!

The content of the gospel of God is Jesus Christ. Paul in his writings uses about 230 times the expression 'Jesus Christ our Lord'. Paul describes the unique Sonship of Christ; God [Father] and Jesus [Son] are inseparable; Jesus' Sonship is different from sonship of the faithful [verse 7]. In Romans 8:3 and Galatians 4:4, Paul mentions Christ's 'heavenly origin'. The expression in verse 4, 'appointed Son of God in power' would mean an act of God, manifested in the resurrection; Father declared Jesus as his 'beloved Son'. This declaration of the Father was in relation to the paschal mystery [death and resurrection of Christ] which was not there before Christ came in the 'Flesh' [humanity]. Christ [Messiah] means the anointed one; God is giving a new anointing to the world [redeemed state] in Jesus Christ, the anointed of God. Resurrection of Jesus Christ is now the ground or beginning of the resurrection of all the dead.

Mission to the Gentiles [1:5-7]: Paul's apostleship is a mission of grace to all. God's presence/action is experienced as grace. Grace is life-transforming relationship, lived as belonging to God/Christ. Belonging to Christ is through 'obedience of faith'. Obedience is

listening to the proclaimed gospel, welcoming grace and make a decision for Christ-hear and answer [faith]; faith is then an ascent of the mind and heart to be in Christ. Both Jew and gentile now belong to Christ through 'obedience of faith', which is the working of grace, universally given to all in the Risen Christ. Paul calls the recipients of his letter in Rome, 'God's beloved and called to be saints'. Saints means that Christians are called to a cause, set apart/life committed for a mission, a vocation to be transformed and be transformers of the world like Paul. Universal gift of grace in Christ removes all divisions between peoples [no Jew or Gentile] and all reasons for wars, discrimination and unjust social systems! Peace Paul wishes the Roman church is the typical Jewish greeting 'Shalom' which is the well-being of the whole person and harmony in the human family!

To be continued...

Father Jose