

*2 Corinthians 5:14-20 (God's love compels us: he has committed to us the message of reconciliation)*

This year, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the German Reformation and its call to réconciliation, with a new focus on salvation by grâce, through faith in Jesus Christ.. And we also recall the fall in 1989, of the Berlin wall which had divided Germany for three décades.

Many people crédit the Peace Prayer Movement , which started in East Germany, as beginning the process which led to the wall's démolition. During the Movement's campaign, people had placed candles in windows and doorways and prayed for freedom. When the wall was demolished, a member of the East German government observed, ' We had planned for everything, except candles and prayers!' Thus the way was open for the reconciliation of East and West Germany. **Anything** is possible with God.!

At the heart of today's passage from Paul's Second letter to the Corinthian church is the thème of réconciliation, in verses 18-20, which is at once what happens to Christians and the content of their message. This réconciliation is first and foremost with God, whom our sin has outraged, and it can only happen in Christ. It calls for a moment of repentance before we draw from the well of forgiveness.

Such repentance admits to division, names the reasons and acknowledges the walls created by our human sinfulness. Reconciliation is enacted by the dismantling of these walls. For our réconciliation with God, Christ became the sin offering, where heaven's love and justice met, when he became the substitute for humans and 'paid the price of our sin'. Thus creating a new people who are right with God.

This creates a radically altered view of people in which external appearances and distinctions no longer matter. The initiative, as always, is from God who, as Creator, breathes new life into his créatures. Not only that, he calls them to spread this message so that others might be reconciled, to him and to each other.

Paul argues that our mission comes with all the authority of God, because those called to preach this message are described as ambassadors, which in those days, was a technical term used for those delegated to représenter Caesar. None of this calling creates a sense of compulsion or coercion. 'We entreat you on behalf of Christ(v20)'. The sovereign initiative of God calls for a responsible acceptance of the message and a caring approach to informing others.

At the heart of informing and encouraging others is the knowledge that we are not alone. On our own we can change nothing, and we must remember that

- God is the only one who can change people
- he wants to save people
- he's already at work, through his Holy Spirit, wherever we are
- he has a part, however small, for us to play.

Christians are brand-new people on the inside. The Holy Spirit gives us new life, and we are not the same anymore. We are not reformed, rehabilitated, or re-educated -we are re-created (a new création), living in union with Christ. At conversion we do not simply turn over a new leaf, we begin a new life with a new Master.

God brings us back to himself by blocking out our sins and making us right with him. When we trust in Christ, and welcome him into our lives, we are no longer strangers or foreigners to God. Because **we** have been reconciled to him, we have the privilège of encouraging others to do the same, and thus **we** are the ones charged with the task of reconciling people to God.

An ambassador is usually an official représentative of one country or state to another. As believers, we are Christ's ambassadors sent with his message of réconciliation to the world. This is a vital responsibility which we dare not take lightly. How well are you and I fulfilling our commission as Christ's ambassadors?

If we have read a good book, found a new recipé or discovered a comfortable hotel , we have no difficulty in discussing it with other people we meet. Similarly, when someone has helped us in some way, we are usually keen to acknowledge it, and it encourages us to help others. So why should we be so reticent about telling others about our life-changing expérience of réconciliation through Christ;

In today's world, new walls are being created everywhere, between nations and between individuals. At every level, people appear to be more concerned about maximising their own comfort and prosperity, rather than in sharing the world's resources with each other. The world is desperately in need of the good news with which we, as Christ's ambassadors, have been entrusted.

We cannot ourselves change things on the world wide scène, but God is all-powerful, almighty. As children of God we can start from where we are, and share with others, the message of réconciliation and of eternal life, a spiritual domain of individuals reunited and living in loving relationships deeper than we can even imagine during our earthly life.

Armed with this assurance from Christ, his love which compels us, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we have no need to protect ourselves from other people and we can demolish any walls that we meet. We owe it to our Saviour to do so!