



Lectio Divina

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¹ Cover: This icon at the National Shrine of Saint Jude at Faversham depicts St. Albert's giving of the Rule to Saint Brocard. From the one Well of Elijah (top left) two streams flow, representing the two major branches of the Carmelite Family.

Friday, September 1, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide,

be close to us and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life. Keep us safe in your love.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 25: 1-13

Jesus said to his disciples: "Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like this: Ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones, though they took their lamps, took no oil with them, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him". Then all those wedding attendants woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out." But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves." They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other attendants arrived later. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us." But He replied, "In truth I tell you I do not know you." So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.

Reflection

- Matthew 25: 1^a: The beginning: "At that time". The parable begins with these two words: "At that time". It is a question of the coming of the Son of Man (cfr. Mt 24: 37). Nobody knows when this day, this time will come, "not even the angels in Heaven nor the Son himself, but only the Father" (Mt 24: 36). The fortune tellers will not succeed in giving an estimate. The Son of Man will come as a surprise, when people less expect him (Mt 24: 44). It can be today, it can be tomorrow, that is why the last warning of the parable of the ten Virgins is: "Keep watch!" The ten girls should be prepared for anything which may happen. When the Nazi police knocked at the door of the Monastery of the Carmelite Sisters of Echt in the Province of Limburger, in the Netherlands, Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was prepared. She took on the Cross and followed the way to martyrdom in the extermination camp out of love for God and for her people. She was one of the prudent virgins of the parable.
- Matthew 25: 1b-4: The ten virgins ready to wait for the bridegroom. The parable begins like this: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like this: ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom". It is a question of the girls who have to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding feast. Because of this, they have to take the lamps with them, to light the way, and also to render the feast more joyful with more light. Five of them were prudent and five were foolish. This

difference is seen in the way in which they prepare themselves for the role that they have to carry out. Together with the lighted lamps, the prudent ones had taken some oil in reserve, preparing themselves in this way for anything which could happen. The foolish ones took only the lamps and they did not think to take some oil in reserve with them.

- Matthew 25: 5-7: The unforeseen delay of the arrival of the bridegroom. The bridegroom was late. He had not indicated precisely the hour of his arrival. While waiting the attendants went to sleep. But the lamps continue to burn and use the oil until gradually they turned off. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, there was a cry: "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him!" All the attendants woke up, and began to prepare their lamps which were burning out. They had to put in some of the oil they had brought in reserve so that the lamps would not burn out.
- Matthew 25: 8-9: The different reactions before the delay of the bridegroom. It is only now that the foolish attendants become aware that they should have brought some oil in reserve with them. They went to ask the prudent ones: "Give us some of your oil, our lamps are going out". The prudent ones could not respond to this request, because at that moment what was important was not for the prudent ones to share their oil with the foolish ones, but that they would be ready to accompany the bridegroom to the place of the feast. For this reason they advised them: "You had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves".
- Matthew 25: 10-12: The fate of the prudent attendants and that of the foolish ones. The foolish ones followed the advice of the prudent ones and went to buy some oil. During their brief absence the bridegroom arrived and the prudent ones were able to accompany him and to enter together with him to the wedding feast. But the door was closed behind them. When the others arrived, they knocked at the door and said: "Lord, Lord, open the door for us!" and they received the response: "In truth I tell you, I do not know you".
- Matthew 25: 13: The final recommendation of Jesus for all of us. The story of this parable is very simple, and the lesson is evident: "So stay awake and watch, because you do not know either the day or the hour". The moral of the story: do not be superficial, look beyond the present moment, and try to discover the call of God even in the smallest things of life, even the oil which may be lacking in the small light or lamp.

Personal Question

- Has it happened to you sometimes in your life to think about having oil in reserve for your lamp?

Concluding Prayer

I will bless Yahweh at all times, his praise continually on my lips.

I will praise Yahweh from my heart;

let the humble hear and rejoice. (Ps 34: 1-2)

Saturday, September 2, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father, help us to seek the values that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world. In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 25: 14-30

Jesus said to his disciples: 'It is like a man about to go abroad who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to a third one, each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out on his journey.

The man who had received the five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. The man who had received two made two more in the same way. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Now a long time afterwards, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with five talents; here are five more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness." Next the man with the two talents came forward. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness."

Last came forward the man who had the single talent. "Sir," said he, "I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered; so, I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back."

But his master answered him, "You wicked and lazy servant! So, you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return, I would have got my money back with interest. So now, take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has. As for this good-for-nothing servant, throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents to us the parable of the talents. This parable was between two other parables: the Parable of the Ten virgins (Mt 25: 1-13) and the Parable of the final Judgement (Mt 25: 31-46). These three parables clarify and orientate persons concerning the coming of the Kingdom. The parable of the Ten Virgins insists on vigilance: the Kingdom may arrive at any moment. The Parable of the final Judgement says that in order to possess the Kingdom it is necessary to accept the little ones. The Parable of the talents orientates on what to do to make the Kingdom grow. It speaks of the gifts and the charisma which persons receive from God. Every person has qualities,

knows something that he/she can teach others. Nobody is only a pupil; nobody is only a teacher. We all learn from one another.

A key to understand the parable: one of the things which has greater influence on the life of the people is the idea which we have of God. Among the Jews who followed the Pharisees, some imagined that God was a severe judge, who treated persons according to the merit they had gained through the observance of the Law. That produced fear in the persons and prevented them from growing. And, especially, prevented them from opening a space within them, to receive and accept the new experience of God which Jesus communicated. In order to help these persons, Matthew tells the story of the talents.

- Matthew 25: 14-15: The door of entrance in the parable. Jesus tells the story of a man, who before going abroad, entrusted his goods to his servants, giving them five, two and one talents, according to the capacity of each one. One talent was equal to 34 kg. of gold, which is not something small! In last instance, each one receives the same amount, because he receives “according to his capacity”. Anyone who has a big cup, receives a full cup. The man went on his journey, abroad where he remained for a long time. The story produces a certain moment of suspense. One does not know for what purpose the man entrusts his money to the servants; neither does one know the end.
- Matthew 25: 16-18: The way of acting of each one of the servants. The two first work and make the money produce a double amount. But the one who received one talent buried it so as not to lose it. It is a question of the goods of the Kingdom which are given to persons and to the communities according to their capacity. Everyone receives some good of the Kingdom, but not all respond in the same way!
- Matthew 25: 19-23: Rendering an account of the first and the second servants, and response of the master. After a long time, the man returned. The first two servants say the same thing: “Sir, you entrusted me with five/two talents, here are five/two more that I have made”. And the master gives the same response: “Well done, good and trustworthy servant, you have shown you are trustworthy in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master’s happiness”.
- Matthew 25: 24-25: Rendering of account of the third servant. The third servant comes and says: “Sir, I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered, so I was afraid and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is!” In this phrase we have a mistaken idea of God which is criticized by Jesus. The servant considers God as a severe master. Before such a God, the human being is afraid and hides behind the exact and narrow-minded observance of the Law. The person thinks that acting in this way, the severity of the legislator will not punish him. In reality, such a person does not believe in God, but believes only in self and in the observance of the Law. This person closes up in self, separates herself from God and cannot be concerned about others. This person becomes incapable to grow and develop like a free person. This false image of God isolates the human being, kills the community, puts an end to joy and impoverishes life.
- Matthew 25: 26-27: The response of the Master to the third servant. The response of the master is ironic. He says: “Wicked and lazy servant! So, you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered; you should have deposited my money with the bankers and on my return I would have got my money back with interest!” The third servant was not coherent with the severe image which he had of God. If he imagined that God was severe, he should have, at least, placed the money in the bank. Then, he is condemned not by God but by the

mistaken idea that he had of God and which makes him more immature and fearful than what he should have been. It was not possible for him to be coherent with the erroneous image which he had of God, because fear dehumanized and paralyzed life.

- Matthew 25: 28-30: The last word of the Lord which clarifies the parable. The master orders to take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has.” This is the key which clarifies everything. In reality, the talents, the “money of the master”, the goods of the Kingdom, are love, service, sharing. It is everything which helps the community to grow and reveals the presence of God. Anyone who closes himself in self out of fear of losing the little that he has, at the end will lose even the little that he has. But the person who does not think of self, and gives herself to others, grows and receives in turn, in an unexpected way, everything which she has given and even more. Anyone who loses his life will find it, and anyone who has the courage to lose his life will find it”.
- The different money of the Kingdom. There is no difference between those who have received more and those who have received less. All have their gift according to their capacity. What is important is that this gift be placed at the service of the Kingdom and make the goods of the Kingdom grow. These gifts are love, fraternal spirit, sharing. The principal key of the parable does not consist in making the talents render something, but rather in relating with God in a correct way. The two first servants ask for nothing, they do not seek their own good, they do not want things for themselves, they do not close up in self, they do not calculate. In the most natural way, almost without being aware and without seeking their own merit, they begin to work, in such a way that the gift received from God may render for God and for the Kingdom. The third servant is afraid, and because of this does nothing. According to the norms of the ancient law, he acts correctly. He responds to the exigencies. He loses nothing and gains nothing. And because of this he loses even what he had. The Kingdom is a risk. Anyone who does not want to run risks will lose the Kingdom!

Personal Questions

- In our community, do we try to know and value the gifts of each person? Is our community a place where persons are able to make known their talents and make them available to others? Sometimes, the gifts of some generate envy and competitiveness in others. How do we react?
- How is the following phrase to be understood: “For anyone who has will be given more and will have in abundance; but anyone who does not have will be taken away even what he has”?

Concluding Prayer

We are waiting for Yahweh; he is our help and our shield, for in him our heart rejoices, in his holy name we trust. (Ps 33: 20-21)

Sunday, September 3, 2023

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Spirit of truth, sent by Jesus to guide us to the whole truth, enlighten our minds so that we may understand the Scriptures. You who overshadowed Mary and made her fruitful ground where the Word of God could germinate, purify our hearts from all obstacles to the Word. Help us to learn like her to listen with good and pure hearts to the Word that God speaks to us in life and in Scripture, so that we may observe the Word and produce good fruit through our perseverance.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 16: 21-27

The Context:

Mt 16: 21-27 is after Peter's profession of faith (16: 13-20) and before the transfiguration (17: 1-8) and is strongly connected with these two events. Jesus asks the twelve to tell him who do people say he is and then wants to know who do the twelve say he is. Peter replies, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16: 16). Jesus not only accepts this profession of faith, but also explicitly says that it is God who has revealed his true identity to Peter. Yet he insists that the disciples must not tell anyone that he is the messiah. Jesus knows well that this title can be misunderstood, and he does not want to run the risk. "From that time" (16: 21) he gradually begins to explain to the twelve what it means to be the messiah; he is the suffering messiah who will enter into his glory through the cross.

The text we are considering is divided into two parts. In the first part (vv. 21-23), Jesus foretells his death and resurrection and shows that he is completely determined to follow God's plan for him in spite of Peter's protestations. In the second part (vv. 24-27), Jesus shows the consequences of recognizing him as the Suffering Messiah for his disciples. No one can be his disciple unless he/she walks the same road.

But Jesus knows well that it is difficult for the twelve to accept his and their cross, and, to reassure them, he gives them a foretaste of his resurrection in his transfiguration (17: 1-8).

The Text:

21-23: From then onwards Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to rebuke him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord,' he said, 'this must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do.'

24-27: Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life? 'For the Son of man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his behavior.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may enter into us and enlighten our life.

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Why does Peter try to deter Jesus from facing the passion?
- Why does Jesus call Peter Satan?
- How do you confront life, with the logic of God and of Jesus or with human logic and that of Peter?
- In your concrete everyday life, what does it mean to lose one's life for the sake of Jesus?
- What are your crosses and who are your Peters?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text

- "Destined to go to Jerusalem..."
The four verbs "go", "suffer", "be put to death" and "be raised" (v. 21) are governed by the word "destined" or "had to." This is a verb, which in the New Testament has a precise theological meaning. It denotes that it is the will of God that something happens because it is part of God's plan of salvation.
The death of Jesus may be seen as the consequence of the "logic" of the attitude he took towards the institutions of his people. Like every uncomfortable prophet he was removed. But the New Testament insists that his death (and resurrection) is part of God's plan, which Jesus accepted freely.
- "You are an obstacle in my path"
Obstacle means hold-up or trap. To be an obstacle means to confront someone with impediments that would divert that person from the way to follow. Peter is an obstacle for Jesus because he tries to swerve from the way of obedience to the will of the Father in order to go an easier way. That is why Jesus compares him to Satan, who at the beginning of his ministry had sought to divert Jesus from the path of his mission, proposing an easy messianic mission (see Mt 4: 1-11).
- "Anyone who loses his life... will find it"
Anyone who understands well the mystery of Jesus and the nature of his mission also understands what it means to be his disciple. The two things are intimately linked.
Jesus himself lays down three conditions for those who wish to be his disciples: renunciation of self, the taking up of one's cross and following him (v.24). To renounce oneself means not to focus one's life on oneself but on God and on the plan of his Reign. This implies an acceptance of adversity and putting up with difficulties. Jesus himself left us his example of how to deal with such circumstances. It suffices to imitate him. He does not compromise his fidelity to the Father and to His Reign, and he remains faithful even to giving his life. It was precisely thus that he came to the fullness of life in the resurrection.

Psalm 40

The Invocation for Help of One who has Remained Faithful to God

I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.
He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord.
Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods!
Thou hast multiplied, O Lord my God,
thy wondrous deeds and thy thoughts toward us; none can compare with thee!
Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be numbered.
Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire; but thou hast given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering thou hast not required. Then I said, "Lo, I come; in the roll
of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my
heart."
I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; lo, I have not
restrained my lips, as thou knowest, O Lord.
I have not hid thy saving help within my heart, I have spoken of thy faithfulness and thy
salvation;
I have not concealed thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness from the great
congregation.
Do not thou, O Lord, withhold thy mercy from me, let thy steadfast love and thy
faithfulness ever preserve me!
For evils have encompassed me without number; my iniquities have overtaken me, till I
cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.
Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me!
Let them be put to shame and confusion altogether who seek to snatch away my life;
let them be turned back and brought to dishonour who desire my hurt!
Let them be appalled because of their shame who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

But may all who seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee; may those who love thy salvation
say continually, "Great is the Lord!"
As for me, I am poor and needy; but the Lord takes thought for me. Thou art my help
and my deliverer; do not tarry, O my God!

Closing Prayer

O God, your ways are not our ways and your thoughts are not our thoughts. In your
plan of salvation there is also room for the cross. Your Son, Jesus, did not retreat before
the cross, but "endured the cross and disregarded the shameful of it" (Heb 12: 2).
The hostility of his enemies could not distract him from his firm intent to fulfil your will
and proclaim the Reign, cost what it may.

Strengthen us, Father, with the gift of your Spirit. May he enable us to follow Jesus resolutely and faithfully. May he make us his imitators in deed and make your Reign the centre of our lives. May he give us strength to bear adversity and difficulties so that true life may blossom in us and in all humankind.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Monday, September 4, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

every good thing comes from you. Fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 4: 16-30

Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening.'

And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?'

But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself," and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own country." 'And he went on, 'In truth I tell you, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. 'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a town in Sidonia.

And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many suffering from virulent skin-diseases in Israel, but none of these was cured—only Naaman the Syrian.' When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him off the cliff, but he passed straight through the crowd and walked away.

Reflection

Today we begin the meditation on the Gospel of Luke, which will extend three months until the end of the liturgical year. Today's Gospel speaks about Jesus' visit to Nazareth and the presentation of his program to the people of the Synagogue. In the first moment the people were admired. But immediately, when they become aware that Jesus wants to accept all, without excluding anyone, people rebel and want to kill him.

- Luke 4: 16-19: The proposal of Jesus. Urged by the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned to Galilee (Lk 4: 14) and begins to announce the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He goes to the community, teaches in the Synagogue, and arrives to Nazareth, where he had grown. He was returning to the community, in which he had participated since he was small, and during thirty years. The following Saturday, as it was the custom, Jesus went to the Synagogue to participate in the celebration, and he stands up to read. He chooses the text of Isaiah which speaks about the poor, of the prisoners, of the blind and the oppressed (Is 61: 1-2). This text is an image of the situation of the people of Galilee at the time of Jesus. The experience which Jesus had of God, the Father of Love, gave him a new look to evaluate the reality. In the name of God, Jesus takes a stand to defend the life of his people, and, with the words of Isaiah, he defines his mission:
 - to announce the Good News to the poor,
 - to proclaim liberty to captives,
 - to give sight to the blind;
 - to release the oppressed, and taking the ancient tradition of the prophets,
 - to proclaim "a year of grace from the Lord". He proclaims the Jubilee Year!
- In the Bible, the "Jubilee Year" was an important Law. Every seven years, at the beginning (Dt 15: 1; Lv 25: 3) it was necessary to restore the land to the clan of origin. All had to be able to return to their own property; and this way they prevented the formation of large estates and families were guaranteed their livelihood. It was also necessary to forgive their debts and to redeem the persons who were slaves. (Dt 15: 1-18). It was not easy to have the Jubilee Year every seven years (cf. Jr 34: 8-16). After the exile, it was decided to have it every fifty years (Lv 25: 8-12). The objective of the Jubilee was and continues to be to re-establish the rights of the poor, to accept the excluded and to re-integrate them into the society to live together with others. The Jubilee was a legal instrument to return to the original sense of the Law of God. This was an occasion offered by God to make a revision of the path being followed, to discover and to correct the errors and to start again from the beginning. Jesus begins his preaching proclaiming a Jubilee "A year of grace from the Lord".
- Luke 4: 20-22: To unite the Bible and Life. Having finished the reading, Jesus updates the text of Isaiah and says: "This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening!" Taking the words of Isaiah as his own, Jesus gives them a full and definitive sense and he declares himself Messiah who comes to fulfil the prophecy. This way of updating the text provokes a reaction of discredit on the part of those who were in the Synagogue. They were scandalized and do not want to know anything about him. They do not accept that Jesus is the Messiah announced by Isaiah. They said: "Is he not the son of Joseph?" They were scandalized because Jesus speaks about accepting the poor, the blind and the oppressed. The people do not accept Jesus' proposal. And, thus when he presents the project of accepting the excluded, he himself is excluded.
- Luke 4: 23-30: To overcome the limits of race. To help the community to overcome the scandal and to help them understand that his proposal formed part of

tradition. Jesus tells two stories known in the Bible, the story of Elijah and the one of Elisha. Both stories criticize the mental closeness of the people of Nazareth. Elijah was sent to the widow of Zarephath (1 K 17: 7-16). Elisha was sent to take care of the foreigner of Syria (2 K 5: 14). Here arises the concern of Luke who wants to show that openness already comes from Jesus. Jesus had the same difficulty which the communities at the time of Luke were having. But the call of Jesus did not calm down people, all the contrary! The stories of Elijah and Elisha produced even greater anger. The community of Nazareth reaches the point of wanting to kill Jesus. But he keeps calm. The anger of others does not succeed in drawing him away from his own path. Luke tells us that it is difficult to overcome the mentality of privilege and of mental closeness.

- It is important to notice the details used in the Old Testament. Jesus quotes the text of Isaiah up to the point where it says: “to proclaim a year of grace from the Lord”. He does not quote the rest of the phrase which says: and a “day of vengeance from our God”. The people of Nazareth throw stones at Jesus because he pretends to be the Messiah, because he wants to accept the excluded and because he has omitted to read the phrase about vengeance. They wanted the day of Yahweh to be a day of vengeance against the oppressors of the people. In this case, the coming of the Kingdom would not have been a true change or conversion of the system. Jesus does not accept this way of thinking; he does not accept vengeance (cf. Mt 5: 44-48) His new experience of God Father/Mother helped him to understand better the sense of the prophecies.

Personal Questions

- The program of Jesus is to accept the excluded. Do we accept everybody, or do we exclude some? Which are the reasons which lead us to exclude certain persons?
- Is the program of Jesus truly our program, my program? Who are the excluded whom we should accept better in our community? Who or what thing gives us the strength to carry out the mission which is entrusted to us by Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

How I love your Law, Lord! I ponder it all day long.

You make me wiser than my enemies by your commandment which is mine for ever.
(Ps 119: 97-78)

Tuesday, September 5, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

every good thing comes from you. Fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 4: 31-37

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath.

And his teaching made a deep impression on them because his word carried authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean devil, and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.'

But Jesus rebuked it, saying, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the devil, throwing the man into the middle, went out of him without hurting him at all.

Astonishment seized them and they were all saying to one another, 'What is it in his words? He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power, and they come out.' And the news of him travelled all through the surrounding countryside.

Reflection

In today's Gospel we can see the facts more closely: the admiration of the people because of the way Jesus taught and the cure of a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit. Not all the Evangelists give this account in the same way. For Luke, the first miracle is the peace with which Jesus liberates himself from the threat of death on the part of the people of Nazareth (Lk 4: 29-30) and the cure of the possessed man (Lk 4: 33-35). For Matthew, the first miracle is the cure of the sick and of the possessed (Mt 4: 23) or, more specifically, the cure of a leper (Mt 8: 1-4). For Mark, the miracle was the expulsion of the devil (Mk 1: 23-26). For John, the first miracle was Cana, where Jesus changed the water into wine (Jn 2: 1-11). Thus, in the way of narrating things, each Evangelist, accordingly, indicates which was the greatest concern of Jesus.

- Luke 4: 31: The change of Jesus toward Capernaum: "Jesus descends to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and on Saturday he taught the people". Matthew says that Jesus went to live in Capernaum (Mt 4: 13). He changed his residence. Capernaum was a small city on the crossroad between two important streets: the one coming from Asia Minor and was leading to Petra on the south of Transjordan, and the other one coming from the region of the two rivers: the Tigris and the Euphrates and descended toward Egypt. The change toward Capernaum facilitated the contact with the people and the diffusion of the Good News.
- Luke 4: 32: Admiration of the people at the teaching of Jesus. The first thing that people perceive is that Jesus teaches in a different way. It is not so much the content that strikes them, but rather his way of teaching: "Jesus speaks with authority". Mark adds that because of his different way of teaching; Jesus created a critical conscience among the people regarding the religious authority of his time. The people perceived and compared: "He teaches with authority, unlike the Scribes" (Mk 1: 22, 27). The Scribes taught quoting authority. Jesus does not quote any authority; rather he speaks starting from his experience of God and of his life.
- Luke 4: 33-35: Jesus fights against the power of evil. The first miracle is the expulsion of the devil. The power of evil took possession of persons, alienating them. Jesus restores the persons to be themselves again, giving them back the consciousness and liberty. He does this thanks to the force of his word: "Be quiet! Come out of him!" And on another occasion, he says: "But if it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out, then the Kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares" (Lk 11: 20). Today, also, many people live alienated from themselves, subjugated by the means of communication, by the propaganda of the government and of business. They live slaves of consumerism, oppressed by debts,

and threatened by creditors. People think that they do not live well if they do not have everything which the propaganda announces. It is not easy to expel this power which today, alienates many people, and return the persons to be themselves again.

- Luke 4: 36-37: The reaction of the people: he gives orders to the unclean spirits. Jesus not only has a diverse way of teaching the things of God, but another aspect which causes admiration in the people is his power over unclean spirits: "What is it in his words? He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power, and they come out". Jesus opens a new path so that the people can place themselves before God to pray and to receive the blessings promised to Abraham. Before, they had to purify themselves. There were many laws and norms which made the life of the people difficult and marginalized many persons who were considered impure. But now, purified by faith in Jesus, persons could once again place themselves before God and pray to him, without the need to have recourse to the complicated norms of purity which were frequently expensive.

Personal Questions

- Jesus causes admiration and astonishment among the people. Does the way of acting of our community cause admiration among the people of the neighborhood? What type of admiration?
- Jesus drives out the power of evil and restores the persons to be themselves again. Today many persons live alienated from everything and from all. How can we help them to recover and be themselves again?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is tenderness and pity, slow to anger, full of faithful love. Yahweh is generous to all, his tenderness embraces all his creatures. (Ps 145: 8-9)

Wednesday, September 6, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

every good thing comes from you. Fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 4: 38-44

Leaving the synagogue Jesus went to Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in the grip of a high fever, and they asked him to do something for her. Standing over her he rebuked the fever and it left her. And she immediately got up and began to serve them.

At sunset all those who had friends suffering from diseases of one kind or another brought them to him, and laying his hands on each he cured them.

Devils too came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God.' But he warned them and would not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ. When daylight came, he left the house and made his way to a lonely place. The crowds went to look for him, and when they had caught up with him, they wanted to prevent him leaving them, but he answered, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do.' And he continued his proclamation in the synagogues of Judaea.

Reflection

The Gospel today narrates four different events: the cure of Peter's mother-in-law (Lk 4: 38- 39), the cure of many sick people at night, after Saturday (Lk 4: 40-41), the prayer of Jesus in a deserted place (Lk 4: 42) and his insistence on the mission (Lk 4: 43-44). With small differences Luke follows and adapts the information taken from the Gospel of Mark.

- Luke 4: 38-39: Jesus restores life for service. After having participated in the celebration of Saturday, in the Synagogue, Jesus goes to Peter's house and cures his mother-in-law. The cure causes her to render service immediately, already standing. Having recovered her health and dignity, she places herself at the service of the people. Jesus not only cures, but he cures in such a way that the person places herself at the service of life.
- Luke 4: 40-41: Jesus accepts and cures the marginalized. At night, when the first stars appear in the sky, after Saturday is over, Jesus accepts and cures the sick and those possessed who the people bring to him. The sick and the possessed were the most marginalized persons at that time. They had no one to whom to go. They were at the mercy of public charity; besides, religion considered them impure. They could not participate in the community. It was as if God rejected and excluded them. Jesus accepts and cures them, placing his hands on each one of them. Thus, it is clear in what the Good News of God consists of and what he wants to do in the life of persons: to accept the marginalized and the excluded and to integrate them into the community, to live with others.
- "Devils came out of many persons shouting: "You are the Son of God!" But he warned them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ". At that time the title Son of God did not have yet the density and depth that it has for us today. Jesus did not allow the devils to speak. He did not want an easy propaganda dictated by spectacular expulsions.
- Luke 4: 42a: To remain united to the Father by means of prayer. "When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place. The crowds went to look for him, and when they had caught up with him they wanted to prevent him from leaving them". Here we see Jesus praying. He has to make an enormous effort to have time available and a place suitable for prayer. He goes to a deserted place to be able to stay alone with God. Many times, the Gospels speak about Jesus' prayer, in silence (Lk 3: 21-22; 4: 1-2, 3-12; 5: 15-16; 6: 12; 9: 18; 10: 21; 5: 16; 9: 18; 11: 1; 9: 28; 23: 34; Mt 14: 22-23; 26: 38; Jn 11: 41-42; 17: 1-26; Mk 1: 35; Lk 3: 21-22). Through prayer, he maintains alive the conscience of his mission.
- Luke 4: 42b-44: To maintain alive the conscience of one's own mission and not think about the result. Jesus becomes known. People follow him and they did not want him to leave them. Jesus does not respond to this petition and says: "I must

proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do". Jesus was very clear about his mission. He does not stop at the result that he has already obtained, but he wishes to maintain very alive the awareness of his mission. It is the mission received from the Father which orientates him when he has to take a decision. I have been sent for this! And here in this text this conscience which is so alive springs as fruit of his prayer.

Personal Questions

- Jesus spent much time in prayer and to be alone with the Father, and he looked for this time. Do I dedicate time for prayer and to be alone with God?
- Jesus had a clear conscience of his mission. And I, a Christian, am I conscious that I have a mission, or do I live without a mission?

Concluding Prayer

We are waiting for Yahweh; he is our help and our shield, for in him our heart rejoices, in his holy name we trust. (Ps 33: 20-21)

Thursday, September 7, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

every good thing comes from you. Fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 5: 1-11

Now it happened that Jesus was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats at the water's edge. The fishermen had got out of them and were washing their nets.

He got into one of the boats - it was Simon's - and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch.' Simon replied, 'Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled both boats to sinking point.

When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man.' For he and all his companions were completely awestruck at the catch they had made;

so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on it is people you will be catching.'

Then, bringing their boats back to land they left everything and followed him.

Reflection

In today's Gospel we have the call of Jesus to Peter. The Gospel of Mark places the call of the first disciples after the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus (Mk 1: 16-20). Luke after that the fame of Jesus was already extended across the whole region (Lk 4: 14). Jesus had cured many people (Lk 4: 40) and had preached in the Synagogues of all the country (Lk 4: 44). The people looked for him and the crowds pushed him on all sides in order to hear the Word of God (Lk 5: 1). Luke makes more understandable the call. In the first place, Peter can listen to the words of Jesus to the people. And then he is a witness of the miraculous catch of fish. It is only after this double surprising experience that he understands the call of Jesus. Peter responds, he abandons everything and becomes a "fisherman of men".

- Luke 5: 1-3: Jesus teaches from the boat. People look for Jesus to listen to the Word of God. Many persons get together around Jesus, they make a throng around him. And Jesus seeks help from Simon Peter and from some of his companions who had just returned from fishing. He goes into the boat with them and responds to the expectation of the people, communicating to them the Word of God. Sitting down, Jesus takes the attitude of a Teacher and speaks from a fisherman's boat. The novelty consists in the fact that he teaches, not only in the Synagogue for a choice public but in any place, where there are people who wish to listen, even on the seashore.
- Luke 5: 4-5: "But if you say so, I will pay out the nets". When he had finished speaking, he addresses himself to Simon and encourages him to fish again. In Simon's response there is frustration, tiredness, and discouragement: "Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing!" But trustful in Jesus' word, they throw in the nets again and continue the struggle. The word of Jesus has greater force for them than the experience of frustration of that night!
- Luke 5: 6-7: The result is surprising. The catch is so abundant that the nets are about to tear, and the boat begins to sink. Simon needs the help of John and of James who are in the other boat. Nobody is complete in himself, alone. One community has to help the other. The conflict among the communities, both at the time of Luke as well as today, should be overcome to attain a common objective, which is the mission. The experience of the force of the word of Jesus which transforms is the axis around which the differences are embraced and overcome.
- Luke 5: 8-11: "Be fishermen of men". The experience of the closeness of God in Jesus makes Peter understand who he is: "Leave me Lord, I am a sinful man!" Before God we are all sinners. Peter and his companions are afraid, and, at the same time, they feel attracted to Jesus. Jesus drives away fear: "Do not be afraid!" He calls Peter and commits him to the mission, ordering him to be a fisherman of men. Peter experiences, quite concretely, that the word of Jesus is like the word of God. It is capable to bring about what it affirms. In Jesus those rough and tough laborers will have an experience of power, of courage, of trust. And so then, "they will abandon everything and follow Jesus!" Up until now it was only Jesus who announced the Good News of the Kingdom. Now other persons will be called and involved in the mission. This way in which Jesus works, in 'equipe', in a team is also Good News for the people.

- The episode of the catch of fish along the lake indicates the attraction and the force of the Word of Jesus. He attracts people (Lk 5: 1). He urges Peter to offer his boat to Jesus to be able to speak (Lk 5: 3). The word of Jesus is so strong that it overcomes the resistance in Peter, it convinces him to throw the nets into the sea again and there is the miraculous catch (Lk 5: 4- 6). It overcomes in him the will to leave Jesus and attracts him to become a “fisherman of men” (Lk 5: 10). This is the way the Word of God acts in us, up until now!

Personal Questions

- Where and how does the miraculous catch of fish take place today; the one which takes place paying attention to the word of Jesus?
- And they leaving everything followed Jesus. What do I have to leave in order to follow Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Who shall go up to the mountain of Yahweh? Who shall take a stand in his holy place?
The clean of hands and pure of heart, who does not swear an oath in order to deceive.
(Ps 24: 3-4)

Friday, September 8, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us

and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us, give us true freedom and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 1: 1-16, 18-23

Roll of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham: Abraham fathered Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers, Judah fathered Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse; and Jesse fathered King David.

David fathered Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife, Solomon fathered Rehoboam, Rehoboam fathered Abijah, Abijah fathered Asa, Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat fathered Joram, Joram fathered Uzziah, Uzziah fathered Jotham, Jotham fathered Ahaz, Ahaz fathered Hezekiah, Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, Manasseh fathered Amon, Amon fathered Josiah; and Josiah fathered Jechoniah and his brothers. Then the deportation to Babylon took place.

After the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah fathered Shealtiel, Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, Abiud fathered Eliakim, Eliakim fathered Azor, Azor fathered Zadok, Zadok fathered Achim, Achim fathered Eliud, Eliud fathered Eleazar, Eleazar fathered Matthan, Matthan fathered Jacob; and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ.

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband

Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally.

He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.'

Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'.

Reflection

Today, September 8th, Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, the Gospel gives us the genealogy or Identity Card of Jesus. By means of the list of his ancestors, the Evangelist tells the communities who Jesus is and how God acts in a surprising way in order to fulfil his promise. On our identity card there is our name and the name of our parents. Some persons, to say who they are, also recall the names of the grandparents. Others, are embarrassed of their ancestors, of their families, and hide behind appearances which deceive. The Identity Card of Jesus has many names. On the list of names there is a great novelty. At that time, the genealogy indicated only the name of the men. This is why, it surprises that Matthew also mentions five women among the ancestors of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah and Mary. Why does he choose precisely these five women and not others? This is the question which the Gospel of Matthew leaves for us.

- Matthew 1: 1-17: The long list of names – the beginning and the end of the genealogy. At the beginning and at the end of the genealogy, Matthew clearly makes us understand which is the identity of Jesus: He is the Messiah, son of David and son of Abraham. As descendant of David, Jesus is the response of God to the expectations of the Jewish people (2 S 7: 12, and 16). As descendant of Abraham, he is source of blessings and of hope for all nations of the earth (Gn 12: 13). Therefore, in this way, both the Jews and the Pagans who formed part of the communities of Syria and of Palestine at the time of Matthew could see that their hope was fulfilled in Jesus. .
- Drawing up the list of the ancestors of Jesus, Matthew adopts a plan of 3 X 14 generations (Mt 1: 17). Number two is the number of the divinity. Number 14 is two times 7, which is the number of perfection. At that time, it was something common to interpret or calculate God's action by using the numbers and the dates. By means of these symbolical calculations, Matthew reveals the presence of God throughout the generations and expresses the conviction of the communities who said that Jesus appeared at the time established by God. With his coming history reaches its fulfilment.

- The message of the five women mentioned in the genealogy. Jesus is the response of God to the expectation both of the Jews and of the Pagans, but it is in a completely surprising way. In the stories of the four women of the Old Testament, mentioned in the genealogy, there is something abnormal. The four of them were foreigners, and they will conceive their sons outside the normal schema of the behaviour of that time and they do not keep the requirements of the laws of purity of the time of Jesus. Tamar, a Canaanite, widow, dresses as a prostitute of Jericho to oblige Judah to be faithful to her and to give her a son (Gn 38: 1-30). Rahab, a prostitute from Jericho, makes an alliance with the Israelites. She helped them to enter into the Promised Land and professed the faith in a God who liberates from the Exodus. (Gs 2: 1-21). Bathsheba, a Hittite, wife of Uriah, was seduced, abused and made pregnant by King David, who in addition to that, ordered her husband to be killed (2 S 11: 1-27). Ruth, a Moabite, a poor widow, chose to remain with Naomi and adhere to the people of God (Rt 1: 16-18). Advised by her mother-in-law Naomi, Ruth imitates Tamar and spends the night together with Boaz, obliging him to observe the law and to give her a son. From their relation Obed was born, the grandfather of King David (Rt 3: 1-15; 4: 13-17). These four women question the models of behavior imposed by the Patriarchal society. And thus, their conventional initiative will give continuity to the descendants of Jesus and will bring salvation to all the people. Through them, God realizes his plan and sends the promised Messiah. Truly, God's way of acting surprises and makes one think! At the end the reader will ask: "And Mary? Is there something irregular in her? What is it? We get the response from the story of Saint Joseph which follows in (Mt 1: 18-23).
- Mathew 1: 18-23: Saint Joseph was just. What was irregular in Mary is that she became pregnant before living together with Joseph, her promised spouse, who was a just man. Jesus says: "If your justice is not greater than the justice of the Pharisees and the Scribes, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven". If Joseph had been just according to the justice of the Pharisees, he should have denounced Mary and she would have been stoned. Jesus would have died. Thanks to the true justice of Joseph, Jesus was able to be born.

Personal Questions

- When I present myself to others, what do I say about myself and about my family?
- If the Evangelist mentions only these five women together with over forty men, no doubt, he wants to communicate a message, which is this message? What does all this tell us about the identity of Jesus? And what does this say about us?

Concluding Prayer

They shall speak of the glory of your kingship and tell of your might, making known your mighty deeds to the children of Adam, the glory and majesty of your kingship. (Ps 145: 10-11)

Saturday, September 9, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

every good thing comes from you. Fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 6: 1-5

It happened that one Sabbath Jesus was walking through the cornfields, and his disciples were picking ears of corn, rubbing them in their hands and eating them.

Some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath day?'

Jesus answered them, 'So you have not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry- how he went into the house of God and took the loaves of the offering and ate them and gave them to his followers, loaves which the priests alone are allowed to eat?'

And he said to them, 'The Son of man is master of the Sabbath.'

Reflection

The Gospel today speaks about the conflict concerning the observance of the Sabbath – Saturday. The observance of the Sabbath was a central law, one of the Ten Commandments. This was a very ancient Law the value of which was stressed after the Exile. During the Exile, the people had to work seven days a week from morning until evening, without any conditions to meet and meditate on the Word of God, to pray together and to share faith, their problems, and their hopes. Therefore, there was an urgent need to stop at least one day a week to get together and encourage one another during the very difficult situation of the exile. Otherwise, they would have lost their faith. It was then that faith was reborn, and the observance of Saturday was re-established.

- Luke 6: 1-2: The cause of the conflict. On Saturday the disciples were walking across the cornfields, and they were picking ears of corn. Matthew 12, 1 says that they were hungry (Mt 12: 1). The Pharisees invoke the Bible to say it was a transgression of the Law of Saturday: Why do you do this which is not permitted to do on Saturday?" (cf. Ex 20: 8-11).
- Luke 6: 3-4: The response of Jesus. Immediately Jesus responds recalling that David himself also did things which were prohibited, because he took the sacred bread from the Temple and gave it to the soldiers to eat because they were hungry (I S 21: 2-7). Jesus knew the Bible and referred to it to show that the arguments of others had no foundation. In Matthew, the response of Jesus is more complete. He not only recalls the story of David, but also quotes the Legislation which permits the priests to work on Saturday and he quotes Prophet Hosea: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice". He quotes a Biblical text or a historical text, a legislative text and a prophetic text (cf. Mt 12: 1-18). At that time there was no printed Bible as we have it today. In each community there was only one Bible, hand written, which remained in the Synagogue. If Jesus knew the Bible so well, it means that in the 30 years of his life in Nazareth he participated intensely in the life of the community, where every Saturday the Scriptures were read. We still lack very much to have the same familiarity with the Bible and the same participation in the community.

- Luke 6: 5: The conclusion for all of us. And Jesus ends with the following phrase: The Son of Man is Master of the Sabbath! The Lord of Saturday! Jesus, Son of Man, who lives in intimacy with God, discovers the sense of the Bible not from outside, from without, but from inside, that is, discovers the sense starting at the roots, beginning from his intimacy with the author of the Bible who is God himself. Because of this, he calls himself Master of Saturday. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus revitalizes the law of Saturday saying: "Saturday was instituted for man and not man for Saturday".

Personal Questions

- How do you spend Sunday, which is our "Sabbath"? Do you go to Mass because it is an obligation, in order to avoid sin or to be with God?
- Jesus knew the Bible almost by heart. What does the Bible represent for me?

Concluding Prayer

My mouth shall always praise Yahweh, let every creature bless his holy name for ever and ever. (Ps 145: 21)

Sunday, September 10, 2023

23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that you read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of your sentence and death. Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection.

Create in us silence so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples from Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice, and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 18: 15-20

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Matthew 18: 15-16: Correcting the brother or sister and re-establishing unity
- Matthew 18: 17: Those who do not listen to the community cut themselves off
- Matthew 18: 18: Decisions made on earth are accepted in heaven
- Matthew 18: 19: Prayer in common for those who leave the community
- Matthew 18: 20: Jesus' presence within the community

A Key to the Reading

- Matthew's Gospel organizes the words of Jesus into five great Sermons or Discourses. This shows that at the end of the first century, the time of the final edition of Matthew's Gospel, the Christian communities had already taken on concrete forms of catechesis. The five Discourses were five great markers showing the way on the journey. They offered concrete criteria to teach people and help them solve problems. The Sermon on the Community (Mt 18: 1-35), for instance, gives instructions as to how the members of the community should live together so that the community may be a revelation of the Kingdom of God.
- On this 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, we shall read and meditate on the second part of the Sermon on the Community and we shall see closely two aspects: fraternal correction, that is how to proceed in case of conflict among the members of the community (18: 15-18), and prayer in common: how to take care of those who have left the community (18: 19-20).

The Text:

15 'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. 16 If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: whatever the misdemeanor, the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain the charge. 17 But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a gentile or a tax collector. 18 'In truth I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 'In truth I tell you once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life.

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which part of the text struck you most? Why?
- What advice does Jesus give us to help people solve the problems of the community and reconcile the members among themselves?
- What is the basic requirement that comes out of Jesus' advice?
- In Mt 16: 19, the power to forgive is given to Peter; in Jn 20: 23, this same power is given to the apostles. Here, the power to forgive is given to the community. How does our community use this power to forgive given to us by Jesus?
- Jesus said: "Where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them". What does this mean for us today?

To Go Deeper into the Text

The Context of Our Text in Matthew's Gospel:

In organizing the words of Jesus into five great sermons or discourses, Matthew's Gospel imitates the five books of the Pentateuch and presents the Good News of the Kingdom as a New Law. This Sunday's liturgy challenges us with the New Law that teaches fraternal correction within the community and our attitude towards those who exclude themselves from the community.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Matthew 18: 15-16: Correcting the brother and sister and rebuilding unity.
Jesus gives simple and concrete norms to tell us how to proceed in case of conflict in the community. If a brother or sister sins, that is, behaves contrary to the life of the community, you must not denounce him/her publicly before the community. First you must speak to him/her alone. Try to find out why he/she acted in that way. If you get no result, then call two or three members of the community to see whether you can get some result.
Matthew writes his Gospel in around the 80's or 90's, almost at the end of the first century, for the community of converted Jews coming from Galilee and Syria. If he recalls so insistently these words of Jesus, it is because, in fact, in those communities there were great divisions concerning the acceptance of Jesus Messiah. Many families were divided and persecuted by their own parents who did not accept Jesus as Messiah (Mt 10: 21, 35-36).
- Matthew 18:17: Anyone who does not listen to the community cuts him/herself off
In extreme cases and after trying everything possible, the reticent brother or sister has to be brought before the community. And if that person will not listen to the advice of the community, then he or she has to be considered "as a publican or pagan", that is as a person not belonging to the community and who much less wishes to be part of the community. Thus you are not excluding anyone, but the person him/herself is excluding him/herself from the common life of the community.
- Matthew 18: 18: Decisions made on earth are accepted in heaven
In Mt 16: 19, the power to forgive is given to Peter, in Jn 20: 23, this same power is given to the apostles. Now, in this text, the power to forgive is given to the community: "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven". Here we see the importance of reconciliation and the enormous responsibility of the community in dealing with its members. The community does not excommunicate the person, but simply ratifies the exclusion that the person had already assumed publicly by leaving the community.
- Matthew 18: 19: Prayer in common for the brother or sister who has left the community
This exclusion does not mean that the person is abandoned to his or her fate. Rather, he or she may be separated from the community, but will not be separated from God. Thus, if talking to the community has not borne results and if the person no longer wishes to be part of the life of the community, we still have the obligation to pray together to the Father to achieve reconciliation. And Jesus guarantees that the Father will listen.
- Matthew 18: 20: Jesus' presence within the community
The reason for the certainty of being heard is Jesus' promise: "Where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them!" Jesus says that he is the center, the axle of the community and, as such, prays to the Father together with the

community that he may grant the gift of the return of the brother or sister who has left.

A Deepening:

The Community as Alternative Space of Solidarity and Fraternity:

Today's neo-liberal society, marked by consumerism, is hard and heartless. It does not welcome the poor, the little ones, strangers, and refugees. Money has no place for mercy. The society of the Roman Empire also was hard and heartless, with no room for the little ones. They sought a refuge for their hearts but found none. The synagogues too were demanding and did not offer them a place of rest. In the Christian communities, there were those who wished to introduce the rigor of the Pharisees in the observance of the Law. They brought into the fraternity the same unjust criteria of society and the synagogue. Thus, within the communities there arose the same divisions as those in society and the synagogue between Jew and non-Jew, rich and poor, rulers and ruled, word and silence, man and woman, race and religion. And instead of making the community a place of welcome, it became a place of judgement. Recalling the words of Jesus in the Discourse on the Community, Matthew wants to shed light on the journey of the Christian so that the community may be an alternative space of solidarity and fraternity. It must be Good News for the poor.

Excommunication and Exclusion from Fraternal Life:

Jesus does not wish to add to the exclusion. Rather, he wishes to promote inclusion. He did this all his life: He welcomed and reintegrated people who, in the name of a false idea of God, were excluded from the community. But he could not prevent that a person who disagreed with the Good News of the Kingdom would refuse to belong to the community and exclude him/herself from the community. This is what some Pharisees and doctors of the law did. Even then, the community must behave like the Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. It must hold the brother or sister in its heart and pray for him/her so that he/she may change his/her mind and come back to the community.

Prayer: Psalm 32

Free Admission of Sin

How blessed are those whose offence is forgiven, whose sin blotted out.

How blessed are those to whom Yahweh imputes no guilt, whose spirit harbours no deceit.

I said not a word, but my bones wasted away from groaning all the day; day and night your hand lay heavy upon me; my heart grew parched as stubble in summer drought. I made my sin known to you, did not conceal my guilt.

I said, 'I shall confess my offence to Yahweh.' And you, for your part, took away my guilt, forgave my sin. That is why each of your faithful ones prays to you in time of distress.

Even if great floods overflow, they will never reach your faithful. You are a refuge for me, you guard me in trouble, with songs of deliverance you surround me.

I shall instruct you and teach you the way to go; I shall not take my eyes off you. Be not like a horse or a mule; that does not understand bridle or bit; if you advance to master them, there is no means of bringing them near.

Countless troubles are in store for the wicked, but one who trusts in Yahweh is enfolded in his faithful love. Rejoice in Yahweh, exult all you upright, shout for joy, you honest of heart.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Monday, September 11, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us

and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us, give us true freedom and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 6: 6-11

On a Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach, and a man was present, and his right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees were watching him to see if he would cure somebody on the Sabbath, hoping to find something to charge him with. But he knew their thoughts; and he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and stand out in the middle!'

And he came forward and stood there.

Then Jesus said to them, 'I put it to you: is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to destroy it?' Then he looked round at them all and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He did so, and his hand was restored.

But they were furious and began to discuss the best way of dealing with Jesus.

Reflection

- Context: This passage presents Jesus who cures a man with a withered hand. Different from the context of chapters 3 and 4 in which Jesus is alone, now here he is surrounded by his disciples and the women who go around with him. Therefore, here we have Jesus always moving. In the first stages of this journey the reader finds different ways of listening to the Word of Jesus on the part of those who follow him and which, definitively, it could be summarized in two experiences, which recall, in turn, two types of approaches: that of Peter (5,1-11) and that of the centurion (7,1-10). The first one encounters Jesus who invites him after the

miraculous catch to become a fisherman of men; then he falls on his knees before Jesus: «Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man” (5, 8). The second one does not have any direct communication with Jesus: he has heard people speak very well about Jesus and he sends his envoys to ask for the cure of one of his servants who is dying; he is asking for something not for himself, but for a person who was a favorite of his. The figure of Peter expresses the attitude of the one who, discovering himself a sinner, places all his acts under the influence of the Word of Jesus. The centurion, showing solicitude for the servant, learns to listen to God. Well, between these itineraries or attitudes which characterize the itinerant journey of Jesus, is placed the cure of the man who presents the withered hand. This event of the miracle takes place in a context of debate or controversy: the ears of corn picked on the Sabbath and on the act of curing on a Saturday, precisely the withered hand. Between the two discussions there is the crucial role played by the Word of Jesus: “The Son of man is master of the Sabbath” (6, 5). Continuing with this passage we ask ourselves which is the sense of this withered hand? It is a symbol of the salvation of man who is taken back to the original moment, that of creation. The right hand, then, expresses human acting. Jesus then, gives back to this day of the week, Saturday, the deepest significance: it is the day of joy, of the restoration and not of limitation. What Jesus shows is the Messianic Saturday and not the legalistic one: the cures that he does are signs of the Messianic times, of restoration, of the liberation of man.

- The dynamic of the miracle. Luke places before Jesus a man who has a withered hand, dry, paralyzed. Nobody is interested in asking for his cure and much less the one concerned. And just the same, the sickness was not only an individual problem, but its effects have repercussion on the whole community. But in our account, we do not have so much the problem of the sickness as that of the aspect that it was done on Saturday. Jesus is criticized because he cured on Saturday. The difference with the Pharisees is in the fact that they on Saturday do not act based on the commandment of love which is the essence of the Law. Jesus, after having ordered man to get in the middle of the assembly, formulates a decisive question: “Is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil?” The space for the answer is restricted: to cure or not to cure, or rather, to cure or to destroy (v.9). Let us imagine the difficulty of the Pharisees: it is excluded that evil can be done on Saturday or lead man to damnation, and even less to cure because help was permitted only in case of extreme need. The Pharisees feel provoked, and this causes aggressiveness in them. But it is evident that the intention of Jesus in curing on Saturday is for the good of man and in the first place, for the one who is sick. This motivation of love invites us to reflect on our behavior and to found it on that of Jesus who saves. Jesus is not only attentive to cure the sick person but is interested also in the cure of his enemies: to cure them from their distorted attitude in their observance of the Law; to observe Saturday without freeing their neighbor from their misery and sickness is not in accordance with the will of God. According to the Evangelist, the function of Saturday is to do good, to save, like Jesus has done during his earthly life.

Personal Questions

- Do you feel involved in the words of Jesus: how do you commit yourself in your service to life? Do you know how to create the necessary conditions so that others may live better?
- Do you know how to place at the center of your attention and of your commitment every person and all their requirements?

Concluding Prayer

Joy for all who take refuge in you, endless songs of gladness!

You shelter them, they rejoice in you, those who love your name. (Ps 5: 11)

Tuesday, September 12, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us

and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us, give us true freedom and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 6: 12-19

Now it happened in those days that Jesus went onto the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them; he called them 'apostles': Simon whom he called Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

He then came down with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples, with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases.

People tormented by unclean spirits were also cured, and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him because power came out of him that cured them all.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents two facts: the choice of the twelve apostles (Lk 6: 12-16) and the enormous crowds who want to meet Jesus (Lk 6: 17-19). The Gospel today invites us to reflect on the Twelve who were chosen to live with Jesus, being apostles. The first Christians remembered and registered the name of these twelve and of some other men and women, who followed Jesus and who, after His Resurrection, began to create the communities for the world outside. Today, also, all remember some catechists or persons, significant for their own Christian formation.

- Luke 6: 12-13: The choice of the 12 apostles. Before choosing the twelve apostles definitively, Jesus spent a whole night in prayer. He prays in order to know whom to choose and then chooses the Twelve, whose names are in the Gospels, and they will receive the name of apostles. Apostle means sent, missionary. They were called to carry out a mission, the same mission that Jesus received from the Father (Jn 20: 21). Mark is more concrete and says that God called them to be with him and he sends them on mission (Mk 3: 14).

- Luke 6: 14-16: The names of the 12 Apostles. With small differences the names of the Twelve are the same in the Gospels of Matthew (Mt 10: 2-4), Mark (Mk 3: 16-19) and Luke (Lk 6: 14- 16). The majority of these names come from the Old Testament. For example, Simeon is the name of one of the sons of the Patriarch Jacob (Gn 29: 33). James (Giacomo) is the same name of Jacob (Gn 25: 26), Judah is the name of the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Matthew also had the name of Levi (Mk 2: 14), the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23) Of the twelve apostles, seven have a name that comes from the time of the Patriarchs: two times Simon, two times, James, two times Judah, and one time Levi! That reveals the wisdom and the pedagogy of the people. Through the names of the Patriarchs and the matriarchs, which were given to the sons and daughters, people maintained alive the tradition of the ancestors and helped their own children not to lose their identity. Which are the names which we give our children today?
- Luke 6: 17-19: Jesus goes down from the mountain and people are looking for him. Coming down from the mountain with the twelve, Jesus finds an immense crowd of people who were trying to hear his words and to touch him, because people knew that from him came out a force of life. In this crowd there were Jews and foreigners, people from Judaea and from Tyre and Sidon. These were people abandoned, disoriented. Jesus accepts all those who look for him Jews and Pagans! This is one of the themes preferred by Luke!
- These twelve persons, called by Jesus to form the first community, were not saints. They were common persons, like all of us. They had their virtues and their defects. The Gospels tell us very little on the temperament and the character of each one of them. But what they say, even if not much is for us a reason for consolation.
 - Peter was a generous person and full of enthusiasm (Mk 14: 29.31; Mt 14: 28-29), but at the moment of danger and of taking a decision, his heart becomes small and cannot go ahead (Mt 14: 30; Mk 14: 66-72). He was even Satan for Jesus (Mk 8: 33). Jesus calls him Rock (Peter). Peter of himself was not '*Pietra*' - Rock, he becomes Rock (*Pietra*) because Jesus prays for him (Lc 22: 31-32).
 - James and John are ready to suffer with and for Jesus (Mk 10: 39), but they were very violent (Lk 9: 54), Jesus calls them "sons of thunder" (Mk 3: 17). John seemed to have some sort of envy. He wanted Jesus only for his group (Mk 9: 38).
 - Philip had a nice welcoming way. He knew how to put others in contact with Jesus (Jn 1: 45- 46), but he was not too practical in solving the problems (Jn 12: 20-22; 6: 7). Sometimes he was very naïve. There was a moment when Jesus lost his patience with him: Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? (Jn 14: 8-9).
 - Andrew, the brother of Peter and friend of Philip, he was more practical. Philip goes to him to solve the problems (Jn 12: 21-22). Andrew calls Peter (Jn 1: 40-41), and Andrew found the boy who had five loaves of bread and two fish (Jn 6: 8-9).
 - Bartholomew seems to be the same as Nathanael. This one was from there and could not admit that anything good could come from Nazareth (Jn 1: 46).
 - Thomas was capable of sustaining his own opinion, for a whole week, against the witness of all the others (Jn 20: 24-25). But when he saw that he was mistaken, he was not afraid to acknowledge his error (Jn 20: 26-28). He was

generous, ready to die with Jesus (Jn 11: 16).

- Matthew or Levi was a Publican, a tax collector, like Zaccheus (Mt 9: 9; Lk 19: 2). They were persons who held to the system of oppression of that time.
- Simon, instead, seems that he belonged to the movement which radically opposed the system which the Roman Empire imposed on the Jewish people. This is why he was also called Zealot (Lk 6: 15). The group of the Zealots even succeeded to bring about an armed revolt against the Romans.
- Judah was the one who was in charge of the money in the group (Jn 13: 29). He betrayed Jesus.
- James, son of Alphaeus and Judas Taddeus. The Gospels say nothing of these two, they only mention their name.

Personal Questions

- Jesus spends the whole night in prayer to know whom to choose, and then he chooses those twelve. Which conclusions can you draw?
- Do you recall the persons who began the community to which you belong? What do you remember about them: the content of what they taught or the witness they gave?

Concluding Prayer

They shall dance in praise of his name, play to him on tambourines and harp! For Yahweh loves his people, he will crown the humble with salvation. (Ps 149: 3-4)

Wednesday, September 13, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us

and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us, give us true freedom and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 6: 20-26

Then fixing his eyes on his disciples Jesus said: How blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours.

Blessed are you who are hungry now: you shall have your fill. Blessed are you who are weeping now: you shall laugh.

'Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of man.

Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, look!-your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets.

But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now.

Alas for you who have plenty to eat now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who are laughing now: you shall mourn and weep.

'Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents four blessings and four curses in Luke's Gospel. There is a progressive revelation in the way in which Luke presents the teaching of Jesus. Up to 6: 16, he says many times, that Jesus taught the people, but he did not describe the content of the teaching (Lk 4: 15, 31-32, 44; 5: 1, 3, 15, 17; 6: 6). Now, after having said that Jesus sees the crowd desirous to hear the Word of God, Luke presents the first great discourse which begins with the exclamation: "Blessed are you who are poor!" And "Alas for you, rich!" and then takes up all the rest of the chapter (Lk 6: 12-49). Some call this Discourse the "Discourse of the Plain" because, according to Luke, Jesus came down from the mountain and stopped in a place which was plain and there he pronounced his discourse. In Matthew's Gospel, this same discourse is given on the mountain (Mt 5: 1) and is called "The Sermon on the Mountain". In Matthew, in this discourse there are eight Beatitudes, which trace a program of life for the Christian communities of Jewish origin. In Luke, the sermon is shorter and more radical. It contains only four Beatitudes and four curses, directed to the Hellenistic communities, formed by rich and poor. This discourse of Jesus will be meditated on in the daily Gospel of the next days.

- Luke 6: 20: Blessed are you, poor! Looking at the disciples, Jesus declares: "Blessed are you who are poor, the Kingdom of Heaven is yours!" This declaration identifies the social category of the disciples. They are poor! And Jesus promises to them: "The Kingdom is yours!" It is not a promise made for the future. The verb is in the present. The Kingdom belongs to them already. They are blessed now. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes explicit the sense of this and says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit!" (Mt 5: 3). They are the poor who have the Spirit of Jesus; because there are some poor who have the mentality of the rich. The disciples of Jesus are poor and have the mentality of the poor. Like Jesus, they do not want to accumulate, but they assume their poverty and with him, they struggle for a more just life together, where there will be fraternity and sharing of goods, without any discrimination.
- Luke 6: 21-22: Blessed are you, who now hunger and weep. In the second and third Beatitude, Jesus says: "Blessed are who are hungry now, because you shall have your fill! Blessed are you, who are weeping now, you shall laugh!" One part of the phrase is in the present and the other in the future. What we live and suffer now is not definitive; what is definitive is the Kingdom of God which we are constructing with the force of the Spirit of Jesus. To construct the Kingdom presupposes pain, suffering and persecution, but something is certain: the Kingdom will be attained, and you will have your fill and you will laugh!"
- Luke 6: 23: Blessed are you when people hate you...! The 4th Beatitude refers to the future: "Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out on account of the Son of Man!" Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, look, your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way your ancestors treated the prophets!" With these words of Jesus, Luke encourages the communities of his time, because they were

persecuted. Suffering is not death rattle, but the pain of birth pangs. It is a source of hope! Persecution was a sign that the future that had been announced by Jesus was arriving, being reached. The communities were following the right path.

- Luke 6: 24-25: Alas for you who are rich! Alas for you who now have your fill and who laugh! After the four Beatitudes in favor of the poor and of the excluded, follow four threats or curses against the rich and those for whom everything goes well and are praised by everybody. The four threats have the same identical literary form as the four Beatitudes. The first one is expressed in the present. The second and the third one have a part in the present and another part in the future. And the fourth one refers completely to the future. These threats are found only in Luke's Gospel and not in that of Matthew. Luke is more radical in denouncing injustices.
- Before Jesus, on the plains there are no rich people. There are only sick and poor people, who have come from all parts (Lk 6: 17-19). But Jesus says: "Alas for you the rich!" And this because Luke, in transmitting these words of Jesus, is thinking more of the communities of his time. In those communities there are rich and poor people, and there is discrimination of the poor on the part of the rich, the same discrimination which marked the structure of the Roman Empire (cf. Jm 5: 1-6; Rv 3: 17-19). Jesus criticizes the rich very hard and directly: You rich have already received consolation! You are already filled, but you are still hungry! Now you are laughing, but you will be afflicted and will weep! This is a sign that for Jesus poverty is not something fatal, nor the fruit of prejudices, but it is the fruit of unjust enrichment on the part of others.
- Luke 6: 26: Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you, because this was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets! This fourth threat refers to the sons of those who in the past praised the false prophets; because some authority of the Jews used its prestige and authority to criticize Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Do we look at life and at persons with the same look of Jesus? What do you think in your heart: is a poor and hungry person truly happy? The stories which we see on Television and the propaganda of the market, what ideal of happiness do they present?
- In saying: "Blessed are the poor", did Jesus want to say that the poor have to continue to be poor?

Concluding Prayer

Upright in all that he does, Yahweh acts only in faithful love.

He is close to all who call upon him, all who call on him from the heart. (Ps 145: 17-18)

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Opening Prayer

Oh Father who wanted to save man by the Cross of Christ, your Son, grant to us who have known on earth his mystery of love, to enjoy in Heaven the fruits of his redemption. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Lectio

Gospel Reading – John 3: 13-17

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man; as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.

Meditatio

Key for the Reading:

The text proposed to us by the Liturgy has been taken from the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. It should not surprise us that the passage chosen for this celebration forms part of the fourth Gospel, because it is precisely this Gospel which presents the mystery of the cross of the Lord, as the exaltation. This is clear from the beginning of the Gospel: "as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up" (Jn 3: 14; Dn 7: 13). John explains the mystery of the Incarnate Word in the paradoxical movement of the descent-ascent (Jn 1: 14, 18; 3: 13). In fact, it is this mystery which offers the key for the reading in order to understand the evolution of the identity and of the mission of the *passus et gloriosus* (suffering and glorious) of Jesus Christ, and that we may well say that this is not only valid for the text of John. The Letter to the Ephesians, for example, uses this paradoxical movement to explain the mystery of Christ: "Now, when it says, 'he went up', it must mean that he had gone down to the deepest levels of the earth" (Ef 4: 9).

Jesus is the Son of God who becoming Son of man (Jn 3: 13) makes known to us the mysteries of God (Jn 1: 18). He alone can do this, in so far as he alone has seen the Father (Jn 6: 46). We can say that the mystery of the Word who descends from Heaven responds to the yearning of the prophets: who will go up to heaven to reveal this mystery to us? (cf. Dt 30: 12; Pr 30: 4). The fourth Gospel is over full of references to the mystery of he who "is from Heaven" (1 Co 15: 47). The following are some quotations or references: Jn 6: 33, 38, 51, 62; 8: 42; 16: 28-30; 17: 5.

The exaltation of Jesus is precisely in his descent to come to us, up to death, and the death on the Cross, on which he was lifted up like the serpent in the desert, which, "anybody... who looked at it would survive" (Nm 21: 7-9; Zc 12: 10). John reminds us in the scene of the death of Jesus of Christ being lifted up: "They will look to the one whom they have pierced" (Jn 19, 37). In the context of the fourth Gospel, to turn and look means, "to know", "to understand", "to see".

Frequently, in John's Gospel, Jesus speaks about his being lifted up: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He" (Jn 8: 28); "when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all peoples to myself. By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die" (Jn 12: 32-33). In the Synoptics also Jesus announces to his disciples the mystery of his condemnation to death on the cross (see Mt 20: 27-29; Mk 10: 32-34; Lk 18: 31-33). In fact, Christ had "to suffer all that to enter into his glory" (Lk 24: 26).

This mystery reveals the great love which God has for us. He is the Son given to us, "so that anyone who believes in him will not be lost, but will have eternal life", this Son whom we have rejected and crucified. But precisely in this rejection on our part, God

has manifested himself to us his fidelity and his love which does not stop before the hardness of our heart. And even in spite of our rejection and our contempt he gives us salvation (cf. Acts 4: 27-28), remaining firm in fulfilling his plan of mercy: God, in fact, has not sent his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world may be saved through him”.

A Few Questions:

- What struck you in the Gospel?
- What does the exaltation of Christ and of his cross mean for you?
- What consequences does this paradoxical movement of descent-ascent imply in the living out of faith?

Oratio

Psalm 77 (1-2, 34-38)

My people, listen to my teaching, pay attention to what I say.

I will speak to you in poetry, unfold the mysteries of the past.

Whenever he slaughtered them, they began to seek him, they turned back and looked eagerly for him, recalling that God was their rock, God the Most High, their redeemer.

They tried to hoodwink him with their mouths, their tongues were deceitful towards him; their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant.

But in his compassion, he forgave their guilt instead of killing them, time and again repressing his anger instead of rousing his full wrath.

Contemplatio

"Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2: 11)

Friday, September 15, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

our creator and guide, may we serve you with all our hearts and know your forgiveness in our lives.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - John 19: 25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.

Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

Reflection

Today, feast of Our Sorrowful Mother, the Gospel of the day presents the passage in which Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple, meet at Calvary before the Cross. The Mother of Jesus appears two times in the Gospel of John: at the beginning at the wedding feast in Cana (Jn 2: 1-5), and at the end, at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19: 25-27). These two episodes, only present in John's Gospel, have a very profound value. The Gospel of John compared to the other three Gospels, is like an X-Ray of the other three, while the other three are only a photograph of what has taken place. The X rays of faith help to discover in the events dimensions which the human eye does not succeed to perceive. The Gospel of John, besides describing the facts, reveals the symbolical dimension which exists in them. Thus, in both cases, at Cana and at the foot of the Cross, the Mother of Jesus represents symbolically the Old Testament waiting for the New Testament to arrive, and in the two cases, she contributes to the arrival of the New Testament. Mary appears like the step between what existed before and that which will arrive afterwards. At Cana she symbolizes the Old Testament; she perceives the limits of the Old Testament and takes the initiative so that the New one arrives. She tells her Son: "They have no wine!" (Jn 2: 3). And in Calvary? Let us see:

- John 19: 25: The women and the Beloved Disciple, together at the foot of the Cross. This is what the Gospel says: "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala". The "photograph" shows the mother together with the Son, standing up. A strong woman, who does not allow herself to be discouraged. "Stabat Mater Dolorosa!" Hers is a silent presence which supports the Son in his gift of self up until death, and the death on the cross (Ph 2: 8). But the "X-Ray" of faith shows how the passage from the Old Testament to the New Testament takes place. Like it happened in Cana, the Mother of Jesus represents the Old Testament, the new humanity which is formed beginning from the lived experience of the Gospel of the Kingdom. At the end of the first century, some Christians thought that the Old Testament was no longer necessary. In fact, at the beginning of the second century, Marciones rejected all the Old Testament and remained with only a part of the New Testament. This is why many wanted to know which was the will of Jesus regarding this.
- John 19: 26-28: The Testament or the Will of Jesus. The words of Jesus are significant. Seeing his Mother, and at her side the beloved Disciple, Jesus says: "Woman, this is your son". Then he says to the disciple: "This is your mother". The Old and the New Testament must walk together. The request of Jesus, the beloved Disciple, the son, the New Testament, receives the mother in his house. In the house of the Beloved Disciple, in the Christian community, the full sense of the Old Testament is discovered. The New Testament cannot be understood without the Old one, neither is the Old one complete without the New one. Saint Agustin said: "Novum in vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet". (The New one is hidden in the Old one. The Old one blooms in the New one). The New one without the Old one would be a building without a foundation. And the Old one without the New one would be like a fruit tree which could not bear fruit.
- Mary in the New Testament. The New Testament speaks very little about Mary and she says even less. Mary is the Mother of silence. The Bible only keeps seven words of Mary. Each one of those is like a window which allows one to see inside Mary's

house and to discover how her relationship with God was. The key to understand all this is given by Luke: "Blessed are those who receive the word of God and put it into practice" (Lk 11: 27-28).

- 1st Word: "How can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?" (Lk 1: 34).
- 2nd Word: "You see before you the Lord's servant; let it happen to me as you have said". (Lk 1: 38).
- 3rd Word: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour (Lk 1: 46-55).
- 4th Word: "My child why have you done this to us? Your father and I were worried looking for you" (Lk 2: 48).
- 5th Word: "They have no wine!" (Jn 2: 3.)
- 6th Word: "Do whatever he tells you!" (Jn 2: 5).
- 7th Word: The silence at the foot of the Cross, more eloquent than one thousand words! (Jn 19: 25-27).

Personal Questions

- Mary at the foot of the Cross. A strong and silent woman. How is my devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus?
- In the Pieta of Michelangelo, Mary seems to be very young, younger than the crucified Son, and she must have been about fifty years old. Asked why he had sculptured the face of Mary as a young girl, Michelangelo replied: the persons who are passionate for God never age!" Passionate for God! Is that passion for God in me?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, what quantities of good things you have in store for those who fear you, and bestow on those who make you their refuge, for all humanity to see. Safe in your presence you hide them, far from human plotting. (Ps 31: 19-20)

Saturday, September 16, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us, give us true freedom and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 6: 43-49

Jesus said to his disciples: 'There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. Every tree can be told by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns, nor gather grapes from brambles.

Good people draw what is good from the store of goodness in their hearts; bad people draw what is bad from the store of badness. For the words of the mouth flow out of what fills the heart. 'Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord" and not do what I say?

'Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and acts on them—I will show you what such a person is like. Such a person is like the man who, when he built a house, dug, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on rock; when the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well built. But someone who listens and does nothing is like the man who built a house on soil, with no foundations; as soon as the river bore down on it, it collapsed; and what a ruin that house became!'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we have the last part of the Discourse of the Plains that is, the version which Luke presents in the Sermon on the Mountain of the Gospel of Matthew. And Luke puts together what follows:

- Luke 6: 43-45: The parable of the tree that bears good fruit. "There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. Every tree can be known by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns or gather grapes from brambles". The letter of James the Apostle serves as a comment to this parable of Jesus: "Does any water supply give a flow of fresh water and salt water out of the same pipe? Can a fig tree yield olives, my brothers, or a vine yield figs? No more can sea water yield fresh water" (James 3: 11-12). A person who is well formed in the tradition of living together in community develops within self a good nature which leads him/her to do good. "The good of the treasure of his/her heart is brought out", but the person who does not pay attention to his/her formation will have difficulty in producing good deeds. Rather, "from his/her evil treasure evil will come out evil, because the mouth speaks of the fullness of the heart". Concerning the "good treasure of the heart" it is worthwhile to remember what the Book of Ecclesiasticus' says on the heart, the source of good counsel: "Stick to the advice your own heart gives you, no one can be truer to you than that; since a person's soul often gives a clearer warning than seven watchmen perched on a watchtower. And besides all this beg the Most High to guide your steps into the truth" (Si 37: 13-15).
- Luke 6: 46: It is not sufficient to say, Lord, Lord. What is important is not to say beautiful things about God, but rather to do the will of the Father and in this way be a revelation of his face and of his presence in the world.
- Luke 6: 47-49: To construct the house on rock. To listen and to put into practice, this is the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mountain. Many people sought security and religious power in the extraordinary heads (gifts) or in the observance. But true security does not come from power; it does not come from any of those things. It comes from God! And God becomes the source of security, when we seek to do his will. And in this way he will be the rock which will support us, in the difficult hours and in the storms.
- God is the rock of our life. In the Book of Psalms, we frequently find the expression: "God is my rock, my fortress... My God, my Rock, my refuge, my shield, the force which saves me..." (Ps 18: 3). He is the defence and the force of those who believe in him and who seek justice (Ps 18: 21-24). The persons, who trust in this God, become,

in turn, a rock for others. Thus, the prophet Isaiah invites the people who were in exile: "Listen to me, you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh. Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father and Sarah who gave you birth" (Is 51: 1- 2). The prophet asks the people not to forget the past and to remember Abraham and Sarah who because of their faith in God became a rock, the beginning of the People of God. Looking toward this rock, the people should draw courage to fight and get out of the exile. And thus Matthew exhorts the communities to have as an incentive or encouragement this same rock (Mt 7: 24-25) and in this way be themselves rocks to strengthen their brothers in the faith. This is also the significance which Jesus gives to Peter: "You are Peter and on this Rock I will build my Church" (Mt 16: 18). This is the vocation of the first communities called to unite themselves to Jesus, the living Rock, so as to become themselves living rocks, listening and putting into practice the Word (P 2: 4-10; 2: 5; Ep 2: 19-22).

Personal Questions

- Which is the quality of my heart?
- Is my house built on rock?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, you created my inmost self, knit me together in my mother's womb.

For so many marvels I thank you; a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders. (Ps 139: 13-14)

Sunday, September 17, 2023

24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that you read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of your sentence and death. Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection.

Create in us silence so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples from Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice, and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 18: 21-35

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Matthew 18: 21: Peter's question
- Matthew 18: 22: Jesus' reply
- Matthew 18: 23-26: 1st part of the parable
- Matthew 18: 27-30: 2nd part of the parable
- Matthew 18: 31-35: 3rd part of the parable

A Key to the Reading:

In the Gospel of the 24th Sunday of ordinary time, Jesus tells us of the need to forgive our brothers and sisters. It is not easy to forgive. There are some offences and insults that go on hurting us. Some say: "I forgive, but not forget." I cannot forget! Resentment, tensions, different opinions, provocations make it difficult to forgive and be reconciled. Why is it that forgiving is so difficult? Do I create a space in my family, my community, my work and my relationships for reconciliation and forgiveness? How? Let us meditate on the third part of the "Sermon on the Community" (Mt 18: 21-35), where Matthew puts together the sayings and parables of Jesus on limitless forgiveness. As you read, think of yourself and try to look back on your life.

The Text:

21 Then Peter went up to him and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' 22 Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times. 23 'And so the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. 24 When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; 25 he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. 26 At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet, with the words, "Be patient with me and I will pay the whole sum." 27 And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. 28 Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow-servant who owed him one hundred *denari*; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him, saying, "Pay what you owe me." 29 His fellow-servant fell at his feet and appealed to him, saying, "Be patient with me and I will pay you." 30 But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 His fellow-servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. 32 Then the master sent for the man and said to him, "You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. 33 Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you?" 34 And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. 35 And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life.

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which part of the parable struck you most? Why?

- What counsels does Jesus give us to help us reconcile and forgive?
- Looking in the mirror of the parable, with which character do I identify myself most: the king who wants to audit his servants or with the forgiven servant who does not want to forgive his companion?
- Looking at the present situation of our family, our community, our church, our society and our world, is there among us a space for forgiveness and reconciliation so that reconciliation spreads among us? Where do we need to begin so that reconciliation may spread among us?

To Go Deeper into the Text

The Context Within Which Our Text is Placed in Matthew's Gospel:

- The comparison that Jesus uses to show the obligation to forgive and be reconciled brings together parable and allegory. When Jesus speaks of the King who wants to settle his accounts with his servants, he is thinking of God who forgives all. When he speaks of the debt of the servant forgiven by the King, he is thinking of our huge debt with God who always forgives us. When he speaks of the attitude of the forgiven servant who will not forgive, he is thinking of us, forgiven by God, but who will not forgive our brothers and sisters.
- At the end of the first century, the Judeo-Christians of the communities of Syria and Palestine had serious and grave problems of reconciliation with the brothers and sisters of the same race. At the time of the great disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the 70's, both the Synagogue and the Ecclesia were trying to reorganize themselves in the regions of Syria and Palestine. That is why there was a great and growing tension between them that was the source of much suffering within families. This tension is the background to Matthew's Gospel.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Matthew 18: 21: Peter's question: how many times forgive?
On hearing Jesus' words on reconciliation, Peter asks: "How often must I forgive? Seven times?" Seven is a number indicating perfection and, in the case of Peter's proposal, seven is synonymous with always.
- Matthew 18: 22: Jesus' reply: seventy times seven!
Jesus sees further. He eliminates any possible limitation to forgiveness: "Not seven, but seventy times seven!" Because there is no proportion between the forgiveness we receive from God and our forgiving our brother and sister. So as to make his reply to Peter clear, Jesus tells a parable. It is the parable of limitless forgiveness!
- Matthew 18: 23-26: The first part of the parable: the situation of the debtor
When he speaks of the King, Jesus is thinking of God. A servant owes the king ten thousand talents. That is, 164 tons of gold. The servant says he will pay. But even if he worked the whole of his life, he, his wife, his children and all his family, he would not be able to acquire 164 tons of gold to pay back the king. In other words, we shall never be in a position to pay back our debt with God. Impossible! (cf Psalm 49: 8-9).
- Matthew 18: 27-30: The second part of the parable: The great contrast
At the servant's insistence, the king forgives him his debt of 164 tons of gold. A fellow servant owes him a hundred denari, that is, 30 grams of gold. There is no comparison between the two debts! A grain of sand and a mountain! Before God's love that forgives freely our debt of 164 tons of gold, it is but just that we should

forgive a debt of 30 grams of gold. But the forgiven servant would not forgive, not even at the insistence of the debtor. He behaves towards his fellow servant the way the king should have behaved towards him but did not: he ordered that he be thrown in jail until the debt of 30 grams of gold was paid! The contrast speaks for itself and needs no commentary!

- Matthew 18: 23-35: The third part of the parable: the moral of the story
The shameful attitude of the forgiven servant who will not forgive, strikes even his mates. They report him to the king and the king acts accordingly: he puts into motion the procedure of justice and the forgiven servant who in turn would not forgive, is thrown into jail, where he will stay until his debt is paid! He should be still there today! Because he will never be able to pay 164 tons of gold! The moral of the parable: "This is how my Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart!" The only limit to the free mercy of God who always forgives us is our refusal to forgive the brother and sister! (Mt 18: 34; 6: 12, 15; Lk 23: 34).

A Deepening: Forgiving after 11 September 2001!

On 11 September 2001, a group of terrorists flew two planes into the two towers of New York and killed more than three thousand persons while shouting "Holy War!" The immediate cry in reply was: "Crusade". Both sides used the name of God to legitimize violence. No one recalled the saying: "Seventy times seven!" And one of the sides calls itself Christian!

On the occasion of the war in Iraq, Pope John Paul II shouted at a public audience: "War is Satanic!", and invited all to fight for peace. At an ecumenical meeting of representatives of Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem in 2000, the Pope said: "We cannot call on the name of God to legitimize violence!"

The last sentence of the Old Testament through which the people of God entered the New Testament and that expresses the nucleus of its messianic hope for reconciliation, is the oracle of the prophet Malachy: "Lo, I will send Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with doom" (Mal 3: 23). To turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers, means to rebuild relationships between persons. There will be no future of peace unless we make a great effort at rebuilding human relationships in the small nucleus, that is, in the family and in the community. The community is where families meet to better preserve and pass on the values that they hold.

Indifference came into the world with the first-born of the first union: Cain who kills Able (Gen 4: 8). This indifference has grown with double vengeance. Cain will be avenged sevenfold, but Lamech seventy times sevenfold (Gen 4: 24). Peter wants to undo the error and proposes a reconciliation of seven times (Mt 18: 21). But his proposal is weak. It does not go to the root of violence. Jesus goes much further and demands seventy times seven (Mt 18: 22). To this day, and especially today, reconciliation is the most urgent task for us, followers of Jesus. It is worthwhile remembering the warning of Jesus: *"That is how my Father will deal with you unless you each forgive the brother from your heart!"* Seventy times seven!

Prayer: Psalm 62

God, Our Only Hope

In God alone there is rest for my soul, from him comes my safety; he alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold so that I stand unshaken. How much longer will you set on a victim, all together, intent on murder, like a rampart already leaning over, a wall already damaged?

Trickery is their only plan, deception their only pleasure, with lies on their lips they pronounce a blessing, with a curse in their hearts.

Rest in God alone, my soul! He is the source of my hope. He alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold, so that I stand unwavering.

In God is my safety and my glory, the rock of my strength. In God is my refuge; trust in him, you people, at all times. Pour out your hearts to him, God is a refuge for us.

Ordinary people are a mere puff of wind, important people a delusion; set both on the scales together, and they are lighter than a puff of wind. Put no trust in extortion, no empty hopes in robbery; however, much wealth may multiply, do not set your heart on it.

Once God has spoken, twice have I heard this: Strength belongs to God, to you, Lord, faithful love; and you repay everyone as their deeds deserve.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Monday, September 18, 2023

Prayer

Holy Father, through Jesus your Son, the Word made flesh for us, send me your Holy Spirit, that my ears may be opened to hear the "letter of love" that you have written to me and enlighten my mind that I may understand it in depth. Make my heart docile that it may receive your will with joy and help me to give witness to it. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Luke 7: 1-10

When he had finished all his words to the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave who was ill and about to die, and he was valuable to him. When he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and save the life of his slave. They approached Jesus and strongly urged him to come, saying, "He deserves to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation and he built the synagogue for us." And Jesus went with them, but when he was only a short distance from the house, the centurion sent friends to tell him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof. Therefore, I did not consider myself worthy to come to you; but say the word and let my servant be healed. For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him and, turning, said to the crowd following him, "I

tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." When the messengers returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Meditation

Chapter 7 of the gospel of Luke helps us to receive the call addressed to the pagans to adhere to faith in the Lord Jesus. The figure of the centurion becomes the pacesetter for all those who want to abide by the faith of Israel and then encounter and know the face of the Father in Jesus. In the meditation on this Gospel, we are also proposed to open ourselves to faith or to make our confidence in the Word of the Lord more firmly unshaken. Let us try, then, to follow, with our hearts, the paces of this Roman centurion, so that in him we may also be present.

- Perhaps the first aspect that emerges from the reading of the passage is the situation of suffering in which the centurion finds himself. Try to hear more attentively the words that try to give light to this reality. Capernaum, a border city, a city apart, on the margins, a city where the blessings of God seem slow to arrive. The grave illness; the imminent death of a dear person.
- But we soon see that the Lord enters into this situation, coming to share in it, to live in it with his loving presence. The words in italics confirm this truth: "asking him to come"; "and Jesus went with them"; "he was only a short distance." It is wonderful to see this movement of Jesus who moves near to him who calls him, who searches for him and who asks for salvation. This is how Jesus acts with each one of us.
- But it is also very useful to enter into contact with the figure of the centurion, who is here a bit like our master, our guide on the way of faith.
- "When he heard about Jesus". He received the announcement; he heard the good news and held it in his heart. He did not let it escape and did not close his ears to life. He remembered Jesus and now he goes in search for him.
- "He sent." Twice does the centurion carry out his action: first sending the elders of the people to Jesus, authoritative figures, then by sending his friends. Luke uses two different verbs and this helps us to understand better that in this man something took place, a state of passage: he became more and more open to the encounter with Jesus. Sending his friends is a bit like going to Jesus himself.
- "Asking him to come and save." Two beautiful verbs that explain the whole intensity of his request to Jesus. He wants Jesus to come, to be near, to enter into his poor life, to come and visit his pain. It is a declaration of love, of great faith, because it is as if he was saying:
- "Without you, I cannot live anymore. Come!" And he does not ask for any mere salvation, a superficial healing, as the particular verb chosen by Luke helps us to understand. In fact, here it is a traverse salvation, one that crosses the entirety of life, of the entire person, and is capable of taking a person beyond, past every obstacle, every difficulty or trial, beyond even death.
- "I am not worthy." Luke puts these words in the mouth of the centurion twice, and these words help us to understand the great transformation that has taken place within himself. He feels unworthy, incapable, insufficient, as the two different Greek terms used here indicate. Perhaps the first conquest on the road of faith with Jesus is exactly this: the discovery of our great need for Him, for his presence and the more certain knowledge that alone we can do nothing because we are poor, we are sinners. However, precisely because of this we are infinitely loved!

- “Say the word.” Here is the great leap, the great transformation in faith. The centurion now believes in a clear, serene, and faithful way. While Jesus walked towards him, he was also completing his own interior journey, changing, becoming a new man. First, he welcomed the person of Jesus, then his word. For him it is the Lord as he is, his word is efficacious, true, powerful, able to do what he says. All his doubts have crumbled; nothing remains but faith, the certain confidence in salvation, in Jesus.

Questions

- Does my prayer feel like that of the centurion, addressed to Jesus to come and save? Am I also ready to explain to the Lord my uneasiness, my need for him? Am I perhaps ashamed to present to him the sickness, the death that lives in my house, in my life? What do I need in order to fulfill this first step in trust?
- And if I open my heart in prayer, to the invocation, if I invite the Lord to come, what is the profound attitude of my heart? Is there also in me, as in the centurion, the knowledge of being unworthy, of not being sufficient solely of myself, of not being pretentious? Do I know how to place myself before the Lord with that humility that comes from love, from serene trust in Him?
- Is his Word good enough for me? Do I ever listen to it in its entirety with attention, with respect, even though, perhaps, I am not able to fully understand it?
- And in this moment, what is the word that I want to hear from the mouth of the Lord for me? What do I want Him to say to me?
- The pagan centurion had such a great faith...and I, who am Christian, what faith do I have? Perhaps it is true that I must pray like this: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9: 24)

Final Prayer

Your words are a lamp for my steps, Lord!

How can a youth keep his way pure? By observing your word. With all my heart I search for you: do not let me deviate from your commands.

Put again into my heart your promise that I may not sin against you. Blessed are you, Lord: teach me your decrees.

With my mouth I recount all of the wisdom from your mouth. On the way of your teachings is my joy, more than all other riches. I want to meditate on your precepts, to consider your ways. In your decrees is my delight, I will not forget your word.

Tuesday, September 19, 2023

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

our creator and guide, may we serve you with all our hearts and know your forgiveness in our lives.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 7: 11-17

It happened that soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people.

Now when he was near the gate of the town there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople was with her.

When the Lord saw her he felt sorry for her and said to her, 'Don't cry.' Then he went up and touched the bier and the bearers stood still, and he said, 'Young man, I tell you: get up.' And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying, 'A great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited his people.' And this view of him spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents the episode of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain. The literary context of this episode of the VII chapter of Luke helps one to understand.

The Evangelist wants to show that Jesus opens the road, revealing the novelty of God which is presented to us in the announcement of the Good News. And in this way the transformation and openness take place: Jesus accepts the request of a foreigner, a non-Jew (Lk 7: 1-10) and resurrects the son of a widow (Lk 7: 11-17). The way in which Jesus reveals the Kingdom surprises the Jewish brothers who were not accustomed to such great openness. Even John the Baptist is surprised and orders to go and ask: "Are you the one who is to come or are we to expect someone else?" (Lk 7: 18-30). Jesus denounces the incoherence of his patricians: "They are like children shouting to one another without knowing what they want!" (Lk 7: 31-35). And finally, there is the openness of Jesus toward women (7: 36-50).

- Luke 7: 11-12: The meeting of the two processions. "Jesus went to a town called Nain. His disciples and a great crowd were going with him. When he was close to the gate of the town, there was a dead man being carried out to the cemetery, the only son of his mother and she was a widow." Luke is like a painter. With few words he succeeds to paint a very beautiful picture on the encounter of the two processions: the procession of death which is going out of the city and accompanies the widow who is taking her only son towards the cemetery; the procession of life which enters the city and accompanies Jesus. The two meet in the small square at the side of the gate of the town of Nain.
- Luke 7: 13: Compassion begins to act here. "When the Lord saw her, he felt sorry for her and said to her: "Do not cry!" It is compassion which moves Jesus to speak and to act. Compassion signifies literally: "to suffer with", to assume or make ours the suffering of the other person, identifying oneself with the person, feeling the pain, the suffering. It is compassion which puts into action the power of Jesus, the power of life over death, the creative power.
- Luke 7: 14-15: "Young man, I tell you, get up!" Jesus gets near the bier and says: "Young man, I tell you, get up!" And the dead man sat up and began to talk; and Jesus gave him to his mother". Sometimes, at the moment of a great sorrow caused by the death of a loved person, people say: "In Jesus' time, when he walked on this earth there was hope not to lose a loved person because Jesus could resurrect her". These persons consider the episode of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain as an event of the past which arouses nostalgia and also certain

envy. The intention of the Gospel, instead, is not, that of arousing nostalgia or envy, but rather of helping us to experience better the living presence of Jesus in our midst. It is the same Jesus, who continues alive in our midst, capable of overcoming death and the sorrow of death. He is with us today, and in the face of the problems of sorrow which strike us, he tells us: "I tell you, get up!"

- Luke 7: 16-17: The repercussion. "Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying: 'A great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited his people'. The fame of these events spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside". It is the prophet who was announced by Moses (Dt 18: 15). It is God who comes to visit us and the "Father of orphans and protector of the widows" (Ps 68: 6: Judith 9: 11).

Personal Questions

- Compassion moves Jesus to resurrect the son of the widow. Does the suffering, the sorrow of others produce in me the same compassion? What do I do to help the others to overcome the sorrow and to create a new life?
- God visited his people. Do I perceive the many visits of God in my life and in the life of the people?

Concluding Prayer

Serve Yahweh with gladness,
come into his presence with songs of joy! Be sure that Yahweh is God, he made us,
we belong to him, his people, the flock of his sheepfold. (Ps 100: 2-3)

Wednesday, September 20, 2023

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

our creator and guide, may we serve you with all our hearts and know your forgiveness in our lives.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 7: 31-35

Jesus said: 'What comparison, then, can I find for the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children shouting to one another while they sit in the marketplace: We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn't cry.

'For John the Baptist has come, not eating bread, not drinking wine, and you say, "He is possessed." The Son of man has come, eating and drinking, and you say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we see the novelty of the Good News which opens its way and thus persons who are attached to ancient forms of faith feel lost and do not understand anything more of God's action. In order to hide their lack of openness and of understanding they defend and seek childish pretexts to justify their attitude of lack of acceptance. Jesus reacts with a parable to denounce the incoherence of his enemies:

"You are similar to children who do not know what they want".

- Luke 7: 31: To whom, then, shall I compare you? Jesus is struck by the reaction of the people and say: "What comparison, then, can I find for the people of this generation? What are they like?" When something is evident and the persons, out of ignorance or because of bad will, do not perceive things and do not want to perceive them, it is good to find an evident comparison which will reveal their incoherence and the ill will. And Jesus is a Master in finding comparisons which speak for themselves.
- Luke 7: 32: Like children without judgment. The comparison which Jesus finds is this one. You are like "those children, shouting to one another while they sit in the marketplace: we played the pipes for you, and you would not dance; we sang dirges, and you would not cry!" Spoiled children, all over the world, have the same reaction. They complain when others do not do and act as they say. The reason for Jesus' complaint is the arbitrary way with which people in the past reacted before John the Baptist and how they react now before Jesus.
- Luke 7: 33-34: Their opinion on John and on Jesus. "For John the Baptist has come, not eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say: he is possessed. The Son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say: look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners". Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist; he believed in him and was baptized by him. On the occasion of this Baptism in the Jordan, he had the revelation of the Father regarding his mission as Messiah-Servant (Mk 1: 10). At the same time, Jesus stressed the difference between him and John. John was more severe, more ascetical, did not eat nor drink. He remained in the desert and threatened the people with the punishment of the Last Judgment (Lk 3: 7-9). Because of this, people said that he was possessed. Jesus was more welcoming; he ate and drank like everybody else. He went through the towns and entered the houses of the people; he accepted the tax collectors and the prostitutes. This is why they said that he was a glutton and a drunkard. Even considering his words regarding "the men of this generation" (Lk 7: 31), in a general way, probably, Jesus had in mind the opinion of the religious authority who did not believe in Jesus (Mk 11: 29-33).
- Luke 7: 35: The obvious conclusion to which Jesus arrives. And Jesus ends drawing this conclusion: "Yet, wisdom is justified by all her children". The lack of seriousness and of coherence is clearly seen in the opinion given on Jesus and on John. The bad will is so evident that it needs no proof. That recalls the response of Job to his friends who believe that they are wise: "Will no one teach you to be quiet! - the only wisdom that becomes you!" (Job 13: 5).

Personal Questions

- When I express my opinion on others, am I like the Pharisees and the Scribes who gave their opinion on Jesus and John? They expressed only their preconceptions and said nothing on the persons whom they judged.
- Do you know any groups in the Church who would merit the parable of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

How blessed the nation whose God is Yahweh, the people he has chosen as his heritage.

From heaven Yahweh looks down, he sees all the children of Adam. (Ps 33: 12-13)

Thursday, September 21, 2023

St. Matthew, the Evangelist

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

you call your children to walk in the light of Christ. Free us from darkness and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 9-13

As Jesus was walking on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

Now while he was at table in the house it happened that several tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples.

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed, I came to call not the upright, but sinners.'

Reflection

The Sermon on the Mountain takes chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew. The purpose of the narrative part of chapters 8 and 9 is to show how Jesus put into practice what he had just taught. In the Sermon on the Mountain, he teaches acceptance (Mt 5: 23-25, 38- 42, 43). Now he puts it into practice accepting the lepers (Mt 8: 1-4), the foreigners (Mt 8, 5- 13), the women (Mt 8: 14-15), the sick (Mt 8: 16-17), the possessed (Mt 8: 28-34), the paralytics (Mt 9: 1-8), the tax collectors (Mt 9, 9-13), the unclean persons (Mt 9: 20-22), etc. Jesus breaks the norms and the customs which excluded and divided persons, that is with the fear and the lack of faith (Mt 8: 23-27) the laws on purity (9: 14-17), and he clearly says which are the requirements for those who want to follow him. They should have the courage to abandon many things (Mt 8: 18-22). In the same way in the attitudes and in the practice of Jesus we see in what the Kingdom and the perfect observance of the Law of God consists.

- Matthew 9: 9: The call to follow Jesus. The first persons called to follow Jesus are four fishermen, all Jewish (Mt 4: 18-22). Now Jesus calls a tax collector, considered a sinner and treated as an unclean person by the community of the most observant of the Pharisees. In the other Gospels, this tax collector is called Levi. Here, his name is Matthew, which means gift of God or given by God. The communities, instead of excluding the tax collector and of considering him unclean, should consider him a Gift of God for the community, because his presence makes the community become a sign of salvation for all! Like the first four who were called, in the same way also Matthew, the tax collector, leaves everything that he has and follows Jesus. The following of Jesus requires breaking away from many things. Matthew leaves the tax office, his source of revenue and follows Jesus!
- Matthew 9: 10: Jesus sits at table with sinners and tax collectors. At that time the Jews lived separated from the tax collectors and sinners and they did not eat with them at the same table. The Christian Jews should break away from this isolation and sit at table with the tax collectors and with the unclean, according to the teaching given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mountain, the expression of the universal love of God the Father (Mt 5: 44-48). The mission of the communities was that of offering a place to those who did not have it. But this new law was not accepted by all. In some communities, persons coming from paganism, even if they were Christians, were not accepted around the same table (cf. Ac 10: 28; 11: 3; Ga 2: 12). The text of today's Gospel shows us Jesus who sits at table with tax collectors and sinners in the same house, around the same table.
- Matthew 9: 11: The question of the Pharisees. Jews were forbidden to sit at table with the tax collectors and with sinners, but Jesus does not follow this prohibition. Rather he becomes a friend to them. The Pharisees seeing the attitude of Jesus, ask the disciples: "Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?" This question may be interpreted as an expression of their desire to know why Jesus acts in that way. Others interpret the question like a criticism of Jesus' behavior, because for over five hundred years, from the time of the slavery in Babylon until the time of Jesus, the Jews had observed the laws of purity. This secular observance became a strong sign of identity. At the same time, it was a factor of their separation in the midst of other peoples. Thus, because of the laws on purity, they could not nor did they succeed to sit around the same table to eat with tax collectors. To eat with tax collectors meant to get contaminated, to become unclean. The precepts of legal purity were rigorously observed, in Palestine as well as in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora. At the time of Jesus, there were more than five hundred precepts to keep purity. In the years 70's, at the time when Matthew wrote, this conflict was very actual.
- Matthew 9: 12-13: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. Jesus hears the question of the Pharisees to the disciples and he answers with two clarifications: the first one is taken from common sense: "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick". The second one is taken from the Bible: "Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice". Through these clarifications, Jesus makes explicit and clarifies his mission among the people: "I have not come to call the upright but sinners". Jesus denies the criticism of the Pharisees; he does not accept their arguments, because they came from a false idea of the Law of God. He himself invokes the Bible: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice". For Jesus, mercy is more important than legal purity. He refers to the prophetic tradition to say that mercy has greater value for God than all sacrifices (Ho 6: 6; Is 1: 10-17). God has profound mercy, and is moved before the failures of his people (Ho 11: 8-9).

Personal Questions

- Today, in our society, who is marginalized and excluded? Why? In our community, do we have preconceptions or prejudices? Which? Which is the challenge which the words of Jesus present to our community?
- Jesus asks the people to read and to understand the Old Testament which says: "Mercy is what pleases me and not sacrifice". What does Jesus want to tell us with this today?

Concluding Prayer

Blessed are those who observe his instructions, Blessed are those who observe his instructions, who seek him with all their hearts, and, doing no evil, who walk in his ways. (Ps 119: 2-3)

Friday, September 22, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

our creator and guide, may we serve you with all our hearts and know your forgiveness in our lives.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 8: 1-3

Now it happened that Jesus made his way through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

With him went the Twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their own resources.

Reflection

In today's Gospel we have the continuation of yesterday's episode which spoke about the surprising attitude of Jesus regarding women, when he defends the woman, who was known in the town as a sinner, against the criticism of the Pharisee. Now at the beginning of chapter 8, Luke describes Jesus who goes through the villages and towns of Galilee and the novelty is that he was not only accompanied by the disciples, but also by the women disciples.

- Luke 8: 1: The Twelve who follow Jesus. In one phrase alone, Luke describes the situation: Jesus goes through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God and the Twelve are with him. The expression "to follow Jesus" (cf. Mk 1: 18; 15: 41) indicates the condition of the disciple who follows

the Master, twenty-four hours a day, trying to imitate his example and to participate in his destiny.

- Luke 8: 2-3: The women follow Jesus. What surprises is that at the side of the men there are also women “together with Jesus”. Luke places both the men and the women disciples at the same level because all of them follow Jesus. Luke has also kept some of the names of some of these women disciples: Mary Magdalene, born in the town of Magdala. She had been cured, and delivered from seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, steward of Herod Antipa, who was Governor of Galilee; Suzanne and several others. It is said that they “served Jesus with their own goods” Jesus allows a group of women “to follow” him (Lk 8: 2-3; 23: 49; Mk 15: 41). The Gospel of Mark when speaking about the women at the moment of Jesus’ death says: “There were some women who were observing at a distance and among them Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joset, and Salome, who followed him and served him when he was still in Galilee, and many others who had gone up with him to Jerusalem (Mk 15: 40-41). Mark defines their attitude with three words: to follow, to serve, to go up to Jerusalem. The first Christians did not draw up a list of these women disciples who followed Jesus as they had done with the twelve disciples. But in the pages of the Gospel of Luke the name of seven of these women disciples are mentioned: Mary Magdalene, Jeanna, wife of Chuza, Suzanne (Lk 8: 3), Martha and Mary (Lk 10: 38), Mary, the mother of James (Lk 24: 10) and Anna, the prophetess (Lk 2: 36), who was eighty-four years old. Number eighty-four is seven times twelve: the perfect age! The later Ecclesiastical tradition does not value this fact about the discipleship of women with the same importance with which it values the following of Jesus on the part of men. It is a sin!
- The Gospel of Luke has always been considered as the Gospel of women. In fact, Luke is the Evangelist who presents the largest number of episodes in which he underlines the relationship of Jesus with the women, and the novelty is not only in the presence of the women around Jesus, but also and, above all, in the attitude of Jesus in relation to them. Jesus touches them and allows them to touch him without fear of being contaminated (Lk 7: 39; 8: 44-45, 54). This was different from the teachers of that time, Jesus accepts women who follow him and who are his disciples (Lk 8: 2-3; 10: 39). The liberating force of God, which acts in Jesus, allows women to raise and to assume their dignity (Lk 13: 13). Jesus is sensitive to the suffering of the widow and is in solidarity with her sorrow (Lk 7: 13). The work of the woman who prepares the meal is considered by Jesus like a sign of the Kingdom (Lk 13: 20-21). The insistent widow who struggles for her rights is considered the model of prayer (Lk 18: 1-8), and the poor widow who shares the little that she has with others is the model of dedication and donation (Lk 21: 1-4). At a time when the witness of women is not accepted as something valid, Jesus accepts women and considers them witnesses of his death (Lk 23: 49), of his burial (Lk 22: 55-56) and of his resurrection (Lk 24: 1-11. 22-24).

Personal Questions

- How is woman considered in your community, in your country, in your Church?
- Compare the attitude of our Church with the attitude of Jesus.

Concluding Prayer

God, examine me and know my heart, test me and know my concerns.

Make sure that I am not on my way to ruin, and guide me on the road of eternity. (Ps 139: 23-24)

Saturday, September 23, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

our creator and guide, may we serve you with all our hearts and know your forgiveness in our lives.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 8: 4-15

With a large crowd gathering and people from every town finding their way to Jesus, he told this parable: 'A sower went out to sow his seed. Now as he sowed, some fell on the edge of the path and was trampled on; and the birds of the air ate it up. Some seed fell on rock, and when it came up it withered away, having no moisture. Some seed fell in the middle of thorns and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell into good soil and grew and produced its crop a hundredfold.' Saying this he cried, 'Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!' His disciples asked him what this parable might mean, and he said, 'To you is granted to understand the secrets of the kingdom of God; for the rest it remains in parables, so that they may look but not perceive, listen but not understand.'

'This, then, is what the parable means: the seed is the word of God. Those on the edge of the path are people who have heard it, and then the devil comes and carries away the word from their hearts in case they should believe and be saved.

Those on the rock are people who, when they first hear it, welcome the word with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of trial they give up.

As for the part that fell into thorns, this is people who have heard, but as they go on their way they are choked by the worries and riches and pleasures of life and never produce any crops. As for the part in the rich soil, this is people with a noble and generous heart who have heard the word and take it to themselves and yield a harvest through their perseverance.

Reflection

In today's Gospel, we will meditate on the parable of the seed. Jesus had a very popular word to teach by means of parables. A parable is a comparison which uses the visible things of life that are known to explain the invisible and unknown things of the Kingdom of God. Jesus had an enormous capacity to find very simple images to compare the things of God with the things of life which people knew and experienced in their daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: to be within the things of life, and to be within the things of God, of the Kingdom of God. For example, the people of Galilee understood all about seeds, of land, of rain, of the sun, of salt of flowers, of the harvest, of fishing, etc. Now, there are exactly these known things that Jesus uses in the

parables to explain the mystery of the Kingdom. The farmer who listens says: "The seed in the ground, I know what this means. Jesus says that this has something to do with the Kingdom of God. What could this ever be?" It is possible to imagine the long conversations with the people! The parable enters the hearts of the people and urges them to listen to nature and to think about life.

When he finishes telling the parable, Jesus does not explain it, but he usually says: "Who has ears to hear, let him hear" This means: "This is: You have heard and so now try to understand!" From time to time, he would explain to the disciples: People like this way of teaching, because Jesus believed in the personal capacity to discover the sense of the parables. The experience which people had of life was for him a means to discover the presence of the mystery of God in their life and to have courage not to be discouraged along the way.

- Luke 8: 4: The crowds follow Jesus. Luke says: a large crowd got around him and people from all the towns ran to him from all the towns. So then he tells them this parable. Mark describes how Jesus told the parable. There were so many people that he, in order not to fall, went into a boat and sitting down he taught the people who were on the seashore (Mk 4: 1).
- Luke 8: 5-8^o: The parable of the seed is a mirror of the life of the farmers. At that time, it was not easy to live from agriculture. The ground was full of rocks; there was little rain, much sun. Besides, many times, people, to shorten the way, passed through the fields and stepped on the plants (Mk 2: 23). But despite that, every year the farmer sowed and planted, trusting in the force of the seed, in the generosity of nature.
- Luke 8, 8b: Anyone who has ears to hear let him hear! At the end, Jesus says: "Anyone who has ears to hear, let him hear!" The way to be able to understand the parable is to search: "Try to understand!" The parable does not say everything immediately, but moves the person to think. It does it in such a way that the person discovers the message beginning from the experience which the person has of the seed. It urges the person to be creative and to participate. It is not a doctrine which is presented ready to be taught and decorated. The parable is not water in a bottle, it is the source.
- Luke 8: 9-10: Jesus explains the parable to the disciples. At home, alone with Jesus, the disciples want to know the meaning of the parable. Jesus responds by means of a difficult and mysterious phrase. He says to the Disciples: "To you is granted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God, for the rest it remains in parables so that "they may look but not perceive, listen but not understand". This phrase gives rise to a question in the heart of the people: What is the purpose of a parable? Is it to clarify or to hide things? Did Jesus use the parables in order that people continue in their ignorance and would not convert themselves? Certainly not! In another place it is said that Jesus used the parables "according to what they could understand" (Mk 4: 33). The parable reveals and hides at the same time" It reveals for those who are "inside, within" who accept Jesus Messiah Servant. It hides for those who insist in seeing in him the Messiah the glorious King. These understand the images of the parable, but do not understand its meaning.
- Luke 8: 11-15: The explanation of the parable, in its diverse parts. One by one, Jesus explains the parts of the parable, the seed, and the earth up to the harvest time. Some scholars think that this explanation was added afterwards; that it would not be from Jesus', but from one of the communities. This is possible! It does not matter! Because in the bud of the parable there is the flower of the explanation. Buds and flowers, both have the same origin, that is, Jesus. This is why we also can

continue to reflect and to discover other beautiful things in the parable. Once, a person in a community asked: "Jesus says that we have to be salt. For what does salt serve?" The persons gave their opinion starting from the experience which each one had regarding salt! And they applied all this to the life of the community and discovered that to be salt is difficult and demanding. The parable functioned well! The same thing can be applied to the seeds. All have a certain experience.

Personal Questions

- The seed falls in four different places: on the roadside, among the rocks, among the thorns and in the good earth. What does each one of these four places mean? What type of earth am I? Sometimes, people are rock; other times thistles; other roadside, other times good ground. Normally, what are we in our community?
- Which are the fruits which the Word of God is producing in our life and in our community?

Concluding Prayer

Your kingship is a kingship forever, your reign lasts from age to age. Yahweh is trustworthy in all his words, and upright in all his deeds. (Ps 145: 12-13)

Sunday, September 24, 2023

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Oh Father, your Son Jesus, whom you have given to us, is our kingdom, our richness, our Heaven; He is the Master of the house and of the earth in which we live and He goes out continuously to search for us, because He desires to call us, to pronounce our name, to offer us His infinite love. We will never be able to pay Him back, never repay the superabundance of His compassion and mercy for us; we can only tell him our Yes, ours: "Here I am, I come", or repeat with Isaiah: "Here I am Lord, send me!". Lord, allow this word to enter into my heart, in my eyes, into my ears and that it changes me, transforms me, according to this surprising incomprehensible love that Jesus is offering me today also, even at this moment. Lead me to the last place, to mine, that which He has prepared for me, there where I can truly and fully be myself. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 20: 1-16

To Insert the Passage in its Context:

This passage places us within the section of the Gospel of Matthew, which directly precedes the account of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. This section begins in 19: 1, where it is said that Jesus definitively leaves the territory of Galilee to go to Judea, beginning in this way the path to get close to Jerusalem and this is concluded in 25: 46, with the account on the coming and the judgment of the Son of God. More in particular, chapter 20 places us also along the road of Jesus towards the holy city and its temple, in a context of teaching and of polemics with the wise and the powerful of the time, which he carries out through parables and encounters.

To Help in the Reading of the Passage:

- 20: 1a: with the first words of the parable, which are a formula of introduction, Jesus wants to accompany us into the most profound theme about which he intends to speak, he wants to open before us the doors of the kingdom, which is He himself and he presents himself as the Master of the vineyard, which needs to be cultivated.
- 20: 1b-7: These verses constitute the first part of the parable; in it Jesus tells about the initiative of the Master of the vineyard to employ the laborers, describing the four times he went out to look for laborers, in which he establishes a contract and the last time he goes out is at the end of the day.
- 29: 8-15: This second part includes, instead, the description of the payment to the workers, with the protest of the first one and the answer of the Master.
- 20: 16: At the end is given the conclusive sentence, which is included with 19: 30 and which reveals the key of the passage and the its application: those who in the community are considered the last ones, in the perspective of the Kingdom and of God's judgment, will be the first ones.

Text:

- 20: 1: -'Now the kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner
- 20: 1b-7: going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. 2 He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard. 3 Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace 4 and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage." 5 So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. 6 Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing around, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" 7 "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You go into my vineyard too."
- 20: 8-15 --- 8 In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first." 9 So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. 10 When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. 11 They took it, but grumbled at the landowner saying, 12 "The men who came last have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat." 13 He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? 14 Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the lastcomer as much as I pay you. 15 Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?"
- 20: 16 - 16Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life.

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- The passage opens with a connecting particle, “in fact”, which is very important, because it sends us to the preceding verse (Mt 19: 30), where Jesus affirms that “the first will be the last and the last the first”, with the same words that he will repeat at the end of this parable. Therefore, words of utmost importance, fundamental, which indicate to me the direction which I should take. Jesus is the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven; He is the new world, into which I am invited to enter. But his is an overturned world, where our logic of power, gain, reward, ability, effort, is defeat and substituted by another logic, that of absolute gratuitousness, of merciful and superabundant love. If I think that I am first, that I am strong and capable; if I have already placed myself in the first place at the table of the Lord, it is better that now I rise and go and take the last place. There the Lord will come to look for me and calling me, he will raise me and take me towards him.
- Here, Jesus compares himself to a landowner, the Master of the house, using a particular figure, which he repeats several times in the Gospel. I try to follow it, being attentive to the characteristics which it presents and trying to verify which is my relationship with Him. The Master of the house is the owner of the vineyard, who takes care of it, surrounding it by a wall, digging a press there, cultivating it with love and fatigue (Mt 21: 33 ff), so that it can bear a better fruit. It is the Master of the house who offers a great supper, and invites many, calling to his table the most forlorn or forsaken, the cripple and the lame, the blind (Lk 14: 21ff). And the one who returns from the wedding and for whom we have to wait keeping watch, because we do not know the hour (Lk 12: 36); is the Master of the house who left on a trip, who has ordered us to keep watch, so as to be ready to open the door for him, as soon as he returns and knocks, in the evening, or at midnight, or at the rooster’s crow, or in the morning (Mk 13: 35). I understand then that the Lord expects the good fruit from me; that he has chosen me as a guest to his table; that he will return and seek to look for me and will knock at my door... Am I ready to respond to him? To open the door for him? To offer to him the fruit of the love which He expects from me? Or rather, am I sleeping, weighed down by a thousand other interests, enslaved by other masters of the house, diverse and far away from him?
- The Lord Jesus, the Master of the house and of the vineyard, repeatedly goes out to call and to send; at dawn, at nine o’clock, at noon, at three o’clock in the afternoon, at five, when the day is almost ended. He does not get tired: he comes to look for me, to offer me his love, his presence, to seal a pact with me. He desires to offer me his vineyard, its beauty. When we will meet, when he, looking at me fixedly, will love me (Mk 10: 21), What will I answer? Will I be sad because I have many other goods belonging to me (Lk 18: 23)? Will I ask him to consider me justified, because I have already taken on other commitments? (Lk 14: 18?). Will I flee, naked, losing also that small cloth of happiness that has remained in order to cover myself (Mk 14: 52)? Or, rather will I say: “Yes, yes”, and then I will not go (Mt 21: 29)? I feel that this word causes me to be in crisis, it peers into the depth of myself, it reveals to me who I am ... I remain dismayed, fearful for my freedom, but I decide, before the Lord who is speaking to me, to do as Mary did and also say: “Lord, may it be done to me according to your word”, with humble availability and abandonment.
- Now the Gospel places me before my relationship with others, the brothers and sisters who share with me the journey of the following of Jesus. We are all convoked to Him, in the evening, after the work of the day: he opens his treasure of love and begins to distribute it, to give grace, mercy, compassion, friendship, himself totally. He does not stop, the Lord continues only to overflow, to pour out, to give himself to us, to each one. Matthew points out, at this point, that someone murmurs against the Master of the vineyard, against the Lord, Indignation springs

up because he treats everyone equally, with the same intensity of love, with the same superabundance. Perhaps what is written in these lines also applies to me: the Gospel knows how to bring out and make evident my heart as it is, the most hidden part of myself. Perhaps the Lord is, precisely, addressing these words filled with sadness: "Perhaps you are jealous?" I should allow myself to be questioned, I have to allow him to enter within me and to look at me with his penetrating eyes, because only if he looks at me, I will be able to be healed. Now I pray as follows: "Lord, I ask you, come to me, put your word in my heart and let new life germinate, let love germinate".

A Key for the Reading

The Vineyard

In the image of the vineyard, apparently very simple and ordinary, Scripture condenses a very rich and profound reality, always more dense in significance, gradually as the texts get closer to the full revelation of Jesus. In the first book of Kings, chapter 21, is narrated the violent attack against Naboth, a simple subject of the corrupt King Ahab, who possessed a vineyard, planted, unfortunately, precisely next to the palace of the King. This account makes us understand how important the vineyard was, an inviolable property: for nothing in the world Naboth would have given it up, as he says: "Yahweh forbid that I should give you my ancestral heritage!" (1 Kings 21: 3). Out of love for it, he lost his life. Therefore, the vineyard represents the most precious good, the family heritage, in a certain part, the identity itself of the person; he cannot sell it, cede it to others, barter or trade it for other goods, which would never succeed to equal it. It hides a vital, spiritual force.

Isaiah 5 tells us clearly that under the figure of the vineyard is signified the people of Israel, as it is written: "Now, the vineyard of Yahweh Sabaoth is the House of Israel; and the people of Judah the plant he cherished" (Is 5: 7). The Lord has loved these people with an infinite and eternal love, sealed by an inviolable covenant; He takes care of it, just as a vinedresser would do with his vineyard, doing everything possible so that it can bear more beautiful fruit. Each one of us is Israel, the whole Church: the Father has found us as dry, arid land, devastated, filled with rocks, and he has cultivated it, he has dug around it, fertilized it, watered it always; he has planted us as a chosen vineyard, all with genuine vines (Jer 2: 21). What else could he have done for us, which he has not done? (Is 5: 4). In his infinite lowering, the Lord has become vineyard Himself; He has become the true Vine (Jn 15: 1ff), of which we are the branches; He united himself to us, just as the vine is united to its branches. The Father, who is the vine-dresser, continues his work of love in us, so that we may bear fruit and he waits patiently. He prunes, He cultivates, but then he sends us to work, to collect the fruits to offer to him. We are sent to his people, to his sons, as sons that we are ourselves, as his disciples; we cannot draw back, refuse, because we have been created for this: that we may go and bear fruit and that our fruit may remain (Jn 15: 16). Lord, turn to us; look down from Heaven and visit your vineyard (Psalm 79: 15).

The Promise: One *Denarius*

The Master of the vineyard establishes as the payment for the work of the day a denarius; a good sum, which allowed to live with dignity. More or less, it corresponds to the *drachma* agreed upon by the old Tobit with the one who accompanied his son Tobias towards the Media (Tb 5: 15).

But in the evangelical account this denarius is immediately called by another name; by the Master; in fact, he says: "that which is just I will give you" (v4). Our inheritance, our salary is what is just, what is good: the Lord Jesus. He, in fact, does not give, does not promise other than himself. Our reward is in Heaven (Mt 5: 12), with our Father (Mt 6: 1). It is not the money, the denarius which was used to pay the tax per-capita to the Romans, on which was the image and the inscription of King Tiberius Caesar (Mt 22: 20), but which is the face of Jesus, his name, his presence. He tells us: "I am with you not only today, but all days, until the end of the world. I myself will be your reward".

The Sending Out

The text offers to our life a very strong energy, which springs from the verbs "*to send, to order*" *to go*", repeated twice; both concern us, they touch us deeply, they call us and put us in movement. It is the Lord Jesus who sends us, making of us his disciples: "Behold, I send you" (Mt 10: 16). He calls us every day for his mission and repeats to us: "Go!" and our happiness is hidden precisely here, in the realization of this Word of his. Also where he sends us, in the way in which He indicates it, towards the reality and the persons whom He places before us.

The Murmuring, the Grumbling

Words of utmost importance, true and very much present in our experience of daily life; we cannot deny this: they dwell in our heart, in our thoughts, sometimes they torment us, disfigure us, get us terribly tired, drive us away from ourselves, from others, from the Lord. Yes, we are also among those workers who complain and grumble, murmuring against the Master. The rumor of the murmuring comes from very far away, but equally it succeeds to join us and to insinuate our heart. Israel in the desert murmured heavily against its Lord and we have received as inheritance those thoughts, those words: "The Lord hates us, that is why he brought us out of the land of Egypt to hand us over to the Amorites and to destroy us" (Dt 1: 27) and we doubt concerning his capacity to nourish us, to lead us ahead, to protect us: "Can God make a banquet in the desert?" (Ps 78: 19). To murmur means not to listen to the voice of the Lord, not to believe anymore in his love for us: Therefore, we become scandalized, upset, strongly against the merciful Lord and we get angry against his way of acting and we wish to change it, to make it smaller according to our own schema: He went to the house of a sinner! He eats and drinks with tax collectors, with sinners!" (Lk 5: 30; 15: 2; 19: 7). If we listen well these is the secret murmuring of our heart. How to heal it? Saint Peter suggest this way: "Practice hospitality with one another, without murmuring" (1 Pt 4: 9); only hospitality, that is acceptance can, little by little, change our heart and open it to be receptive, capable of bearing within it persons, situations, the reality which we find in life. "Accept one another" says Scripture. And it is precisely like that: we have to learn to accept, above all, the Lord Jesus, as He is, with his way of loving and of remaining, of speaking with us and of changing us, of waiting for us and of attracting us. To accept him is to accept the one who is at our side, who comes to meet us; it is only this movement which can overcome the harshness of murmuring.

Murmuring is born from jealousy, from envy, from our evil eye, as the Master of the vineyard says, Jesus himself. He knows how to keep us inside, he knows how to penetrate our look and reach our heart, in the spirit. He knows how we are, he knows us, loves us; And it is out of love that He brings out of us the evil within, takes off the veil from our evil eye, he helps us to become aware or conscious of how we are, of that which is within us. At the moment when he says: "Perhaps your eye is evil?" as he is doing today in this Gospel, He heals us, he takes the balm and spreads it, takes the clay made with his saliva and puts it on our eyes, to the very depth.

A Moment of Prayer: Psalm 135

Refrain: Your love for us is infinite!

Alleluia! Give thanks to Yahweh for he is good, for his faithful love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods, for his faithful love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his faithful love endures forever. He alone works wonders, for his faithful love endures forever.

He struck down the first-born of Egypt, for his faithful love endures forever. He brought Israel out from among them, for his faithful love endures forever. With mighty hand and outstretched arm, for his faithful love endures forever.

He split the Sea of Reeds in two, for his faithful love endures forever. Let Israel pass through the middle, for his faithful love endures forever. And drowned Pharaoh and all his army, for his faithful love endures forever. He led his people through the desert, for his faithful love endures forever.

He kept us in mind when we were humbled, for his faithful love endures forever. And rescued us from our enemies, for his faithful love endures for ever. He provides food for all living creatures, for his faithful love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his faithful love endures forever.

Final Prayer

Thank you, Oh Father, for having revealed to me your Son and for having made me enter in his inheritance, in his vineyard. You have rendered me a branch, have rendered me a grape: now I only need to remain in Him, in you and allow myself to be taken as good fruit, ripe, to be placed in the press. Yes, Lord, I know it: this is the way, I am not afraid, because you are with me. I know that the only way to happiness is the gift of self to you, the gift to the brothers. That I may be a branch, that I may be good grapes, to be squeezed, as you wish! Amen.

Monday, September 25, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

guide us, as you guide creation according to your law of love. May we love one another and come to perfection in the eternal life prepared for us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 8: 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples: 'No one lights a lamp to cover it with a bowl or to put it under a bed. No, it is put on a lampstand so that people may see the light when they come in. For nothing is hidden but it will be made clear, nothing secret but it will be made known and brought to light.

So take care how you listen; anyone who has, will be given more; anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he thinks he has.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents three brief phrases pronounced by Jesus. They are phrases scattered in different places which Luke collected here after the parable of the seed (Lk 8: 4-8) and of his explanation to the disciples (Lk 8: 9-15). This literary context, in which Luke places the three phrases, helps us to understand how he wants people to understand these phrases of Jesus.

- Luke 8: 16: The lamp which gives light. "No one lights a lamp to cover it with a bowl or to put it under a bed; no, it is put on a lampstand so that people may see the light when they come in. This phrase of Jesus is a brief parable. Jesus does not explain, because all know what he is speaking about. This belonged to everyday life. At that time, there was no electric light. Just imagine this! The family meets at home. The sun begins to set. A person gets up, lights the lamp, covers it with a vase or places it under the bed. What will the others say? All will scream out: "But are you crazy... place the lamp on the table!" In a Biblical meeting somebody made the following comment: The Word of God is a lamp which is necessary to light in the darkness of the night. If it remains closed up in the Book of the Bible, it will be like the lamp under a vase. But when it is placed on the table it gives light to the whole house, when it is read in community and is connected to life.
- In the context in which Luke places this phrase, he is referring to the explanation which Jesus gave about the parable of the seeds (Lk 8: 9-15). It is as if he would say: the things which you have just heard you should not keep them only for yourselves, but you should share them with others. A Christian should not be afraid to give witness and spread the Good News. Humility is important, but the humility which hides the gifts of God given to edify the community is false (1 Cor 12: 4-26; Rom 12: 3-8).
- Luke 8: 17: That which is hidden will be manifested. "There is nothing hidden which will not be manifested, nothing secret which will not be known and brought to light". In the context in which Luke places this second phrase of Jesus, it also refers to the teachings given by Jesus particularly to the disciples (Lk 8: 9-10). The disciples cannot keep these only for themselves, but they should diffuse them, because they form part of the Good News which Jesus has brought.
- Luke 8: 18: Attention to preconceptions. "So take care how you listen, anyone who has will be given more, anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he thinks he has". At that time, there were many preconceptions on the Messiah which prevented people from understanding, in a correct way, the Good News of the Kingdom which Jesus announced. "For this reason, this warning of Jesus concerning preconceptions is quite actual. Jesus asks the disciples to be aware of the preconceptions with which they listen to the teaching that he presents. With this phrase of Jesus, Luke is saying to the communities and to all of us: "Be attentive to the ideas with which you look at Jesus!" Because if the color of the eyes is green, everything will seem to be green. If it were blue, everything would be blue! If the idea that I have when I look at Jesus is mistaken, erroneous, everything which I receive and teach about Jesus will be threatened by error! If I think that the Messiah has to be a glorious King, I will not want to hear anything which Jesus teaches about the Cross, about suffering, persecution and about commitment, and to lose even what I thought I possessed. Joining this third phrase to the first one, I

can conclude what follows: anyone who keeps for himself what he receives and does not distribute it to others, loses what he has, because it becomes corrupt.

Personal Questions

- Have you had any experience of preconceptions which have prevented you from perceiving and appreciating in their just value, the good things that persons have?
- Have you perceived the preconceptions which are behind certain stories, accounts, and parables which certain persons tell us?

Concluding Prayer

How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the Law of Yahweh!

Blessed are those who observe his instructions, who seek him with all their hearts. (Ps 119: 1-2)

Tuesday, September 26, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

guide us, as you guide creation according to your law of love. May we love one another and come to perfection in the eternal life prepared for us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 8: 19-21

Jesus' mother and his brothers came looking for him, but they could not get to him because of the crowd.

He was told, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside and want to see you.' But he said in answer, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.'

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the episode in which the relatives of Jesus and also his Mother want to speak with him, but Jesus does not pay attention to them. Jesus had problems with his family. Sometimes the family helps one to live the Gospel and to participate in the community. Other times, the family prevents this. This is what happened to Jesus and this is what happens to us.

- Luke 8: 19-20: The family looks for Jesus. The relatives reach the house where Jesus was staying. Probably, they had come from Nazareth. From there to Capernaum the distance is about 40 kilometers. His Mother was with them. Probably, they did not enter because there were many people, but they sent somebody to tell him:

“Your Mother and your brothers are outside and want to see you”. According to the Gospel of Mark, the relatives do not want to see Jesus, they want to take him back home (Mk 3: 32). They thought that Jesus had lost his head (Mk 3: 21). Probably, they were afraid, because according to what history says, the Romans watched very closely all that he did, in one way or other, with the people (cf. Ac 5: 36-39). In Nazareth, up on the mountains he would have been safer than in Capernaum.

- Luke 8: 21: The response of Jesus. The reaction of Jesus is clear: “My mother and my brothers are those who listen to the Word of God and put it into practice”. In Mark the reaction of Jesus is more concrete. Mark says: Looking around at those who were sitting there he said: “Look, my mother, and my brothers! Anyone who does the will of God, he is my brother, sister, and mother (Mk 3: 34-35). Jesus extends his family! He does not permit the family to draw him away from the mission: neither the family (Jn 7: 3- 6), nor Peter (Mk 8: 33), nor the disciples (Mk 1: 36-38), nor Herod (Lk 13: 32), nor anybody else (Jn 10: 18).
- It is the Word of God which creates a new family around Jesus: “My mother and my brothers are those who listen to the Word of God, and put it into practice.” A good commentary on this episode is what the Gospel of John says in the Prologue: “He was in the world that had come into being through him and the world did not recognize him. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him”. But to those who did accept him he gave them power to become children of God: to those who believed in his name, who were born not from human stock or human desire, or human will, but from God himself. And the Word became flesh, he lived among us; and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1: 10-14). The family, the relatives, do not understand Jesus (Jn 7: 3-5; Mk 3: 21), they do not form part of the new family. Only those who receive the Word, that is, who believe in Jesus, form part of the new family. These are born of God and form part of God’s Family.
- The situation of the family at the time of Jesus. In the time of Jesus, the political social and economic moment or the religious ideology, everything conspired in favor of weakening the central values of the clan, of the community. The concern for the problems of the family prevented persons from being united in the community. Rather, in order that the Kingdom of God could manifest itself anew, in the community life of the people, persons had to go beyond, to pass the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves to the large family, toward the Community. Jesus gives the example. When his own family tried to take hold of him, Jesus reacted and extended the family (Mk 3: 33-35). He created the Community.
- The brothers and the sisters of Jesus. The expression “brothers and sisters of Jesus” causes much polemics among Catholics and Protestants. Basing themselves on this and on other texts, the Protestants say that Jesus had more brothers and sisters and that Mary had more sons! The Catholics say that Mary did not have other sons. What should we think about this? In the first place, both positions: that of the Catholics as well as that of the Protestants, start from the arguments drawn from the Bible and from the Traditions of their respective Churches. Because of this, it is not convenient to discuss on this question with only intellectual arguments. Because here it is a question of the convictions that they have and which have to do with faith and sentiments. The intellectual argument alone fails in changing a conviction of the heart! Rather, it irritates and draws away! And even if I do not agree with the opinion of the other person, I must respect it. In the second place, instead of discussing about texts, both we Catholics and the Protestants, we should unite together to fight in defense of life, created by God, a life totally disfigured by

poverty, injustice, by the lack of faith. We should recall some phrase of Jesus: "I have come so that they may have life and life

- in abundance" (Jn 10: 10). "So that all may be one so that the world will believe that it was you who sent me" (Jn 17: 21). "Do not prevent them! Anyone who is not against us is for us" (Mk 9: 39, 40).

Personal Questions

- Does your family help or make it difficult for you to participate in the Christian community?
- How do you assume your commitment in the Christian community without prejudice for the family or for the community?

Concluding Prayer

Teach me, Yahweh, the way of your will, and I will observe it.

Give me understanding and I will observe your Law, and keep it wholeheartedly. (Ps 119: 33-34)

Wednesday, September 27, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

guide us, as you guide creation according to your law of love. May we love one another and come to perfection in the eternal life prepared for us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 9: 1-6

Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

He said to them, 'Take nothing for the journey: neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money; and do not have a spare tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there; and when you leave let your departure be from there. As for those who do not welcome you, when you leave their town shake the dust from your feet as evidence against them.'

So they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and healing everywhere.

Reflection

Today's Gospel describes the mission which the Twelve received from Jesus. Later, Luke speaks about the mission of the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10: 1-12). The two Gospels complete one another and reveal the mission of the Church.

- Luke 9: 1-2: The sending out of the Twelve on mission. “Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases. And he sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal”. In calling the Twelve, Jesus intensifies the announcement of the Good News. The objective of the mission is simple and clear: they received the power and authority to cast out devils, to cure the sick and to announce the Kingdom of God. Just as people were admired, astonished seeing Jesus’ authority over the unclean spirits, and seeing his way of announcing the Good News (Lk 4: 32, 36), the same thing should happen with the preaching of the twelve apostles.
- Luke 9: 3-5. The instructions for the Mission. Jesus sends them out with the following recommendations: “Take nothing for the journey, neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money and do not have a spare tunic”. Do not go from one house to another, but “Whatever house you enter stay there; and when you leave let your departure be from there”. “As for those who do not welcome you, when you leave their town shake the dust from your feet as evidence against them”. As you will see these recommendations, which seem strange to us, have a very important significance.
- Luke 9: 6. The execution of the Mission. They go. It is the beginning of a new stage. Now, not only Jesus, but the whole group goes to announce the Good News to the people. If the preaching of Jesus caused conflict, now, with the preaching of the whole group, there will be a greater conflict.
- The four fundamental points of the mission. At the time of Jesus, there were diverse Movements of renewal: the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Zealots. They also were seeking a new way to live in community, and they had their own missionaries (cf. Mt 23: 15). But they, when they went on mission, they were advised: to carry a staff, and a haversack to put in it their food. They did not trust the food which was literally not “pure”. Contrary to the other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus received diverse recommendations which help us to understand the fundamental points of the mission, to announce the Good News:
 - They should take nothing (Lk 9: 3; 10: 4). That means that Jesus obliges them to trust in the hospitality; because one who goes with nothing, goes because he trusts in the people and thinks that he will be welcomed, received. With this attitude they criticize the laws of exclusion taught by the official religion and they show, by means of a new practice, that they had other criteria in the community.
 - They should remain in the first house where they enter, until they leave the place (Lk 9: 4; 10: 7). That is, they should live together in a stable way and not go from one house to another. They should work with all and live from what they receive in exchange “because the laborer deserves his wages” (Lk 10: 7). In other words, they should participate in the life and work of the people, and the people will receive them in their community and will share with them house and food. That means that they have to trust in sharing. This explains the severity of the criticism against those who reject the message: shake off the dust from the feet, as a protest against them (Lk 10: 10-12), because they are not rejecting anything new but rather their past.
 - They should cure the sick and drive out the devils (Lk 9: 1; 10: 9; Mt 10: 8). That is, they should carry out the function of “defenders” (*goé*) and accept in the clan, in the community, the excluded. With this attitude they criticize the situation of disintegration of community life of the clan and they indicate concrete openings. The expulsion of the devils is a sign of the coming of the

Kingdom of God (Lk 11: 20).

- They should eat what the people give them (Lk 10: 8). They could not live separated having their own food, but they should accept the communion with others, eat with others. That means that in the contact with the people, they should not be afraid of losing the purity as it had been taught to them. With this attitude they criticize the laws of purity which were in force and indicate, by means of the new practice, that they possess another access to purity, that is, intimacy with God.

These were the four fundamental points of community living which should characterize the attitude of the missionaries who announce the Good News in the name of Jesus: hospitality, sharing, communion and acceptance of the excluded (defender, *goêl*). If there is a response to these four requirements, then it is possible to cry out all over to the four corners of the world: "The Kingdom has arrived!" (cf. Lk 10: 1-12; 9: 1-6; Mk 6: 7-13; Mt 10: 6-16). And the Kingdom of God which Jesus has revealed to us is not a doctrine, nor a catechism, nor a law. The Kingdom of God comes and becomes present when persons, motivated by their faith in Jesus, decide to live together in community to give witness and to reveal, in this way, to all, that God is Father and Mother and that we, the human beings, are brothers and sisters. Jesus wanted the local community to be a new expression of the Covenant of the Kingdom, of the love of God the Father, who makes us all brothers and sisters.

Personal Questions

- Has participation in the community helped you to accept and to trust persons, especially the simpler and poorer?
- Which is the point of the mission of the Apostles which for us today has greater importance? Why?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, set me free from taunts and contempt since I observe your instructions.

Though princes sit plotting against me, your servant keeps pondering your will. (Ps 119: 22-23)

Thursday, September 28, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

guide us, as you guide creation according to your law of love. May we love one another and come to perfection in the eternal life prepared for us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 9: 7-9

Herod the tetrarch had heard about all that was going on; and he was puzzled, because some people were saying that John had risen from the dead, others that Elijah had reappeared, still others that one of the ancient prophets had come back to life.

But Herod said, 'John? I beheaded him. So, who is this I hear such reports about?' And he was anxious to see him.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents a reaction from Herod listening to the preaching of Jesus. Herod does not know how to place himself before Jesus He had killed John the Baptist and now he wants to see Jesus close to him. It is always threatening.

- Luke 9: 7-8: Who is Jesus? The text begins with the exposition of the opinion of the people and of Herod on Jesus. Some associated Jesus to John the Baptist and to Elijah. Others identified him with a Prophet, that is, with a person who speaks in the name of God, who has the courage to denounce injustices of those in power and who knows how to give hope to the little ones. He is the Prophet announced in the Old Testament like a new Moses (Dt 18: 15). These are the same opinions that Jesus received from the disciples when he asked them: "Who do people say I am?" (Lk 9: 18). Persons tried to understand Jesus starting from things that they knew, thought and expected. They tried to set him against the background of the familiar criteria of the Old Testament with its prophecies and hopes, and of the Tradition of the Ancients with their laws. But these were insufficient criteria; Jesus could not enter into them, he was much bigger!
- Luke 9: 9: Herod wants to see Jesus. But Herod said: "John, I beheaded him; so who is this of whom I hear such things?" "And he was anxious to see him". Herod, a superstitious man without scruples, recognizes that he was the murderer of John the Baptist. Now, he wants to see Jesus. Luke suggests thus that the threats begin to appear on the horizon of the preaching of Jesus. Herod had no fear to kill John. He will not be afraid to kill Jesus. On the other side, Jesus does no fear Herod. When they tell him that Herod wanted to take him to kill him, he sent someone to tell him: "You may go and give that fox this message: Look, today and tomorrow I drive out devils and heal, and on the third day I attain my end." (Lk 13: 32). Herod has no power over Jesus. When at the hour of the passion, Pilate sends Jesus to be judged by Herod, Jesus does not respond anything (Lk 23: 9). Herod does not deserve a response.
- From father to son. Sometimes the three Herods, who lived during that time are confused, then the three appear in the New Testament with the same name: a) Herod, called the Great, governed over the whole of Palestine from 37 before Christ. He appears at the birth of Jesus (Mt 2: 1). He kills the new-born babies of Bethlehem (Mt 2: 16). b) Herod, called Antipas, governed in Galilee from the year 4 to 39 after Christ. He appears at the death of Jesus (Lk 23: 7). He killed John the Baptist (Mk 6: 14-29). c) Herod, called Agrippa, governed all over Palestine from the year 41 to 44 after Christ. He appears in the Acts of the Apostles (Ac 12, 1.20). He killed the Apostle James (Ac 12: 2).
- When Jesus was about four years old, King Herod, the one who killed the new-born babies of Bethlehem died (Mt 2: 16). His territory was divided among his sons, Archelaus, would govern Judea. He was less intelligent than his father, but more violent. When he assumed the power, approximately 3000 persons were massacred on the square of the Temple! The Gospel of Matthew says that Mary and Joseph, when they learnt that Archelaus had taken over the government of Galilee,

were afraid and returned on the road and went to Nazareth, in Galilee, which was governed by another son of Herod, called Herod Antipas (Lk 3: 1). This Antipas governed over 40 years. During the thirty-three years of Jesus there was no change of government in Galilee.

- Herod, the Great, the father of Herod Antipas, had constructed the city of Caesarea Maritime, inaugurated in the year 15 before Christ. It was the new port to get out the products of the region. They had to compete with the large port of Tyron in the North and, thus, help to develop trade and business in Samaria and in Galilee. Because of this, from the time of Herod the Great, the agricultural production in Galilee began to orientate itself no longer according to the needs of the families, as before, but according to the demands of the market. This process of change in the economy continued during all the time of the government of Herod Antipas, another forty years, and found in him an efficient organizer. All these governors were 'servants of power'. In fact, the one who commanded in Palestine, from the year 63 before Christ, was Rome, the Empire.

Personal Questions

- It is well always to ask ourselves: Who is Jesus for me?
- Herod wants to see Jesus. His was a superstitious and morbid curiosity. Others want to see Jesus because they seek a sense for their life. And I, what motivation do I have which moves me to see and encounter Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Each morning fill us with your faithful love, we shall sing and be happy all our days; let our joy be as long as the time that you afflicted us, the years when we experienced disaster. (Ps 90: 14-15)

Friday, September 29, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness. Continue to fill us with your gifts of love. Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - John 1: 47-51

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, he said of him, 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception.'

Nathanael asked, 'How do you know me?' Jesus replied, 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree.'

Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.'

Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.' And then he added, 'In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents the dialogue between Jesus and Nathanael in which the following phrase appears: "In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man". This phrase helps to clarify something concerning the archangels.

- John 1: 45-46). Nathanael had exclaimed: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael was from Cana, which was close to Nazareth. Seeing Nathanael, Jesus said: "There, truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deception!" And he affirms that he knew him already when he was under the fig tree. How could Nathanael be an "authentic Israelite", if he did not accept Jesus as Messiah? Nathanael "was under the fig tree". The fig tree was the symbol of Israel (cf. Mq 4: 4; Zc 3: 10; 1 Kg 5: 5). "To be under the fig tree" was the same as being faithful to the project of the God of Israel. The authentic Israelite is the one who knows how to detach himself from his own ideas when he perceives that these are not in agreement with God's project. The Israelite who is not ready to converse is neither authentic nor honest. Nathanael is authentic. He expected the Messiah according to the official teaching of that time, according to which the Messiah came from Bethlehem in Judea. The Messiah could not come from Nazareth in Galilee (Jn 7: 41-42.52). This is why Nathanael resists himself to accept Jesus as Messiah. But the encounter with Jesus helps him to become aware that God's project is not always as persons imagine it or desire that it be. Nathanael recognizes his own deception, he changes idea, accepts Jesus as Messiah and confesses: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!"
- The diversity of the call. The Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke present the call of the first disciples in quite a brief way: Jesus walks along the seashore, and he calls Peter and Andrew. Then he calls John and James (Mk 1: 16-20). The Gospel of John has a different way of describing the beginning of the first community which was formed around Jesus. John does it by narrating very concrete stories. One is struck by the variety of the calls and of the encounters of persons among themselves and with Jesus. Thus, John teaches what is necessary to do to begin a community. It is by means of contacts and personal invitations, and it is like that even today! Jesus calls some directly (Jn 1: 43). Others indirectly (Jn 1: 41-42). One day he called two disciples of John the Baptist (Jn 1: 39). The following day he called Philip who, in turn, called Nathanael (Jn 1: 45). No call is repeated because every person is diverse. People will never forget the important calls which have marked their life. One even remembers the hour and the day (Jn 1: 39).
- John 1: 50-51: The angels of God who descend and ascend on the Son of Man. The confession of Nathanael is only at the beginning. Anyone who is faithful, will see heaven open and the angels who go up and descend on the Son of Man. They will experience that Jesus is the new bond of union between God and us, human beings. It is the realization of the dream of Jacob (Gn 28: 10-22).
- The angels who go up and descend the ladder. The three Archangels: Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael. Gabriel explained to Prophet Daniel the meaning of the

vision (Dn 8: 16; 9: 21). The angel Gabriel also took God's message to Elizabeth (Lk 1: 19) and to Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Lk 1: 26). His name means "God is strong". Raphael appears in the Book of Tobit. He accompanies Tobias, the son of Tobit and of Anna, throughout the trip and protects him from all danger. He helps Tobias to liberate Sara from the evil spirit and to cure Tobit, his father, from his blindness. His name means "God heals". Michael helped the Prophet Daniel in his struggles and difficulties (Dn 10: 13, 21; 12: 1). The letter of Jude says that Michael disputed with the devil over the body of Moses (Jude 1, 9). It was Michael who obtained victory over Satan, throwing him out of Heaven and throwing him into hell (RV 12: 7). His name means: "Who is like God!" The word 'angel' means messenger. He takes a message from God. In the Bible, the entire nature could be the messenger of God himself, when it turns its face on us and reveals God's love for us (Ps 104: 4). The angel can be God himself, when he turns his face on us and reveals his loving presence to us.

Personal Questions

- Have you already had some encounter which has marked your whole life? How have you discovered there the call of God?
- Have you been interested, some times, like Philip, to call another person to participate in the community?

Concluding Prayer

I thank you, Yahweh, with all my heart, for you have listened to the cry I uttered. In the presence of angels I sing to you, I bow down before your holy Temple. (Ps 138: 1-2)

Saturday, September 30, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

guide us, as you guide creation according to your law of love. May we love one another and come to perfection in the eternal life prepared for us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 9: 43b-45

Everyone was awestruck by the greatness of God. But while everyone was full of admiration for all he did, he said to his disciples, 'For your part, you must have these words constantly in mind: The Son of man is going to be delivered into the power of men.'

But they did not understand what he said; it was hidden from them so that they should not see the meaning of it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the second announcement of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. The disciples do not understand the words about the cross, because they are neither capable to understand a Messiah who becomes the servant of his brothers. They continue to dream about a glorious Messiah.

- Luke 9: 43b-44: The contrast. “Everyone was full of admiration for all he did”. Jesus said to his disciples “For your part you must have these words constantly in mind: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the power of men”. The contrast is very big. On one side, the vibration and admiration of the people for everything that Jesus said and did. Jesus seems to correspond to all that people dream, believe and expect. On the other side, the affirmation of Jesus that he will be put to death and delivered in the hands of men, that is, the opinion of the authority on Jesus is totally contrary to the opinion of the people.
- Luke 9: 45: The announcement of the Cross. “But they did not understand what he said; for them it was so mysterious, that they did not understand the sense and were afraid to ask questions concerning this argument”. The disciples listened to him but they did not understand the words about the cross. But even in this way, they do not ask for any clarification. They are afraid to show their ignorance!
- The title Son of Man. This name appears quite frequently in the Gospels: 12 times in John, 13 in Mark, 28 in Luke, 30 in Matthew. In all, it appears 83 times in the four Gospels. This is the name which pleased Jesus the most. This title comes from the Old Testament. In the Book of Ezekiel, is indicated the very human condition of the prophet (Ez 3: 1, 4, 10, 17; 4: 1 etc.). In the Book of Daniel, the same title appears in the apocalyptic vision (Dn 7: 1-28), in which Daniel describes the empires of the Babylonians, of the Medes, of the Persians and of the Greeks. In the vision of the prophet, these four empires have the appearance of “monstrous animals” (cf. Dn 7: 3-8). They are animal empires which are brutal, inhuman, which persecute, dehumanize and kill (Dn 7: 21, 25). In the vision of the prophet, after the anti-human kingdoms, the Kingdom of God appears which has the appearance, not of an animal, but rather of a human person, Son of Man. That is, a Kingdom with the appearance of people, a human kingdom, which promotes life, it humanizes (Dn 7: 13-14). In the prophecy of Daniel the Son of Man represents, not an individual, but rather, as he himself says, the “people of the Saints of the Most High” (Dn 7: 27; cf. Dn 7: 18). It is the People of God who do not allow themselves to be dehumanized nor deceived or manipulated by the dominating ideology of the animal empires. The Mission of the Son of Man, that is, of the People of God, consists in realizing the Kingdom of God like a human kingdom. That is, a Kingdom which promotes life, which humanizes persons.
- Presenting himself as Son of Man to the disciples, Jesus makes his own this mission which is the mission of all the People of God. It is as if he would say to them and to all of us: “Come with me! This mission is not only mine, but it belongs to all of us! Let us go together to carry out the mission which God has entrusted to us, and thus realize the human and humanizing Kingdom which he dreamt!” And he did this during all his life, especially during the last three years. Pope Leo the Great said: “Jesus was so human, but so human, like only God can be human”. The more human he was, the more divine he was. The more he is “Son of Man” the more he is “Son of God!” Everything which dehumanizes persons draws away from God. That was condemned by God, who has placed the good of the human person above all the laws, above the Sabbath or Saturday (Mk 2: 27). At the moment when he was

condemned to death by the religious tribunal of the Synedrium, Jesus assumes this title. When he was asked if he was “the Son of God” (Mk 14: 61), he answered that he is the “Son of Man”: “I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Almighty” (Mk 14: 62). Because of this affirmation he was declared, by the authority, guilty deserving death. He himself knew it because he had said: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10: 45).

Personal Questions

- How do you combine in your life, suffering and faith in God?
- In the time of Jesus there was contrast: people thought and expected or hoped in a certain way; the religious authority thought and expected or hoped in a different way. Today, this same contrast exists.

Concluding Prayer

Forever, Yahweh,

your word is planted firm in heaven. Your constancy endures from age to age; you established the earth and it stands firm. (Ps 119: 89-90)