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Lectio Divina: Tuesday, January 1, 2019

Visit of the Shepherds to Jesus and His Mother
The marginalized are God's favorites
Luke 2:16-21

1. Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us read the Scriptures the same way 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, and 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 a 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.

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The reason for Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem was the census imposed by Rome's emperor (Lk 2:1-7). Periodically, the Roman authorities decreed these censuses in the various regions of their immense empire. It was a matter of registering people and knowing how many had to pay taxes. The rich paid taxes on land and goods. The poor paid for the number of children they had.

In Luke's Gospel we note a significant difference between the birth of Jesus and that of John the Baptist. John is born at home, in his land, in the midst of parents and neighbors and is welcomed by all (Lk 1:57-58). Jesus is born unknown, away from His surroundings of family



and neighbors and far from His land. “There was no room in the inn.” He had to be left in a manger (Lk 2:7).

Let us try to put our text (Lk 2:16-21) into the wider context of the visit of the shepherds (Lk 2:8-21). As we read, let us try to pay attention to the surprises we find and the contrasts that appear in this text.

b) A division of the text to help us in our reading:

Luke 2:8-9: The shepherds in the field, the first persons invited

Luke 2:10-12: The first announcement of the Good News is made to the shepherds

Luke 2:13-14: The praise of the angels

Luke 2:15-18: The shepherds go to Bethlehem and tell of their vision of the angels

Luke 2:19-20: Mary’s attitude and that of the shepherds concerning these events

Luke 2:21: The circumcision of the child Jesus

c) Text:

In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favours. Now it happened that when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us.' So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds said to them. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as they had been told. When the eighth day came and the child was to be circumcised, they gave him the name Jesus, the name the angel had given him before his conception.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What did you like best in this text? Why?
- b) What surprises and contrasts do you find in this text?
- c) How does the text teach us that the little ones are great in heaven and the poorest on earth?
- d) What is Mary's attitude and that of the shepherds concerning the mystery of God just revealed to them?
- e) What is the message Luke wants to communicate to us through these details?

5. For those who wish to go deeper into the theme

a) The context of then and of today:

The text of the feast of the Mother of God (Lk 2:16-21) is part of the broader description of the birth of Jesus (Lk 2:1-7) and the visit of the shepherds (Lk 2:8-21). The angel had announced the birth of the savior and gave a sign of recognition: "You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger!" They were expecting the savior of a whole people and they were to recognize Him in a newborn child, poor, who lies close to two animals! What a great surprise!

God's plan is fulfilled in an unexpected way, full of surprise. This happens today too. A poor child is the savior of the people! Can you believe this?

b) A commentary on the text:

Luke 2:8-9: The first invited people.

The shepherds were marginalized people and not appreciated. They lived together with the animals, separate from the rest of humanity. Because of their constant contact with animals, they were considered impure. No one would have ever invited them to visit a newly born baby. This is why the Angel of the Lord appears to pass on the great news of the birth of Jesus to them. Seeing the vision of the angels, they are full of fear.

Luke 2:10-12: The first announcement of the Good News

Luke 2:13-14: The praise of the angels: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those He favors.

A multitude of angels appears descending from heaven. It is heaven that bends itself towards the earth. The parts of this verse summarize God's plan. The first part tells us what happens in the world up there: Glory to God in the highest heaven. The second part tells us what will happen in the world here below: On earth peace for those He favors! If people could experience what it means to be favored by God, everything would be different and peace would dwell on earth. And this would be to the greater glory of God who dwells in the highest!

Luke 2:15-18: The shepherds go to Bethlehem and tell of their vision of the angels. The Word of God is no longer a sound produced by the mouth. It is an event! The shepherds literally say: "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us". In Hebrew, the expression DABAR means word or talk. The word of God is a creative force. It fulfills what it says. At creation God said: "Let there be light, and there was light!" (Gen 1:3). The word of the angel to the shepherds is the event of the birth of Jesus.

Luke 2:19-20: Mary's attitude and that of the shepherds concerning these events
Luke immediately adds that, "Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart". These are two ways of hearing and welcoming the Word of God: (i) The shepherds get up to see the events and verify the sign given by the angel, and then they go back to their flocks glorifying and praising God for all that they had seen and heard. (ii) Mary, on the other hand, carefully keeps all these events in her mind and meditates on them in her heart. To meditate on things in one's heart means to reflect on them in the light of the Word of God, to better understand their full significance.

Luke 2:21: The circumcision and Name of Jesus.

According to the norms of the law, the child Jesus is circumcised on the eighth day after His birth (cf. Gen 17:12). Circumcision was a sign of belonging to the people. It gave the person an identity. On this occasion each child received his name (cf. Lk 1:59-63). He receives the name of Jesus that had been given Him by the angel before His conception. The angel had said to Joseph that the name of the child had to be Jesus, as "He is the one who is to save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). The name of Jesus is the transliteration of the name "Yehoshua", or Joshua, and means Yahweh saves. Another name that will gradually be given to Jesus is Christ, which means Anointed or Messiah. Jesus is the awaited Messiah. A third name is that of Emmanuel, which means God with us (Mt 1:23).

c) Further information:

Mary in Luke's Gospel

i) The role of the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel:

These are two rather well known but less understood chapters. Luke writes them in imitation of the Old Testament. It is as though these two chapters were the last of the Old Testament so as to open the door for the coming of the New Testament. In these chapters, Luke creates an atmosphere of softness and praise. From beginning to end the mercy of God is sung: God, who comes to fulfill His promises. Luke shows us how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament and begins the New Testament. And He does so in favor of the poor, the anawim, who knew how to wait for His coming: Elisabeth, Zachary, Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna and the shepherds. That is why the first two chapters are history but not in the sense that we give to history today. They were more like a mirror for the Christians converted from paganism. They could discover who Jesus was and how He had come to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament, satisfying the deepest aspirations of the human heart. These chapters were also a mirror of the events that were taking place within the communities in Luke's time. The communities originating from paganism will be born from the communities of converted Jews. But these were different. The New did not correspond to what the Old Testament imagined and expected. It was "the sign of contradiction" (Lk 2:34), and caused tensions and was the source of much suffering. In Mary's reaction, Luke presents a model of how the communities could react to and persevere in the New.

ii) A key to the reading:

In these two chapters Luke presents Mary as a model for the life of the community. The key is given to us in the episode where the woman in the crowd praises the mother of Jesus. Jesus modifies the praise and says: "More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Lk 11:27-28). Herein lies the greatness of Mary. It is in the world where Mary knows how to relate to the Word of God that the communities contemplate. The better way of relating to the Word of God: welcoming it, incarnating it, living it, deepening it, reflecting on it, giving it birth and making it grow, allowing oneself to be overpowered by it even when one does not understand it or when one suffers because of it. This is the vision underlying the texts of chapters 1 and 2 of Luke's Gospel, which speak of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

iii) An application of the key to the texts:

1. Luke 1:26-38: The Annunciation: "Let it happen to me as you have said!"
Opening one's self so that the Word of God may be welcomed and incarnated.
2. Luke 1:39-45: The Visitation: "Blessed is she who believed!"
Recognizing the Word of God in the events of life.
3. Luke 1:46-56: The Magnificat: "The Almighty has done great things for me!"
A resistance hymn of hope.
4. Luke 2:1-20: The Birth: "She treasured all these things and pondered them in her

heart.”

The marginalized welcome the Word.

5. Luke 2:21-32: The Presentation: "My eyes have seen the salvation!"

God's promise is fulfilled.

6. Luke 2:33-38: Simeon and Anna: "A sword will pierce your soul"

Being a Christian means being a sign of contradiction.

7. Luke 2:39-52: At twelve years: " Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?"

They did not understand the Word of God addressed to them!

iv) The contrasts that stand out in our text:

1. In the darkness of the night a light shines (2:8-9).

2. The world up there, heaven, seems to embrace our world here below (2:13).

3. The greatness of God manifests itself in the weakness of a child (2:7).

4. The glory of God is made present in a manger, close to animals (2:16).

5. Fear generated by the sudden apparition of an angel is changed into joy (2:9-10).

6. Those completely marginalized are the first to be invited (2:8).

7. The shepherds recognize God present in a child (2:20).

6. Praying with the Psalm 23 (22)

“Yahweh is my shepherd!”

Yahweh is my shepherd,

I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows He lets me lie.

By tranquil streams He leads me

to restore my spirit.

He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits His name.

Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death

I should fear no danger,

for You are at my side.

Your staff and Your crook are there to soothe me.

You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil;

my cup brims over.

Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life.

I make my home in the house of Yahweh for all time to come.

7. 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.

The first thing the angel says is: Do not be afraid! The second is: Joy to be shared by the whole people! The third is: Today! Then the angel gives three names to indicate who Jesus is: savior, Christ and Lord! Savior is the one who frees all people from all ties! The authorities in those days liked to use the title savior. They attributed the title of Soter (Greek) to themselves. Christ means anointed or messiah. In the Old Testament this was the title given to kings and prophets. It was also the title of the future messiah who would fulfill the promises made by God to His people. This means that the newly born child, who lies in a manger, has come to fulfill the hopes of the people. Lord was the name given to God himself! Here we have the three greatest titles imaginable. From this announcement of the birth of Jesus as savior, Christ and Lord, can you imagine anyone with a higher standing? If an angel says to you: "Be careful! I give you this sign of recognition: you will meet a child in a manger, in the midst of poor people!" Would you believe him? God's ways are not our ways!

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, January 2, 2019

Christmas Time

1) Opening prayer

All-powerful Father,
You sent Your son Jesus Christ
to bring the new light of salvation to the world.
May He enlighten us with His radiance,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 1:19-28

This is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, "Who are you?" He admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Christ." So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" He said: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said." Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked

him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie." This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel speaks about the witness of John the Baptist. The Jews sent "priests and Levites" to question him. In the same way, some years later, they sent people to control the activity of Jesus (Mk 3:22). There is a resemblance between the response of the people regarding Jesus and the questions which authorities address to John. Jesus asks the disciples: Whom do people say that I am?" They answered: "Elijah, John the Baptist, Jeremiah, one of the Prophets" (cf. Mk 8:27-28). The authorities address the same questions to Jesus: Are You the Messiah, or Elijah, the Prophet?" John responds by quoting the prophet Isaiah: "I am a voice of one who cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord". The other three Gospels contain the same affirmation concerning John: he is not the Messiah, but he has come to prepare the coming of the Messiah (cf. Mk 1:3; Mt 3:3; Lk 3:4). The four Gospels give great attention to the activity and the witness of John the Baptist. Why do they insist so much in saying that John is not the Messiah?

- John the Baptist was put to death by Herod around the year 30. But up to the end of the first century, the time when the Fourth Gospel was written, John continued to be considered a leader among the Jews. After his death, the memory of John continued to have a strong influence in the living out of the faith of the people. He was considered a prophet (Mk 11:32). He was the first great prophet who appeared after centuries without prophets. Many considered him the Messiah. In the year 50 Paul passed through Ephesus, in Asia Minor, and found a group of people who had been baptized with the baptism of John (cf. Acts 19:1-4). Because of this, it was important to spread the witness of John the Baptist himself, saying that he was not the Messiah, and instead proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. John himself contributed to radiate better the Good News of Jesus.

- "How is it that you baptize if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet? The John's response is another affirmation in which he shows that Jesus is the Messiah: "I baptize with water, but standing among you, unknown to you, is one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo the strap of His sandal". Further ahead (Jn 1:33) John refers to the prophecies which announced the coming of the Spirit in the Messianic times: "The one on whom you will see the Spirit descend and rest upon Him, is the one who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit" (cf. Is 11:1-9; Ez 36:25-27; Joel 3:1-2).

4) Personal questions

- Have you had someone like John the Baptist who has prepared the way for you to receive Jesus?
- John was humble. He did not try to make himself greater than what he was in announcing Jesus. Have you been that way for someone in your life?

5) Concluding prayer

The whole wide world
has seen the saving power of our God.
Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth,
burst into shouts of joy! (Ps 98:3-4)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, January 3, 2019

Christmas Time

1) Opening prayer

Father, You make known the salvation of mankind
at the birth of Your Son.
Make us strong in faith
and bring us to the glory You promise.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - John 1:29-34

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one of whom I said, 'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.' I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel." John testified further, saying, "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him. I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God."

3) Reflection

- In the Gospel of John, history and symbol join together. In today's text, the symbolism consists in recalling texts of the Old Testament which reveal hints to the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. In these few verses (Jn 1:29-34) we find the following expressions which contain a symbolical description: 1) Lamb of God; 2) Who takes away the sins of the world; 3) He existed before me; 4) The descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove; 5) Son of God.
- **Lamb of God.** This title brings to mind the Exodus and the night of the first Passover. The blood of the Paschal Lamb, with which the doors of the houses were signed, was a sign of liberation (Ex 12:13-14). Jesus is the new Paschal Lamb who liberates His people (1 Co 5:7; 1 P 1:19; Rev 5:6-9).

- **Who takes away the sins of the World.** This recalls a very beautiful phrase of the prophecy of Jeremiah: “There will be no further need for everyone to teach neighbor or brother: “You will know the Lord, they will all know me, from the least to the greatest, says the Lord; since I shall forgive their guilt and never more call their sin to mind” (Jer 31:34).
- **He existed before me.** This recalls several texts of the Books of Wisdom, in which God’s Wisdom, which existed before all the other creatures and which was with God, fixed her dwelling among the people of God (Pro 8:22-31; Eccl 24:1-11).
- **The descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove.** It denotes creative action where it is said that the “Spirit of God sweeping over the waters” (Gen 1:2). The text of Genesis suggests the image of a bird which flies over its nest. An image of the new creation is thanks to the action of Jesus.
- **Son of God.** This is the title which summarizes all the others. The best comment on this title is the explanation from Jesus himself: “The Jews answered Him: ‘We are stoning You not for doing a good work, but for blasphemy: though You are only a man, You claim to be God’. Jesus answered: “Is it not written in your Law: I said: you are gods?” So the word ‘gods’ refers to those people to whom the word of God was addressed (and Scripture cannot be set aside). Yet to someone whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world you say, “You are blaspheming because I said, I am Son of God? If I am not doing My Father’s work there is no need to believe Me, but if I am doing it, then even if you refuse to believe in Me, at least believe in the work I do; then you will know for certain that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father” (Jn 10:33-38).

4) Personal questions

- Jesus offered himself completely for the whole of humanity. What can I offer to help my neighbor?
- We have also received the Holy Spirit. How conscious or aware am I that I am His temple?

5) Concluding prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh,
for He has performed wonders,
His saving power is in His right hand
and His holy arm. (Ps 98:1)

Lectio Divina: Friday, January 4, 2019

The call of the first disciples

1) PRAYER

Dear Father, You who are God Almighty and a merciful God, receive the prayer of your children, as the Savior that You have sent as a new light on the horizon of the world, rises again and shine on our entire lives.

2) READING

From the Gospel of John (1:35-42)

John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah," which is translated Christ. Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas," which is translated Peter.

3) MEDITATION

In the first chapter of his Gospel John takes us through a sort time of travel. A week punctuated by the repetition (three times) of the expression "the day after" (vv. 29, 35 and 43). Our track puts us at the second of these moments, the central one and the most important one, characterized by physical and spiritual transition of the first disciples of John to Jesus.

Our scene is brought to life by a very intense exchange of looks: from John to Jesus (v. 35), from Jesus to the two disciples (v. 38), by the disciples of Jesus (vv. 38-39), and finally Jesus speaks as he is looking, to the person of Peter (v. 42).

The evangelist uses different verbs, but all are full of nuances. Not casual looks, but life changing looks instead. Jesus, the Lord looks at His disciples and us, so that, in our turn, we should learn to look at Him. The verb that closes the passage is beautiful; "to look" which means in this manner, "to look inside".

Jesus is walking along the sea, along the shores of our lives, and John acts as a photographer. He records it. He uses verbs which tell us that today, Jesus still is passing by us, and our lives can be visited and intersected by Him. Our world can welcome the imprints of His footsteps.

The center of the passage is centered on the movement of Jesus. He walks first, then turns and stops. His eyes and His heart change the life of the two disciples. Here Jesus is revealed as God incarnate, God came among us. He turned from the bosom of the Father and turned toward us.

It is beautiful to see how the Lord draws us in His movements, in His own life. In fact, He invites the two disciples to "come and see." You can not sit still, when meeting the Lord and His presence puts us in motion. It makes us get up from our old positions and makes us run. Collecting all the verbs referring to the disciples in this passage, we have: "followed Him" (v. 37); "followed Him" (v. 38); "they went ... they saw ... they stayed with Him" (v. 39).

The first part of the passage closes with the beautiful experience of the first two disciples who remain with Jesus. They later come into His house and stay with Him. This is the path of salvation, of true happiness, which is offered to us when we accept to remain, to stand still, firm, determined, in love, without turning to and fro, toward one or the other master of the moment. Because, when there is Jesus, the Lord, and you are invited by Him, nothing is missing.

4) QUESTIONS

The time passage of this part of the Gospel, with its "day after" shows us that the Lord is not distant, but He enters our days and years in our concrete existence. Am I willing to open myself to Him, to share my life with Him? I am ready to deliver into His hands my present and my future so that He can drive my "day after"?

The disciples make a wonderful spiritual journey, highlighted by the verbs "heard, followed, went, saw, and stayed." Do I want to start this beautiful adventure with Jesus too? Do I open my ears to hear, to listen deeply, so I can give my positive response to the love of the Father who wants to join me? Do I feel born in me the joy of starting a new journey and walking behind Jesus? Are my heart and eyes wide open to see what really happens in and around me and to recognize in any event the presence of the Lord?

Peter receives a new name from Jesus and his life is completely transformed. Do I feel like that today, giving to the Father my name, my life and my whole person, so that He might give me a new birth as His son or daughter, calling me by name in His infinite love?

5) FINAL PRAYER

The LORD is my shepherd;

there is nothing I lack.

In green pastures You let me graze;

to safe waters You lead me;

You restore my strength.

You guide me along the right path for the sake of Your name.

Even when I walk through a dark valley,

I fear no harm for You are at my side.

(Psalm 23)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, January 5, 2019

Christmas Time

1) Opening prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God,
You give us a new vision of Your glory
in the coming of Christ Your Son.
He was born of the Virgin Mary
and came to share our life.
May we come to share His eternal life
in the glory of Your kingdom,
where He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 1:43-51

Jesus decided to go to Galilee, and he found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth." But Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Here is a true child of Israel. There is no duplicity in him." Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this." And he said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

3) Reflection

- Jesus returned to Galilee. He met Philip and called him by telling him: “Follow Me!” The purpose of the call is always the same: “to follow Jesus”. The first Christians sought to preserve the names of the first disciples and of some of them they even kept as their family names and the names of their places of origin. Philip, Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida (Jn 1:44). Nathanael was from Cana. Today, many forget the names of the people who were at the start of their communities. Remembering the names is a way of preserving identity.
- Philip meets Nathanael and speaks to him about Jesus: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth”. Jesus is the one to whom all the history of the Old Testament refers.
- Nathanael asks: “From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?” Probably, even in his question, there shows a rivalry which existed among the small villages of the same region: Cana and Nazareth. According to the official teaching of the scribes, the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, in Judah. He would not come from Nazareth in Galilee (Jn 7:41-42). Philip gives the same answer which Jesus gave to the other two disciples: “Come and see for yourself!” It is not by imposing, but by seeing that people are convinced. Once again the same way: to meet, to experience, to share, to witness, to lead toward Jesus!
- Jesus sees Nathanael and says: “Truly, he is an Israelite in whom there is no deception”. And He affirms that He already knew him when he was under the fig tree. How could Nathanael be an “authentic or true Israelite” if he did not accept Jesus as the Messiah? Nathanael “was under the fig tree”. The fig tree was the symbol of Israel (cf. Mi 4:4; Zc 3:10; 1 Kg 5:5). An authentic Israelite is one who knows how to detach himself from his own ideas when he sees that they are not in agreement with God’s plan. The Israelite who is not ready for this conversion is neither authentic nor honest. Nathanael is authentic. He was waiting for the Messiah according to the official teaching of the time (Jn 7:41-42,52). This is why, at the beginning, he did not accept a Messiah coming from Nazareth. But the encounter with Jesus helped him to understand that God’s plan is not always as people imagine or desire it to be. He recognizes and acknowledges his mistake, he changes his idea, and he accepts God as Messiah and confesses: “Rabbi, You are the Son of God: You are the King of Israel!” The confession of Nathanael is only the beginning: The one who will be faithful will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man. He will experience that Jesus is the new bond between God and human beings. It is the dream of Jacob which has become a reality (Gen 28:10-22).

4) Personal questions

- Which title for Jesus pleases you the most? Why?
- Have you had an intermediary that brought you to Jesus?

5) Concluding prayer

For Yahweh is good,
His faithful love is everlasting,
His constancy from age to age. (Ps 100:5)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, January 6, 2019

The Magi's journey of faith
The adoration of the child Jesus as King and Lord
Matthew 2:1-12

1. Opening prayer

Merciful Father, You have called me to meet You in this word of the Gospel, because You wish that I may have life, You wish to give me yourself. Send, I pray You, Your Holy Spirit upon me so that I may let myself be led along the holy way of this passage of Scripture. May I, today, get out of my prison to set out on a journey to seek You. May I recognize the star that You have lit as a sign of Your love on my journey to follow it tirelessly, intensely, committing my whole life. May I, finally, enter Your house and there see the Lord; may I bend low humbly before You to adore You and offer my life to You, all that I am and all that I have. Lord, by Your grace, may I return by a new route, without ever passing through the old paths of sin.

2. Reading

a) Placing the passage in its context:

This passage belongs to the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel, which constitute a kind of prologue to the whole work. We are presented with the historical origin of the Messiah as son of David, as well as His divine origin as Jesus Christ, God-with-us. Matthew immediately leads us into a very deep and engaging meditation, placing before us a choice about the people he introduces in his story: we either recognize and welcome the Lord who is just born, or we remain indifferent, even to wanting to eliminate Him and kill Him. This passage offers us the beautiful story of the journey of the Magi, who come from afar because they want to seek and welcome, love and adore the Lord Jesus. But their long journey and tireless search, and the conversion of their hearts, are facts that speak of us, facts already written on the scroll of our own sacred story.

b) An aid to the reading of the passage:

The passage may be divided into two main parts, determined by the location where the scenes take place: the first part (2: 1-9a) takes place in Jerusalem, and the second part is focused around Bethlehem (2: 9b-12).

Mt 2: 1-2: The passage begins with the place and time of the birth of Jesus: in Bethlehem of Judea, at the time of king Herod. Within this quite specific description, the Magi suddenly appear, coming from afar, and arriving in Jerusalem under the guidance of a

star. It is they who announce the birth of the Lord king. They ask where they might find Him because they wish to adore Him.

Mt 2: 3-6: On hearing the words of the Magi, king Herod, and with him all of Jerusalem, is disturbed and afraid. Rather than welcoming the Lord and joining Him, they seek to eliminate Him. Herod calls the authorities of the Jewish people and the experts in scripture. It is they, with the help of ancient prophecies, who reveal Bethlehem as the place to find the Messiah.

Mt 2: 7-8: Herod calls the Magi in secret because he wants to use them for his own evil ends. His detailed interest is entirely directed towards the elimination of Christ.

Mt 2: 9a: The Magi, urged by strength of faith and led by the star, leave again and go towards Bethlehem.

Mt 2: 9b-11: The star reappears, moves with the Magi and leads them to the exact spot where the Lord Jesus is. Full of joy, they enter the house and prostrate themselves. They offer precious gifts because they recognize that He is king and Lord.

Mt 2: 12: When they have contemplated and adored the Lord, the Magi receive a revelation from God. It is He who speaks to them. They are new men. They have in them a new heaven and a new earth. They are free of the deceits of Herod and therefore they go back to their lives by an entirely new way

c) The text:

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel." Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage." After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

I listen deeply to the silent voice of the Lord and let the breath of the Spirit come to me and infuse me. In this silence I seek the Lord and repeat in my heart: "Where are You, my God?"

4. A few questions

- a) I take the first words that come from the mouths of the Magi and make them my own: “*Where is the infant king of the Jews?*” Do I really feel attracted to the place where the Lord is because I desire to be with Him? Am I ready to leave the dark and old places of my habits and my comfort, to undertake a journey of faith in search of Jesus?
- b) “*We have come to adore Him*”. Here the Word of the Lord tests me and puts me through a crucible: do I really live in a relationship of love with God? Am I able to open my life in His presence and allow Him to enter into my very heartbeats?
- c) “*From you will come a leader who will shepherd My people*”. Am I capable of placing and giving my whole existence to the guidance of the Lord? To trust in Him, in His love, in His real presence, even though He remains invisible?
- d) “*Going into the house they saw the child*”. It is precisely because they accept to go into the house, to enter into communion, to give themselves fully and truly, that their eyes can see, contemplate, and recognize. Am I not aware of the fact that the more I stay outside, the more I am distant from the life of my brothers and sisters and the more I become sad and empty?

5. A key to the reading

I look for some key words, some basic themes, that may guide and help me better penetrate the meaning of this passage of the Gospel, so that my life may be enlightened and changed by this Word of the Lord.

* **The journey:** This passage seems to be given the theme of a journey, an exodus, a going out. The Magi, these mysterious characters, get moving, go far away from their land and go seeking the king, the Lord. Matthew presents this fact by means of some verbs that proceed along with the development of the event: “*came, we have come, sent them, go, set out, went before them, going into, not to go back, returned.*” The physical journey of the Magi hides a much more important and meaningful journey: the journey of faith. This is the movement of the soul born from a desire to meet and know the Lord. At the same time it is God’s invitation which calls and attracts us with His own power. It is He who gets us to stand up and sets us in motion and who offers us signs and does not cease to walk with us. Scripture gives us many important examples, and these help us enter into this path of grace and blessings. God said to Abraham: “Leave your country, your family and your father’s house, for the land I will show you” (Gen 12:1). Jacob was also a pilgrim of faith and conversion. It is written about him: “Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran” (Gen 28:10), and: “Moving on, Jacob went to the land of the sons of the East” (Gen 29:1). Many years later, the Lord spoke to him and said: “Go back to the land of your forefathers and to your kindred; and I will be with you” (Gen 31:3). Moses was also a man on a journey. God Himself showed him the way, the exodus, in his heart, and made his whole life a long march of salvation for him and for his brothers and sisters. “So come, I send you to Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel, My people, out of Egypt!” (Ex 3:10). As the new people of God, we are the children of the promise and of the new covenant and are called to go out, setting out on a journey in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. The exodus never ceased. The liberation that comes

from faith is always active. Let us look at Jesus, at His apostles, at Paul: not one of them stands still, not one of them hides. All these witnesses speak to us today by their deeds and they repeat: “Blessed is he who finds in You his strength and one who decides in his heart to go on the holy journey” (Ps 83:6).

* **The star:** This is a very important and central element in this passage because the star has the role of guiding the Magi to their destination, enlightening their nights along the journey, indicating precisely the place of the presence of the Lord, and giving great joy to their hearts. Throughout the Bible, stars appear as signs of blessing and glory, almost as a personification of God, who does not abandon His people, and at the same time, is a personification of the people that does not forget its God and praises and blesses him (cfr. Ps 148:3; Bar 3:34). The word *star* appears for the first time in Scripture in Genesis 1:16. On the fourth day the story of creation tells us of the appearance in the heavens of the sun, the moon and stars, as signs and as light, to set order and give light. The Jewish term for “star” *kokhab* is very beautiful and full of meaning. In fact, the letters that make up the word reveal the immensity of the presence that these celestial elements bring with them. We find two letters kaf, which signify “hand” and which enclose the letter waw which means man. Thus, within the stars there are two hands, kaf and kaf, that lovingly hold within them waw, man. These are the hands of God that never cease to hold us, if only we entrust ourselves to them. Then appears the letter *bet*, which means house. Thus, the stars speak of our journey towards our house, our constant migration, from whence we have come, from the day of our creation and even from all eternity. Often God compares the descendants of Abraham to the stars in the heavens, almost as if each person is a star, born to give light in the night: “Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can” and then He adds: “Such will be your descendants” (Gen 15:5). Jesus is also a star, the star that takes its rise from Jacob (Num 24:17), which rises from on high and is the radiant morning star as the Apocalypse says (22:16). By taking on flesh the infinite love of God, which bends itself down towards us, His children, opens the palms of His hands to gather and welcome us. Only such love can give our infinite weakness the capacity and courage, the perseverance and joy of accepting to leave and to go on the long and arduous journey of faith which takes us to Bethlehem, to the place where God appears to us.

* **The adoration:** The act of adoration is as old as humankind itself, because since the beginning, the relationship with the divine has been accompanied by this demand of love, humility, and self-offering. Before the greatness of God, we little people feel and discover that we are nothing, a speck of dust, a drop from a bucket. In the Old Testament, the act of adoration appears as an act of deep love towards the Lord, an act that demands the involvement of the whole person. It involves the mind, the will to choose, love full of desire and a body that bows and prostrates itself even to the ground. It is said in several places that the act of adoration is accompanied by a prostration with the face touching the ground. The face of man, his gaze, his breath returns to the dust whence he has his origin and there he recognizes himself as creature of God, as a breath of God’s nostrils. “Come in, let us bow, prostrate ourselves, and kneel in front of Yahweh our maker” (Ps 94:6). This is the invitation of Scripture to us every day which shows us the way to walk so that we may again and again come to the truth and therefore

live fully.

The New Testament goes even deeper in its spiritual reflection on this fact and seems to want to accompany us on a pedagogical journey of conversion and maturity in our interior life. In the Gospels we see the disciples, men and women, adoring the Lord Jesus after His resurrection (Mt 28:9; Lk 24:52) because they recognize Him as God. Jesus' words in His dialogue with the Samaritan woman give us a deep insight into the truth of this act, which after all, involves the whole of life and is an attitude of the heart. Adoration is for God the Father and does not happen here or there but in Spirit and in truth, which is in the Spirit and the Son, Jesus. We must not deceive ourselves. It is not by moving from one place to another, nor by seeking this or that spiritual person, that we can adore our God. The movement, the journey, is an interior one and takes place in our deepest being and is a complete surrender of ourselves, our life, and our whole being, to the wings of the Holy Spirit and into the arms of Jesus which are wide open on the cross and ever ready to attract all things to himself. St. Peter says clearly: "Simply reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts" (1 Pt 3:15). The act of bowing to the ground, of prostrating ourselves before the Lord comes from the heart. If we let ourselves be touched and reach into our hearts, if we allow the Lord to enter our hearts, that sacred space, then He will change us completely, transforming the whole of our person to make of us new men and women.

6. A moment of prayer: Psalm 84

*A hymn concerning the trust of man
on his journey to the house of God*

**Res. I have seen Your star, Lord,
and I have come to adore You!**

How lovely are Your dwelling-places, YHWH Sabaoth.
My whole being yearns and pines for Yahweh's courts,
My heart and my body cry out for joy to the living God.
Even the sparrow has found a home, the swallow a nest to place its young: Your
altars, YHWH Sabaoth, my King and my God.
How blessed are those who live in Your house;
they shall praise You continually.
Blessed those who find their strength in You,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of the Balsam,
they make there a water-hole,
and -- a further blessing -- early rain fills it.
They make their way from height to height,
God shows himself to them in Zion.
YHWH Sabaoth, hear my prayer,
listen, God of Jacob.
God, our shield, look,
and see the face of Your anointed.

Better one day in Your courts than a thousand at my own devices,
to stand on the threshold of God's house
than to live in the tents of the wicked.
For Yahweh God is a rampart and shield,
he gives grace and glory;
Yahweh refuses nothing good to those whose life is blameless.
YHWH Sabaoth,
blessed is he who trusts in You.

7. Closing prayer

Lord, my Father, I have really seen Your star, I have opened my eyes to Your presence of love and salvation and I have received the light of life. I have contemplated the night changed into light, pain into joy and solitude into communion; yes, all this happened before You, in Your Word. You have led me through the desert; You have led me to Your house and opened the door for me to enter. There I saw You, Your Son Jesus, savior of my life; there I prayed and adored, I cried and found Your smile, I kept silence and learned to speak. In Your house, merciful Father, I have found life once more! And now I am going back, I have resumed my journey, but the way is not the one I took before and my life is not what it was before. Your Word has left me with a new heart, capable of opening itself to love, to listen, to welcome and become home to so many brothers and sisters whom You have placed in my way. I was not aware, Lord, but You have made me into a child again, You have given birth to me with Jesus. Thank You, Father, my Father!

Lectio Divina: Monday, January 7, 2019

Christmas Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord, let the light of Your glory shine within us,
and lead us through the darkness of this world
to the radiant joy of our eternal home.

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.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled: Land of Zebulun and

land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen. From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people. His fame spread to all of Syria, and they brought to him all who were sick with various diseases and racked with pain, those who were possessed, lunatics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan followed him.

3) Reflection

- Some brief information on the objective of the Gospel of Matthew: The Gospel of Matthew was written during the second half of the first century in order to encourage the small and fragile community of converted Jews who lived in the region of Galilee and Syria. They suffered persecution and threats on the part of the Jewish brothers because they had accepted Jesus as the Messiah and for having received the pagans. In order to strengthen them in their faith, the Gospel of Matthew insists on saying that Jesus is really the Messiah and that the salvation which Jesus comes to bring is not only for the Jews, but for all of humanity. At the beginning of his Gospel, in the genealogy, Matthew already indicates this universal vocation of Jesus, because being "son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1, 17) He will be a source of blessings for all the nations of the world" (cf. Gen 12:3). In the visit of the Magi, who came from the East, he suggests once again that salvation is addressed to the pagans (Mt 2:1-12). In the text of today's Gospel, he shows that the light which shines in the "Galilee of the Gentiles" shines also outside the frontiers of Israel, in the Decapolis and beyond the Jordan (Mt 4:12-25). Further on, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will say that the vocation of the Christian community is that of being "salt of the earth and light of the world" (Mt 5:13-14) and He asks people to love their enemies (Mt 5:43-48). Jesus is the servant of God who announces the rights of the nations (Mt 12:18). Helped by the Canaanite woman, Jesus Himself overcomes the barriers of race (Mt 15:21-28). He also overcomes the laws of purity which prevented the Gospel from being opened to the pagans (Mt 15:1-20). And finally, when Jesus sends His disciples to all nations, the universality of salvation is even clearer (Mt 28:19-20). In the same way, the communities are called to open themselves to all, without excluding anyone, because all are called to live as sons and daughters of God.

- Today's Gospel describes how this universal mission is an initiative. The news of the imprisonment of John the Baptist impels Jesus to begin His preaching. John had said, "Repent, because the Kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mt 3:2). This was the reason why he was imprisoned by Herod. When Jesus knew that John had been imprisoned, He returned to Galilee proclaiming the same message: "Repent, because the Kingdom of

God is at hand!” (Mt 4:17). In other words, from the beginning, the preaching of the Gospel involved risks, but Jesus did not allow Himself to be frightened. In this way, Matthew encourages the communities which were running the same risks of persecution. He quotes from Isaiah: “The people who lived in darkness have seen a great light!” Like Jesus, the communities are also called to be “the light of nations!”

- Jesus began the announcement of the Good News by going through the whole of Galilee. He does not stop, waiting for the people to arrive, but He goes to the people. He Himself participates in the meetings, and in the synagogues, to announce His message. The people bring the sick and the possessed, and Jesus accepts all and cures them. This service to the sick forms part of the Good News and reveals to the people the presence of the Kingdom.

- Thus, the fame of Jesus is spread throughout all the region, going beyond the frontier of Galilee, penetrates Judah, reaches Jerusalem, goes beyond the Jordan and reaches Syria and the Decapolis. In this region there are also some communities for whom Matthew was writing his Gospel. Now they know that in spite of all the difficulties and the risks, there is already the light which shines in the darkness.

4) Personal questions

- Are you also light for others?
- Today many close themselves up in the Catholic religion. How can we live the universality of salvation?
- “Repent” is a common phrase heard in Christian discussions. What does this really mean? Take some time to examine the meaning of “repent” and its forms, and what it means personally.

5) Concluding prayer

I will proclaim the decree of Yahweh:
He said to me, "You are My son,
today have I fathered you." (Ps 2:7)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, January 8, 2019

Christmas Time

1) Opening prayer

Father, Your Son became like us
when He revealed Himself in our nature;
help us to become more like Him,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 6:34-44

When Jesus saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. By now it was already late and his disciples approached him and said, "This is a deserted place and it is already very late. Dismiss them so that they can go to the surrounding farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat." He said to them in reply, "Give them some food yourselves." But they said to him, "Are we to buy two hundred days' wages worth of food and give it to them to eat?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out they said, "Five loaves and two fish." So he gave orders to have them sit down in groups on the green grass. The people took their places in rows by hundreds and by fifties. Then, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; he also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied. And they picked up twelve wicker baskets full of fragments and what was left of the fish. Those who ate of the loaves were five thousand men.

3) Reflection

- It is always good to look at the context in which the text of the Gospel is found because it enlightens us to discover the meaning more fully. A bit before (Mk 6:17-19), Mark narrates the banquet of death, organized by Herod with the great people of Galilee, in the palace of the capital city, during which John the Baptist was killed. In today's text, he describes the banquet of life promoted by Jesus with the hungry crowds of Galilee there in the desert. The contrast of this context is great and enlightens the text.
- In Mark's Gospel, the multiplication of the loaves is very important. It is mentioned twice: here and in Mk 8:1-9. And Jesus Himself questions the disciples on the multiplication of the loaves (Mk 8:14-21). This is why it is worthwhile to observe and to reflect, so as to discover what exactly is the importance of the multiplication of the loaves.

- Jesus had invited the disciples to rest a bit in a place in the desert (Mk 6:31). The crowds noticed that Jesus had gone to the other side of the lake, and they followed Him and arrived there before He did (Mk 6:33). When Jesus, getting down from the boat, sees that large crowd waiting for Him, He becomes sad “because they were like sheep without a shepherd”. This phrase recalls the psalm of the Good Shepherd (Ps 23). Faced with these people without a shepherd, Jesus forgets to rest and begins to teach. He begins to be a shepherd. With His words, He guides the crowds in the desert of life; and in this way the crowd could sing, “The Lord is my Shepherd! There is nothing I shall want!” (Ps 23:1).
- Time went by and it began to be late and dark. The disciples were concerned and asked Jesus to send the people away. They affirm that there in the desert it is not possible to find anything to eat for so many people. Jesus says, “Give them some food yourselves.” But they were afraid: “Do you want us to go and buy bread for 200 denarii?” (that is, the salary of 200 days!). The disciples seek a solution outside the crowds, for the crowds. Jesus does not seek the solution outside, but rather within the crowd and for the crowd and He asks, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” The answer is, “Five loaves and two fish!” It is very little for so many people! Jesus orders the crowd to sit down in groups and asks the disciples to distribute the bread and the fish. Everybody ate enough to be satisfied!
- It is important to observe how Mark describes this fact: Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, raised His eyes to Heaven, pronounced the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to the disciples to distribute it. This way of speaking makes the communities think about what? No doubt, this made them think about the Eucharist. Because these same words will be used (even now) in the celebration of the Supper of the Lord. Thus Mark suggests that the Eucharist has to lead us to share. It is the Bread of Life which gives us courage and leads us to face the problems of people in a different way, not from outside, but from inside.
- In the way of describing the facts, Mark recalls the bible in order to illuminate the meaning of the facts. To feed the hungry crowds in the desert, Moses was the first one to do it (cf. Ex 16:1-36). And to ask the people to organize themselves and sit down in groups of 50 or 100 reminds us of the census of the people in the desert after they left Egypt (cf. Num 1-4). In this way, Mark suggests that Jesus is the new Messiah. The people of the communities knew the Old Testament, and for one who understands well, a few words suffice. In this way they discovered the mystery which surrounded the person of Jesus.

Thoughts to put into practice

When we think of feeding the world, or of all the need in the world, it can be overwhelming and might either give us a reason to put it off until we have a solution,

or throw up our hands in the face of such an enormous task. Mother Teresa (St Teresa of Calcutta) offered advice throughout her life on this. It is necessary to first love those in your family. Love begins at home.

Some families have someone who is suffering or lonely, yet we don't even have time to smile at them. "If you really want to be God's love in the world of today, begin to be God's love in your own home first." You must be hope of eternal happiness to your husband, your wife, your child, your grandparents, parents, and whoever is connected to you. Even among co-workers in the office or at the job, can they see Jesus in you? So many people go to their office meetings to defend their interests, rather than serve for instance.

She once visited what would be a care home for the elderly. It had everything they needed and was quite beautiful, yet she noticed everybody was sad and looking towards the door. When she asked a sister why, she was told they spend their time expecting, hoping, that a son or daughter will come to visit them. They hurt because they are forgotten.

Another time, a rich man visited from another country and asked her if she wanted him to give up his big house and nice car. She said "no" - but go back and see some of the lonely people where you live. Take them in your nice car and invite them in and entertain them in your big house for a short time. Make your house a center for love! "And when you buy some clothes, buy one for a little less and use the extra money to buy something for someone else."

These are ways to start.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus forgets to rest in order to serve the people. What example does this set for myself?
- If we shared what we have today, there would be no hunger in the world. What can I do?
- Am I personally involved in serving and loving others, or is my effort just symbolic gesture from me?

5) Concluding prayer

In His days uprightness shall flourish,
and peace in plenty till the moon is no more.
His empire shall stretch from sea to sea,
from the river to the limits of the earth. (Ps 72:7-8)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, January 9, 2019

Christmas Time

1) Opening prayer

God, light of all nations,
give us the joy of lasting peace,
and fill us with Your radiance
as You filled the hearts of our fathers.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 6:45-52

After the five thousand had eaten and were satisfied, Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side toward Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And when he had taken leave of them, he went off to the mountain to pray. When it was evening, the boat was far out on the sea and he was alone on shore. Then he saw that they were tossed about while rowing, for the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out. They had all seen him and were terrified. But at once he spoke with them, "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!" He got into the boat with them and the wind died down. They were completely astounded. They had not understood the incident of the loaves. On the contrary, their hearts were hardened.

3) Reflection

- After the multiplication of the loaves (yesterday's Gospel), Jesus ordered the disciples to go into the boat. Why? Mark does not explain this. The Gospel of John says the following. According to the hope people had at that time, the Messiah would repeat the gesture of Moses and would feed the multitude in the desert. This is why, before the multiplication of the loaves, the people concluded that Jesus must be the expected Messiah, announced by Moses (cf. Dt 18:15-18) and they wanted to make Him a King

(cf. Jn 6:14-15). This decision of the people was a temptation for Jesus as well as for the disciples. For this reason, Jesus obliged the disciples to take the boat and leave. He wanted to avoid the risk of them being contaminated with the dominant ideology, because the “leaven of Herod and of the Pharisees” was very strong (Mk 8:15). Jesus Himself faces the temptation through prayer.

- Mark describes the events with great art. On one side, Jesus goes up to the mountain to pray. On the other, the disciples go toward the sea and get into the boat. It almost seems like a symbolical picture which foreshadows the future: it is as if Jesus went up to Heaven, leaving the disciples alone in the midst of the contradictions of life, in the fragile boat of the community. It was night. They are in the high seas, all together in the small boat, trying to advance, rowing, but the wind was strong and against them. They were tired. It was night, between three and six o’clock in the morning. The communities of the time of Mark were like the disciples. In the night! Contrary wind! They caught no fish, in spite of the efforts made! Jesus seemed to be absent! This is very symbolic of the times. But He was present and came close to them, and they, like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, did not recognize Him (Lk 24:16).

- At the time of Mark, around the year 70, the small boat of the communities had to face the contrary wind on the part of some converted Jews who wished to reduce the mystery of Jesus to the prophecies and figures of the Old Testament, as well as some converted pagans who thought it was possible to have a certain alliance between faith in Jesus and the empire. Mark tries to help the Christians to respect the mystery of Jesus and not to want to reduce Jesus to their own desires and ideas.

- Jesus arrives walking on the water of the sea of life. They scream, taken up by fear, because they think that it is a ghost. As it happens in the passage of the disciples on the way to Emmaus, Jesus pretends that He wants to continue to walk (Lk 24:28). But they cry out and this causes Him to change the way. He gets close to them and says, “Courage, it is I, do not be afraid!” Here, once again, for one who knows the story of the Old Testament, this recalls some very important facts: (a) Remember that the people, protected by God, crossed the Red Sea without fear; (b) Remember that God, calling Moses, declared his name several times, saying, “I am He who is!” (cf. Ex 3:15); (c) Remember also the Book of Isaiah which represents the return from the exile as a new Exodus, where God appears, repeating numerous times, “I am He who is!” (cf. Is 42:8; 43:5,11,13; 44:6,25; 45:5-7). This way of recalling the Old Testament, of using the bible, helped the communities to recognize the presence of God in Jesus and in the facts of life. Do not be afraid!

- Jesus got into the boat and the wind ceased. But the disciples’ fear, instead of disappearing, increases. Mark the Evangelist criticizes them and says, “They had not understood what the miracle of the loaves meant, and their minds were closed” (6:52). The affirmation that their minds were closed reminds us of the heart of Pharaoh which was hardened (Ex 7:3,13,22) and of the people in the desert (Ps 95:8) who did not want

to listen to Moses and thought only of returning to Egypt (Num 20:2-10), where there was plenty of bread and meat to satisfy them (Ex 16:3).

4) Personal questions

- Night, stormy sea, contrary wind... Have you ever felt like this? What have you done to overcome it?
- Have you been afraid so many times because you have not known how to recognize Jesus present and acting in your life?
- How does this passage apply to me personally and to the Church today, with all the world problems and challenges?

5) Concluding prayer

He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the needy from death.
From oppression and violence He redeems their lives,
their blood is precious in His sight. (Ps 72:13-14)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, January 10, 2019

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
through Christ Your Son
the hope of eternal life dawned on our world.
Give to us the light of faith
that we may always acknowledge Him as our Redeemer
and come to the glory of His kingdom,
where He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 4:14-22a

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. Rolling up the scroll,

he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

3) Reflection

- Animated by the Spirit, Jesus returns toward Galilee and begins to announce the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Being in the community and teaching in the synagogues, He reaches Nazareth where He grew up. He was returning to the community where, since the time He was small, had participated in the celebration - for thirty years. The following Saturday, according to His custom, He went to the synagogue to be with the people and to participate in the celebrations.
- Jesus rises to read. He chooses a text from Isaiah which speaks about the poor, of prisoners, of the blind and the oppressed. The text reflects the situation of the people of Galilee in the time of Jesus. 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 proclaim the Good News to the poor, to proclaim freedom to prisoners, to restore sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. Going back to the ancient tradition of the prophets, He proclaims "a year of grace of the Lord". He proclaims a jubilee year. Jesus wants to reconstruct the community, the clan, in such a way that once again it may be the expression of their faith in God! And then, as God is Father of all, we should all be brothers and sisters of one another.
- In ancient Israel, the great family, the clan or **community**, was the basis of living together. It was the protection of families and of the people, the guarantee of the possession of the land, the principal channel of tradition, and the defense of the people. It was a concrete way of embodying the love of God in the love for neighbor. To defend the clan, the community, was the same as defending the Covenant with God. In Galilee at the time of Jesus, there was a two-fold segregation, that of the politics of Herod Antipas (4 BC to 39 AD) and the segregation of the official religion. This became the system of exploitation and of repression of the politics of Herod Antipas supported by the Roman Empire. Many people were homeless, excluded, and without work (Lk 14:21; Mt 20:3, 5-6). The result was that the clan, the **community**, was weakened. The families and the people remained without any help, without any defense. The official religion maintained by the religious authorities of the time, instead of strengthening the community in a way in which it could receive and accept the excluded, strengthened this segregation even more. The law of God was used to legitimize the exclusion of many people: women, children, Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, the possessed, publicans, the sick, the mutilated, the handicapped. It was all the opposite of the fraternity which God had dreamt for all! This was the political and economic situation, as well as the religious ideology. Everything conspired to weaken the local community and hinder the

manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' program, based on the prophecy of Isaiah, offered an alternative.

- After finishing the reading, Jesus updated the text applying it to the life of the people, saying, “*Today*, this reading, which you have heard with your own ears, has been fulfilled!” His way of joining the bible to the life of the people produced a two-fold reaction. Some remained surprised and amazed. Others had a negative reaction. Some were scandalized and wanted to have nothing more to do with Him. They said, “Is He not the son of Joseph?” (Lk 4:22). Why were they scandalized? They were because Jesus says to accept and receive the poor, the blind, the oppressed. But they did not accept His proposal. And thus, when He presented His project to accept the excluded, He Himself was excluded!

4) Personal questions

- Jesus joined faith in God with the social situation of His people. How do I live my faith in God?
- Where I live, are there any blind, prisoners, or oppressed? How do I treat them?
- How do I treat immigrants and foreigners? Is it with inclusion and love, or not? Do I also use “the law” to segregate people?

5) Concluding prayer

May His name be blessed for ever,
and endure in the sight of the sun.
In Him shall be blessed every race in the world,
and all nations call Him blessed. (Ps 72:17)

Lectio Divina: Friday, January 11, 2019

1) Opening prayer

All-powerful Father,
You have made known the birth of the Savior
by the light of a star.
May He continue to guide us with the light,
for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Luke 5:12-16

It happened that there was a man full of leprosy in one of the towns where Jesus was; and when he saw Jesus, he fell prostrate, pleaded with him, and said, "Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean." Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do will it. Be made clean." And the leprosy left him immediately. Then he ordered him not to tell anyone, but "Go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them." The report about him spread all the more, and great crowds assembled to listen to him and to be cured of their ailments, but he would withdraw to deserted places to pray.

3) Reflection

- A leper came close to Jesus. He had to live far away from others, because whoever touched him remained impure! But that leper had great courage. He transgressed the norms of religion so as to be able to get close to Jesus. He said, "*Sir, if You want, You can heal me!*" That is to say, "It is not necessary for You to touch me." It is sufficient for the Lord to want it, and He cured him! The sentence reveals two evils: a) the *evil* of leprosy which renders him impure; b) the evil of isolation, to which he was condemned by society and by religion. This also reveals the man's great faith in the power of Jesus. Jesus, profoundly moved, heals him from both evils! In the first place, to cure the isolation, He touches the leper. It is as if He said, "For Me you are not excluded. I accept you as a brother!" And then He cures the leper saying, "*I do will it. Be made clean.*"
- The leper, in order to be able to enter in contact with Jesus, had transgressed the norms of the law. Jesus also, in order to be able to help that excluded man and reveal to him a new face of God, transgresses the norms of His religion and touches the leper. At that time, whoever touched a leper became impure according to the religious authority and by the law of the time.
- Jesus, not only cures, but also wants the cured person to be able to live with others. He once again inserts the person in society so that he can live together with others. At that time for a leper to be accepted again in the community, he needed a certificate from a priest, that he had been cured. It is the same today. The sick person leaves the hospital having a document signed by the doctor. Jesus obliges the person to go and look for the document, so that he can live normally with the others. He obliges the authority to recognize that this man has been cured.
- Jesus forbids the leper to speak about the healing. The Gospel of Mark informs us that this prohibition was not effective and went unheeded. The leper went away, but then started freely proclaiming and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but stayed outside in deserted places (Mk 1:45) Why? Jesus had touched a leper. For this reason, according to the opinion of the religion of the time, now He Himself was impure and should be far away from everybody. He could no

longer enter into the cities. Mark says that the people did not care at all about these official norms, in fact, *people came to Him from all parts* (Mk 1:45).

- The two-fold message which Luke and Mark give the community of their time and to all of us is the following: a) to announce the Good News means to give witness of the concrete experience that one has of Jesus. What does the leper announce? He tells the others the good that Jesus has done to him. That is all! All this! This is the witness which impels others to accept the Good News of God, that brought by Jesus. b) In order to take the Good News to people, it is necessary to not be afraid to transgress the religious norms which are contrary to God's project and which render communication, dialogue and the lived experience of love difficult, even if this implies difficulty for the people, as happened with Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- In order to help the neighbor, Jesus transgresses the law of purity. In the Church today, are there any laws which render difficult or prevent the practice of love toward neighbor?
- In order to be cured, the leper had the courage to challenge the public opinion of his time. Do I have such courage?
- Do I treat the homeless on the street as a leper? Think of all the times. Do I reach out and hold a hand, or give a hug, or do I cross the street or pretend they aren't there?
- Jesus gave what the leper needed, not a donation or some money. When I am asked for help, do I take the time to give the help that is needed to "cure" the problem, or do I offer some token donation (if at all) and just keep walking?

5) Concluding prayer

Praise Yahweh, Jerusalem, Zion, praise your God.
For He gives strength to the bars of your gates,
He blesses your children within you. (Ps 147:12-13)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, January 12, 2019

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
through Your Son You made us a new creation.
He shared our nature and became one of us;

with His help, may we become more like Him,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 3:22-30

Jesus and his disciples went into the region of Judea, where he spent some time with them baptizing. John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was an abundance of water there, and people came to be baptized, for John had not yet been imprisoned. Now a dispute arose between the disciples of John and a Jew about ceremonial washings. So they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him." John answered and said, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said that I am not the Christ, but that I was sent before him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete. He must increase; I must decrease."

3) Reflection

- Both John the Baptist and Jesus indicated a new way to the crowds. But Jesus, after having adhered to the movement of John the Baptist, and after having been baptized by him, advanced a step ahead and created His own movement. He baptized people in the Jordan River when John the Baptist was also doing it. Both of them attracted the poor and abandoned people of Palestine by announcing the Good News of the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus, the new preacher, had a certain advantage over John the Baptist. He baptized more people and attracted more disciples. Thus, a tension arose between the disciples of John and those of Jesus, concerning the "purification," that is, concerning the value of baptism. The disciples of John the Baptist experienced a certain envy and went to John to speak to him and informed him about the movement of Jesus.
- John's response to his disciples is a beautiful response, which reveals his great spirit. John helps his disciples to see things more objectively. He uses three arguments: a) Nobody receives anything which is not given by God. If Jesus does such beautiful things, it is because he receives them from God (Jn 3:27). Instead of having envy, the disciples should feel joy. b) John reaffirms once again that he, John, is not the Messiah but only the precursor (Jn 3:28). c) In the end, he uses a comparison taken from the wedding feast. At that time, in Palestine, on the day of the wedding, in the house of the bride, the so called "friends of the bridegroom" waited for the arrival of the bridegroom to present him to the bride. In this case, Jesus is the bridegroom, the crowd is the bride, John the friend of the bridegroom. John the Baptist says that, in the voice of Jesus, he

recognizes the voice of the bridegroom and can present him to the bride, to the crowds. At this moment, the bridegroom, the people, leave the friend of the bridegroom and follow Jesus, because they recognize in Him the voice of their bridegroom! And for this reason the joy of John is great, “complete joy”. John wants nothing for himself! His mission is to present the bridegroom to the bride! The last sentence summarizes everything: “He must increase, I must decrease!” This statement is also the program for anyone who follows Jesus.

- At the end of the first century, in Palestine as well as in Asia Minor, where there were some communities of Jews, there were also people who had been in contact with John the Baptist or who had been baptized by him (Acts 19:3). Seen from outside, the movement of John the Baptist and that of Jesus were very similar to one another. Both of them announced the coming of the Kingdom (cf. Mt 3:1-2; 4:17). There must have been some confusion between the followers of John and those of Jesus. And because of this, the witness of John about Jesus was very important. The four Gospels are concerned about transmitting the words of John the Baptist saying that he is not the Messiah. For the Christian communities, the Christian response, John’s response, “*He must increase but I must decrease*” was valid not only for the disciples of John at the time of Jesus, but also for the disciples of the Baptist or the Cambric community of the end of the first century.

4) Personal questions

- “He must increase, I must decrease”. This is John’s agenda. Is this also my agenda?
- What is important is that the bride finds the bridegroom. We are only spokespersons, nothing more. Am I this?
- Here John shows the essence of humility, which has many forms. In what ways do I exemplify humility?

5) 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)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, January 13, 2019

*The Baptism of Jesus and
His manifestation as the Son of God
Luke 3:15-16,21-22*

1. Opening prayer

Lord, our God and our Father, grant us to know the mystery of the baptism of Your Son. Grant that we may understand it as the Evangelist Luke understood it, as the early Christians understood it. Father, grant that we may contemplate the mystery of Jesus' identity as You revealed it at His baptism in the waters of the Jordan and who is present in our baptism.

Lord Jesus, by our listening to Your word, teach us what it means to be children in You and with You. You are the true Christ because You teach us to be children of God as You are. Grant us a deep awareness of the action of the Spirit who invites us to listen to the word with docility and attention.

Holy Spirit we ask You to calm our anxieties and fears so that we may become more free, simple and meek in listening to the voice of God who reveals Himself in the word of Jesus Christ, our brother and redeemer. Amen!

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The account of the baptism of Jesus, presented to us in this Sunday's liturgy, invites us to meditate on it and touches on a crucial question concerning our faith: **Who is Jesus?** At the time of Jesus and throughout history, this question has been answered in numerous ways and these indicate the attempt of human beings and believers to better understand the mystery of the person of Jesus. However, in this meditative exercise of ours, we wish to draw deeply from the more genuine and reliable source, the word of God. In describing the scene of Christ's baptism in the Jordan, Luke is not interested in telling us the historical and concrete details of this event, but rather invites us who read the Gospel in this liturgical year, to consider the main elements that enable us to grasp **the identity of Jesus.**

b) A division of the text to help us with the reading:

This passage from Luke contains two declarations on the identity of Jesus, namely the declaration of John (3:15-16) and that of God Himself (3:21-22).

- The first declaration is provoked by the people's reaction to the preaching and baptism of conversion of John: might he not be the Messiah? (3:15). John replies that there is a substantial difference between his baptism by water and Jesus' baptism administered in

the “Holy Spirit and fire.” (3:16).

- The second declaration comes from heaven and is made during Jesus’ baptism. In the background, there are the baptized from among whom the figure of Jesus comes forward to be baptized (3:21). The focal point of the scene is not the baptism, but the events surrounding it: the heavens open, the Spirit descends on Him and a voice is heard proclaiming Jesus’ identity (3:22).

c) The text:

The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."



3. A moment of prayerful silence

In the silence, try to bring to life in your heart the Gospel scene just read. Try to assimilate it and make the words your own, thus identifying your thoughts with the content or meaning of the words.

4. A few questions

to help us in our meditation and prayer.

- a) What effect did the “voice of God” declaring Jesus “the” only, beloved Son of God, have on you?
- b) Is this truth a shared and conscious conviction for you?
- c) Has the baptism of Jesus convinced you that God is not distant, closed in His transcendence and indifferent to humanity’s need of salvation?
- d) Does it not surprise you that Jesus goes down into the water of the Jordan to receive the baptism of penance, becoming one with sinners, He who is sinless?
- e) Jesus is no sinner, but He does not refuse to become one with sinful humanity. Are you convinced that salvation begins with the law of solidarity?
- f) You, who have been baptized in the name of Christ, “in the Holy Spirit and fire”, are

you aware that you have been called by God to experience God's solidarity with your personal history, so that you may no longer identify with sin that isolates and divides, but with love that unites?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to deepen their understanding.

I. The context of the Jesus' baptism

After the childhood accounts and in preparation for the public activities of Jesus, Luke tells us of John the Baptist's activities and the baptism and temptations of Jesus. These introduce Jesus' own activities and give them meaning. The Evangelist includes in one unique and complete frame all of the activities of John: from the beginning of his preaching on the banks of the Jordan (3:3-18) to his capture by Herod Antipas (3:19-20). When Jesus appears on the scene in 3:21 to be baptized, John is no longer mentioned. Through this silence, Luke makes explicit his reading of salvation history: John is the last prophetic voice of the promise of the Old Testament. Now the center of history is Jesus, and it is He who begins the time of salvation, which is extended into the time of the Church.

A significant element in the understanding of the events previous to those of John the Baptist and of Jesus is the geographical and political description of Palestine in the thirties. The Evangelist wants to present a historical dimension and a theological meaning to the Jesus event. He wants to say that it is not worldly political power (represented by Tiberius Caesar) nor religious power (represented by the high priests) that gives value or meaning to human events; but rather it is "the word of God that rests upon John, son of Zachary, in the desert" (Lk 1:2). For Luke, the new or developed aspect of the history inaugurated by Jesus lies in this context or political situation of profane and religious dominance and power. In previous times, in the accounts of the prophets, the word of God was addressed to a particular historical-political situation, but in John's message there is a sense of urgency: God comes in the person of Jesus. Thus the word of God calls John the Baptist from the desert to send him to the people of Israel. The task of this last prophet of the Old Testament is to prepare for the coming of the Lord among His people (Lk 1:16-17,76). He accomplishes this task by preparing all to receive God's forgiveness through the baptism of conversion (Ezek 36:25), which means a change in the way of seeing one's relationship with God. Changing one's life means practicing fraternity and justice according to the teaching of the prophets (Lk 3:10-14). As opposed to religious or social conformity, the reader of Luke's Gospel is invited to be open to the person of Jesus, the saving Messiah. Moreover, Luke emphasizes that the prophet John did not pretend to be Jesus' rival. On the contrary, the

prophet of the Jordan saw himself as entirely subordinate to the person of Jesus: “the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” (3:16). Again, Jesus is stronger because He gives the Spirit.

John’s life comes to a violent end in the manner of the classical prophets. The authenticity of a prophet is measured by his freedom in facing political power. Indeed, he courageously denounces the evil actions of Herod towards his people. There are two reactions to the call of the prophet: the people and sinners become converted, whereas the powerful react with repressive violence. John ends his days in prison. Through this tragic event, John anticipates the fate of Jesus who is rejected and killed, but who becomes the point of reference for all those persecuted by repressive power.

Finally, the Jordan is the physical setting of John’s preaching. Luke means to establish a close tie between this river and the Baptist: after His baptism, Jesus will never go to the Jordan again and John will never cross into Galilee and Judea, because these are places reserved for the activities of Jesus.

II. A commentary on the text

1. The Baptist’s words concerning Jesus (Lk 3:15-16)

In the first scene of the Gospel passage of today’s liturgy, John prophetically affirms that there is one “who is mightier” than he who is to come. This is the answer of the prophet of the Jordan to the opinion of the crowd that he might be the Christ. The crowds here are called people filled with expectation. For Luke, Israel is considered a people open and prepared to receive the messianic salvation (at least during the time before the crucifixion). John’s words draw on the images of the Old Testament and act to exalt the mysterious person whose imminent coming he announces: “He who is mightier than I is coming” (3:16).

a) the figure of “the mightier”

The Baptist begins to paint the figure of Christ with the adjective “mighty” already used by Isaiah of the king-Messiah: “mighty, powerful like God” (9:5) and a term used in the Old Testament to signify an attribute of the Creator, considered sovereign of the universe and of history: “Yahweh is king, robed in majesty, Yahweh is robed in power, He wears it like a belt” (Ps 93:1). The expression “one is coming” echoes a title of messianic flavor found in Psalm 118, a processional hymn sung during the feast of Tabernacles: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Luke applies this hymn to Jesus when He enters Jerusalem. The famous messianic proclamation in the book of the prophet Zachariah bears the same message: “See now, your king comes to you...” (9:9).

b) A humble gesture: “the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie”

This is another way the Evangelist describes the figure of Christ and has a typically oriental flavor: “to untie the thong of the sandals”. This is the task of a slave. The Baptist sees himself as a servant of the Messiah who is to come, moreover he feels humble and unworthy: “the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie”.

Then he presents the baptism that the proclaimed person will perform: “he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” In Psalm 104:3 the Spirit of God is defined as the principle that creates and regenerates all being: “Send forth Your Spirit, and they shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth.” The fire, however, is *par excellence* the symbol of divinity: it brings heat and enkindles, animates and destroys. It is the source of warmth and death.

2. The words from heaven concerning Jesus (Lk 3:1-22)

In the second scene we have a new profile or revelation of Christ. This time, it is God Himself, and not John, who paints the figure of Christ with solemn words: “You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.” This introduction and definition of Christ is supported by a real and particular heavenly choreography (the heavens open... the Spirit descends in the form of a dove... the voice from heaven) to show the divine quality of the words pronounced on the person of Jesus.

a) The dove is the symbol of the Spirit of God who possessed the prophets, but who now is infused in his fullness on the Messiah foretold by Isaiah: “On him the Spirit of Yahweh rests” (11:2). The symbol of the dove shows that with the coming of Jesus the perfect presence of God takes place, who manifests Himself in the pouring out of His Spirit. It is this fullness of the Holy Spirit that consecrates Christ for His saving mission and for the task of revealing to people the definitive word of the Father. It is certain that the sign of the dove shows the reader of the passage concerning the baptism that God is about to meet with humanity. This meeting is verified in the person of Jesus. The Baptist presented Jesus as the Messiah – who in the OT remains simply a man, even though perfect – and now God defines Jesus as the “beloved” Son. This title shows the supreme presence of God, which goes beyond that experienced in the cult or any other aspect of life in Israel.

b) The divine voice is another sign accompanying the revelation of Jesus in the waters of the Jordan. The voice recalls two texts of the Old Testament. The first is a messianic hymn that cites some words of God addressed to His king-Messiah: “You are My son, this day I have begotten you” (Ps 2:7). In the OT both the figure of the king and the Messiah were considered as adoptive sons of God. Jesus, however, is the beloved son, synonymous with the only son. The second text that throws light on the words pronounced by the voice from heaven is a passage taken from the Hymns of the servant

of the Lord and that the liturgy of the word of this Sunday gives us for the first reading: “Here is My servant whom I uphold, My chosen one in whom My soul delights” (Is 42:1). Two figures presented by Isaiah converge in Jesus: the hope of the Messiah-king and the figure of the suffering Messiah. It would not be improper to say that the scene of the baptism as presented by Luke is a true catechesis on the mystery of the person of Jesus, Messiah, king, servant, prophet, Son of God.

c) Again, from the voice from heaven we can see the transcendent, divine, unique quality of Jesus. This belonging of Jesus to the world of God will become visible, palpable, experienced in His humanity, in His belonging in the midst of people, in His wandering along the roads of Palestine.

Thus the Word of God this Sunday, through the account of Jesus’ baptism, is meant to introduce Jesus to the world in a solemn way. This presentation will be complete only on the cross and in the resurrection. Indeed, on the cross, two faces of Christ are presented, the human-saving face through His death on the cross for our redemption, and the divine face in the profession of faith of the centurion: “Indeed, this is the Son of God!” The word of God on this day of the Lord invites us to contemplate and adore the face of Christ that St. Augustine presented in one of his reflections: “In that face we can also see our features, those of the adoptive son revealed in our baptism.”

6. Psalm 42

When we experience the silence of God in our life, let us not grow discouraged, but let us always cultivate our thirst for Him together with all our brothers and sisters. Let us walk on the roads of the Kingdom, sure to find His presence in Christ Jesus.

Seeking the face of God

As a hart longs for flowing streams,
so longs my soul for Thee, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and behold the face of God?

My tears have been my food day and night,
while men say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my help
and my God.

7. Closing prayer

Lord God, when Your Son Jesus was being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan He prayed. Your divine voice heard His prayer that opened the heavens. The Holy Spirit too revealed His presence under the form of a dove. Listen to our prayer! We implore You to sustain us with Your grace so that we may behave truly as children of the light. Grant us the strength to abandon the habits of the old man so that we may be constantly renewed in the Spirit, clothed and imbued with the thoughts and feelings of Christ. Lord Jesus, You willed to be baptized by John the Baptist with the baptism of repentance. We turn the eyes of our heart to You so that we may learn to pray as You prayed to the Father at Your baptism, with filial trust and complete faithfulness to His will. Amen!

Lectio Divina: Monday, January 14, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.
Help us to know Your will
and to do it with courage and faith.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 1:14-20

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel." As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they left their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

3) Reflection

- After John had been arrested, Jesus went to Galilee. There He proclaimed the Gospel of God. John was arrested by King Herod for having denounced the immoral behavior of the King (Lk 3:18-20). The imprisonment of John the Baptist did not frighten Jesus! On the contrary, in that event He saw a symbol of the coming of the Kingdom. Today, would we know how to read the facts of politics and of urban violence to announce or proclaim the Good News of God?

- Jesus proclaimed the Good News of God. The Good News is of God not only because it comes from God, but also and, above all, because God is its content. God Himself is the greatest Good News for human life. He responds to the deepest aspiration of our heart. In Jesus, we see what happens when a human person allows God to enter and to reign. This Good News of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus has four different aspects:

- a) The time is fulfilled and has arrived. For the other Jews the time was not as yet fulfilled, had not arrived. There was still much missing for the coming of the Kingdom. For the Pharisees, for example, the Kingdom could be attained only when the observance of the law would be perfect. Jesus had another way of reading the facts. He says that the time is fulfilled; it has arrived.

- b) The Kingdom of God is close at hand! For the Pharisees the coming of the Kingdom depended on their efforts. It would have arrived only after they had observed the law. Jesus says the contrary: "The Kingdom is close at hand." It is already here! When Jesus says, "The Kingdom is close at hand", He does not mean to say that the Kingdom has been reached only at that moment, but rather that it was already there. What everybody was expecting was already present in their life, but they did not know it. They did not perceive it (cf. Lk 17:21). Jesus saw it! He saw and read reality from a different perspective. It is in this hidden presence of the Kingdom in the midst of the people that Jesus reveals Himself to the poor of His land. And this is the seed of the Kingdom which will receive the rain of His Word and the warmth of His love.

- c) Convert yourselves! The exact meaning is "change your way of thinking and of living." In order to be able to perceive the presence of the Kingdom in life, a person should begin to think and live in a different way. The person should change his or her way of life and find another way of living together with others! He/she should leave aside all of the legalism of the teaching of the Pharisees and allow the new experience of God to invade his/her life and give him/her a new way of looking so as to read and understand the facts in a new way.

- d) To believe in the Good News! It was not easy to accept this message. It is not easy for us to begin to think in a different way from all that we have learned since we were small children. This is possible only through an act of faith. When someone gives a different piece of news, it is difficult to accept it, and it is accepted only if we trust the person who delivers the news. And thus, you will say to others, "You can accept! I know

this person! This person does not deceive! You can trust him/her!” We can trust Jesus!

- The first objective of the proclamation of the Good News is to form a community. Jesus goes by; He sees and He calls. The first four who were called - Simon, Andrew, John and James - listen, abandon everything, and follow Jesus in order to form a community with Him. It seems to be love at first sight! According to Mark’s account, everything takes place in the first encounter with Jesus. Comparing with the other Gospels, people perceive that the four already knew Jesus (Jn 1:39; Lk 5:1-11). They had already had the opportunity to live with Him, to see Him help the people and to listen to Him in the synagogue. They knew how He lived and what He thought. The call was not something from one moment, but a progression of repeated calls and invitations, of progressing and retreating. The call begins and begins again always anew! In practice, it coincided with living together with Jesus for two or three years, since the time of the Baptism until the moment when Jesus ascended to Heaven (Acts 1:21-22). And then, why does Mark present this as something sudden, an act of love at first sight? Mark thinks of the ideal: the encounter with Jesus should bring about a radical change in our life!

4) Personal questions

- A political fact, the imprisonment of John, led Jesus to begin the proclamation of the Good News of God. Today, does the political situation exercise any influence in the proclamation of the Good News that we present to people today?
- “Repent! Believe in the Good News!” How is this taking place in my own life?

5) Concluding prayer

For You are Yahweh,
Most High over all the earth,
far transcending all gods. (Ps 97:9)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, January 15, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.

Help us to know Your will

and to do it with courage and faith.

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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 1:21-28

Jesus came to Capernaum with his followers, and on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him and said, "Quiet! Come out of him!" The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

3) Reflection

- Sequence of the Gospels of the days of this week. Yesterday's Gospel informed us about the first activity of Jesus. He called four people to form a community with them (Mk 1:16-10). Today's Gospel describes admiration for the teaching of Jesus (Mt 1:21-22) and the first miracle when He expels the devil (Mk 1:23-28). The Gospel of tomorrow narrates the cure of Peter's mother-in-law (Mk 1:29-31), the healing of many sick people (Mk 1:32-34) and the prayer of Jesus in an isolated place (Mk 1:35-39). Mark gathers all of these episodes which had been transmitted orally in the communities, joining them together like bricks of a wall. In the years 70's, the year in which he writes, the communities needed orientation. By describing how Jesus began His activity, Mark tells of what they should do to announce the Good News. Mark gives them a catechesis by telling the communities about the events in the life of Jesus.
- Jesus teaches with authority, differently from the way the scribes do it. The first thing that the people perceive is the diverse way in which Jesus teaches. It is not so much the content, but rather the way in which He teaches that impresses the people. For this reason, by His different way, Jesus creates a critical conscience in people concerning the religious authority of that time. The people compare and say: He teaches with authority, in a way different from the way the scribes do. The scribes of that time taught quoting the authority. Jesus does not quote any authority. He speaks with His experience of God and of His life. His word is rooted in the heart.
- You have come to destroy us! In Mark, the first miracle is the expulsion of the devil. Jesus struggles and expels the power of evil that takes possession of people and alienates them from themselves. The man possessed by the devil shouts: "I know who You are: You are the Holy One of God!" The man repeated the official teaching which presented the Messiah as the "Holy One of God", as a High Priest, or like a King, Judge, Doctor or General. Even today, many people live alienated from themselves, deceived by the power of mass media, mass communication, and the advertising of business. They repeat what they hear others say. They live as slaves of consumerism, oppressed by the

power of money, and threatened by debtors. Many think that their life is not as it should be if they cannot buy what the advertising recommends.

- Jesus rebuked the evil spirit: “Be quiet! Come out of him!” The spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. Jesus restores the person to himself. He gives him back his conscience and his liberty. He makes the person recover his complete judgment (cf. Mk 5:15). It was not easy then, it was not easy yesterday, and it is not easy today to do this in such a way that a person begins to think and act in a way which diverges from the official ideology.

- A new teaching! He commands even the evil spirits. The first two signs of the Good News are these: His different way of teaching the things of God, and His power over evil spirits. Jesus opens a new road in order for people to attain purity. At that time, a person who was declared impure could not present himself/herself before God to pray and to receive the blessing promised by God to Abraham. He/she should first purify himself/herself. These and many other laws and norms made the life of people very difficult and marginalized many people who were considered impure and far from God. Now, purified by the contact with Jesus, people could present themselves before God. This was a great Good News!

4) Personal questions

- Can I really say: “I am fully free, master of myself? If I cannot say it of myself, then something in me is possessed by other powers. What do I do to expel this strange power?
- Today many people do not live, do not think, but rather are driven by mass media. They do not have a critical mind or way of thinking. They allow other masters into their lives. How can this “devil” be expelled?

5) Concluding prayer

Yahweh our Lord,

how majestic is Your name throughout the world!

What are human beings that You spare a thought for them,

or the child of Adam that You care for him? (Ps 8,1.4)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, January 16, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.
Help us to know Your will
and to do it with courage and faith.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 1:29-39

On leaving the synagogue Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They immediately told him about her. He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them. When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him. Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. Simon and those who were with him pursued him and on finding him said, "Everyone is looking for you." He told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come." So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

3) Reflection

- Jesus restores life for the service. After having participated in the celebration of Saturday in the Synagogue, Jesus went to Peter's house and cured his mother-in-law. Once healed, she gets up, with her health restored and having recovered her dignity, and she begins to serve. Jesus does not only heal the person, but He does it in such a way that she begins to serve life.
- Jesus accepts the marginalized. When it begins to get dark, in the afternoon, at the end of Saturday when the first star shines in the sky, Jesus accepts and cures the sick and those possessed whom people had brought to Him. The sick and those possessed were the most marginalized people of that time. They had nobody to whom they had recourse. They depended on public charity. Besides this, religion considered them impure. They could not participate in the community. It was as if God rejected and excluded them. Therefore, the Good News of God consists of what He wants to do in the life of people: to accept the marginalized and the excluded, and to insert them again to live together in the community.
- To remain united to the Father, in prayer. Jesus is presented to us while He prays. He makes a great effort to have the time and the adequate environment to pray. He rises before the others and goes to a deserted place, to be able to be alone with God. Many

times the Gospels speak to us about the prayer of Jesus, in silence (Mt 14:22-23); Mk 1:35; Lk 5:15-16; 3:21-22). Through prayer He maintains the awareness of His mission.

- To maintain the awareness of the mission and not to close oneself up in what is already obtained. Jesus is known. Everybody follows Him. This publicity pleases the disciples. They go to look for Jesus to take Him back to the people who were seeking for Him, and they tell Him: “All are looking for You.” They thought that Jesus would go to the banquet. They were disillusioned! Jesus does not pay attention and tells them: “Let us go elsewhere. It is precisely for this that I have come!” Surely, they must have been surprised! Jesus was not like what they had imagined Him to be. Jesus had a very clear conscience of the mission and wants to transmit this to the disciples. He does not want them to close themselves up in the results already obtained. They should not look back. But, like Jesus, they should maintain conscious of their mission. It is the mission received from the Father, which has to orientate their decisions.

- It is precisely for this that I have come! This was the first misunderstanding between Jesus and His disciples. At present, it is only a question of a small difference. Later on, in the Gospel of Mark, this misunderstanding will grow and will practically become a break between Jesus and the disciples (cf. Mk 8:14-21,32-33; 9:32; 14:27). Today, there are some misunderstandings along the way in the proclaiming the Good News. Mark helps one to be attentive to the differences.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve. Peter’s mother-in-law began to serve. Do I act in such a way that my life is a service to God and to my brothers and sisters?
- Jesus is conscious and aware of His mission through prayer. Am I?

5) Concluding prayer

Sing to Yahweh, bless His name!
Proclaim His salvation day after day,
declare His glory among the nations,
His marvels to every people! (Ps 96:2-3)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, January 17, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.
Help us to know Your will
and to do it with courage and faith.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 1:40-45

A leper came to him and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched the leper, and said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean." The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once. Then he said to him, "See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them." The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

3) Reflection

- Accepting and curing the leper, Jesus reveals a new face of God. A leper came near Jesus. He was an excluded, impure person. He should be far away. Anybody who touched him would also become impure! But that leper had great courage. He transgresses the norms of religion in order to be able to get near Jesus. He calls out: "If You want, You can heal me. You need not touch me! It suffices that You want, and I will be healed!" This phrase reveals two evils: a) the evil of leprosy which made him impure; and b) the evil of solitude to which he was condemned by society and by religion. It also reveals the great faith of the man in the power of Jesus. Jesus is profoundly moved and cures both evils. In the first place, in order to cure solitude, He touches the leper. It is as if He said: "For Me, you are not an excluded one. I accept you as a brother!" And then He cures the leper saying: "I want it! Be cured!" The leper, in order to enter into contact with Jesus, had transgressed the norms of the Law. Jesus, in order to be able to help that excluded person and therefore reveal a new face of God, transgresses the norms of His religion and touches the leper. At that time, whoever touched a leper became impure according to the religious authority and by the law of that time.
- He integrated the excluded person into fraternal living together. Jesus not only cures, but also wants the cured person to be able to live with the others. He once again inserts the person in society to live with others. At that time, for a leper to be accepted again in the community, it was necessary to get a certificate from the priest that he had been cured. It is like today in some places. A sick person leaves the hospital with a document signed by the doctor of the department where he had been hospitalized. Jesus obliges the person to look for that document in such a way that he will be able to live normally with others. He obliges the authorities to recognize that this man has been cured.
- The leper announces the good that Jesus has done to him and Jesus becomes an excluded person. Jesus forbids the leper to speak about the cure. The Gospel of Mark tells us that this prohibition does not survive. The leper, walking away, began to spread the news to the point that Jesus could no longer publicly enter into a city, but remained outside in a deserted place (Mk 1:45). Why? Because Jesus had touched the leper. Because of this, according to the opinion of the religion of that time, He himself was now impure and should live far away from all others. He could no longer enter the city. Mark says that people did not care about these official norms, in fact, people came to

Him from everywhere (Mk 1:45).

• Summarizing. In the year 70, when Mark wrote, as well as today, the time in which we live, it was and is important to have models of how to live and how to proclaim the Good News of God. In verses 16 to 45 of the first chapter of his Gospel, Mark describes the mission of the community and presents eight criteria in order that the communities of his time could evaluate their mission. The following is the outline:

Text	Activity of Jesus	Objective of the mission
Mark 1:16-20	Jesus calls His first disciples	To form the community
Mark 1:21-22	The people were admired at His teaching	To create a critical conscience
Mark 1:23-28	Jesus expels a devil	To overcome the force of evil
Mark 1:29-31	He cures Peter's mother-in-law	To give life back so as to serve
Mark 1:32-34	He cures the sick and the possessed	To accept the marginalized
Mark 1:35	Jesus rises early to pray	To remain united with the Father
Mark 1:36-39	Jesus continues the announcement	Not to stop at the results
Mark 1:40-45	He cures a leper	To integrate anew the excluded

4) Personal questions

- To proclaim the Good News means to give witness to the experience of Jesus that one has. What does the leper announce? He tells others the good that Jesus has done to him. This witness leads others to accept the Good News of God which Jesus brings to us. What is the witness that you give?
- To take the Good News to the people, it is not necessary to be afraid of transgressing the religious norms which are contrary to God's plan and which make communication, dialogue, and the living out of love difficult, even if this causes difficulty for the people as it caused difficulty for Jesus. Do I have this courage?

5) Concluding prayer

Come, let us bow low and do reverence;
kneel before Yahweh who made us!
For He is our God,
and we the people of His sheepfold,
the flock of His hand. (Ps 95:6-7)

Lectio Divina: Friday, January 18, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.
Help us to know Your will
and to do it with courage and faith.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 2,1-12

When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it became known that he was at home. Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even around the door, and he preached the word to them. They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to him, "Child, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?" Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves, so he said, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, pick up your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth" –he said to the paralytic, "I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home." He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

3) Reflection

- In Mark 1:1-15, Mark shows how the Good News of God should be prepared and spread. In Mark 1:16-45, he describes the objective of the Good News and the mission of the community. Now, in Mk 2:1 to 3, 6 there is the effect of the proclamation of the Good News. A community faithful to the Gospel lives values which can be in

contradiction to the interests of the unjust society which surrounds it. This is why one of the effects of the proclamation of the Good News is the conflict with those who defend the interests of the unjust society. Mark gathers together five conflicts which the proclamation of the Good News brought to Jesus.

- In the year 70, the time when he wrote his Gospel, there were many conflicts in the life of the communities, but they did not always know how to behave before the accusations which they received from the Roman authorities and from the Jewish leaders. This series of five conflicts found in Mk 2:1 to 3, 6 served as a guide to the communities, those of the past as well as those of today. Conflict is not an incident along the road, it forms part of the journey.

- The following is the outline of the five conflicts which Mark presents in his Gospel:

Texts conflict:

1st conflict: Mk 2:1-12

2nd conflict: Mk 2:13-17

3rd conflict: Mk 2:18-22

4th conflict: Mk 2:23-28

5th conflict: Mk 3:1-6

Adversaries of Jesus:

The scribes

The scribes of the Pharisees

The disciples of John and the Pharisees

The Pharisees

The Pharisees and the Herodians

Cause of the conflict:

Forgiveness of sins

To eat with sinners

The practice of fasting

Observance of Saturday

To cure on Saturday

- The solidarity of the friends of the paralytic obtains the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is returning to Capernaum. Many people gather before the door of the house. He accepts everybody and begins to teach them. To teach, to speak of God, was what Jesus did the most. A paralytic, carried by four friends, arrived. Jesus is their only hope. They do not doubt about going up and they make an opening in the roof over the place where Jesus was. It must have been a poor house, with the roof being just mud covered with leaves. They lowered the stretcher with the man to Jesus. Jesus, seeing their faith, says to the paralytic: your sins are forgiven you. At that time people thought that physical defects (paralytic) were a punishment from God for any sin that had been committed. The Doctors of the Law taught that the person remained impure and therefore, incapable of getting close to God. For this reason, the sick, the poor, the paralytics, felt that they were rejected by God! But Jesus did not think this way. Such a great faith was a sign that the paralytic was accepted by God. And for this reason, He declares: "Your sins are forgiven you!" With this affirmation Jesus denies that the paralysis was a punishment

due to the sin of the man.

- Jesus is accused of blasphemy by those who held power. The affirmation of Jesus was contrary to the catechism of the time. It was not in accordance with the idea that they had of God. And because of this they react against and accuse Jesus: He blasphemes! According to them only God could forgive sins. And only the priest could declare someone forgiven and purified. How could it be that Jesus, a man without studies, a lay person, a simple carpenter, could declare people forgiven and purified of their sins? There was also another reason which pushed them to criticize Jesus. They had thought: “If it is true what Jesus says, we will lose our power! We will lose our source of income”.

- By curing, Jesus shows that He also has the power to forgive sins. Jesus perceives the criticism. This is why He asks: “Which of these is easier to say to the paralytic: Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, get up, pick up your stretcher and walk? It is easier to say: “Your sins are forgiven you”. Because nobody can verify if the sins have truly been forgiven or not. But if I tell him: “Get up and walk!”, there, all can see if I have or don't have the power to heal. In order to show that He had the power to forgive sins, in the name of God, Jesus says to the paralytic: Get up, take up your stretcher and go off home! He cures the man! The leaders were confronted with a dilemma. Either their teaching was wrong and sickness is not related to sin, or Jesus had the power to forgive sins, proven by their own teaching! Thus, through a miracle, He taught that the paralysis of the man was not a punishment from God, and He showed that the faith of the poor is a proof that God accepts them in His love.

- The message of the miracle and the reaction of people. The paralytic gets up, he takes his stretcher, and begins to walk, and all say: “We have never seen anything like this!” This miracle reveals three very important things: a) The sicknesses of people are not a punishment for sins. b) Jesus opens a new way to reach God. What the system called impurity was no more an obstacle for people to get close to God. c) The face of God revealed through the attitude of Jesus was different from the severe face of God revealed by the attitude of the doctors.

- This reminds us of what a drug addict said once he had recovered and who is now a member of a community in Curitiba, Brazil: “I grew up in the Catholic religion. I abandoned it. My parents were good practicing Catholics and wanted us, their children to be like them. People were obliged always to go to Church, every Sunday and every feast day. And when one did not go, they would say: “God will punish you”. I went because this was imposed upon me, and when I became an adult, I no longer went to Mass. I did not like the God of my parents. I could not understand that God, the Creator of the world, could extend over me, a small child, threatening me with the punishment of hell. I liked much more the God of my uncle who never went to Church, but who every day, and I repeat, every day, bought twice as much bread than what he ate, in order to give to the poor!”.

4) Personal questions

- Do you like the God of the uncle or the God of the parents of the ex drug addict?
- Which is the face of God that others discover in my behavior?

5) Concluding prayer

What we have heard and know,
what our ancestors have told us
we shall not conceal from their descendants,
but will tell to a generation still to come:
the praises of Yahweh, His power,
the wonderful deeds He has done. (Ps 78,3-4)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, January 19, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of love, hear our prayers.
Help us to know Your will
and to do it with courage and faith.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 2:13-17

Jesus went out along the sea. All the crowd came to him and he taught them. As he passed by, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the customs post. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed Jesus. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners sat with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him. Some scribes who were Pharisees saw that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors and said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus heard this and said to them, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

3) Reflection

- In yesterday's Gospel, we saw the first conflict which arose concerning the forgiveness of sins (Mk 2:1-12). In today's Gospel we meditate on the second conflict which arose when Jesus sat at table with the sinners (Mk 2:13-17). In the years 70's, the time when Mark wrote, there was a conflict in the communities between Christians who had been converted from paganism and those from Judaism. Those from Judaism found it difficult to enter into the house of converted pagans and sit with them around the same table (cf. Acts 10:28; 11:3). In describing how Jesus faces this conflict, Mark directs the community to solve the problem.
- Jesus taught, and the people were happy to listen to Him. Jesus goes out again to go near the sea. People arrive and He begins to teach them. He transmits the Word of God.

In Mark's Gospel, the beginning of the activity of Jesus is characterized by teaching and by acceptance on the part of the people (Mk 1:14,21,38-39; 2:2,13) in spite of the conflict with religious authority. What did Jesus teach? Jesus proclaimed the Good News of God (Mk 1:14). He spoke about God, but He spoke in a new way. He spoke from His experience, of the experience which He himself had of God and life. Jesus lived in God. Surely He had touched the heart of the people who liked to listen to Him (Mk 1:22,27). God, instead of being a severe Jew who threatens from afar with punishment and hell, becomes a friendly presence and a Good News for the people.

- Jesus calls a sinner to be a disciple and invites him to eat in His house. Jesus calls Levi, a tax collector and he immediately leaves everything and follows Jesus. He begins to be part of the group of disciples. The text says literally: While Jesus was at table in His house. Some think that in his house means the house of Levi. But the most probable translation is that it was a question of the house of Jesus. It is Jesus who invites all to eat in His house: sinners and tax collectors, together with the disciples.
- Jesus has come not for the just, but for sinners. This gesture or act of Jesus causes the religious authority to get very angry. It was forbidden to sit at table with tax collectors and sinners, because to sit at table with someone meant that he was considered a brother! Instead of speaking directly with Jesus, the scribes of the Pharisees speak with the disciples: How is it that He eats and drinks together with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus responds: "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. I came to call not the upright, but sinners! As before with the disciples (Mk 1:38), it is the conscience of His mission which helps Jesus to find the response and to point the way for the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus calls a sinner, a tax collector, a person hated by the people, to be His disciple. What is the message for us in this act of Jesus?
- Jesus says that He has come to call sinners. He provides a path to forgiveness. How do we act once we have His forgiveness? Do we consciously try to avoid sin?

5) Concluding prayer

May the words of my mouth always find favor,
and the whispering of my heart, in Your presence,
Yahweh, my rock, my redeemer. (Ps 19:14)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, January 20, 2019

The First Miracle of Jesus

“Do whatever He tells you!”

John 2:1-11

1. 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 silence in us 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 on the way to 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 the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The Gospel of this second Sunday of Ordinary Time places us before the celebration of the Wedding at Cana, in Galilee. At that time, just as now, everybody liked feasts: the feast for a marriage or for a Baptism, the birthday party, the feast of the patron or patroness of the Church, the feast at the end of the year, feasts and more feasts... There are some feasts which remain engraved in our memory and which, over time, acquire a more profound significance. Other feasts, we forget. We no longer remember them because they have lost their significance. The feast of the wedding at Cana, as it has been described in the Gospel of John (Jn 2:1-11), has remained alive in the memory of the Christian people, and for some it has taken on a more profound meaning. To understand this progressive discovery of the significance of the wedding at Cana we must remember that the Gospel of John is different from the other Gospels. John describes the facts of the life of Jesus in such a way that the readers discover in them a more profound dimension, which only faith can perceive. John, at the same time, presents a photograph or an x-ray. This is why, during the reading, it is good to be very attentive to the details of the text, especially to the two following things: (i) to the attitudes and behavior of the people and (ii) to what is lacking and to the abundance which appear in the wedding at Cana.

b) A division of the text to help in the reading:

John 2:1-2: Feast of the wedding. Mary is present. Jesus is the one who has been invited.

John 2:3-5: Jesus and His mother faced with the lack of wine.

John 2:6: The jars for the ablutions are empty.

John 2:7-8: The initiative of Jesus and of the servants.

John 2:9-10: The discovery of the sign by the chief wine steward

John 2:11: The Evangelist's brief commentary

c) Text:

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told the them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from — although the servers who had drawn the water knew —, the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs at Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which point in this text did you like best? Which one impressed you the most? Why?
- b) What struck you in the attitude and behavior of the people? Why?
- c) What kind of lack and what kind of abundance was there in the feast? What is the significance of this detail?
- d) What did Jesus do and how did He do it to offer wine in abundance?
- e) Jesus begins the announcement of the Kingdom



at a wedding feast. What does He want to teach us with this gesture?

f) What is the message of this text for us today?

5. For those who wish to go deeper into the theme

a) The context in order to understand the photograph and the x-ray:

When we say “photograph”, we indicate the facts in themselves, just as they appear before our eyes. When we say “x-ray”, we are speaking of a deeper dimension, invisible to our eyes, which is enclosed in the facts that only faith reveals to us.

It is in the way in which John describes the facts that he takes an x-ray of the words and the gestures of Jesus. Through these small details and references, he uncovers the symbolic dimension and, in doing this, he helps us to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of the person and the message of Jesus. In the wedding at Cana, in Galilee, there is the change of the water of the ablutions of the Jews into the wine for the wedding feast. Let us look closely at the details with which John describes the feast, in a way that we can understand the deeper significance of this beautiful and well known episode.

b) Comment on the text:

John 2:1-2: Wedding feast. Jesus has been invited.

In the Old Testament, the wedding feast was a symbol of God’s love for His people. That was what everyone expected in the future (Hos 2:21-22; Isa 62:4-5). It is precisely in a wedding feast, around a family and a community, that Jesus performs His first sign (Jn 2:11). The mother of Jesus was also at the feast. Jesus and His disciples had been invited. The mother of Jesus takes part in the celebration. This symbolizes the Old Testament. Together with His disciples Jesus is the New Testament which is arriving. The mother of Jesus will help to pass from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

John 2:3-5: Jesus and His mother faced with the lack of wine.

Right in the middle of the celebration, the wine is depleted. The mother of Jesus recognizes the limitations of the Old Testament and takes the initiative, in order that the New Testament may be manifested. She approaches Jesus and says, “They have no wine!” Here we have the photograph and the x-ray. The photo represents the mother of Jesus as someone who is attentive to the problems of others and is aware that the lack of wine would ruin the feast. She is not only aware of the problem, but also takes the initiative to solve it. The x-ray reveal the deepest dimension of the relationship between the Old Testament (the mother of Jesus) and the New Testament (Jesus). The statement, “They have no wine!” comes from the Old Testament and awakens in Jesus the action which will bring the New Testament to light. Jesus says, “Woman, what do you want from Me?” That is, what is the link between the Old and the New Testament? “My hour

has not yet come!” Mary did not understand this response as negative, as a no, because she tells the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.” It is in doing what Jesus teaches that one goes from the Old to the New Testament! Jesus’ hour, in which the passage from the Old to the New Testament will take place, is His Passion, Death and Resurrection. The changing of the water into wine is the anticipation of what is new, which will come from the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

At the end of the first century, the first Christians debated the validity of the Old Testament. Some no longer wanted to know anything about the Old Testament. In the meeting of the apostles in Jerusalem, James defended the continuity of the use of the Old Testament (Acts 15:13-21). In fact, at the beginning of the second century, Marcion rejected the Old Testament and remained only with the books of the New Testament. Some even affirmed that after the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus of Nazareth should no longer be remembered, but that we should speak only of the Risen Christ. In the name of the Holy Spirit, they said: “Anathema Jesus!” (I Cor 12: 3).

John 2:6: The jars for the ablutions are empty.

It is a small point, but with significant detail. The jars were usually full, especially during a feast. Here they are empty! Why? The observance of the law of purification, symbolized by the six jars, has exhausted all their possibilities. The ancient law has already succeeded to prepare the people to be able to have the union of grace and justification before God. The jars, the old Covenant, are empty! They are no longer capable of generating new life.

John 2:7-8: Jesus and the servants.

The recommendation of the mother of Jesus to the servants is the last order of the Old Testament: “Do whatever He tells you!” The Old Testament looks toward Jesus. From now on, the words and gestures and actions of Jesus will be the ones to direct our life. Jesus calls the servants and orders them to fill the six empty jars. In all, over six hundred liters! He immediately orders them to draw from the jars and to take them to the chief steward. Jesus’ initiative takes place without the intervention of the chief steward. Neither Jesus, nor His mother, nor the servants, were obviously the bosses. None of them went to ask permission from the steward or the bridegroom. Renewal passes to the people who do not belong to the center of power.

John 2:9-10: Discovery of the sign by the president of the feast.

The chief steward tasted the water transformed into wine and said to the bridegroom, “Everyone serves good wine first. But you have kept the best wine until now!” The chief steward, the Old Testament, recognizes publicly that the New is better! Where before there was water for the rite of ablutions of the Jews, now there is abundant wine for the feast. There was a lot of wine: over six hundred liters, and the feast was almost

over! What is the meaning of this abundance? What was done with the wine which was left over? We are drinking it even now!

John 2:11: *Comment of the Evangelist.*

This is the first sign. In the fourth Gospel, the first sign takes place to help in the building up of the family, of the community, in order to mend the relationships among people. Six other signs will follow. John does not use the word *miracle*, but *sign*. The word sign indicates that the actions of Jesus on behalf of the people have a more profound value, that can only be discovered with the x-ray of faith. The small community which had formed around Jesus that week, seeing the sign, was ready to accept the deeper significance and “believe in Him”.

c) Extending the information:

*** A much expected wedding**

In the Gospel of John, the beginning of Jesus’ public life takes place at a wedding feast, a moment of great joy and of great hope. For this same reason, the wedding at Cana has intense symbolic significance. In the Bible, matrimony is the image used to signify the realization of the perfect union between God and His people. This marriage between God and His people was expected for a long time, for over eight hundred years!

It was prophet Hosea (around the year 750 BC) who, for the first time, represented the hope of this marriage when he narrates the parable of the infidelity of the people before the proposal of Yahweh. The monarchy in Israel had abandoned Yahweh and His mercy, leading the people toward false gods. But the prophet, sure of God’s love, says that the people will be led once again to the desert to listen to the following promise from God: “I shall betroth you to Myself forever. I shall betroth you in uprightness and justice, and faithful love and tenderness. Yes, I shall betroth you to Myself in loyalty and in the knowledge of Yahweh!” (Hos 2:21-22). This marriage between God and the people indicates that the ideal of the exodus will be attained (Hos 2:4-25). About a hundred and fifty years later, the prophet Jeremiah takes the words of Hosea to denounce the monarchy of Judah. And he says that Judah will have the same destiny as Israel because of its infidelity (Jer 2:2-5; 3:11-13). But Jeremiah also looks towards the hope of a perfect marriage with the following novelty: it will be the woman who will seduce the husband (Jer 31:22). And in spite of the crisis created by the Babylonian exile, the people do not lose hope that one day this marriage will take place. Yahweh will have compassion on His abandoned spouse (Isa 54:1-8). With the return of the exiled, the “abandoned one” will again be the spouse accepted with great joy (Isa 62:4-5).

Finally, looking at the events which are taking place, John the Baptist looks towards Jesus, the awaited bridegroom (Jn 3:29). In His teachings and conversations with the people, Jesus takes back Hosea's parable, the dream of the perfect marriage. He presents Himself as the long-awaited bridegroom (Mk 2:19). In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, He discreetly presents Himself as the true bridegroom, the seventh one (Jn 4:16-17). The Christian communities will accept Jesus as the expected bridegroom (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-31). The wedding at Cana wishes to show that Jesus is the true bridegroom who arrives for the long expected wedding, bringing a tasteful and abundant wine. This definitive marriage is described with beautiful images in the book of Apocalypse (Rev 19:7-8; 21:2).

*** The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John**

Even though she is never called by the name of Mary, the mother of Jesus appears two times in the Gospel of John: at the beginning of the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-5), and at the end, at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25-27). In both cases she represents the Old Testament which is waiting for the New one to arrive, and, in both cases, she contributes to the arrival of the New One. Mary is the bond of union between what was before and what will come afterwards. At Cana, she, the mother of Jesus, symbol of the Old Testament, is the one who perceives the limitations of the Old Testament and takes the necessary steps in order to proceed to the New one. At the foot of the Cross, she is at the side of the "Beloved Disciple". The Beloved Disciple is the community which grows around Jesus. He is the son born from the Old Testament. At the request of Jesus, the son, the New Testament, receives Mary, the Old Testament, in his house. Both of them have to walk together. In fact, the New cannot be understood without the Old. The New Testament would have no basis, foundation. And the Old without the New would be incomplete: a tree without fruit.

*** The Seven Days of the New Creation**

The text begins by saying: "*On the third day*" (Jn 2:1). In the previous chapter, John had already repeated the expression: "*On the following day*" (Jn 1:29,35,43). Considering this, it offers the following schema: The witness of John the Baptist to Jesus (Jn 1:19-28) takes place on the first day. "The day after" (Jn 1:29), that is the second day, is the Baptism of Jesus (Jn 1: 29-34). The third day, the call of the disciples and Peter takes place (Jn 1:35-42). On the fourth day, Jesus calls Philip, and Philip calls Nathanael (Jn 1:43-51). Finally, "*three days later*" that is on the seventh day, that is, on Saturday, the first **sign**, that of the wedding at Cana, takes place (Jn 2, 1). Throughout the Gospel, Jesus performs seven signs.

John uses the outline of the *week* to present the beginning of Jesus' activity. The Old Testament uses the same outline to present creation. In the first six days, God created all things calling them by name. On the seventh day He rested, and worked no more (Gen 1:1-2: 4). In the same way, Jesus, in the first days of His activity, calls the people and creates the community, the new humanity. On the seventh day, that is, on Saturday, Jesus does not rest, but works the first sign. Throughout the next chapters, from 2 until 19 included, He performs six other signs, always on Saturday (Jn 5:16; 9:14). Finally, in the morning of the Resurrection, when Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, it is said, "the first day of the week" (Jn 20:1). It is the first day of the new creation, after that prolonged Saturday in which Jesus worked the seven signs. Accused of working on Saturday, Jesus answers, "My Father still goes on working and I am at work too" (Jn 5:17). Through the activity of Jesus between Cana and the Cross, the Father completes what is lacking in the old creation, in a way in which the new creation can emerge in the Resurrection of Jesus.

6. Pray with Psalm 148

Alleluia! Praise Yahweh from the heavens,
praise Him in the heights.
Praise Him, all His angels,
praise Him, all His host!

Praise Him, sun and moon,
praise Him, all shining stars,
praise Him, highest heavens,
praise Him, waters above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of Yahweh
at whose command they were made;
He established them for ever
and ever by an unchanging decree.

Praise Yahweh from the earth,
sea-monsters and all the depths,
fire and hail, snow and mist,
storm-winds that obey His word,
mountains and every hill,
orchards and every cedar,
wild animals and all cattle,
reptiles and winged birds,
kings of the earth and all nations,

princes and all judges on earth,
young men and girls,
old people and children together.

Let them praise the name of Yahweh,
for His name alone is sublime,
His splendor transcends earth and heaven.
For He heightens the strength of His people,
to the praise of all His faithful,
the children of Israel,
the people close to Him.

7. Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You 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 what 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.

Lectio Divina: Monday, January 21, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of heaven and earth,
hear our prayers,
and show us the way to Your peace in the world.

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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 2:18-22

The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were accustomed to fast. People came to Jesus and objected, "Why do the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests fast

while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. If he does, its fullness pulls away, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins are ruined. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins."

3) Reflection

- The five conflicts between Jesus and the religious authority. In Mark 2:1-12 we have seen the first conflict. It was about the forgiveness of sins. In Mark 2:13-17, the second conflict is on communion around the same table, with sinners. Today's Gospel presents the third conflict concerning fasting. Tomorrow we have the fourth conflict concerning the observance of the Sabbath (Mk 2:13-28). The day after tomorrow is the last conflict concerning the cure on the Sabbath (Mk 3:1-6). The conflict concerning fasting has a central place. For this reason, the words on sewing a piece of new cloth on an old cloak and the new wine into fresh skins (Mk 2:21-22) should be understood in the light which also radiates clearly on the other conflicts, two before and two after.
- Jesus does not insist on the practice of fasting. Fasting is a very ancient practice, practiced by practically all religions. Jesus himself practiced it during forty days (Mt 4:2). But He does not insist with His disciples that they do the same thing. He leaves them free. This is why the disciples of John the Baptist and those of the Pharisees, who were obliged to fast, want to know why Jesus does not insist on fasting.
- When the bridegroom is with them they do not have to fast. Jesus responds with a comparison. When the bridegroom is with the friends of the bridegroom, that is, during the wedding feast, they do not need to fast. Jesus considers himself the bridegroom. The disciples are the friends of the bridegroom. During the time in which Jesus is with the disciples, there is the wedding feast. A day will come in which the bridegroom will be absent and then, if they wish, they can fast. Jesus refers to His death. He knows and feels that if He wishes to continue on this path of freedom, the religious authority will want to kill Him.
- To sew a new piece of cloth on an old cloak, pour new wine in new skins. These two affirmations of Jesus, which Mark places here, clarify the critical attitude of Jesus before religious authority. One does not sew a piece of new cloth on an old cloak. When the cloak is washed, the new piece of cloth tears the cloak and the tear becomes bigger. Nobody puts new wine in old skins, because the fermentation of the new wine will tear the old skins. New wine in new skins! The religion defended by the authority was like an old cloak, like an old skin. It is not necessary to want to change what is new and brought by Jesus, for old customs. The concepts brought by Jesus cannot be reduced to fit the measure of Judaism. Either one or the other! The wine which Jesus brings tears the old skins. It is necessary to know how to separate things. Jesus is not against what

is “old”. What He wants to avoid is that the old impose itself on the new, and thus, He begins to manifest it.

4) Personal questions

- Beginning with the profound experience of God which encouraged Him interiorly, Jesus had liberty concerning the norms and religious practices. Today, do we have this same liberty and the freedom of the mystics?
- A new piece of cloth on an old cloak, new wine in old skins. Does this exist in my life?

5) Concluding prayer

We have recognized for ourselves,

and put our faith in, the love God has for us. (1Jn 4:16)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, January 22, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of heaven and earth,

hear our prayers,

and show us the way to Your peace in the world.

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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 2:23-28

As Jesus was passing through a field of grain on the sabbath, his disciples began to make a path while picking the heads of grain. At this the Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the sabbath?" He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions were hungry? How he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of offering that only the priests could lawfully eat, and shared it with his companions?"

Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

3) Reflection

- The Law exists for the good of people. One day on the Sabbath, the disciples passed by a cornfield and they opened a path by plucking ears of corn. In Matthew 12:1 it is said that they were hungry. Quoting the Bible, the Pharisees criticized the attitude of the disciples. It would be a transgression of the law of the Sabbath (cf. Ex 20:8-11). Jesus responded quoting the Bible to indicate that the arguments of the others have no meaning. He recalls that David himself did something which was prohibited, because he took the sacred bread of the temple and gave it to the soldiers to eat because they were hungry (I Sam 21:2-7). Jesus ends with two important phrases: (a) the Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath; (b) The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath!

- The Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath. For more than five hundred years, from the time of the Babylonian captivity to the time of Jesus, the Jews had observed the law of the Sabbath. This secular observance became for them a strong sign of identity. The Sabbath was rigorously observed. At the time of the Maccabees, toward the end of the second century before Christ, this observance had reached a critical point. Attacked by the Greeks on Sabbath, the rebellious Maccabees preferred to allow themselves to be killed rather than to transgress the law of the Sabbath by using arms to defend their own life. For this, one thousand people died (I Mac 2: 32-38). Reflecting on the massacre, the Maccabee leaders concluded that they should resist and defend their own life, even on the Sabbath (I Mac 2:39-41) Jesus used the same attitude: to consider the law of the Sabbath in a relative way in favor of human life, because the law exists for the good of human life, and not vice-versa!

- The Son of Man is also the Lord of the Sabbath! The new experience of God as Father gives Jesus, the Son of Man, the key to discovering the intention of God who is at the origin of the Law of the Old Testament. For this reason, the Son of Man is also the Lord of the Sabbath. Living with the people of Galilee during thirty years and feeling in His own person the oppression and the exclusion to which so many brothers and sisters were condemned in the name of the Law of God, Jesus perceives that this could not be the significance of that law. If God is Father, then He accepts all as sons and daughters. If God is Father, then we should be brothers and sisters to others. And this is what Jesus lived and preached, from the beginning to the end. The Law of the Sabbath must be at the service of life and of fraternity. It was precisely because of His fidelity to this message that Jesus was condemned to death. He disturbed the system. He was uncomfortable for them and the system defended itself, using force against Jesus, because He wanted the Law itself to be at the service of life and not vice-versa.

- Jesus and the Bible. The Pharisees criticized Jesus in the name of the Bible. Jesus responds and criticizes the Pharisees using the Bible. He knew the Bible by heart. At that time, there were no printed Bibles as we have today! In every community there was

only one Bible, hand written, which remained in the Synagogue. If Jesus knew the Bible so well, it means that during 30 years of His life in Nazareth, He participated intensely in the life of the community, where the Scripture was read every Saturday. By comparison, we are still lacking very much in familiarity with the Bible and participation in the community!

4) Personal questions

- The Sabbath is for the human being and not vice-versa. How do I interpret this?
- Even without having the Bible at home, Jesus knew it by heart. Do I?

5) Concluding prayer

I give thanks to Yahweh with all my heart,
in the meeting-place of honest people, in the assembly.
Great are the deeds of Yahweh,
to be pondered by all who delight in them. (Ps 111:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, January 23, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of heaven and earth,
hear our prayers,
and show us the way to Your peace in the world.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 3:1-6

Jesus entered the synagogue. There was a man there who had a withered hand. They watched Jesus closely to see if he would cure him on the sabbath so that they might accuse him. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Come up here before us." Then he said to the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?" But they remained silent. Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart, Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians against him to put him to death.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we meditate on the last of the five conflicts which Mark presents at the beginning of his Gospel (Mk 2:1 to 3:6). The four previous conflicts were provoked by the enemies of Jesus. This last one is provoked by Jesus himself and reveals the seriousness of the conflict between Him and the religious authority of His time. It is a conflict of life or death. It is important to note the category of enemies which has arisen in this conflict. It is a question of the Pharisees and the Herodians, that is, of the religious and civil authority. When Mark wrote his Gospel in the year 70, many of them still remembered very well the terrible persecution of the 60's, perpetrated by Nero against the Christian communities. In hearing that Jesus Himself had been threatened to death and how He behaved in the midst of these dangerous conflicts, the Christians found a source of courage and direction so as not to be discouraged along the journey.
- Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus enters the Synagogue. He had the habit of participating in the celebrations of the people. A man was there who had a withered hand, a physically disabled person who could not participate fully, because he was considered impure. Even if he was present in the community, he was marginalized. He had to remain far away from the rest.
- The concern of the enemies of Jesus. The enemies were observing Him to see if Jesus would cure on Saturday. They wanted to accuse Him. The second commandment of the Law of God ordered to "sanctify the Sabbath". It was prohibited to work on that day (Ex 20:8-20). The Pharisees said that to cure a sick person was the same as working. And for this reason they taught, "It is prohibited to cure on the Sabbath!" They placed the law above the well-being of people. Jesus was an uncomfortable person for them, because He placed the well-being of people above the norms and laws. The concern of the Pharisees and of the Herodians was not zeal for the Law, but rather the will and the desire to accuse and get rid of Jesus.
- Get up and stand in the middle! Jesus asks two things of the physically disabled person: "Get up and stand in the middle!" The word "get up" is the same one which the communities of Mark also used to say: "rise, resurrect". The disabled person has to "rise", to get up, to live in the middle and to take his place in the center of the community! The marginalized, the excluded, must live in the middle! They cannot be excluded. They must be together with the others! Jesus calls the excluded one to stand in the middle.
- Jesus' question leaves the others without knowing what to say. Jesus asks, "Is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good or to do bad, to save life or to kill?" He could have asked, "On the Sabbath, is it permitted to cure: yes or no?!" And in this way all would have answered, "No, it is not permitted!" But Jesus changed the question. For Him, in that concrete case, "to cure" was the same as "to do good" or "to save a life", and not "to kill!" With His question Jesus put His finger on the wound. He denounced the prohibition of curing on the Sabbath, considering this to be a system of death. A wise question! The enemies do not know what to answer.

- Jesus looked angrily around at them, grieved to find them so obstinate. Jesus reacts with indignation and sadness before the attitude of the Pharisees and the Herodians. He orders the man to stretch out his hand, and He cures him. By curing the disabled man, Jesus shows that He does not agree with the system which places the law above life. In response to Jesus' action, the Pharisees and the Herodians decide to kill Him. With this decision they confirm that, in fact, they are defenders of a system of death! They are not afraid to kill in order to defend the system against Jesus, who attacks and criticizes it in the name of life.

4) Personal questions

- The disabled man was called to stand in the center of the community. In our community, do the poor and the excluded have a privileged place?
- Have you, yourself, ever been confronted by people such as the Herodians and the Pharisees, who place the law above the well-being of people? What did you feel at that moment? Did you agree with them or did you challenge them?

5) Concluding prayer

Yet You are merciful to all,

and nothing that You have made disgusts You,

Lord, lover of life! (Wis 11:23-26)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, January 24, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of heaven and earth,

hear our prayers,

and show us the way to Your peace in the world.

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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 3:7-12

Jesus withdrew toward the sea with his disciples. A large number of people followed from Galilee and from Judea. Hearing what he was doing, a large number of people came to him also from Jerusalem, from Idumea, from beyond the Jordan, and from the neighborhood of Tyre and Sidon. He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him

because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him. He had cured many and, as a result, those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him. And whenever unclean spirits saw him they would fall down before him and shout, "You are the Son of God." He warned them sternly not to make him known.

3) Reflection

- The conclusion reached at the end of this fifth conflict (Mk 3: 2 to 6) is that the Good News as it was announced by Jesus said exactly the opposite of the teaching of the religious authority of the time. This is why, at the end of the last conflict, it is foreseen that Jesus will not have an easy life and will be put to death. Death is already appearing on the horizon. They decide to make Him die (Mk 3:6). Without sincere conversion it is not possible for people to reach a correct understanding of the Good News.
- A summary of the evangelizing action of Jesus. The verses of today's Gospel (Mk 3:7-12) are a summary of the activity of Jesus and they highlight an enormous contrast. Earlier, in Mk 2:1 to 3:6, only conflicts were spoken of, including the conflict of life and death between Jesus and the civil and religious authority of Galilee (Mk 3:1-6). Now, in the summary, we have the contrary: an immense popular movement, greater than the movement of John the Baptist, because people come not only from Galilee, but also from Judea, from Jerusalem, from Idumaea, from Transjordan, and even from the pagan region of Tyre and Sidon to encounter Jesus! (Mk 3:7-12). All want to see Him and to touch Him. The people are so numerous that Jesus Himself is concerned. There is a danger of being crushed by the multitude. This is why He asks the disciples to have a boat ready for Him so that the crowd would not crush Him. And from the boat He spoke to the crowds. Especially the excluded and the marginalized who came to Him with their ailments: the sick and those possessed. Those who were not accepted in the society of the time were accepted by Jesus. Here is the contrast: on the one side the religious and civil leaders decided to put Jesus to death (Mk 3:6), and on the other side there was an immense popular movement seeking salvation in Jesus. Who will win?
- The unclean spirits and Jesus. Mark insists very much on the expulsion of the unclean spirits. The first miracle of Jesus is the expulsion of the unclean spirits (Mk 1:25). The first impact caused by Jesus is due to the expulsion of the devil (Mk 1:27). One of the principal causes of Jesus' clash with the s is the expulsion of the unclean spirits. (Mk 3:22). The first power which the Apostles received when they were sent out on mission was the power to expel demons (Mk 16:17). What does it mean in Mark's Gospel to drive out or expel evil spirits?
- At the time of Mark the fear of the devil was increasing. Some religions, instead of liberating the people, increased fear and anguish. One of the objectives of the Good News of Jesus is to help people liberate themselves from this fear. The coming of the Kingdom means the coming of a stronger power. Jesus is "the Stronger Man" Who has come to conquer and overcome Satan, the power of evil, and to take away from Satan those imprisoned by fear (Mk 3:27). This is why Mark insists very much on the victory of Jesus over the power of evil, over the devil, over Satan, sin and death. From the beginning to the end, with similar words, Mark repeats the same message: "And Jesus drove out, expelled the impure spirits!" (Mk 1: 26,27,34,39; 3:11-12,15,22,30; 5:1-20; 6:7,13; 7:25-29; 9:25-27,38; 16:9,17). It seems almost a refrain which is repeated!

Today, instead of always using the same words, we prefer to use diverse words. We would say, "The power of evil, Satan, which causes so much fear to people - Jesus overcame him, dominated him, conquered him, threw him off the throne, drove him out or expelled him, eliminated him, annihilated him, knocked him down, destroyed him and killed him!" What Mark wants to tell us is this: "Christians are forbidden to be afraid of Satan!" After Jesus rose from the dead, it is madness and a lack of faith to invoke Satan at every moment, as if he still had any power over us. To insist on the power of the devil in order to persuade people to return to Church means to ignore the Good News of the Kingdom. It is a lack of faith in the Resurrection of Jesus!

4) Personal questions

- How do you live your faith in the Resurrection of Jesus? Does your faith in some way help you to overcome fear?
- To drive away or expel the devil! What do you do in order to neutralize this power in your life?

5) Concluding prayer

Joy and happiness in You to all who seek You!
Let them ceaselessly cry, "Great is Yahweh"
who love Your saving power. (Ps 40)

Lectio Divina: Friday, January 25, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of heaven and earth,
hear our prayers,
and show us the way to Your peace in the world.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 16:15-18

Jesus appeared to the Eleven and said to them: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

3) Reflection

- *The signs which accompany the proclamation or announcement of the Good News.* Jesus appears to the eleven disciples and reproaches them because they had not believed the people who had seen Him risen. Once again, Mark refers to the resistance of the disciples to believe in the witness of those men and women who had had an experience of the resurrection of Jesus. Why would this be? Probably to teach two things. *In the first place*, that faith in Jesus goes through the faith of people who give witness. *Second*, that nobody should get discouraged when incredulity comes from the heart. Even the eleven disciples had doubts!
- Then Jesus gives them the mission of announcing the Good News to all creatures. The requirement which He gives is the following: *to believe and to be baptized*. To those who have the courage to believe in the Good News and who are baptized, He promises the followings signs: they will cast out devils, they will have the gift of tongues, they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison, and they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover. This happens even in our own day.
 - *To cast out devils* is to fight against the force of evil which destroys life. The life of many people has improved for having entered a community and for having begun to live the Good News of the presence of God in their life.
 - *To have the gift of tongues* is to begin to communicate with others in a new form. Sometimes, we find a person whom we never have seen before, but it seems to us that we have known her for a long time. This happens because we speak the same language, the language of love.
 - *They will be unharmed if they take deadly poison*: there are many things which poison living together, e.g. gossip, which destroys the relationship between people. The one who lives in the presence of God goes beyond this and succeeds in not being bothered by this terrible poison.
 - *To cure the sick*: wherever there is a clearer consciousness of the presence of God, there is also a special attention toward oppressed and marginalized people, especially the sick. What helps the person to heal is to feel accepted and loved.
 - *Through the community, Jesus continues His mission*: Jesus himself, who lived in Palestine where He accepted the poor of His time, revealed the love of the Father, this same Jesus continues alive in our midst, in the same way in our communities. Through us He continues His mission, revealing the Good News of the Love of God for the poor. Even today, the Resurrection takes place which urges us to sing, "Who will separate us, who will separate us from the love of Christ, who will separate us?" (cf. Rm 8: 38-39). No power of this world can counteract the force which comes from faith in the Resurrection (Rm 8: 35-39). A community which wants to witness to the Resurrection has to be a sign of life, should fight against the forces of death in a way that the world will be a favorable place for life, and should believe that a different world is possible. Above all in Latin America, where the life of the people is in danger because of the system of death which has been imposed, the communities have to be a living proof of the hope which overcomes the world without the fear of being happy!

4) Personal questions

- To cast out devils, to have the gift of new tongues, to be unharmed by deadly poison and by snakes, to impose the hands on the sick: Have you fulfilled any of these signs?
- Does Jesus continue His mission through us and through our community? Is He able to fulfill this mission in our community? In what way?

5) Concluding prayer

Praise Yahweh, all nations,
extol Him, all peoples,
for His faithful love is strong
and His constancy never-ending. (Ps 117:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, January 26, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,
ruler of all things in heaven and on earth,
listen favorably to the prayer of Your people,
and grant us Your peace in our day.
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.

2) Gospel reading - Mark 3:20-21

Jesus came with his disciples into the house. Again the crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat. When his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today is very short. There are only two verses. It speaks about two things: (a) about the great activity of Jesus up to the point of not even having time to eat; (b) the contrary reaction of the family of Jesus up to the point of thinking that He was out of His mind. Jesus had problems with His family. Sometimes the family helps; at other times it constitutes an obstacle. This is what happened with Jesus, and this is what happens with us as well.
- Mark 3:20: The activity of Jesus. Jesus returned home. His home is now in Capernaum (Mk 2:1). He is no longer living with His family in Nazareth. People, knowing that Jesus was at home, went there. Such a crowd of people gathered there that He and His

disciples did not even have time to eat calmly (Mk 6:31)

- Mark 3:20: Conflict with His family. When Jesus' relatives knew this, they said, "He has lost His mind!" Perhaps this was so because Jesus did not seem to be behaving normally. Perhaps they thought that He was jeopardizing the name of the family. Whatever it was, the relatives decided to take Him back to Nazareth. This is a sign that the relationship of Jesus with His family was suffering. This must have been a source of suffering for Him as well as for Mary, His Mother. Later on (Mk 3:31-35) Mark tells what the encounter of Jesus with His relatives was like. They arrived at the house where Jesus was staying. They had probably come there from Nazareth. There is a distance of about 40 km from there to Capernaum. His mother was with them. They could not enter the house because there were many people there at the entrance. This is the reason why they sent Him a message: "Your mother and Your brothers and sisters are outside asking for You!" Jesus' reaction was firm. He asked, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" And He Himself answers, pointing to the crowd gathered there around Him, "Here are My mother and My brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is My brother and sister and mother". He extended the family! Jesus does not allow the family to draw Him away from the mission.

- The situation of the family at the time of Jesus. In ancient Israel, the clan, that is, the large family (the community), was the basis of living together. This was for the protection of small families and of people, the guarantee of the possession of the land, the principal channel of tradition, and the defense of identity. That was the way which the people of that time had to incarnate the love of God in the love toward neighbor. To defend the clan, the community, was the same as to defend the Covenant. In Galilee at the time of Jesus, because of the Roman system introduced and imposed during the long years under the government of Herod the Great (37 BC to 4 BC), and his son Herod Antipas (4 BC to 39 AD), all this had ceased to exist, or existed less every day. The clan (community) was becoming weaker. The taxes that had to be paid to the government and to the Temple, the increasing indebtedness, the individualistic mentality of Hellenism, the frequent threats of violent repression on the part of the Romans, the obligation to accept the soldiers and to give them lodging, the ever greater problems for survival, all led the families to close in on themselves and on their own needs. Hospitality was no longer practiced; neither was sharing, nor communion around the table, nor acceptance of the excluded. This closing in was strengthened by the religion of the time. The observance of the norms of purity was a factor in the marginalization of many people: women, children, Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, possessed, publicans or tax collectors, the sick, mutilated people, paraplegics. These norms, instead of helping and favoring acceptance, sharing and communion, favored separation and exclusion.

Thus, the political, social and economic situation as well as the religious ideology of the time, was against and contributed to the weakening of the central values of the clan and the community. Therefore, in order for the Kingdom of God to manifest itself once again in community living, the people had to overcome the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves up to the larger family and the community.

Jesus gives the example. When His relatives get to Capernaum and try to take hold of Him to take Him back home, He reacts. Instead of remaining closed up in His small family, He extends the family (Mk 3:33-35). He creates the community. He asks the

same thing of those who want to follow Him. Families cannot close up in themselves. The excluded and the marginalized should be accepted, once again, into the community, and in this way feel accepted by God (cf. Lk 14:12-14). This is the path to be followed in order to attain the objective of the Law which said, "Let there be no poor among you" (Dt 15:4). Just like the great prophets, Jesus tries to strengthen and affirm community life in the villages of Galilee. He takes the profound sense or significance of the clan, the family, and the community, like an expression of the incarnation of the love of God in the love toward neighbor.

4) Personal questions

- Does the family help participation in the Christian community or does it make it difficult?
- How do you take on your commitment in the Christian community?
- What can all this tell us concerning our relationships in the family and in the community?

5) Concluding prayer

Clap your hands, all peoples,
acclaim God with shouts of joy.
For Yahweh, the Most High, is glorious,
the great king over all the earth. (Ps 47:1-2)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, January 27, 2019

*Jesus presents the programme of His mission
in the community of Nazareth
Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21*

1. Opening prayer

Lord, let the light of Your glory shine within us

and lead us through the darkness of this world

to the radiant joy of our eternal home.

We ask this through Our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

2. Lectio

a) The text:

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received. Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

b) Comment:

A brief introductory summary presents Jesus' activity, His person, and the scene of this Gospel (Lk 4:14-21) takes place in the synagogue in Nazareth on a Saturday. Jesus' return to the place from where His fame had spread everywhere in the region of Galilee and to which the Spirit led His steps has a special significance. In concise terms, Luke tries to give a salvific interpretation to it by shedding light on the salient aspects of the events. Jesus' teaching in the synagogue signifies His Jewish origin and His wish to be part of the culture so as to emphasize the vital role of the law that God had entrusted to His people and to offer Himself as fulfillment and hope of Israel.

To the question implied in the narrative - Is Jesus a prophet? - the answer becomes clearer according to the criteria of discernment used by Israel to verify whether a prophet was sent by Yahweh or not: is his teaching in accordance with the teachings of the law, do his works correspond with God's commandments, do his prophecies concerning the future come true? In Nazareth, Jesus presents



Himself as a prophet – in fact He compares Himself to Elijah and Elisha – even though He does not define Himself as such in keeping with His custom that avoids any attempt at defining Himself.

c) A moment of silence:

Let us allow the voice of the Word to resonate within us.

3. Meditatio

a) Some questions:

- *To consider carefully every circumstance*: are we always in a hurry during our day? Do we really wish to reflect carefully on what happens to us?
- *He sent me to proclaim the good news to the poor*: do I always think of the poor as the others, while I belong to the haves and those who know, and consequently, I do not need anyone?
- *Today this scripture has been fulfilled*: what scripture do we know so well as to recognize it as incarnation in our day?

b) A key to the reading:

A historical contextualization

The passage of the synagogue of Nazareth is part of an approach that will later form the key to the reading to what follows in Luke's Gospel. The reference to the prophet Isaiah is basic because therein is revealed the continuity of the human history of God. Jesus' gestures, placed in parallel, "*He stood and opened the scroll*" (v.17), "*He closed the scroll and sat down*" (v.20), give the narrative a liturgical character that is customary yet new.

The newness occurs in the homily that renders the prophecy present. *Today*, a key word in Luke, expresses the fulfillment in Christ of God's purpose. The immediate reactions to this *today* are of surprise and unbelief, of wonder and scandal, even to rejection already found in the question that follows Jesus' proclamation, a question hanging in the air without an answer: "*Is this not the son of Joseph?*" (v. 22). The contrast with the Word proclaimed by a man who is imbued with the Spirit of the Lord, consecrated by an anointing, sent on a special mission of messianic character: to bring the good news, to forgive, to proclaim...creates a conflict of identity.

A literary contextualization

This passage does not have precise parallels in the synoptic Gospels. Jesus' visit to Nazareth in Matthew 13:53-58 and in Mark 6:1-6a is limited to a question concerning Jesus' origin and His rejection. There is no description of the rite in the synagogue nor is there a record of the words Jesus pronounced and of the interpretation of the present fulfillment of the sacred Word. The only point in common is the rejection of Jesus by the Nazarenes.

Through Jesus' discourse in Nazareth, Luke wants to introduce and shed light on the whole public ministry of Jesus. Isaiah 61:1-2 contains a synthesis of the great themes that characterize Luke's Gospel and those most dear to him: the Holy Spirit, the messianic anointing, the eschatological liberation, the messianic joy, the divine intervention in favor of the poor and oppressed, the proclamation of the year of grace. The program is inaugurated in Mark with the proclamation: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel*" (Mk 1:14-15) and in Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5: 1-48), appears in Luke at the center of the Jewish belief: that which is fulfilled is not the time but the scripture. The reader is invited to see the necessity of "walking" with Christ and to imitate Him on the way of conformity to the will of the Father. Jerusalem, the end of a long journey (Lk 9:51-18,14) that leads Jesus towards the decisive moment of His life, is also the final point of His earthly mission (Lk 24) and the beginning of the life of the newborn Church (Acts 1-2).

Literary genre

In this passage, we can see a slight literary unity. The editorial intervention of Luke that begins from traditional data follows its own purpose. The unitary design of both parts shows internal clarity and accurate external delimitation. For Luke, the two fields of questioning are inseparable: *Who is Jesus? To whom is His work addressed?* The relationship between word and action is very strong, the dramatic action of a proclamation that takes place in life. This passage wants to introduce the public ministry of Jesus, almost enabling Him to act on the confines of His belonging to Israel. The Spirit abundantly given to Jesus: at His birth (1:35), at His baptism (3:22), during the temptations (4:1) at the beginning of His mission (4:14) is the Spirit mentioned in Isaiah (v.18) who makes God's action explicit. An action without ethnic limits and that does not seek notoriety, but that is in favor of those in need of salvation: the poor, prisoners, the blind, the oppressed, and to begin the time of grace of the Lord. We pass from a culture of the synagogue that is not capable of welcoming the ancient Word fulfilled in the today, to a culture of following on the roads of the world. Jesus goes off. He follows His way, that from Jerusalem will lead Him to the ends of the earth through His followers

Detailed analysis of the text

A detailed analysis of the verses of this passage will reveal important peculiarities, which, within a historical framework, present in the Nazareth synagogue scene a synthesis of the content of the Gospel.

v.16: It seems that the synagogue was a place frequented by Jesus. It is here that from His early adulthood He has heard the Word of God and has interpreted it according to the living tradition of the people. It is significant that Jesus seeks out the centers of worship. Every adult Jew could read the word, generally the leaders of the synagogue entrusted this task to those who were experts in Scripture. The fact that Jesus gets up to read shows that it was customary for Him to do so as it was customary for Him to attend the synagogue. The words: “*as was His custom*” lend great force to the verse almost as though the one who reads and speaks is not just anyone, but a son of Israel expert in the reading and interpretation of the *Torah* and the *prophets*. Christian faith then is born from faithful representatives of the people of Israel whose time of waiting has come to fulfillment. All the main characters in Luke are authentic Israelites: Zachary, Elizabeth and John, Mary, Joseph and Jesus, the apostles, and later in Acts, Paul. This is “*a custom*” that carries with it something new. The synagogue is the place where the proclamation begins and spreads to the cities of Judah and Galilee and the whole of Israel, even to the ends of the earth.

vv. 17-19: Jesus finds the passage in Isaiah 61:1-2 which probably refers to the consecration of a prophet (cf. 1 Kg 19:16). Luke leaves out from the citation from Isaiah the menacing end because it is of no interest to his purpose: he emphasizes that Jesus’ teaching has its roots in scripture (17-19; 25-27) and makes it present in His own person. Isaiah’s words on His lips acquire their full meaning and summarize His mission (cf 4:1), full of the Spirit, anointed by the Lord, sent to proclaim the good news to the poor, freedom to prisoners and those oppressed, sight to the blind and to preach the time of grace of the Lord.

v. 20: The detailed description of the gestures foreshadows what is to come. Jesus speaks while sitting, the typical position of one who teaches. The eyes of the people turned towards Him prepare us for the importance of what He is about to say. His is a short but disturbing homily. The movements show the character of this passage from Luke. Jesus came, He went in, He stood up, He sat down, He passed among them, He went away. The Nazarenes too rise but it is to throw Him out. The contrast is clear. Jesus stands up to read, the men stand up to send Him away. The waiting described in this verse, “*The eyes of all in the synagogue were gazing on Him,*” degenerates into a rejection. The problem is not the proclamation, already well known and source of hope for devout Israelites, but the one who proclaims it and makes it His own.

v. 21: Jesus does not make any comments on the words of Isaiah, but He makes them present. His is a word event - *rhêma* - (Acts 10:37), a word that is salvation now. The

prophecy comes alive and is taking place. Jesus' interpretation goes beyond every expectation. In the Word, the *today* is present, the *today* that is typical of the Evangelist and that is the *today* of salvation, the *today* of the fulfillment that comes from listening (cf Rom 10:17). What is essential for Luke is listening. The realization of the ancient promises repeated in the whole of Luke's works (Lk 9:51; Acts 2:1; 19:21) is for those who listen: the *anawim*, the poor, the oppressed, those favored by Jhwh (Is 11:4; 29:19) and now those favored by Jesus (Mt 11:28).

c) Reflection:

The exegesis made by Jesus Himself on Isaiah 61 is an example of actualization that reveals the messianic present and has recourse to scripture passages to shed light on the present situation. Christ's is a creative authority that invites people to adapt their lives to the message, accepting the Anointed of God and renouncing the presumption of reducing Him to their dimension. This pragmatic perspective is the key to actualization in every age: the *today* of salvation echoes wherever there is preaching, so is the welcoming and the commitment.

In the synagogue of Nazareth, we find the fundamental answers of human beings who live in expectation of meeting with salvation. Jesus is sent by God and is sustained by the Spirit. The anointing says that He is the Christ. In Him scripture is fulfilled. He is the today of God who fulfills past history now come to maturation in Jesus and will turn into the daily today of tomorrow that is the time of the Church, it too sent as prophetic Word, sustained by the Spirit.

The main message found in this passage of Luke is the scripture. The scripture contains the whole of God's secret who lives in eternity and who becomes one of us.

4. Oratio

Psalm 2: 6-9

"I myself have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain."
I will proclaim the decree of the Lord,
who said to me, "You are my son;
today I am your father.
Only ask it of Me,
and I will make your inheritance the nations,
your possession the ends of the earth.
With an iron rod you shall shepherd them,
like a clay pot you will shatter them."

5. Contemplatio

Today: this the key word in my daily life. In this today the Scripture is fulfilled. In this today Christ goes into the synagogue of my convictions to proclaim the good news to the poverty of my thought, to my feelings that are prisoners of that desire built on the ruins of grey days stretched from hour to hour, to my vision obscured by my all too short-sightedness. A year of grace, of conversion, of blessing. Lord, may my today be Yours so that not one of Your words may fall in vain in my life, but that Your words may be fulfilled as grains of wheat in the frozen furrow of the past, capable of budding at the first signs of spring.

Lectio Divina: Monday, January 28, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God,
direct Your love that is within us,
that our efforts in the name of Your Son
may bring the human race to unity and peace.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 3:22-30

The scribes who had come from Jerusalem said of Jesus, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "By the prince of demons he drives out demons." Summoning them, he began to speak to them in parables, "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand; that is the end of him. But no one can enter a strong man's house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house. Amen, I say to you, all sins and all blasphemies that people utter will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin." For they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

3) Reflection

- *The conflict grows.* In the Gospel of Mark there is a progressive sequence. By the measure in which the Good News advances and people accept it, in the same measure it grows resistance on the part of the religious authority. The conflict began to grow and

to influence all groups of people. For example, the relatives of Jesus thought that He was out of His mind. (Mk 3:20-21), and the scribes who had come from Jerusalem thought that He was possessed, that Beelzebul was in Him (Mk 3:22).

- *The conflict with authority.* The scribes slandered against Him. They said that Beelzebul was in Him and that it was through the prince of devils that He drove out the devils. They had come from Jerusalem, about 120 kilometers away, to keep an eye on Jesus' behavior. They wanted to defend tradition against the new ideas that Jesus taught to the people (Mk 7:1). They thought that His teaching was against good doctrine. The response given by Jesus had three parts.

- *First Part: The comparison with a divided family.* Jesus uses the comparison of the divided family and the divided kingdom to denounce the absurdity of the slander. To say that Jesus casts out or drives out the devils with the help of the prince of the devils is to deny what is evident. It is like saying that water is dry, and that the sun is darkness. The doctors of Jerusalem slandered because they did not know how to explain the benefits worked by Jesus on behalf of the people. They were afraid to lose their power.

- *Second Part: The comparison of the strong man.* Jesus compares the devil to a strong man. Nobody, unless he is a strong person, will be able to take away the house from a strong man to rob it. Jesus is the strongest of all. And this is why He succeeds in entering the house and in dominating and overcoming the strong man. He succeeds in driving out the devils. Jesus wins over the strong man and robs his house. He liberates the people who were under the power of the evil one. The Prophet Isaiah had already used the same comparison to describe the coming of the Messiah (Is 49:24-25). Luke adds that the expulsion of the devil is the evidence of the coming of the Kingdom (Lk 11:20).

- *Third part: The sin against the Holy Spirit.* All sins are forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Spirit. Which is the sin against the Holy Spirit? It is to say, "The spirit which impels Jesus to cast out or drive out the devil, comes precisely from the devil!" The one who speaks in this way is incapable of receiving pardon. Why? Can the one who covers his eyes guess? He cannot! The one who closes his mouth, can he eat? He cannot. The one who does not close the umbrella of slander, can he receive the rain of pardon? He cannot! Pardon would pass by his side but would not reach him. It is not that God does not want to forgive. God always wants to forgive. But it is the sinner who refuses to receive pardon!

4) Personal questions

- The religious authorities close themselves up in themselves and deny the evidence. Has this ever happened to me, that I close myself off before the evidence or facts?
- Slander is the arm or weapon of the weak. Have you experienced this?

5) Concluding prayer

The whole wide world has seen the saving power of our God.
Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth,
burst into shouts of joy! (Ps 98:3-4)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, January 29, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God,
direct Your love that is within us,
that our efforts in the name of Your Son
may bring the human race to unity and peace.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 3:31-35

The mother of Jesus and his brothers arrived at the house. Standing outside, they sent word to Jesus and called him. A crowd seated around him told him, "Your mother and your brothers and your sisters are outside asking for you." But he said to them in reply, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

3) Reflection

- The family of Jesus. The relatives reached the house where Jesus was. They have probably come from Nazareth. From there to Capernaum there is a distance of forty kilometers. His mother also comes with them. They do not enter, but they send a messenger: "Look, Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for You!" Jesus' reaction is clear: "Who are My mother and My brothers?" And He Himself responds by turning to look toward the crowd who is there around Him: "Here are My mother and My brothers! Anyone who does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother!" To understand the meaning of this response it is necessary to look at the situation of the family at the time of Jesus.
- In old Israel, the clan (the large family, the community), was the basis of living together. It was protection for families and people, the guarantee of possession of the land, the principle vehicle of tradition, and the defense of identity. It was the concrete way on the part of the people of that time to incarnate the love of God and the love toward neighbor. To defend the clan was the same as to defend the Covenant.
- In Galilee at the time of Jesus, because of the system established during the long periods of government of Herod the Great (37 BC to 4 BC) and his son Herod Antipas (4 BC to 39 AD), the clan (the community), was becoming weaker. The taxes to be paid, both to the government and to the Temple, the debts which were increasing, the individualistic mentality of Hellenism, the frequent threats of violent repression on the part of the Romans and the obligation to accept the soldiers and give them hospitality, and the ever growing problem of survival, impelled families to close themselves in on themselves and to think only of their own needs. This closing up was strengthened by

the religion of the time. For example, one who gave his inheritance to the Temple could leave his parents without any help. This weakened the fourth commandment which was the backbone of the clan (Mk 7:8-13). The observance of the norms of purity was a factor in the marginalization of many people too, such as women, children, Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, possessed people, tax collectors or publicans, the sick, mutilated people and paraplegics.

- The concern over the problems of one's own family prevented people from meeting in community. Now, in order that the Kingdom of God could manifest itself in community living, people had to overcome the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves to the larger family, and the community. Jesus gave the example. When His own family tried to take control of Him, He reacted and extended the family: "Who are My mother and My brothers?" And He Himself gave the answer, turning His look toward the crowd, "Here are My mother and My brothers! Anyone who does the will of God is My brother, sister and mother!" (Mk 3:33-35). He created a community.
- Jesus asked the same thing from all those who wanted to follow Him. Families should not close themselves in on themselves. The excluded and the marginalized had to be accepted in life with others and feel accepted by God (Lk 14:12-14). This was the path to attaining the objective of the Law, which said, "There must, then, be no poor among you" (Dt 15:4). Like the great prophets of the past, Jesus tries to consolidate community life in the villages of Galilee. He takes back the profound sense of the clan, the family, and the community as an expression of the incarnation of the love toward God and toward neighbor.

4) Personal questions

- What place and what influence does the community have in my way of living the faith?
- Today, in the large city, overcrowding promotes individualism which is at odds with life in community. What am I doing to counteract this? How does one reconcile personal physical safety with community involvement in these urban areas?

5) Concluding prayer

I waited, I waited for Yahweh,
then He stooped to me
and heard my cry for help.
He put a fresh song in my mouth,
praise of our God. (Ps 40:1.3)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, January 30, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God,
direct Your love that is within us,
that our efforts in the name of Your Son
may bring the human race to unity and peace.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 4:1-20

On another occasion, Jesus began to teach by the sea. A very large crowd gathered around him so that he got into a boat on the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on land. And he taught them at length in parables, and in the course of his instruction he said to them, "Hear this! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain. And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." He added, "Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear." And when he was alone, those present along with the Twelve questioned him about the parables. He answered them, "The mystery of the Kingdom of God has been granted to you. But to those outside everything comes in parables, so that they may look and see but not perceive, and hear and listen but not understand, in order that they may not be converted and be forgiven." Jesus said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand any of the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown. As soon as they hear, Satan comes at once and takes away the word sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground who, when they hear the word, receive it at once with joy. But they have no roots; they last only for a time. Then when tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Those sown among thorns are another sort. They are the people who hear the word, but worldly anxiety, the lure of riches, and the craving for other things intrude and choke the word, and it bears no fruit. But those sown on rich soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

3) Reflection

- Sitting in the boat, Jesus taught the crowds. In these verses, Mark describes the way in which Jesus teaches the crowd: on the seaside, sitting in the boat, with many people around listening to Him. Jesus was not a cultured person (Jn 7:15). He had not frequented the superior school of Jerusalem. He had come from the country side, from

Nazareth. He was someone who was unknown. He was a craftsman and a country man. Without asking permission from the authorities, He began to teach the people. He spoke in a very different way. People liked to listen to Him.

- Jesus helped people perceive the mysterious presence of the Kingdom in the things of life by means of parables. A parable is a comparison. He uses the known and visible things of life to explain the invisible and unknown things of the Kingdom of God. For example, the people from Galilee understood when He spoke of seeds, soil, rain, the sun, salt, flowers, fish, harvest, etc. His parable uses these things which were known to the people to explain the mysteries of the Kingdom.

- The parable of the sower is a picture of the life of the farmer. At that time it was not easy to get a livelihood from agriculture. The land was full of stones. There were many bushes, little rain and much sun. Many times people, in order to take a shortcut, passed through the fields and stepped on the plants. (Mk 2:23). But in spite of that, every year, the farmer sowed and planted, trusting in the force of the seed, in the generosity of nature.

- He who has ears to listen, let him listen! Jesus begins the parable saying, “Listen!” (Mk 4:3). Now, at the end, He says, “He who has ears to listen, let him listen!” The way to understand the parable is by listening and thinking, “trying to understand!” The parable does not give us everything ready made, but induces those who listen to think and discover, based on the lived experience that they have of the seed. It induces creativity and participation. It is not a doctrine that arrives ready made to be taught and decorated. The parable does not give bottled water, but rather, leads one to the fountain or source. The farmer who listens, says, “Seed in the ground, I know what that is!” But Jesus says that this has something to do with the Kingdom of God. What would this be? One can already guess the long conversations of the crowd. The parable affects the people and moves them to listen to nature and to think about life.

- Jesus explains the parable to His disciples. At home, alone with Jesus, the disciples want to know the meaning of the parable. They do not understand it. Jesus is surprised at their ignorance (Mk 4:13) and responds with a difficult and mysterious phrase. He tells His disciples, “To you is granted the secret of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are outside everything comes in parables, so that they may look and not perceive, listen but not understand, to avoid changing their ways and being healed!” This phrase leads people to ask themselves “then what good is the parable? To clarify or to hide?” Perhaps Jesus uses parables in order for people to continue to live in ignorance and not reach conversion? Certainly not! Because at another point Mark says that Jesus used parables “according to what they could understand” (Mk 4:33).

- The parable reveals and hides at the same time! It reveals to “those who are inside,” who accept Jesus, the Messiah, the Servant. It hides for those who insist on considering Him the glorious king. They understand the images of the parable, but they do not grasp the significance.

- The explanation of the parable in its different parts. One after another, Jesus explains the parts of the parable, seed and soil, up to the harvest time. Some scholars hold that this explanation was added later and would have been given to some communities. This is quite possible, because in the bud of the parable there is already the flower of the explanation. Bud and flower, both have the same origin which is Jesus. For this reason, we can continue to reflect and discover other beautiful things in the parable. Once a

person asked in community, "Jesus has said that we should be salt. For what does salt serve?" This was discussed and at the end more than ten different purposes for salt were discovered! These meanings were applied to the life of the community and it was discovered that to be salt is something difficult and demanding. The parable functioned! Salt not only has uses, but in Jesus' time it had high value. The Romans used it as money and in the difficult hot climate it was needed by the human body to survive. Salt was valuable and gave life! The same for the seed. Everybody has some experience of the seed.

4) Personal questions

- What experience do you have with seeds? How does this help you understand the Good News better?
- What type of soil are you?

5) Concluding prayer

Fix your gaze on Yahweh
and your face will grow bright,
you will never hang your head in shame. (Ps 34:5)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, January 31, 2019

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God,
direct Your love that is within us,
that our efforts in the name of Your Son
may bring mankind to unity and peace.
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.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 4:21-25

Jesus said to his disciples, "Is a lamp brought in to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed, and not to be placed on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden except to be made visible; nothing is secret except to come to light. Anyone who has ears to hear ought to hear." He also told them, "Take care what you hear. The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you, and still more will be given to you. To the one who has, more will be given; from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

3) Reflection

- The lamp which gives light. At that time, there was no electric light. Imagine all that follows. The family is at home. It begins to get dark. The father lifts up the small lamp, lights it and places it under the tub or under the bed. What will the others say? They will begin to scream, “Father, place it on the table!” This is the story that Jesus tells. He does not explain. He only says, “Anyone who has ears to listen, should listen!” The Word of God is the lamp which should be lit in the darkness of the night. If it remains hidden in the closed book of the bible, it is like a small lamp under the tub. When it is united to the life in community, there it is placed on the table and it gives light!
- Be attentive to preconceptions. Jesus asks the disciples to become aware of the preconceptions with which they listen to the teaching He offers. We should be attentive to the ideas which we have when we look at Jesus! If the lenses over the eyes are green, everything seems to be green. If they are blue, everything will be blue! If the idea with which we look at Jesus is mistaken, everything which I think about Jesus will be subject to error. If I think that the Messiah has to be a glorious king, I will understand nothing of what the Lord teaches and I will conclude that everything is mistaken.
- Parable: a new way of teaching and speaking of Jesus. Jesus used parables, above all, to teach; this was His way. He had an enormous capacity to find very simple images to compare the things of God with the things of the life which people knew and experienced in the daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: to be inside, involved in the things of life, and to be inside, involved in the things of the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus’ teaching was different from the teaching of the scribes. It was Good News for the poor, because Jesus revealed a new face of God, in which people could recognize themselves and rejoice. “I bless You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased You to do!” (Mt 11:25-28).

4) Personal questions

- The Word of God, a lamp which gives light. What place does the Bible have in my life? What light do I receive?
- What is the image of Jesus that I have within me? Who is Jesus for me and who am I for Jesus?
- What can I do, on a regular basis, to further learn the context of the bible and His teaching, to reduce my preconceptions, so I too won't have on colored lenses and will be able to see and act clearly?

5) Concluding prayer

Taste and see that Yahweh is good.

How blessed are those who take refuge in Him. (Ps 34:8)