

## Lectio Divina February 2019

Lectio Divina: Friday, February 1, 2019 .....	2
Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 2, 2019 .....	3
Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 3, 2019 .....	7
Lectio Divina: Monday, February 4, 2019 .....	7
Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 5, 2019 .....	16
Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 6, 2019 .....	18
Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 7, 2019 .....	21
Lectio Divina: Friday, February 8, 2019 .....	23
Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 9, 2019 .....	26
Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 10, 2019 .....	28
Lectio Divina: Monday, February 11, 2019 .....	33
Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 12, 2019 .....	35
Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 13, 2019 .....	38
Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 14, 2019 .....	40
Lectio Divina: Friday, February 15, 2019 .....	42
Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 16, 2019 .....	45
Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 17, 2019 .....	47
Lectio Divina: Monday, February 18, 2019 .....	55
Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 19, 2019 .....	57
Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 20, 2019 .....	59
Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 21, 2019 .....	62
Lectio Divina: Friday, February 22, 2019 .....	64
Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 23, 2019 .....	66
Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 24, 2019 - 08 .....	69
Lectio Divina: Monday, February 25, 2019 .....	69
Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 26, 2019 .....	78
Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 27, 2019 .....	80
Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 28, 2019 .....	83

## Lectio Divina: Friday, February 1, 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 4:26-34**

Jesus said to the crowds: "This is how it is with the Kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come." He said, "To what shall we compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade." With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

#### **3) Reflection**

- It is always beautiful to see Jesus, who sought in life and in events new elements and images which could help people to see and experience the presence of the Kingdom. In today's Gospel, once again, He narrates two brief stories which take place every day in the life of all of us: the story of "the seed that grows by itself" and the story of "the small mustard seed which grows into the biggest shrub".
- The story of the seed which grows alone. The farmer who plants knows the process: seed, the green sprout, leaf, spike, grain. The farmer knows how to wait. He does not cut down the grain before it is time. But he does not know how the soil, the rain, the sun and the seed have this force or strength to make the plant grow from nothing until it bears fruit. This is how the Kingdom of God is. It is a process. There are stages and moments of growth. It takes place in time. It produces fruit at just the right moment, but nobody knows how to explain its mysterious force - nobody, not even the landlord. Only God!
- The story of the small mustard seed which grows and becomes big. The mustard seed is small, but it grows, and at the end the birds make their nests in its branches. This is

how the Kingdom is. It begins very small, it grows, and it extends its branches. The parable leaves an open question which will receive a response later on in the Gospel: Who are the birds? The text suggests that it is the pagans, who will not be able to enter the community and participate in the Kingdom.

- Because Jesus teaches by means of parables. Jesus tells many parables. All are taken from the life of the people! In this way He helped people discover the things of God in daily life, a life which becomes transparent because what is extraordinary from God is hidden in the ordinary and common things of daily life. People understood the things of life. In the parables they received the key to open them and to find the signs of God in them.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Jesus does not explain the parables. He tells the stories and awakens in others the imagination to reflect on the discovery. What have you discovered in these two parables?

- The purpose of these words is to render life transparent. Has your life become more transparent throughout the years, or has the contrary taken place?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Have mercy on me, O God, in Your faithful love,  
in Your great tenderness wipe away my offenses;  
wash me clean from my guilt,  
purify me from my sin. (Ps 51:1-2)

### **Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 2, 2019**

*Luke 2:22-40*

*The presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple*

#### **1. Opening prayer**

O God, our Creator and Father, You willed that Your Son, generated before the dawn of the world, should become a member of the human family. Rekindle in us an appreciation for the gift of life, so that parents may participate in the fruitfulness of Your love, old people may pass on to young ones their mature wisdom, and children may grow in wisdom, piety and grace, all giving praise to Your holy name. Through Christ our Lord.

#### **2. Reading: Luke 2:22-40**

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to

the Lord, and to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted. And you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

### **3. A moment of prayerful silence**

- that the Word of God may dwell in us and that we may allow it to enlighten our lives;
- that before we share any comments, the very light of the Word may shine and dominate with the mystery of the living presence of the Lord.

### **4. Some questions**

to help us in our personal reflection.

a) Why should Jesus, Son of the Most High, and His mother Mary, conceived without sin, obey the prescriptions of Moses? Was Mary perhaps not yet aware of her innocence and holiness?

b) Is there special significance in the words and attitudes of Simeon and the prophetess Anna? Do not their actions and joy perhaps recall the style of the ancient prophets?

c) How can we explain this "sword" that pierces? Is it a rending of consciences before the challenges and richness of Jesus? Or is it only the inner pains of the Mother?

d) Can this scene mean anything to parents today: for the religious formation of their children; for the plan that God has for each of their children; for the fears and sufferings that parents carry in their hearts when they think of the time when their children grow up?

## 5. A key to the reading

for those who wish go deeper into the text.

a) As laid down in the law of Moses/of the Lord. This is a kind of refrain repeated several times. Luke mixes two prescriptions without making any distinction. The purification of the mother was foreseen in Leviticus (12:2-8) and was to take place forty days after the birth. Until then, the woman could not approach sacred places, and the ceremony was accompanied by the gift of a small animal. But the consecration of the first-born was prescribed in Exodus (13:11-16) and was considered a kind of "ransom" in memory of the saving action of God when He liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. For this also the offering was a small animal. Throughout this scene, the parents seem to be in the process of presenting/offering their son as was done with sacrifices and Levites, while through the persons of Simeon and Anna it seems rather God who offers/presents the son for the salvation of people.

b) Simeon and Anna: these are figures full of symbolic value. Their role is one of recognition, that comes from both the enlightenment and action of the Spirit and a life lived in expectation and faith. Simeon especially is defined as *prodek menos*, that is, one entirely absorbed in waiting, and one who goes forward to welcome. He, too, appears to be obedient to the law, the law of the Spirit, who leads him towards the child in the temple. The canticle he proclaims manifests his *pro-existentia*: he has lived in order to come to this moment, and now he withdraws so that others may see the light and the salvation to come for Israel and the gentiles. Anna completes the picture, by her very age (symbolic value: 84 equals  $7 \times 12$ , the twelve tribes of Israel; or  $84 - 7 = 77$ , double perfection), but above all by her way of living (fasting and praying) and by her proclamation to all who "looked forward". She is led by the Spirit of prophecy, docile and purified in her heart. Besides, she belongs to the smallest of the tribes, that of Asher, a sign that the small and fragile are the ones more disposed to recognize Jesus, the Savior. Both of these old people, who look like an original couple, are symbols of the best of Judaism, of faithful and meek Jerusalem, that awaits and rejoices and that from now on allows the new light to shine.

c) A sword will pierce: generally these words are interpreted as meaning that Mary will suffer, a drama made visible in Our Lady of Sorrows. Rather, we need to see the Mother as a symbol of Israel. Simeon feels the drama of his people who will be deeply torn by the living and sharp word of the redeemer (cf. Lk 12:51-53). Mary represents the path: she must trust, but will go through times of pain and darkness, struggles and painful silences. The story of the suffering Messiah will be painful for all, even for the Mother. One does not follow the new light of the whole world without paying the cost, without being provoked to make risky choices, without being always born again from on high and in newness. But these images of the "sword that pierces," of the child who will "trip" and shake hearts from their lethargy, are not to be separated from the meaningful action of the two old people: the one, Simeon, takes the child in his arms to show that faith is a meeting and an embrace, not an idea or theorem; the other, Anna, takes on the

role of proclaiming and en-kindles a bright light in the hearts of all who "looked forward" to Him.

d) Daily life, an epiphany of God. Finally, it is interesting to note that the whole episode emphasizes the situation of the most simple and homely: the young couple with the child in their arms; the old man who rejoices and embraces, the old woman who prays and proclaims, those listening who appear to be indirectly involved. At the end of the passage, we also get a glimpse of the village of Nazareth, of the growth of the child in a normal context, the impression of a child extraordinarily gifted with wisdom and goodness. The theme of wisdom, woven into the fabric of normal life and growth in a village context, leaves the story as if in suspense, and it will be taken up again precisely with the theme of the wisdom of the boy among the doctors in the temple. Indeed, this is the episode that follows immediately (Lk 2:41-52).

## **6. Psalm 122**

I was glad when they said to me,  
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"  
Our feet have been standing within your gates,  
O Jerusalem!  
Jerusalem, built as a city which is bound firmly together,  
to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord,  
as was decreed for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.  
There thrones for judgment were set,  
the thrones of the house of David.  
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!  
"May they prosper who love you!  
Peace be within your walls,  
and security within your towers!"  
For my brethren and companions' sake I will say,  
"Peace be within you!"  
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,  
I will seek your good.

## **7. Final Prayer**

Father, we praise You and we bless You because through Your Son, born of woman by the working of the Holy Spirit, born under the law, has ransomed us from the law and You have filled our life with light and new hope. May our families welcome and remain faithful to Your designs; may they help and sustain in their children the new dreams and enthusiasm, wrap them in tenderness when they are fragile, educate them in love for You and for all creatures. All honor and glory to You, Father. Amen.

## Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 3, 2019

*Jesus connects the Bible to life*

*The people of Nazareth do not like Jesus and drive Him away*

*Luke 4:21-30*

### 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:

On the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Liturgy presents us with the conflict that arose between Jesus and the people of Nazareth. This happens on a Saturday during the celebration of the Word in the synagogue, after Jesus reads a text from the prophet Isaiah. Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah, presenting His plan of action, and immediately adds a very brief comment. At first, they are all amazed and happy. But when they realize the significance of Jesus' plan concerning their lives, they rebel and want to kill Him. These kinds of conflicts exist today. We accept others as long as they act in conformity with our ideas, but when they decide to welcome into the community people whom we exclude, then we are in conflict. This is what happened in Nazareth.

This Sunday's Gospel begins with verse 21, a brief comment made by Jesus. We take the liberty to include in the comment the preceding verses 16-20. This allows us to read the text from Isaiah quoted by Jesus and to better understand the conflict. As we read, it is good for us to note two things: "How does Jesus actualize the text of Isaiah? What reactions does this actualization of the text of Isaiah produce in the people?"

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

Luke 4:16: Jesus arrives in Nazareth and takes part in the community meeting.

Luke 4:17-19: Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah.

Luke 4:20-21: Jesus connects the Bible to life before an attentive public.

Luke 4:22: The contradictory reactions of the public.

Luke 4:23-24: Jesus criticizes the people's reaction.

Luke 4:25-27: Jesus sheds light on the bible, quoting Elijah and Elisha.  
Luke 4:28-30: The furious reaction of the people, who want to kill Jesus.

### **b) Text:**

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.



Jesus began speaking in the synagogue, saying: "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. They also asked, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" He said to them, "Surely you will quote me this proverb, 'Physician, cure yourself,' and say, 'Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.'" And he said, "Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went away.

### **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 pleased or struck you most in the text? Why?
- b) On what day, where, how, and through whom does Jesus present His plan?
- c) What is the content of Jesus' plan? Who are the excluded He wants to welcome?
- d) How does Jesus actualize Isaiah's text?

- e) How do the people react? Why?
- f) Could Jesus' plan of action also be ours? Who are the excluded that we should welcome into our community today?

## 5. For those who wish to go deeper into the text

### a) The historical context so as to locate the text:

In ancient Israel, the large family or clan, or *community*, was the basis of social life. It provided protection to families and people, it guaranteed possession of the land, it was the principal vehicle of tradition, and a guardian of the people's identity. It was a concrete way of incarnating the love of God in the love of neighbor. To defend the clan, or the community, was equivalent to defending the Covenant with God.

In Jesus' days, a double slavery marked people's lives and contributed to the disintegration of the *community*: (i) the slavery of the politics of Herod Antipas' government (4 BC to 39 AD) and (ii) the slavery of the official religion. Because of the exploitation and repression of Herod Antipas' politics, supported by the Roman Empire, many people had no fixed home and were excluded and unemployed (Lk 14:21; Mt 20:3,5-6). The *community* was weakened. Families and individuals had no help, no defense. The official religion, maintained by the religious authorities of the time, instead of strengthening the community so that it could welcome the excluded, added to this slavery. God's Law was used to legitimize the exclusion or marginalization of many people: women, children, Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, the possessed, publicans, the sick, the mutilated, paraplegics. It was the opposite of the fraternity God wanted for all! Thus, the political and economic situation and the religious ideology all conspired to weaken the local community and prevented the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus reacts to this situation of His people and presents a plan of action that will change it. Jesus' experience of God as the Father of love, gives Him the ability to evaluate reality and to see what was wrong with the lives of His people.

### b) A commentary on the text:

Luke 4:16: *Jesus arrives in Nazareth and takes part in the community meeting.*

Moved by the Holy Spirit, Jesus goes to Galilee and begins to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Lk 4:14). He goes to villages teaching in synagogues and finally arrives in Nazareth. He goes back to the community of His childhood for thirty years where He had taken part in the weekly meetings. On the Saturday after His arrival, Jesus goes to the synagogue to take part in the celebration as usual and gets up to read.

Luke 4:17-19: *Jesus reads a passage from the prophet Isaiah.*

In those days, there were two readings during the Saturday celebrations. The first dealt with the Law of God, was taken from the Pentateuch and was fixed. The second was taken from the historical or prophetic books, and was chosen by the reader. The reader could choose. Jesus chose the text from Isaiah that presents a summary of the mission of the Servant of God, and that reflected the situation of the people of Galilee at the time. In the name of God, Jesus takes up His position in defense of the life of His people, takes on His mission as Servant of God, and, using Isaiah's words, proclaims before all,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for He has anointed Me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord” (Isa 61:1-2). He takes up an ancient tradition of the prophets and proclaims “a year of favor from the Lord”. This expression was equivalent to proclaiming a jubilee year, so Jesus invites the people of His town to begin anew, to rewrite history at its very roots (Deut 15:1-11; Lev 25:8-17).

Luke 4:20-21: *Jesus connects the Bible to life before an attentive public.*

When He had finished reading, Jesus gave the book back to the servant and sat down. Jesus is not yet the coordinator of the community. He is a lay person and as such takes part in the celebration like all the others. He had been away from the community for many weeks, had then joined John the Baptist’s movement and was baptized by John in the Jordan (Lk 3:21-22). Moreover, He had spent more than forty days in the desert, reflecting on His mission (Lk 4:1-2). The Saturday after His return to the community, Jesus is invited to read. All are attentive and curious: “What will He say?” Jesus’ comment is very brief indeed. He actualizes the text, connects it with the people’s lives, saying, “This text is being fulfilled *today* even as you are listening.”

Luke 4:22: *The contradictory reactions of the people.*

The people’s reaction is ambivalent. At first their attitude is one of attention, wonder and acclamation. Then, immediately, there is a negative reaction. They say, “This is Joseph’s son, surely!” Why are they scandalized? Because Jesus speaks of welcoming the poor, the blind, prisoners and the oppressed. They do not accept His proposal. And so, just when Jesus presents His project to welcome the excluded, He Himself is excluded!

But there is another motive too. It is important to note the details of the quotations that Jesus uses from the Old Testament. In the commentary on Luke 3:4-6 on the second Sunday of Advent, Luke gives a longer quotation from Isaiah to show that the opening to gentiles had already been foreseen by the prophets. Here we have something like this. Jesus quotes the text from Isaiah up to the point where it says “to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord”, and leaves out the rest of the sentence that says “*and a day of vindication by our God, to comfort all who mourn*” (Is 61:2b). The people of Nazareth challenge the fact that Jesus left out the part on vindication. They wanted the day of the coming of the Kingdom to be a day of vindication against the oppressors of the people. Thus those who mourned would have regained their rights. But if that were so, then the advent, the coming of the Kingdom, would not have changed an unjust system. Jesus rejects this way of thinking. He rejects vengeance. His experience of God, Father, helped Him better understand the exact meaning of the prophecies. His reaction, unlike that of the people of Nazareth, shows us that the old image of God as a severe and vengeful judge was stronger than the Good News of God, a loving Father who welcomes those excluded.

Luke 4:23-24: *Jesus criticizes the people’s reaction.*

Jesus interprets the people’s reaction and considers it a form of envy: “Physician, heal yourself. Whatever things we have heard of as done in Capernaum, do here, also in your own country!” Jesus was well known throughout Galilee (Lk 4:14) and the people of

Nazareth were not pleased that Jesus, a son of their land, worked good things in other peoples' lands and not in His own. But there is a deeper reason for the reaction. Even if Jesus had worked in Nazareth the things He had worked in Capernaum, they would still not have believed in Him. They knew Jesus. "Who is He to teach us? Is He not Joseph's son?" (Lk 4:22). "Is He not the carpenter?" (cf Mk 6:3-4) Today this happens so often: when a lay person preaches in church, many will not accept that. They leave and say, "He or she is like us: he or she knows nothing!" They cannot believe that God can speak through the most ordinary people. Mark adds that Jesus is hurt by His people's unbelief (Mk 6).

*Luke 4:23-27: Jesus sheds light on the Bible quoting Elijah and Elisha.*

In order to confirm that His mission is really that of welcoming the excluded, Jesus uses two well known passages of the bible, the story of Elijah and that of Elisha. Both reflect the closed mentality of the people of Nazareth and criticize them. In Elijah's time there were many widows in Israel, but Elijah was sent to a foreign widow from Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-16). In Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but Elisha was sent to a foreigner from Syria (2 Kings 5:14). Again we see Luke's concern to show that openness towards pagans came from Jesus Himself. Jesus faced the same difficulties that the communities in Luke's time faced.

*Luke 4:28-30: The furious reaction of the people who want to kill Jesus.*

The mention of these two passages from the Bible produces greater anger in the people. The community of Nazareth even wants to kill Jesus. He remains calm. Other people's anger will not distract Him from His purpose. Luke shows how difficult it is to overcome a mentality of privilege and of closure towards others. The same thing happens today. Many of us Catholics grow up with a mentality that leads us to believe that we are better than others and that the others must become like us in order to be saved. Jesus never thought this way.

### **c) Further information:**

#### **The meaning of a jubilee year:**

In 2000, Pope John Paul II invited Catholics to celebrate the jubilee. Celebrating important dates is part of life. This allows us to rediscover and revive our initial enthusiasm. In the bible, "the Jubilee Year" was an important law. At first, it was decreed that every seventh year, sold or leased lands were to return to the clan of origin. Everyone was to be able to go back to his property. This prevented the formation of stagnant funds and guaranteed a living for families. During a Jubilee Year lands were to be sold back, slaves were to be redeemed and debts cancelled (cf. Deut 15:1-18). The celebration of a Jubilee Year every seven years was not easy (cf Jeremiah 34:8-16). After the exile began the custom of celebrating every fifty years, that is, every seven times seven years (Lev 25:8-17). The purpose of a Jubilee Year was, and still is, to re-affirm the rights of the poor, welcome the excluded, and reintegrate them into society. The jubilee was a legal instrument to go back to the deep sense of the Law of God. It was an occasion to take stock of the course travelled, to discover and correct errors and

to begin everything anew. Jesus begins His preaching by proclaiming a new jubilee, a “Year of favor from the Lord”.

## **6. Praying with Psalm 72 (71)**

**“He will free the poor who cry!”**

God, endow the king with Your own fair judgement,  
the Son of the king with Your own saving justice,  
that He may rule your people with justice,  
and Your poor with fair judgment.

Mountains and hills,  
bring peace to the people!  
With justice He will judge the poor of the people;  
He will save the children of the needy and crush their oppressors.  
In the sight of the sun and the moon He will endure, age after age.

He will come down like rain on mown grass,  
like showers moistening the land.  
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.

The Beast will cower before Him,  
His enemies lick the dust;  
the kings of Tarshish and the islands will pay Him tribute.  
The kings of Sheba and Saba will offer gifts;  
all kings will do Him homage,  
all nations become His servants.

For He rescues the needy who call to Him,  
and the poor who have no one to help.  
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.

Long may He live; may the gold of Sheba be given Him!  
Prayer will be offered for Him constantly,  
and blessings invoked on Him all day.  
May wheat abound in the land,  
waving on the heights of the hills,  
like Lebanon with its fruits and flowers at their best,  
like the grasses of the earth.

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.  
Blessed be Yahweh,  
the God of Israel,  
who alone works wonders;  
blessed for ever His glorious name.  
May the whole world be filled with His glory!  
Amen! Amen!

## **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, February 4, 2019**

*Ordinary Time*

### **1) Opening prayer**

Lord our God,  
help us to love You with all our hearts  
and to love all people as You love them.  
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 5: 1-20**

Jesus and his disciples came to the other side of the sea, to the territory of the Gerasenes. When he got out of the boat, at once a man from the tombs who had an unclean spirit met him. The man had been dwelling among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any longer, even with a chain. In fact, he had frequently been bound with shackles and chains, but the chains had been pulled apart by him and the shackles smashed, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the hillsides he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones. Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and prostrated himself before him, crying out in a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!" (He had been saying to him, "Unclean spirit, come out of the man!") He asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "Legion is my name. There

are many of us." And he pleaded earnestly with him not to drive them away from that territory. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside. And they pleaded with him, "Send us into the swine. Let us enter them." And he let them, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine. The herd of about two thousand rushed down a steep bank into the sea, where they were drowned. The swineherds ran away and reported the incident in the town and throughout the countryside. And people came out to see what had happened. As they approached Jesus, they caught sight of the man who had been possessed by Legion, sitting there clothed and in his right mind. And they were seized with fear. Those who witnessed the incident explained to them what had happened to the possessed man and to the swine. Then they began to beg him to leave their district. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed pleaded to remain with him. But Jesus would not permit him but told him instead, "Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you." Then the man went off and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what Jesus had done for him; and all were amazed.

### 3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, we meditate on a long text on the expulsion of a devil which was called *Legion* which oppressed and tortured a person. Today there are many people who use the texts of the Gospel which speak of the expulsion of the devils or impure spirits in order to frighten others. This is a sin! Mark does the opposite. As we will see, he associates the action of power of evil to four things: a) With the *cemetery*, the place of the dead. Death which kills life! b) With the *pork* which was considered an unclean animal. The impurity which separates from God. c) With the *sea*, which was considered a symbol of the chaos which existed before creation, and a chaos which destroys nature . d) With the word *Legion*, a name given to the army of the Roman Empire - the empire which oppressed and exploited people. Jesus overcomes the power of evil in these four points. The victory of Jesus had a very great outreach for the community of the years 70's, the time in which Mark wrote his Gospel. These communities lived under persecution by the *Roman Legions*, with an ideology which manipulated the popular beliefs concerning the devils in order to frighten people and to obtain their submission.
- *The power of evil oppresses, ill-treats and alienates people.* The initial verses describe the situation of the people before the arrival of Jesus. In the way of describing the behavior of the possessed person, Mark associates the power of evil to the cemetery and to death. It is a power without any purpose, threatening, without control, and destructive, which makes everybody afraid. It deprives the person of conscience, of self control, and of autonomy.
- *In the presence of Jesus the power of evil disintegrates itself and breaks into fragments.* In his description of the first contact between Jesus and the possessed man, Mark stresses the total lack of proportion that exists! The power, which at the beginning seemed to be very strong, melts and is broken. It is fragmented before Jesus. The man falls on his knees, asks not to be expelled from that district and finally says its name is *Legion*. With this name, Mark associates the power of evil with the political and military power of the Roman Empire which dominated the world through its *Legions*.
- *The power of evil is impure and has neither autonomy nor consistency.* The devil has

no power in its movements. He only manages to enter into the pigs with the permission of Jesus! Once he had entered into the pigs, they charged down the cliff into the sea. There were 2000! According to the people the pig was a symbol of impurity, the impurity which prevented the human being from entering into relationship with God and from feeling accepted by Him. The sea was the symbol of chaos which existed before creation and which, according to the belief of the time, threatened life. This episode of the pigs which threw themselves into the sea is strange and difficult to understand, but the message is sufficiently clear: before Jesus the power of evil has no autonomy nor consistency. The one who believes in Jesus has already overcome the power of evil and should not be afraid, should have no fear!

- *The reaction of the local people.* On the advice of the herdsmen who took care of the pigs, the people of the place ran to see the man who had been liberated from the power of evil, now “*in his full senses*”. But the Legion had entered the pigs! And for this reason they ask Jesus to leave. For them, in fact, the pigs were more important than the human person who had just returned to his normal self. Those pigs also had a large economic value to the local people. The same thing happens today: we often give very little importance to people. It frightens people to be given the choice to give up wealth for the peace of Christ.

- *To announce the Good News means to announce “what the Lord has done for you!”* The man who was liberated wanted to “follow Jesus,” but Jesus tells him, “Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in His mercy has done for you.” Mark addressed this phrase of Jesus to the communities and to all of us. For the majority of us “to follow Jesus” means, “Go to your house, to your people, and announce to them what the Lord has done for you!”

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Which point of this text pleased or struck you the most? Why?
- The man who was cured wanted to follow Jesus. But he should remain at home and tell everybody what Jesus has done for him. What has Jesus done for you? Do you want to share this with others?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Yahweh, what quantities of good things  
You have in store for those who fear You,  
and bestow on those who make You their refuge,  
for all humanity to see. (Ps 31:19)

## Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 5, 2019

*Ordinary Time*

### **1) Opening prayer**

Lord our God,  
help us to love You with all our hearts  
and to love all people as You love them.  
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 5, 21-43**

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him, and he stayed close to the sea. One of the synagogue officials, named Jairus, came forward. Seeing him he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, saying, "My daughter is at the point of death. Please, come lay your hands on her that she may get well and live." He went off with him and a large crowd followed him. There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured." Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who has touched my clothes?" But his disciples said to him, "You see how the crowd is pressing upon you, and yet you ask, Who touched me?" And he looked around to see who had done it. The woman, realizing what had happened to her, approached in fear and trembling. She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction." While he was still speaking, people from the synagogue official's house arrived and said, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher any longer?" Disregarding the message that was reported, Jesus said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid; just have faith." He did not allow anyone to accompany him inside except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official, he caught sight of a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. So he went in and said to them, "Why this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep." And they ridiculed him. Then he put them all out. He took along the child's father and mother and those who were with him and entered the room where the child was. He took the child by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" The girl, a child of twelve, arose immediately and walked around. At that they were utterly astounded. He gave strict orders that no one should know this and said that she should be given something to eat.

### 3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, we meditate on two miracles which Jesus worked in favor of two women: the first one for a woman who was considered impure because of the hemorrhage which she was suffering from for the past 12 years; the other one for a twelve year-old girl, who had died a short time before. According to the mentality of the time, anybody who would touch blood or a corpse was considered impure. Blood and death were factors for exclusion! Because of this, those two women were marginalized people and excluded from participation in the community.

- *The starting point. Jesus arrives in the boat.* The people join Him. Jairus, the head of the synagogue, asks help for his daughter, who is dying. Jesus goes with him and the people accompany Him, pushing on all sides. This is the starting point of the two cases of healing which follow: the cure of the woman and the resurrection of the twelve year-old girl.

- *The situation of the woman.* Twelve years of suffering from hemorrhage! For this reason she lived excluded, because at that time blood rendered people impure, and the one who touched them became impure also. Mark says that the woman had spent all she had with doctors. And instead of becoming better, she got worse. A situation without a solution!

- *The attitude of the woman.* She heard people speak about Jesus. Hope sprang up in her. She told herself, "If I can just touch His clothes, I will be saved". The catechism of the time said, "If I touch His cloak, He will become impure". The woman thinks exactly the contrary! This is a sign that women did not agree with all that religious authority taught. The woman gets in through the crowd, in the midst of the people, and without being noticed, she touches Jesus, because everybody was touching Him and pushing Him. At that same moment she noticed in her body that she had been cured.

- *The reaction of Jesus and that of the disciples.* Jesus, aware of the power that had gone out from Him, asked, "*Who touched My clothes?*" The disciples said to Him, "You see how the crowd is pressing round You; how can You ask, 'Who touched Me?'" So now comes the clash between Jesus and the disciples. Jesus had a sensitivity which the disciples did not perceive. The disciples reacted like everybody else; they did not understand the different reaction of Jesus. But Jesus did not pay attention and continued to investigate.

- *Healing through faith.* The woman became aware that she had been discovered. It was a difficult and dangerous moment for her, because according to the belief of the time, an impure person like herself got in among the people and contaminated everyone who touched her. All would become impure before God (Lev 15:19-30). For this reason, the punishment could be stoning. But the woman had the courage to accept the consequences of what she had done. The woman "*frightened and trembling*" fell at Jesus' feet and told Him the whole truth. Jesus has the last word: "*My daughter, your faith has restored you to health, go in peace and be free of your complaint.*"

(a) "Daughter", with this word Jesus accepts the woman into the new family, into the community which was gathering together around Him. (b) What she thought through faith became a reality. (c) Jesus acknowledges that, without that woman's faith, He would not have been able to work the miracle.

- *The news of the death of the little girl.* At that moment some people arrived from the

house of Jairus to inform him that his daughter had died. It was no longer necessary to disturb Jesus. For them, death was the great barrier. Jesus will not be able to overcome death! Jesus listens, looks at Jairus, and applies what He had just seen, that faith is capable of realizing what the person believes. And He says, “*Do not be afraid, only have faith!*”

- *In Jairus’ house.* Jesus allows only three of His disciples to go with Him. Seeing the commotion of the people weeping and wailing because of the death of the child, He said, “The child is not dead; she sleeps!” The people laughed. They know how to distinguish between a person who is sleeping and when the person is dead. It is the same laughter of Abraham and of Sarah, of those who are unable to believe that nothing is impossible for God (Gn 17:17; 18:12-14; Lk 1:37). For them, death was a barrier which nobody could overcome or go beyond! The words of Jesus had a very profound meaning. The situation of the persecuted communities at the time of Mark seemed to be a situation of death. They needed to hear, “She is not dead! You are sleeping! Wake up!” Jesus does not pay attention to the laughter and enters into the room where the child is, alone, and with the three disciples and the parents of the child.

- *The resurrection of the child.* Jesus takes the child by the hand and says: “Talitha kum!” She rises. There is a great commotion! Jesus keeps calm and asks that they give her something to eat. Two women are cured! One is twelve years old, the other one twelve years of hemorrhage, twelve years of exclusion! The exclusion of the child begins at twelve years of age, because her menstruation begins; she begins to die! Jesus has the greatest power and resurrects: “Get up!”

#### **4) Personal questions**

- What is the point in this text which pleased you or struck you the most? Why?
- One of the women was cured and once again integrated so that she could live in the community. A child was raised from her death bed. What does this action of Jesus teach us for our life in the family and for our community today?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

From You comes my praise in the thronged assembly;  
I will perform my vows before all who fear Him.  
The poor will eat and be filled;  
those who seek Yahweh will praise Him.  
May your heart live for ever. (Ps 22:25-26)

### **Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 6, 2019**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Lord our God,  
help us to love You with all our hearts  
and to love all people as You love them.

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 6:1-6**

Jesus departed from there and came to his native place, accompanied by his disciples. When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands! Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house.” So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

## **3) Reflection**

- The Gospel today speaks of the visit of Jesus to Nazareth and describes the obstinacy of the people of Nazareth who do not want to accept Him. (Mk 6:1-6). Tomorrow the Gospel describes the openness of Jesus toward the people of Galilee, shown through the sending out of His disciples on mission (Mk 6:7-13).
- Mark 6:1-2a: Jesus returns to Nazareth. At that time Jesus went to His home town, and His disciples accompanied Him. “With the coming of the Sabbath, He began teaching in the synagogue”. It is always good to return to one’s home town and to reunite with friends. After a long absence, Jesus also returns, and as usual, on Saturday, He goes to the synagogue to participate in the meeting of the community. Jesus was not the coordinator of the community, but even though He was not, He takes the floor and begins to teach. This is a sign that people could participate and express their own opinion.
- Mark 6:2b-3: Reaction of the people of Nazareth before Jesus. The people of Capernaum had accepted the teaching of Jesus (Mk 1: 22), but the people of Nazareth did not like the words of Jesus and were scandalized. For what reason? Jesus, the boy whom they had known since He was born, how is it that now He is so different? They do not accept God’s mystery present in Jesus, a human being and common as they are and known by all! They think that to be able to speak of God, He should be different from them! As we can see, not everything went well for Jesus. The people who should have been the first ones to accept the Good News were precisely those who had the greatest difficulty accepting it. The conflict was not only with foreigners, but especially with His relatives and with the people of Nazareth. They refused to believe in Jesus, because they could not understand the mystery of God embracing the person of Jesus. “From where do all these things come to Him? And what wisdom is this which has been given to Him? And these miracles which are worked by Him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses and Jude and Simon? His sisters too, are they not here with us?” And they would not accept Him. They do not believe in Jesus!

- The brothers and the sisters of Jesus. The expression “brothers of Jesus” causes polemics among Catholics and Protestants. Based on this text and on others, the Protestants say that Jesus had more brothers and sisters and that Mary had more sons! The Catholics say that Mary had no other sons. What should we think about all this? In the first place, the two positions, that of Catholics and that of the Protestants, both have arguments taken from the Bible and from the tradition of their respective communities. Therefore, it is not proper to discuss this question with arguments drawn only from reason. This is a question of profound convictions, which have something to do with the faith sentiments both of Catholics and Protestants. An argument taken only from reason cannot succeed in changing the conviction of the heart! On the contrary, it irritates and draws others away! Even when I do not agree with the opinion of another, I should always respect it! We, both Catholics and Protestants, instead of discussing texts, should unite to struggle in defense of life, created by God, a life which has been so disfigured by poverty and injustice, by the lack of faith. We should remember other phrases of Jesus: “I have come in order that they may have life and life in abundance” (Jn 10:10). “That all may be one, so that the world may believe that You, Father, have sent Me” (Jn 17:21). “Who is not against us is for us” (Mk 10:39-40).
- Mark 6: 4-6. Jesus’ reaction before the attitude of the people of Nazareth. Jesus knows very well that “nobody is a prophet in his own country”. He says, “A prophet is despised only in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house”. In fact, where there is no acceptance or faith, people can do nothing. The preconception prevents this. Even if Jesus wanted to do something, He cannot, and He is amazed at their lack of faith. For this reason, before the closed door of His community “He began to make a tour around the villages, teaching”. The experience of this rejection led Jesus to change His practice. He goes to the other villages and, as we shall see in tomorrow’s Gospel, He gets the disciples involved in the mission instructing them on how they have to continue the mission.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Jesus had problems with His relatives and with His community. From the time when you began to live the Gospel better, has something changed in your relationship with your family and with your relatives?
- Jesus cannot work many miracles in Nazareth because faith is lacking. Today, does He find faith in us, in me?
- Does the debate over Mary and Jesus' brothers and sisters precipitate a change in our behavior or how we put faith into action? Should this change how we treat the poor and marginalized?

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

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

How blessed are those to whom Yahweh imputes no guilt,  
whose spirit harbors no deceit. (Ps 32:1-2)

## Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 7, 2019

### 1) Opening prayer:

Lord our God,  
help us to love You with all our hearts  
and to love all people as You love them.  
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) Gospel reading - Mark 6:7-13

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick - no food, no sack, no money in their belts. They were, however, to wear sandals but not a second tunic. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave from there. Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them." So they went off and preached repentance. The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

### 3) Reflection

Today's Gospel continues what we have already seen in the Gospel yesterday. The passage through Nazareth was painful for Jesus. He was rejected by His own people (Mk 6: 1-5). The community, which had been His community, is no longer such. Something has changed. Beginning at that moment, as today's Gospel says, Jesus began to go around to the villages of Galilee to announce the Good News (Mk 6: 6) and to send the Twelve on a mission. In the 70's, the time when Mark wrote his Gospel, the Christian communities lived in a difficult situation, without any horizon. Humanly speaking, there was no future for them. In the year 64, Nero began to persecute the Christians. In the year 65, the revolt or uprising of the Jews in Palestine against Rome broke out. In the year 70, Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Romans. This is why the description of the sending out of the disciples, after the conflict in Nazareth, was a source of light and of courage for the Christians.

Mark 6:7. The objective of the Mission. The conflict grew and closely affected Jesus. How does He react? In two ways: 1) In the face of the mental stubbornness of the people of His community, Jesus leaves Nazareth and begins to go to the neighboring villages (Mk 6: 6). 2) He extends the mission and intensifies the announcement of the Good News, calling other people to involve them in the mission. He summons the Twelve,

and begins to send them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits . The objective of the mission is simple and profound. The disciples participate in the mission of Jesus. They cannot go alone; they have to go in pairs, two by two, because two persons represent the community better than one alone and they can mutually help one another. They receive authority over unclean spirits, i.e., they are to be a help for others in suffering and, through purification, they are to open the door for direct access to God.

Mark 6: 8-11. The attitudes which they should have in the Mission. The recommendations are simple: He instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff: no bread, no bag, no money for their purses; they were to wear sandals and not to take a spare tunic. And He told them, "If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away, shake off the dust under your feet, as evidence to them." So they set off. It is the beginning of a new stage. Now not only Jesus but the whole group will announce the Good News of God to the people. If the preaching of Jesus caused conflict, much more now, there will be conflict with the preaching of the whole group. If the mystery was already great, now it will be greater since the mission has been intensified.

Mark 6: 12-13. The result of the mission. So they set off to proclaim repentance, and they cast out many devils and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them. The proclamation of the Good News produces conversion or a change in people; it alleviates suffering in people; it cures illnesses and casts out devils.

The sending out of the disciples on Mission. At the time of Jesus there were several other movements of renewal, for example, the Essenes and the Pharisees. They also sought a new way of living in community and they had their own missionaries (cf. Mt 23:15). But these, when they went on mission, had prejudices. They took with them a bag and money to take care of their own meals, because they did not trust the food that people would give them, which was not always ritually pure. As opposed to other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus received various recommendations which helped them to understand the fundamental points of the mission which they received from Jesus and which is also our mission:

a) They should go without taking anything. They should take nothing, no bag, no money, no staff, no bread, no sandals, no spare tunic. That meant that Jesus obliged them to trust in hospitality, because one who goes without taking anything goes because he trusts people and thinks that he will be well received. With this attitude they criticized the laws of exclusion, taught by the official religion, and showed, by means of the new practice, that they in the community had other criteria.

b) They should eat what people ate or what the people gave them. They could not live separately, providing their own food, but they were to accept to sit at the same table (Lk 10: 8). This means that in contact with the people, they should not be afraid of losing purity as it was taught at that time. With this attitude they criticized the laws of purity

which were in force and showed, by means of the new practice, that they had another type of access to purity, that is, intimacy with God.

c) They should remain in the first house that welcomed them. They should live together in a stable way and not go from house to house. They should work like everybody else and live off what they received in exchange, because the laborer deserves his wages (Lk 10: 7). In other words, they should participate in the life and in the work of the people, and the people would have accepted them in the community and would have shared the food with them. This means that they had to have trust in sharing.

d) They should take care of the sick, cure lepers and cast out devils (Lk 10: 9; Mk 6: 7-13; Mt 10: 8). They had to carry out the function of Defender (“go’el”) and accept within the community those who were excluded. With this attitude they criticized the situation of disintegration of the community life of the clan and they aimed at concrete ways of correcting this. These were the four fundamental points which had to give impetus to the attitude of the missionaries who announced the Good News in the name of Jesus: hospitality, communion, sharing and acceptance of the excluded (defender, “go’el”). If these four requirements were respected, they could and should cry out to the four ends of the earth: The Kingdom of God has come! (cf. Lk 10: 1-12; 9: 1-6; Mk 6: 7-13; Mt 10: 6-16). The Kingdom of God revealed by Jesus is not a doctrine, nor a catechism, nor a law. The Kingdom of God comes and becomes present when people, motivated by their faith in Jesus, decide to live in community to give witness and to manifest to all that God is Father and Mother and that, therefore, we human beings are brothers and sisters to one another. Jesus wanted the local community to be an expression of the Covenant, of the Kingdom, of the love of God the Father, who makes all of us brothers and sisters.

#### **4) Personal questions:**

Do you participate in the mission as a disciple of Jesus?  
Which point of the mission of the apostles is more important for us today? Why?

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

Great is Yahweh and most worthy of praise in the city of our God,  
the holy mountain,  
towering in beauty,  
the joy of the whole world. (Ps 48:1-2)

### **Lectio Divina: Friday, February 8, 2019**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Lord our God,  
help us to love You with all our hearts  
and to love all people as You love them.

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 6:14-29**

King Herod heard about Jesus, for his fame had become widespread, and people were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead; That is why mighty powers are at work in him." Others were saying, "He is Elijah"; still others, "He is a prophet like any of the prophets." But when Herod learned of it, he said, "It is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up." Herod was the one who had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, whom he had married. John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Herodias harbored a grudge against him and wanted to kill him but was unable to do so. Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him. Herodias had an opportunity one day when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his courtiers, his military officers, and the leading men of Galilee. His own daughter came in and performed a dance that delighted Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask of me whatever you wish and I will grant it to you." He even swore many things to her, "I will grant you whatever you ask of me, even to half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" Her mother replied, "The head of John the Baptist." The girl hurried back to the king's presence and made her request, "I want you to give me at once on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was deeply distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests he did not wish to break his word to her. So he promptly dispatched an executioner with orders to bring back his head. He went off and beheaded him in the prison. He brought in the head on a platter and gave it to the girl. The girl in turn gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

## **3) Reflection**

- The Gospel today describes how John the Baptist was victim of the corruption and of the arrogance of the government of Herod. He died without being judged by a tribunal, in the course of a banquet given by Herod with the great men of the kingdom. The text gives us much information about the time of the life of Jesus and on the way in which the powerful of the time exercised power. From the beginning of the Gospel of Mark we perceive or see a situation of suspense. He had said, "After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God!" (Mk 1:14). In today's Gospel, almost suddenly, we know that Herod had already killed John the Baptist. Therefore, the reader asks himself, "What will he do now with Jesus? Will He suffer the same destiny? Rather than drawing up a balance of the opinions of the people and of Herod

on Jesus, Mark asks another question, “Who is Jesus?” This last question grows throughout the Gospel until it receives the definitive response from the centurion at the foot of the Cross: “Truly, this man was the Son of God!” (Mk 15:39)

- Mark 6:14-16. Who is Jesus? The text begins with a balance on the opinions of the people and of Herod on Jesus. Some associated Jesus with John the Baptist and with Elijah. Others identified Him with a prophet, that is, with someone who spoke in the name of God, who had the courage to denounce the injustices of the powerful and who knew how to animate the hope of the little ones. People tried to understand Jesus starting from the things that they themselves knew, believed, and hoped. They tried to make Him fit into the familiar criteria of the Old Testament with its prophecies and its hopes, and of the tradition of the ancients, with their laws. But these criteria were not sufficient. Jesus could not fit in those criteria. He was much greater!

- Mark 6:17-20. The cause for the killing of John. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod the Great, from the year 4 BC up to the year 39 after Christ. In all, 43 years! During the whole lifetime of Jesus, there had been no change in the government of Galilee! Herod Antipas was the absolute lord of everything; he listened to no one and did whatever he pleased! But the one who really commanded in Palestine, from the year 63 BC, was the Roman Empire. Herod, in order to not be removed from office, tried to please Rome in everything. He insisted above all on an efficient administration which would provide income for the Roman Empire. The only thing that concerned or worried him was his security and promotion. This is why he repressed any type of subversion. Flavius Josephus, a writer of that time, says that the reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was Herod’s fear of a popular revolt. Herod liked to be called benefactor of the people, but in reality he was a tyrant (Lk 22:25). John’s denouncement of him (Mk 6: 18) was the drop which filled up the cup, and John was thrown into prison.

- Mark 6:21-29: The murder plot. The anniversary and the banquet of the feast, with dancing and orgies! This was an environment in which the alliances were plotted. In attendance were “the great of the court, the officials and important people from Galilee”. In this environment the murder of John the Baptist was plotted. John, the prophet, was a living denouncement in this corrupt system. This is why he was eliminated under the pretext of personal vengeance. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of a man who did not control himself! Under the enthusiasm of the feast and of the wine, Herod swore lightly to give something to the young dancer. And superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to maintain his oath. For Herod, the life of his subjects counted nothing, had no value. He used them as he wanted and decided what to do with them just as he decided where to place the chairs in his house. Mark gives an account of how things happened and lets the community draw its own conclusions.

#### **4) Personal questions**

Do you know the cases of people who have died victims of corruption and of the dominion of the powerful? Do you know people in the community and in our Church who are victims of authoritarianism and an excess of power?

- Herod, the powerful who considered himself the owner of life and death of the people, was a great superstitious man and feared John the Baptist. He was a coward before the great, a corrupt man before the girl. Superstition, cowardice, and corruption characterized the exercise of Herod's power. Compare this with the corrupt power today in the various levels of society.

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

This God, His way is blameless;  
the word of Yahweh is refined in the furnace,  
for He alone is the shield of all who take refuge in Him. (Ps 18:30)

### **Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 9, 2019**

*Ordinary Time*

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Lord our God,  
help us to love You with all our hearts  
and to love all people as You love them.  
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) Gospel reading - Mark 6:30-34**

The Apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat. So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place. People saw them leaving and many came to know about it. They hastened there on foot from all the towns and arrived at the place before them. When Jesus disembarked and 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.

### 3) Reflection

The Gospel today is in great contrast with that of yesterday. On one side, the banquet of death, wanted by Herod with the great of his kingdom in the Palace of the Capital, during which John the Baptist was murdered (Mk 6: 17-29); on the other side, the banquet of life promoted by Jesus with the hungry people of Galilee in the desert (Mk 6: 30-44). The Gospel today presents only the introduction to the multiplication of the loaves and describes the teaching of Jesus.

Mark 6: 30-32. The welcome given to the disciples. At that time, the apostles rejoined Jesus and told Him all they had done and taught. And He said to them, "Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while." These verses show how Jesus formed His disciples. He was not concerned only with the content of the preaching, but also with rest for the disciples. He invited them to go to a lonely place so as to be able to rest and review what they had done.

Mark 6: 33-34. The welcome given to the people. The people noticed that Jesus had gone to the other side of the lake, and they followed Him trying to go to Him by foot, to the other shore. So as He stepped ashore He saw a large crowd, and He took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd and He began to teach them at some length. Seeing that crowd, Jesus was sad, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He forgets about His own rest and begins to teach them. In becoming aware that the people have no shepherd, Jesus began to be their shepherd. He begins to teach them. As the psalm says, "The Lord 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 in the sight of my enemies." (Ps 23: 1:3-5). Jesus wanted to rest together with His disciples, but the desire to respond to the needs of the people impels Him to leave rest aside. Something similar happens when He meets the Samaritan woman. The disciples went to get some food. When they returned they said to Jesus, "Master, eat something!" (Jn 4: 31), but He answers, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." (Jn 4: 32). The desire to respond to the needs of the Samaritan people leads Him to forget His hunger. My food is to do the will of the One who sent Me and to complete His work (Jn 4: 34). The first thing is to respond to the people who look for Him. Then He can eat.

Then Jesus began to teach them many things. The Gospel of Mark tells us many things that Jesus taught. The people were impressed: A new teaching! He taught them with authority! It was unlike that of the scribes! (Mk 1: 22,27). Teaching was what Jesus did the most (Mk 2: 13; 4: 1-2; 6: 34). This is what He usually did (Mk 10: 1). For another fifteen times Mark says that Jesus taught. Was it perhaps because Mark was not interested in the content? It depends on what people understand when they speak about content! To teach is not only a question of teaching new truths in order to say something. The content which Jesus gave did not only appear in His words, but also in His gestures and in His way of relating with people. The content is never separated from the person

who communicates it. Jesus was a welcoming person (Mk 6: 34). He wanted the good of the people. The goodness and the love which came from His words formed part of the content. They were His temperament. A good content without goodness and kindness would be like milk poured on the floor. Jesus' teaching manifested itself in a thousand ways. Jesus accepts as disciples not only men, but also women. He does not only teach in the synagogue, but also in any place where there were people to listen to Him: in the synagogue, in the house, on the shore, on the mountain, on the plain, in the boat, in the desert. It was not the relationship of pupil-teacher, but of disciple to Master. The professor teaches and the pupil is with him during the time of the class. The Master gives witness and the disciple lives with Him 24 hours a day. It is more difficult to be a Master than a teacher! We are not pupils of Jesus, we are His disciples! The teaching of Jesus was a communication that came from the abundance of His heart in the most varied forms: like a conversation by which He tries to clarify the facts (Mk 9: 9-13), like a comparison or parable that invites people to think and to participate (Mk 4: 33), like an explanation of what He Himself thought and did (Mk 7: 17-23), like a discussion which does not necessarily avoid polemics (Mk 2: 6-12), like a criticism that denounces what is false and mistaken (Mk 12: 38-40). It was always a witness of what He Himself lived, an expression of His love! (Mt 11: 28-30).

#### **4) Personal questions**

What do you do when you want to teach others something about your faith and your religion? Do you imitate Jesus?

Jesus is concerned not only about the content, but also about rest. How was the religious education that you received as a child? Did the catechists imitate Jesus?

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

How can a young man keep his way spotless?

By keeping your words.

With all my heart I seek You;

do not let me stray from Your commandments. (Ps 119:9-10)

### **Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 10, 2019**

*Faith in the word of Jesus and the miraculous catch of fish*

*The call of the first disciples*

*Luke 5:1-11*

#### **1. Opening prayer**

Father, now Your Word has come! It has appeared like the sun after a dark night, empty and solitary. When Your Word is not present, it is always thus, I know. Grant me the soft breeze from the sea of Your Holy Spirit and may it gather me, walk with me towards

Christ, Your living Word to whom I wish to listen. I shall not move from this shore, where He teaches and speaks, but I shall stay here until such time as He takes me with Him. Then I shall follow Him wherever He takes me.

## **2. Reading**

### **a) Placing the passage in its context:**

This passage, full of great theological intensity, comes at the center of a journey of faith and of meeting with the Lord Jesus, who leads us from deafness to being able to hear, from the most paralyzing sickness to the saving healing that makes us capable of helping our brothers and sisters to be reborn with us. Jesus has begun His preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth, giving sense and light to the words in the scroll of the Torah (4:16). He has defeated sin (4:31-37) and sickness (4:38-41), driving them away from the heart of human beings and He has announced the mysterious force that sent Him to us and by which He moves, running like a giant who reaches every corner of the earth. It is at this point that we hear the answer that is the beginning of what follows, that is, the obedience of faith. It is at this point that the Church and a new people are born, those able to hear and respond with a yes.

### **b) To help us with the reading of the passage:**

**vv. 1-3:** Jesus is on the shore of Lake Gennesaret and before Him is a large crowd of people, eager to listen to the Word of God. He goes into a boat and pushes off a little. As teacher and guide, He sits on the waters and teaches them, and from there He offers salvation to those who listen to and welcome the Word of God.

**vv. 4-6:** Jesus invites some to go fishing and Peter trusts Him, believes in the Word of the Master. In faith he launches into the deep and casts his nets. Because of his faith, the catch is over-abundant; it is miraculous.

**v.7:** Meeting Jesus is never a closed matter. The meeting always leads to communication and sharing. Indeed, the gift is too great and cannot be held by one person. Peter calls his friends in another boat and the gift is doubled and grows continually.

**vv. 8-11:** Peter kneels before Jesus, adores Him and recognizes his sinfulness, his nothingness, but Jesus calls him with the same authority that made so many seas obey Him throughout scripture: "Fear not!" God reveals Himself and becomes the companion of men and women. Peter accepts the mission of delivering men and women, his brothers and sisters, from the waters of the world and of sin, just as he was delivered. He leaves his boat, his nets, the fish and follows Jesus.

### c) The text:

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that the boats were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.



### 3. A moment of prayerful silence

During this time of silence and solitude accorded to me so that I can stay with Him, I go away from the shore a little way, take to the deep and, trusting in the Lord, I cast the net into the deep and I wait...

### 4. Some questions

a) "*He sat down and taught the people from the boat*". Jesus comes down, sits and takes up His abode among us. He bends down even to touching our earth and from this smallness He offers us His teaching, His Word of salvation. Jesus offers me time, space, full availability to meet Him and know Him, but do I know how to pause, to stay, to take root in Him and before Him?

b) "*He asked him to put out a little from the land*". The Lord's request is gradual. In fact, after this first putting out from the land, He asks him to launch into the deep. "Put out into the deep!" - an invitation addressed to every man and woman. Do I have faith, trust and confidence in Him to let go of my concerns? Do I look at myself sincerely and seriously? Where do the treasures of my life lie?

c) "*I will let down the nets*". Peter gives us a brilliant example of faith in the Word of Jesus. In this passage, the verb "let down" occurs twice: the first time it refers to the

nets and the second to the person of Peter. The significance is clear: before the Lord we can let down our whole being. We let down, but He gathers, always and with an absolute and infallible faithfulness. Do I feel like taking my life, today, just as it is, and letting it down at the feet of Jesus, in Him, so that He, once more, may gather me, heal and save me, making of me a new person?

d) *“They beckoned to their partners in the other boat”*. Again Peter becomes a guide on my journey and shows me how to be open to others, to share, because it is not possible to remain isolated and closed in the Church. We are all sent: *“Go to my brethren and say to them”* (Jn 20:17). Am I able to bring my boat close to that of others? Am I able to share with my brothers and sisters the gifts and riches the Lord has given me to hold in trust?

## 5. A key to the reading

\* *The sea and the theme of the exodus:*

Jesus is standing by the seashore. He stands above the dark, menacing and unknown tides of the sea and of life. He stands before this crowd of people gathered, ready to listen to Him and ready for the journey, He who is the Good Shepherd with the staff of His Word. He wishes to take us across the seas and oceans of this world on a journey of salvation that brings us before Him, as had already happened at the Red Sea (Ex 14: 21-23) and on the banks of the Jordan (Jn 3:14-17). Even the sea of sand in the desert is overcome by the power of His Word and opens up, becoming a garden, a level and passable road (Isa 43:16-21) for those who decide to go on the return journey to God and allow themselves to be guided by Him. In these few verses of the Gospel, the Lord once more prepares for us the great miracle of the exodus, of the coming out of the darkness of death through the saving crossing to the green pastures of friendship with Him and the listening to His voice. All is ready: our name has been called with infinite love by the Good Shepherd, who knows us from all eternity and who guides us for all eternity, never allowing us to fall from His hand.

\* *Listening in faith that leads to obedience:*

This passage from Luke is the second concerning the glorious journey that the Lord Jesus presents to us. The crowd gathers closely around Jesus, driven by the intimate desire to *“hear the Word of God”*; this is the answer to the constant invitation of the Father, which we find throughout the scriptures: *“Hear, O Israel!”* (Deut 6:4) and *“If only my people would hear me!”* (Ps 80:14). It is as if the crowd were saying, *“Yes, I will hear what God proclaims, the Lord”* (Ps 85:9). But the kind of hearing that is mentioned and suggested is complete, not superficial, it is alive and life-giving, not dead; it is the hearing of faith, not of incredulity and of hardness of heart. It is the hearing that says, *“Yes, Lord, at Your word I will let down my nets”*. The call addressed to us just now is the call to faith, to trust in Him and in every word that comes from His lips, certain that whatever He says will come true. As God said to Abraham, *“Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”* (Gen 18:14) or to Jeremiah, *“Is anything impossible to Me?”* (Jer 32:27); cf. also Zech 8:6. Or as it was said to Mary, *“Nothing is impossible for God”* (Lk 1:37), and she replied, *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me”*

*according to Your word*". That is the point we must reach; like Mary, like Peter. We cannot be just hearers, otherwise we would be deceiving ourselves, as James says (1:19-25); we would continue to be deceived by forgetfulness and we would be lost. The Word must be actualized, put into practice, fulfilled. Great is the ruin of the one who hears the Word but does not put it into practice; we must dig deep and lay foundations on the rock, that is, faith in practice (cf. Lk 6:46-49).

*\* Fishing as the mission of the Church:*

Fidelity to hearing and to faith leads to mission, that is, to enter into that society that Jesus instituted for the spreading of the Kingdom. It seems that Luke, in this passage, wishes to present the Church living the post-paschal experience of the encounter with the risen Jesus. We note, in fact, the many allusions to the passage in Jn 21:1-8. Jesus chooses a boat and chooses Peter and, from the boat, He calls men and women, sons and daughters, to carry on His mission. We note that the verb "*put out into the deep*" is in the singular, referring to Peter who is given the task of guide, but the act of fishing is in the plural: "*let down your nets*", referring to all those who wish to adhere to and participate in the mission. This one mission and common task of all is beautiful and sparkling; it is joyful! It is the apostolic mission, which begins now, in obedience to the Word of the Lord and that will reach the deep, even to the ends of the earth (cf. Mt 28:19; Acts 1:8; Mk 16:15; 13:10; Lk 24:45-48).

It is interesting to note the word that Luke uses to point out the mission given by Jesus to Peter, and to all of us, when He says: "*Do not be afraid, henceforth you shall catch men*". Here we do not come across the term found in Mt 4:18 ff., and in Mk 1:16 or even in this passage in v.2, which is simply *fishing*; here we find a new word, which appears only twice in the whole of the New Testament and which derives from the verb "*to capture*", in the sense of "*taking alive and keeping alive*". Indeed, the fishing people of the Lord, let down their nets into the sea of the world to offer to people life, to rescue them from the abyss and make them come back to true life. Peter and the others, we and our sailing partners in this world, can continue, if we wish, wherever we are, His wonderful mission as sent by the Father "*to save what was lost*" (Lk 19: 10).

## **6. A time of prayer: Psalm 66**

*A hymn of praise to the Lord,  
who has opened our hearts to faith.*

**My strength and my song is the Lord; He has saved me!**

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;  
sing the glory of His name;  
give to Him glorious praise!  
Say to God, "How awesome are Your deeds!

All the earth worships You; they sing praises to You,  
sing praises to Your name.  
Come and see what God has done:  
He is terrible in His deeds among men.

He turned the sea into dry land;  
men passed through the river on foot.  
There did we rejoice in Him.

Bless our God, O peoples,  
let the sound of His praise be heard,  
who has kept us among the living,  
and has not let our feet slip.  
For You, O God, have tested us;  
You have tried us as silver is tried.  
You brought us into the net;  
we went through fire and through water;  
yet You have brought us forth to a spacious place.

Come and hear, all you who fear God,  
and I will tell what He has done for me.  
I cried aloud to Him,  
and He was extolled with my tongue.  
But truly God has listened;  
He has given heed to the voice of my prayer.  
Blessed be God,  
because He has not rejected my prayer  
or removed His steadfast love from me!

## **7. Closing prayer**

Lord, You opened the sea and came to me; You split the night and began a new day in my life! You spoke Your Word to me and touched my heart; You made me go with You into the boat and brought me to the deep. Lord, You have done great things! I praise You, I bless You and thank You, in Your Word, in Your Son Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. Always take me into the deep with You, I in You and You in me, so that I may let down many nets of love, friendship, sharing and seeking Your face and Your kingdom here on earth. Lord, I am a sinner, I know! But for this too I thank You, because You did not come to call the just but sinners and I hear Your voice and follow You. Behold, Father, I leave everything and go with You...

## **Lectio Divina: Monday, February 11, 2019**

### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
watch over Your family  
and keep us safe in Your care,  
for all our hope is in You.  
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) Gospel reading - Mark 6:53-56**

After making the crossing to the other side of the sea, Jesus and his disciples came to land at Gennesaret and tied up there. As they were leaving the boat, people immediately recognized him. They scurried about the surrounding country and began to bring in the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. Whatever villages or towns or countryside he entered, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch only the tassel on his cloak; and as many as touched it were healed.

## **3) Reflection**

The text of today's Gospel is the final part of the whole passage of Mark 6:45-56, which presents three different themes: a) Jesus goes to the mountain alone to pray (Mk 6:45-46); b) Immediately after, He walks on the water, goes toward the disciples who are struggling against the waves of the sea (Mk 6: 47-52); 3) Now, in today's Gospel, when they were already on the shore, the people look for Jesus so that He can cure their sick (Mk 6:53-56).

Mark 6: 53-56. The search of the people. At that time, Jesus and His disciples having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When they disembarked, the people recognized Him at once. The people were numerous. They came from all parts, bringing their sick. The enthusiasm of the people who look for Jesus, recognize Him, and follow Him is surprising. What impels people to search for Jesus is not only the desire to encounter Him, to be with Him, but rather the desire to be cured of their sicknesses. Hurrying through the countryside, they brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard He went.

And wherever He went, to village or town or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging Him to let them touch even the fringe of His cloak, and all those who touched Him were saved. The Gospel of Matthew comments and enlightens this fact quoting the figure of the Servant of Yahweh, of whom Isaiah says, "Yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing, ours the sorrows he was carrying." (Is 53: 4 and Mt 8: 16-17)

To teach and to cure, to cure and to teach. Right from the beginning of His apostolic activity, Jesus goes through all the villages of Galilee, to speak to the people about the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1: 14-15). There, wherever He finds people to listen to Him, He speaks and transmits the Good News of God; He accepts the sick, in all places: in the synagogues during the celebration of the Word on Saturday (Mk 1: 21; 3: 1; 6: 2); in the informal meetings in the houses of friends (Mk 2: 1,15; 7: 17; 9:28; 10:10); walking on the street with the disciples (Mk 2: 23); along the beach, sitting in a boat (Mk 4: 1); in the desert where He took refuge and where people looked for Him (Mk 1: 45; 6: 32-34); on the mountain from where He proclaimed the Beatitudes (Mt 5: 1); in the squares of the villages and of the cities, where the people

took their sick (Mk 6: 55-56); in the Temple of Jerusalem, on the occasion of pilgrimages, every day without fear (Mk 14: 49)! To cure and to teach, to teach and to cure, that is what Jesus did the most (Mk 2: 13; 4: 1-2; 6: 34). This is what He used to do (Mk 10:1). The people were amazed (Mk 12: 37; 1: 22,27; 11:18) and they looked for Him, as a crowd.

The origin of this great enthusiasm of the people was, on the one hand, the person of Jesus who called and attracted and, on the other hand, the abandonment in which people lived, they were like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mk 6:34). In Jesus, everything was revelation of what impelled Him from within! He not only spoke of God, but He also revealed Him. He communicated something of what He Himself lived and experienced. He not only announced the Good News. He Himself was a proof, a living witness of the Kingdom. In Him was manifested what happens when a human being allows God to reign in His life. What has value, what is important, is not only the words, but also, and above all, the witness, the concrete gesture. This is the Good News which attracts!

#### **4) Personal questions**

The enthusiasm of the people for Jesus, looking for the sense of life and a solution for their ills. Where does this exist today? Does it exist in you? Does it exist in others?

What attracts is Jesus' loving attitude toward the poor and the abandoned. And I? How do I deal with the people excluded by society?

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

How countless are Your works, Yahweh,  
all of them made so wisely!  
The earth is full of Your creatures.  
Bless Yahweh, my soul. (Ps 104:24,35)

### **Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 12, 2019**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
watch over Your family  
and keep us safe in Your care,  
for all our hope is in You.  
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) Gospel reading - Mark 7:1-13

When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands. (For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds.) So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?" He responded, "Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts. You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." He went on to say, "How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to uphold your tradition! For Moses said, Honor your father and your mother, and whoever curses father or mother shall die. Yet you say, 'If someone says to father or mother, 'Any support you might have had from me is qorban' (meaning, dedicated to God), you allow him to do nothing more for his father or mother. You nullify the word of God in favor of your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many such things."

## 3) Reflection

The Gospel today speaks about the religious traditions of that time and of the Pharisees who taught this tradition to the people, for example, to eat without washing their hands, as they said, "to eat with impure hands." Many of these traditions were separated from life and had lost their significance. But even if this was the state of things, these traditions were kept and taught, either because of fear or because of superstition. The Gospel presents some instructions of Jesus concerning these traditions.

Mark 7: 1-2: Control of the Pharisees and liberty of the disciples. The Pharisees and some, who had come from Jerusalem, observed how the disciples of Jesus ate bread with impure hands. Here there are three points which deserve to be highlighted: a) They were from Jerusalem, from the capital city! This means that they had come to observe and to control what Jesus did. b) The disciples do not wash their hands before eating! This means that being with Jesus impels them to have the courage to transgress the norms which tradition imposed on the people, but that no longer had any sense, any meaning for life. c) The practice of washing hands, which up until now continues to be an important norm of hygiene, had assumed for them a religious significance which served to control and discriminate against people.

Mark 7: 3-4: The Tradition of the Ancients. The Tradition of the Ancients transmitted norms which had to be observed by the people in order to have the purity required by the Law. The observance of the Law was a very serious matter for the people of that time. They thought that an impure person could not receive the blessings promised by God to Abraham. The norms on purity were taught in order to open the way to God,

source of peace. In reality, instead of being a source of peace, the norms constituted a prison, slavery. For the poor, it was practically impossible to observe the hundreds of norms, of traditions and of laws. For this reason they were considered ignorant and damned persons who did not know the Law (Jn 7: 49).

Mark 7: 5: The scribes and the Pharisees criticize the behavior of Jesus' disciples. The scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus, " Why do Your disciples not behave according to the tradition of the Ancients and eat the bread with impure hands? They think that they are interested in knowing the reason for the disciples' behavior. In reality, they criticize Jesus because He allows the disciples to transgress the norms of purity. The Pharisees formed a type of confraternity, the principal concern of which was to observe all the laws of purity. They were responsible for the doctrine. They taught the laws relative to the observance of purity.

Mark 7: 6-13 Jesus criticizes the inconsistency of the Pharisees. Jesus answers quoting Isaiah: "This people approaches me only in words, honors me only with lip service, while their hearts are far from me" (cf. Is 29:13). Insisting on the norms of purity, the Pharisees emptied the content of the commandments of God's Law. Jesus quotes a concrete example. They said, "The person who offers his goods to the Temple cannot use these goods to help those in greater need." Thus, in the name of tradition they emptied the fourth commandment of its content, which commands to love father and mother. These people seem to be very observant, but they are only so externally. In their heart, they remain far away from God. As the hymn says, " His name is Jesus Christ and is hungry, and lives out on the sidewalk. And people when they pass by, sometimes do not stop, because they are afraid to arrive late to church!" At the time of Jesus, people in their wisdom were not in agreement with everything they were taught. They were hoping that one day the Messiah would come to indicate another way to attain purity. In Jesus this hope becomes a reality.

#### **4) Personal questions**

Do you know any religious tradition today which does not make much sense, but which continues to be taught?

The Pharisees were practicing Jews, but their faith was divided, separated from the life of the people. This is why Jesus criticizes them. Would Jesus criticize us today? For what things?

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

Our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the world!  
I look up at Your heavens, shaped by Your fingers,  
at the moon and the stars You set firm-  
what are human beings that You spare a thought for them,  
or the child of Adam that you care for him? (Ps 8:1,3-4)

## Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 13, 2019

### 1) Opening prayer

Father,  
watch over Your family  
and keep us safe in Your care,  
for all our hope is in You.  
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) Gospel reading - Mark 7:14-23

Jesus summoned the crowd again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.” When he got home away from the crowd his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, “Are even you likewise without understanding? Do you not realize that everything that goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters not the heart but the stomach and passes out into the latrine?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) “But what comes out of the man, that is what defiles him. From within the man, from his heart, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.”

### 3) Reflection

The Gospel today is the continuation of the themes on which we meditated yesterday. Jesus helps the people and the disciples to understand better the significance of purity before God. For centuries, the Jews, in order not to contract impurity, observed many norms and customs bound to food, to drink, to dress, to hygiene of the body, to contact with persons of other races and religions, etc. (Mk 7: 3-4). For them it was forbidden to have contact with gentiles and to eat with them. In the 70's, the time of Mark, some converted Jews said, “Now that we are Christians we have to abandon these ancient customs which separate us from converted gentiles!” But others thought that they had to continue with the observance of these laws of purity (cf. Col 2: 16,20-22). The attitude of Jesus, described in today's Gospel, helps us to overcome this problem.

Mark 7: 14-16: Jesus opens a new way to try to bring people closer to God. He says to the crowds, “Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean (Mk 7: 15). Jesus overturns things: what is impure does not come from outside to the inside, as the Doctors of the Law taught, but what comes from inside to the outside. Thus, nobody ever needs to ask himself if this or that food is pure or impure. Jesus places what is pure and impure on another level, not on the level of ethical behavior. He opens a new way to reach God, and in this way realizes the most profound design of the people. .

Mark 7: 17-23: In the house, the disciples asked for an explanation. The disciples did not understand what Jesus wanted to say with that affirmation. When they reached the house, they ask for an explanation. The disciples' question surprises Jesus. He thought that they had understood the parable. In His explanation to the disciples He goes to the very bottom of the question of impurity. He declares that all food is pure! In other words, no food which enters into the human being from outside can make him become impure, because it does not go to the heart, but to the stomach and ends in the septic tank, but what makes one become impure, according to Jesus, is what comes out from within the heart to poison human relationships. And then He enumerates some of them: prostitution, murder, adultery, ambition, theft, etc. Thus in many ways, by means of the word, of life together, of living close to one another, Jesus helps people to attain purity in another way. By means of the word He purified the lepers (Mk 1: 40-44), cast out unclean spirits (Mk 1: 26,39; 3: 15,22, etc.), and overcame death, which was the source of all impurity. Thanks to Jesus, who touches her, the woman who was excluded and considered impure is cured (Mk 5: 25-34). Without fear of being contaminated, Jesus eats together with people who were considered impure (Mk 2: 15-17).

The laws of purity at the time of Jesus. The people of that time were concerned very much about purity. The laws and the norms of purity indicated the necessary conditions to be able to place oneself before God and to feel well in His presence. One could not approach God in just any way, because God is holy. The Law stated, "Be holy because I am holy!" (Lv 19: 2). One who was not pure could not get close to God to receive the blessings promised to Abraham. The laws of what was pure and impure (Lv 11 to 16) were written after the time of slavery in Babylon, around the year 800 after the Exodus, but had its origin in the ancient mentality and customs of the people of the Bible. A religious and mystical vision of the world led people to appreciate things, people and animals, beginning from the category of purity (Gn 7: 2; Dt 14: 13-21; Nm 12: 10-15; Dt 24: 8-9).

In the context of the Persian domination, the fifth and fourth centuries before Christ, before the difficulties of reconstructing the Temple of Jerusalem and of the survival of the clergy, the priests who governed the people of the Bible increased the laws relative to poverty and obliged the people to offer sacrifices of purification for sin. Thus, after child birth (Lv 12: 1-8), menstruation (Lv 15: 19-24) the cure of a hemorrhage (Lv 15: 25-30), women had to offer sacrifices to recover purity. Lepers (Lv 13) or people who had contact with impure things or animals (Lv 5:1-13) also had to offer sacrifices. Part of this offering remained for the priests (Lv 5: 13).

At the time of Jesus, to touch a leper, to eat with a tax collector or publican, to eat without washing your hands, and so many other activities rendered the person impure, and any contact with this person contaminated the others. For this reason, it was necessary to avoid an impure person. People lived with fear, always threatened by so many impure things which threatened life. They were obliged to live without trust, not trusting anything or anybody. Now, all of a sudden, everything changes! Through faith in Jesus, it was possible to have purity and to feel good before God without having to observe all those laws and those norms of the ancient tradition . It was liberation! The

Good News announced by Jesus took away all fear from the people, and they no longer had to be in a defensive situation all the time, and He gives them back the desire to live, and the joy of being children of God, without fear of being happy!

#### **4) Personal questions**

In your life, are there any traditions which you consider sacred and others which you do not? Which ones? Why?

In the name of the tradition of the ancients, the Pharisees refused the Commandment of Jesus. Does this happen today? Where and when? Does it also happen in my life?

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

The upright have Yahweh for their Savior,  
their refuge in times of trouble;  
Yahweh helps them and rescues them,  
He will rescue them from the wicked,  
and save them because they take refuge in Him. (Ps 37:39-40)

### **Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 14, 2019**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
watch over Your family  
and keep us safe in Your care,  
for all our hope is in You.  
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) Gospel reading - Mark 7:24-30**

Jesus went to the district of Tyre. He entered a house and wanted no one to know about it, but he could not escape notice. Soon a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him. She came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth, and she begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She replied and said to him, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps." Then he said to her, "For saying this, you may go. The demon has gone out of your daughter." When the woman went home, she found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

### 3) Reflection

In today's Gospel we see how Jesus is attentive to a foreign woman, belonging to another race and to another religion, even though this was forbidden by the religious law of that time. At the beginning Jesus did not want to help her, but the woman insists and obtains what she wants: the cure of her daughter.

Jesus is trying to broaden the mentality of the disciples and of the people beyond the traditional vision. In the multiplication of the loaves, He had insisted on sharing (Mk 6: 30-44). He had declared all food pure (Mk 7: 1-23). In this episode of the Canaanite woman, He exceeds, goes beyond the frontiers of the national territory and accepts a foreign woman who did not belong to the people and with whom it was forbidden to speak. These initiatives of Jesus, which come from His experience of God the Father, were foreign to the mentality of the people of that time; Jesus helps the people to get out of their way of experiencing God in life.

Mark 7: 24: Jesus gets out of that territory. In the Gospel yesterday (Mk 7: 14-23) and of the day before (Mk 7: 1-13), Jesus had criticized the incoherence of the tradition of the ancients and had helped the people and the disciples to get out of the prison of the laws of purity. Here, in Mark 7: 24, He leaves Galilee. He seems to want to get out from the prison of territory and race. Finding Himself outside, He does not want to be recognized. But His fame had reached there before. People had recourse to Jesus.

Mark 7: 25-26: The situation. A woman approaches Jesus and begins to ask for help for her daughter who is sick. Mark says explicitly that she belongs to another race and to another religion. That means that she was a gentile. She throws herself at the feet of Jesus and begins to plead for the cure of her daughter, who was possessed by an unclean spirit. For the gentiles it was not a problem to go to Jesus. But for the Jews to live with gentiles was a problem!

Mark 7: 27: The response of Jesus. Faithful to the norms of His religion, Jesus says that it is not appropriate to take the bread of the children and give it to little dogs! This was a hard phrase. The comparison came from life in the family. Even now, children and dogs are numerous, especially in poor neighborhoods. Jesus affirms one thing: no mother takes away bread from the mouth of her children to give it to the dogs. In this case the children were the Hebrew people and the little dogs, the gentiles. At the time of the Old Testament, because of rivalry among the people, the people used to call other people dogs (1 Sam 17: 43). In the other Gospels, Jesus explains the reason for His refusal: "I have been sent only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel!" (Mt 15:24). In other words, the Father does not want Me to take care of this woman!

Mark 7: 28: The reaction of the woman. She agrees with Jesus, but she extends the comparison and applies it to her case: Jesus, this is true, but the little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the children! It is as if she said, "If I am a little dog, then I have the right of little dogs, that is, the crumbs that fall from the table belong to me!" She simply draws conclusions from the parable that Jesus told and shows that even in the house of Jesus, the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the children.

And in the house of Jesus , that is, in the Christian community, the multiplication of the bread for the children was so abundant that there were twelve baskets full left over (Mk 6: 42) for the little dogs , that is, for her, for the gentiles!

Mark 7: 29-30: The reaction of Jesus: “Because of what you have said, go. The devil has gone out of your daughter!” In the other Gospels it is made more explicit: “Great is your faith! May it be done as you wish!” (Mt 15: 28). If Jesus accepts the woman’s request, it is because He understands that now the Father wanted Him to accept her request. This episode helps us to understand something of the mystery which envelops the person of Jesus and His life with the Father. Observing the reactions and the attitudes of the people, Jesus discovers the will of the Father in the events of life. The attitude of the woman opens a new horizon in the life of Jesus. Thanks to her, He discovers better the project of the Father for all those who seek to liberate themselves from the chains which imprison their energy. Thus, throughout the pages of the Gospel of Mark, there is a growing opening toward the people. In this way, Mark leads the readers to open themselves before the reality of the world which surrounds them and to overcome the preconceptions which prevent a peaceful living together among the people. This opening toward gentiles appears very clearly in the final order given by Jesus to the disciples, after His Resurrection: “Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Gospel to all creation” (Mk 16: 15).

#### **4) Personal questions**

Concretely, what do you do to live peacefully with people of other Christian Churches?  
In the neighborhood where you live, are there people of other religions? Which?  
Do you normally speak with people of other religions?  
What kind of broadening of mind does this text demand from us today, in the family and in the community?

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

Blessed are those who keep to what is just,  
whose conduct is always upright!  
Remember me, Yahweh, in Your love for Your people.  
Come near to me with Your saving power. (Ps 106:3-4)

### **Lectio Divina: Friday, February 15, 2019**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
watch over Your family  
and keep us safe in Your care,  
for all our hope is in You.  
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) Gospel reading - Mark 7:31-37**

Jesus left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis. And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!" (that is, "Be opened!") And immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly. He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly astonished and they said, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

## **3) Reflection**

In today's Gospel, Jesus cures a deaf-mute. This episode is not known very much. In the episode of the Canaanite woman, Jesus goes beyond the frontiers of the national territory and accepts a foreign woman who does not belong to the people and with whom it was forbidden to speak. In today's Gospel we notice this same opening.

Mark 7: 31. The region of the Decapolis. At that time, returning from the territory of Tyre, Jesus went to Sidon toward the Lake of Galilee, right through the Decapolis territory. Decapolis literally means "ten cities." This was a region of ten cities in the southeast part of Galilee, and its population was gentile.

Mark 7: 31-35. To open the ears and to loosen the tongue. A deaf-mute man was brought before Jesus. People wanted Jesus to place His hands on him. But Jesus goes far beyond this request. He leads the man aside from the crowd, puts His finger into the man's ears and touches his tongue with spittle. Looking up to Heaven, He sighed deeply and said, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" At that same moment, his ears were opened, and at once the impediment of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. Jesus wants the people to open their ears and to loosen their tongues!

Mark 7:36-37: Jesus wants no publicity. And He ordered them not to tell anyone about it, but the more He insisted, the more widely they proclaimed it. Their admiration was unbounded and they said, "Everything He does is good; He makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak." He prohibits that the cure be proclaimed, but in fact that does not happen. Those who have experienced what Jesus has done go and tell others, whether Jesus wants it or not! The people who were present at the cure began to proclaim what they had seen and summarize the Good News as follows: Everything He does is good; He makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak! This affirmation of the people makes us remember creation, when it was said, "God saw that everything was good!" (Gen 1: 31). And this also recalls the prophecy of Isaiah, where he says that in the future the deaf will hear and the dumb will speak (Is 29: 28; 35: 5, cf. Mt 11: 5).

The recommendation not to tell anybody. Sometimes, the attention which Mark's Gospel attributes to the prohibition of Jesus to proclaim the cure is exaggerated, as if Jesus had some secret that He wanted to keep. In the majority of cases in which Jesus works a miracle, He does not ask for silence. Rather, He once even asked for publicity (Mk 5: 19). Sometimes, He orders not to announce the healing (Mk 1: 44; 5: 43; 7: 36; 8: 26), but obtains the opposite result. The more He prohibits it, the more the Good News is proclaimed (Mk 1: 28,45; 3: 7-8; 7: 36-37). It is useless to prohibit! The interior force of the Good News is so great that it spreads by itself.

Growing openness in the Gospel of Mark. Throughout the pages of Mark's Gospel, there is a growing openness toward the other populations. Thus Mark leads the readers to open themselves toward the reality of the world around and to overcome the preconceptions which prevent peaceful co-existence among the different populations. When He passed through the Decapolis, a gentile region, Jesus responded to the request of the people of the place and cured a deaf-mute man. He is not afraid to be contaminated with the impurity of a gentile, because in curing him, He touches his ears and his tongue. The Jews and the disciples themselves have difficulty hearing and understanding that a gentile who was deaf and dumb can now hear and speak thanks to Jesus who touched him. It recalls the Song of the Servant, "The Lord God has opened the ears, and I listen to Him" (Is 50: 4-5). In driving the merchants out of the Temple, Jesus criticizes the unjust trade and affirms that the Temple should be a house of prayer for all peoples (Mk 11:17). In the parable of the wicked tenants, Mark refers to the fact that the message will be taken away from the chosen people, the Jews, and will be given to others, the gentiles (Mk 12:1-12). After the death of Jesus, Mark presents the profession of faith of a gentile at the foot of the Cross. In quoting the Roman centurion and how he recognizes the Son of God in Jesus, Mark is saying that the gentile is more faithful than the disciples and more faithful than the Jews (Mk 15:39). The openness to the gentiles appears very clearly in the final order given by Jesus to the disciples, after His Resurrection: "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation" (Mk 16:15).

#### **4) Personal questions**

Jesus shows a great openness toward people of another race, another religion and of other customs. We Christians, today, do we have the same openness? Do I have this openness?

Definition of the Good News: Everything Jesus does is good! Am I good News for others?

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

Sing a new song to Yahweh!  
Sing to Yahweh, all the earth!  
Sing to Yahweh, bless His name! (Ps 96:1-2)

## Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 16, 2019

### 1) Opening prayer

Father,  
watch over Your family  
and keep us safe in Your care,  
for all our hope is in You.  
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) Gospel reading - Mark 8:1-10

In those days when there again was a great crowd without anything to eat, Jesus summoned the disciples and said, “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will collapse on the way, and some of them have come a great distance.” His disciples answered him, “Where can anyone get enough bread to satisfy them here in this deserted place?” Still he asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” They replied, “Seven.” He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then, taking the seven loaves he gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to his disciples to distribute, and they distributed them to the crowd. They also had a few fish. He said the blessing over them and ordered them distributed also. They ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets. There were about four thousand people. He dismissed the crowd and got into the boat with his disciples and came to the region of Dalmanutha.

### 3) Reflection

The Gospel today speaks about the second multiplication of the loaves. The unitive thread of several episodes in this part of the Gospel of Mark is the food, the bread. After the banquet of death (Mk 6:17-29), comes the banquet of life (Mk 6:30-44). During the crossing of the Lake the disciples are afraid, because they have understood nothing of the bread multiplied in the desert (Mk 6: 51-52). Then Jesus declares that all food is pure (Mk 7: 1-23). In Jesus’ conversation with the Canaanite woman, the gentiles ate the crumbs which fell from the table of the children (Mk 7:24-30). And here, in today’s Gospel, Mark speaks about the second multiplication of the loaves (Mk 8:1-10).

Mark 8: 1-3: The situation of the people and the reaction of Jesus. The crowds who gathered around Jesus in the desert had no food to eat. Jesus calls the disciples and presents the problem to them: I feel pity for this people, because for three days they have been following Me and have not eaten. If I send them away to their homes without eating, they will faint on the way; and some came from very far! In Jesus’ concern there are two important things: a) People forget home and food and follow Jesus to the desert!

This is a sign that Jesus aroused great sympathy, up to the point that people followed Him into the desert and remained with Him three days! b) Jesus does not ask them to solve the problem. He only expresses His concern to the disciples. It seems to be a problem without a solution.

Mark 8: 4: The reaction of the disciples: the first misunderstanding. The disciples then think of a solution, according to which someone had to bring bread for the people. It does not even occur to them that the solution could come from the people themselves. They say: And how could we feed all these people in the desert? In other words, they think of a traditional solution. Someone has to find the money, buy bread and distribute it to the people. They themselves perceive that, in that desert, to buy bread, this solution is not possible, but they see no other possibility to solve the problem. That is, if Jesus insists in not sending the people back to their homes, there will be no way to feed them!

Mark 8:5-7: The solution found by Jesus. First of all, He asks how much bread they have: seven loaves! Then He orders the people to sit down. Then, He takes those seven loaves of bread, gives thanks, breaks them and gives them to the disciples to distribute; and they distribute them to the crowds. And He does the same thing with the fish. As in the first multiplication (Mk 6: 41), the way in which Mark describes Jesus' attitude, recalls the Eucharist. The message is this: participation in the Eucharist should lead to the gift and to the sharing of bread with those who have no bread.

Mark 8: 8-10: The result: Everyone ate, they were satisfied and bread was left over! This was an unexpected solution, which began within the people, with the few loaves of bread that they had brought! In the first multiplication, twelve baskets of bread were left over; here, seven. In the first one, they served five thousand people. Here four thousand. In the first one there were five loaves of bread and two fish. Here, seven loaves of bread and a few fish.

The time of the dominant ideology. The disciples thought one way, Jesus thinks in another way. In the way of thinking of the disciples there is the dominant ideology, the common way of thinking of people. Jesus thinks in a different way. It is not by going with Jesus and living in a community that a person is already a saint and renewed. Among the disciples, the old mentality always emerges again, because the leaven of Herod and of the Pharisees (Mk 8:15), that is, the dominant ideology, had profound roots in the life of those people. The conversion requested by Jesus is a deep conversion. He wants to uproot the various types of leaven.

\* The leaven of the community closed up in itself, without any openness. Jesus responds: The one who is not against is in favor! (Mk 9:39-40). For Jesus, what is important is not if the person forms part of the community or not, but if he/she is generous, available or not to do the good which the community has to do.

\* The leaven of the group which considers itself superior to others. Jesus responds: You do not know what spirit animates you (Lk 9:55).

\* The leaven of the mentality of class and of competition, which characterized the society of the Roman Empire and which permeated the small community which was just beginning. Jesus responds: Let the first one be the last one (Mk 9:35). This is the point on which He insists the most; it is the strongest point of His witness: "I have not come to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10:45; Mt 20: 28; Jn 13:1-16).

\* The leaven of the mentality of the culture of the time. Jesus responds: Allow the little ones to come to me!. Jesus indicates that the little ones are the models of discipleship for adults: anyone who does not accept the kingdom of God as a child will not enter it (Lk 18:17).

The reading of the Gospel, done in community, can help us to change life and the vision and can help us to continue to convert ourselves and to be faithful to the words of Jesus.

#### **4) Personal questions**

We can always encounter misunderstandings with friends and enemies. What is the misunderstanding between Jesus and the disciples on the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves? How does Jesus face this misunderstanding?

In your house, with your neighbors or in the community, have there been misunderstandings? How have you reacted?

Has your community had misunderstandings or conflicts with the civil or ecclesiastical authority? How did this happen?

What is the leaven which today prevents the realization of the Gospel and should be eliminated?

#### **5) Concluding prayer**

Lord, You have been our refuge from age to age.  
Before the mountains were born,  
before the earth and the world came to birth,  
from eternity to eternity You are God. (Ps 90:1-2)

### **Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 17, 2019**

*"Blessed are you who are poor!  
Alas for you who are rich!"  
The light of the Gospel changes our way of looking.  
Luke 6:17, 20-26*

#### **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:**

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus declares blessed those who are poor, those who weep, those who are hungry and who are persecuted. And He declares bound to unhappiness the rich, those who laugh, who are satisfied, or who are praised by all. Of what does the happiness consist which Jesus attributes to the poor, to the hungry, to those who weep, to those who are persecuted? Is it happiness? The words of Jesus contrast with the daily experience of our life. The common ideal of happiness is quite different from the happiness that Jesus speaks about. And you, in your heart, do you think that a person who is poor and hungry is really happy?

Keeping in mind these questions, which result from our daily experience, read the text of this Sunday's Gospel. Read it attentively, perhaps without trying to understand it all. Allow the word of Jesus to enter into you. Keep silent. During the reading try to be attentive to two things: (i) to the social category of people who say they are happy, as well as those who are threatened by unhappiness; (ii) to people whom you know and who are part of the group of your friends and who could be part of one or another of these social categories.

The text of this Sunday's Gospel omits verses 18 and 19. We take the liberty to include them in the brief comment that follows, because they explain a bit better the public, those to whom the word of Jesus is addressed.

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

Luke 6:17: Places the action of Jesus in time

Luke 6:18-19: The crowd seeking Jesus

Luke 6:20-23: The four beatitudes

Luke 6: 24-26: The four threats

### **c) Text:**

Jesus came down with the twelve and stood on a stretch of level ground with a great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon

came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and even those who were tormented by unclean spirits were cured. Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from him and healed them all.



And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.”

### **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 is the point that you liked best or that struck you the most? Why?
- b) Who constituted the great crowd around Jesus? From where did they come and what were they seeking?
- c) What are the social categories of the people who are declared happy (Lk 6:20-23)? What is the promise that each one of them receives from Jesus? How are these promises to be understood?
- d) When saying “Blessed are the poor”, would Jesus be trying to say that the poor should continue to live in their poverty?
- e) What are the social categories of the people who are threatened by unhappiness? (Lk

6:24-26)? What are the threats for each one of them? How is this threat to be understood?

f) Do I look at life and at people as Jesus does?

## **5. For those who wish to deepen more on the theme**

### **a) Context of the time and that of today:**

Luke presents the teaching of Jesus in a progressive revelation. First, up to verse 6:16, Luke says many times that Jesus taught, but says nothing on the content of the teaching (Lk 4:15,31-32,44; 5:1,3,15,17; 6:6). Now, after informing us that Jesus saw a great multitude desirous of opening themselves to the Word of God, Luke presents the first sermon. The sermon is not long, but it is significant. The one who reads it unprepared will almost be afraid. It seems to be a sort of shock therapy!

The first part of the sermon (Lk 6:20-38) begins with a provocative contrast: “Blessed you who are poor!” “Alas to you who are rich!” (Lk 6:36-38). The second part (6:39-49) says that nobody can consider himself superior to others (Lk 6:39-42); the good tree bears good fruit, the bad tree bears bad fruit (Lk 6:43-45). Certainly, a person is not helped by hiding behind beautiful words and prayers. What matters is to put the word into practice (Lk 6:46-49).

### **b) Commentary on the text:**

*Luke 6:17: Places the action of Jesus in time and space.*

Jesus has spent the night in prayer (Lk 6:12) and has chosen the twelve to whom He has given the name of apostles (Lk 6:13-16). Now He goes down from the mountain together with the twelve. Having reached level ground, He finds two groups of people: a numerous group of disciples and an immense crowd of people who had come there from all of Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon.

*Luke 6:18-19: The crowds who seek Jesus.*

The crowds feel disoriented and abandoned and seek Jesus for two reasons: they want to listen to His word and they want to be cured of their illnesses. Many people were cured, who had been possessed by the evil spirits. The people try to touch Jesus because they are aware that there is a force in Him which does good and cures people. Jesus accepts all those who seek Him. Among these crowds there are also some Jews and foreigners. This is one of the favorite themes of Luke!

### **Luke 6:20-23 The four Beatitudes**

*\*Luke 6:20: Blessed are you who are poor!*

Fixing His eyes on His disciples, Jesus declared, “Blessed are you who are poor, because the Kingdom of God is yours!” This first Beatitude identifies the social category of the disciples of Jesus. They are poor! Jesus guarantees for them: “Yours is the Kingdom of Heaven!” It is not a promise concerning the future. The verb is in the present. The Kingdom is already theirs. Even being poor, they are already happy. The Kingdom is not a good future. It already exists in the midst of the poor.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes the meaning clear and says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit!” (Mt 5:3). The poor are those who have the Spirit of Jesus, because there are also the poor who have the spirit and the mentality of the rich. The disciples of Jesus are poor and have the mentality of the poor. They also, like Jesus, do not want to accumulate, but accept their poverty and like Jesus, struggle for a more just living together where there will be a fraternal spirit and the sharing of goods, without discrimination.

*\* Luke 6:21: Blessed are you, who are now hungry, blessed are you who now weep!*

In the second and third Beatitude Jesus says, “Blessed are you who are now hungry, because you shall have your fill! Blessed are you who now weep, because you shall laugh!” The first part of these declarations is in the present, the second part in the future. What we now live and suffer is not definitive. What is definitive will be the Kingdom which we are constructing today with the force of the Spirit of Jesus. To construct the Kingdom presupposes suffering and persecution, but one thing is certain: the Kingdom will arrive and “you shall have your fill and shall laugh!” The Kingdom is at the same time a present and a future reality. The second Beatitude evokes the Cantic of Mary: “He has filled the starving with good things” (Lk 1:53). The third one evokes the prophet Ezekiel who speaks of those who “grieve and lament over all the loathsome practices” carried out in the city of Jerusalem (Ezek 9:4; cf. Ps 119: 136).

*\* Luke 6:23: Blessed are you, when people hate you...!*

The fourth Beatitude refers to the future: “Blessed are you when people will hate you and will denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for your reward will be great in Heaven. This was the way the prophets were treated!” With these words of Jesus, Luke points out that the future announced by Jesus is about to arrive, and these people are on the right path.

#### **Luke 6:24-26: The four threats.**

After the four Beatitudes on behalf of the poor and the excluded, follow the four threats against the rich, those who are filled, those who laugh or who are praised by everyone. The four threats have the same literary form as the four Beatitudes. The first one is in the present. The second and third one have a part in the present and a part in the future. The fourth one refers completely to the future. These four threats are found in the Gospel of Luke and not in Matthew. Luke is more radical in denouncing injustice.

*\* Luke 6:24: Alas for you who are rich!*

Before Jesus, on that level ground, there are only poor and sick people who have come from all parts (Lk 6:17,19). But before them, Jesus says, “Alas for you who are rich!” In transmitting these words of Jesus, Luke is thinking of the communities of his time, toward the end of the first century. There were rich and poor, there was discrimination against the poor on the part of the rich, discrimination which also affected the structure of the Roman Empire (cf. Jas 2:1-9; 5: 1-6; Rev 3:15-17). Jesus harshly and directly criticizes the rich: “You rich, you have already had your consolation!” It is good to remember what Jesus says at another moment concerning the rich! He does not believe

very much in their conversion (Lk 18:24-25). But when the disciples are frightened, He says that nothing is impossible for God (Lk 18:26-27).

\* *Luke 6:25: Alas for you who now laugh because you will be afflicted and will weep!*  
“Alas for you who have now been filled, because you will be hungry! Alas for you who now laugh, because you will be afflicted and will weep!” These two threats indicate that for Jesus poverty is nothing fatal, and much less the fruit of prejudices, but rather the fruit of an unjust enrichment on the part of others. Here also, it is good to recall the words of the Canticle of Mary: “You sent the rich away empty handed!” (Lk 1:53).

\* *Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you!*  
“Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you; in fact, their fathers did the same with the false prophets!” This fourth threat refers to the Jews, that is, the sons of those who in the past praised the false prophets. In quoting these words of Jesus, Luke thinks about some converted Jews of his time who used their prestige and their authority to criticize the openness toward the gentiles (cf. Acts 15:1,5).

### **c) Extending the information:**

#### **The Beatitudes in Luke**

The two affirmations “Blessed are you who are poor!” and “Alas for you who are rich!” urge those who listen to make a choice, an option on behalf of the poor. In the Old Testament, several times God places the people before the choice of the blessing or the curse. The people are free to choose: “I place you before life and death, blessing and curse; choose, therefore, life so that you and your descendants may live” (Deut 30:19). It is not God who condemns. It is the people who choose life or death, it depends on their position before God and of others. These moments of choice are moments of the visit of God to His people (Gen 21:1; 50:24-25; Ex 3:16; 32:34; Jer 29:10; Ps 59:6; Ps 65:10; Ps 80:15; Ps 106:4). Luke is the only evangelist who uses this image of God’s visit (Lk 1:68,78; 7:16; 19:44). For Luke, Jesus is the visit of God who places the crowds before the choice of blessing or the curse: “Blessed are you who are poor!” and “Alas for you who are rich!” But the people do not recognize God’s visit (Lk 19:44).

#### **The message of Luke for the converted pagans**

The Beatitudes and the threats form part of a sermon. The first part of the sermon is addressed to the disciples (Lk 6:20). The second part is addressed to “You who listen to Me” (Lk 1:27), that is to those immense crowds of the poor and the sick, who had come from all parts (Lk 6:17-19). The words which Jesus addressed to this crowd are demanding and difficult: “love your enemies” (Lk 6:27), “blessed are those who curse you” (Lk 6:28), “to those who slap you on one cheek, present the other cheek” (Lk 6:29), to anyone who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic” (Lk 6:29). Taken literally, these words may benefit the rich, because the harder choice is always for the poor. And these words seem to say the opposite of the message of the Beatitudes and of the threats which Jesus had communicated before to His disciples.

But they cannot be taken literally. Not even Jesus took them like that. When the soldier slaps Him in the face, He does not offer the other cheek; rather, He reacts firmly: “If there is some offense in what I said, point it out; but if not, why do you strike Me?” (Jn 18:22-23). Then how can we understand these words? Two sentences help to understand what these words want to teach. The first sentence: “Treat others as you would like people to treat you!” (Lk 6:31). The second sentence: “Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate!” (Lk 6:36). Jesus does not simply want to change something, because that would change nothing. He wants to change the system. The new way which Jesus wants to construct comes from the new experience that Jesus has: the Father full of tenderness who accepts everyone! The words of threat against the rich cannot be an occasion of revenge on the part of the poor. Jesus commands them to have the contrary attitude: “Love your enemies!” True love cannot depend on what I receive from the other. Love should want the good of the other independently from what the other does for me. God’s love for us is like this.

### **The sermon on the mountain, the sermon on the level ground**

In the Gospel of Luke Jesus comes down from the mountain and stops on level ground to give a sermon (Lk 6:17). This is why some call it the “sermon on the plain”. In the Gospel of Matthew, this same sermon is given on the mountain (Mt 5:1) and is called the “sermon on the mount”. Because Matthew seeks to present Jesus as the new legislator, the new Moses. It was on the mountain where Moses received the Law (Ex 19:3-6; 31:18; 34:1-2). And it is on the mountain that we receive the new law of Jesus.

### **6. Prayer of Psalm 34 (33)**

*“Gratitude which comes from a diverse way of looking at things”*

I will bless Yahweh at all times,  
His praise continually on my lips.  
I will praise Yahweh from my heart;  
let the humble hear and rejoice.  
Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh,  
let us acclaim His name together.  
I seek Yahweh and He answers me,  
frees me from all my fears.

Fix your gaze on Yahweh and your face will grow bright,  
you will never hang your head in shame.  
A pauper calls out and Yahweh hears,  
saves him from all his troubles.  
The angel of Yahweh encamps around those who fear Him,  
and rescues them.  
Taste and see that Yahweh is good.  
How blessed are those who take refuge in Him.

Fear Yahweh, you His holy ones;  
those who fear Him lack for nothing.  
Young lions may go needy and hungry,  
but those who seek Yahweh lack nothing good.  
Come, my children, listen to me,  
I will teach you the fear of Yahweh.

Who among you delights in life,  
longs for time to enjoy prosperity?  
Guard your tongue from evil,  
your lips from any breath of deceit.

Turn away from evil and do good,  
seek peace and pursue it.  
The eyes of Yahweh are on the upright,  
His ear turned to their cry.

But Yahweh's face is set against those who do evil,  
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.  
They cry in anguish and Yahweh hears,  
and rescues them from all their troubles.

Yahweh is near to the broken-hearted;  
He helps those whose spirit is crushed.  
Though hardships without number beset the upright,  
Yahweh brings rescue from them all.

Yahweh takes care of all their bones,  
not one of them will be broken.  
But to the wicked evil brings death,  
those who hate the upright will pay the penalty.

Yahweh ransoms the lives of those who serve Him,  
and there will be no penalty for those who take refuge in 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, February 18, 2019

### 1) Opening prayer

Lord God,  
forgive us that in our weak faith  
we ask sometimes for signs and wonders.  
We know that You are our Father,  
but it is not always easy for us  
to recognize Your loving presence.  
Give us eyes of faith to see the sign  
that You are with us in Jesus and His message.  
We say so reluctantly, for it is painful.  
Purify our trust in You and in Jesus  
that we may become more mature Christians,  
who love You through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### 2) Gospel Reading - Mark 8:11-13

The Pharisees came forward and began to argue with Jesus, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. He sighed from the depth of his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Amen, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." Then he left them, got into the boat again, and went off to the other shore.

### 3) Reflection

Mark 8: 11-13: The Pharisees ask for a sign from Heaven. Today's Gospel narrates a discussion of the Pharisees with Jesus. Jesus also, as it happened with Moses in the Old Testament, had fed hungry people in the desert, by multiplying the bread (Mk 8: 1-10). This is a sign that He presented himself before the people as a new Moses. But the Pharisees were not capable of perceiving the meaning of the multiplication of the loaves. They continued to discuss with Jesus and ask for a sign from Heaven. They had understood nothing of all that Jesus had done. Jesus sighed profoundly, probably feeling disgust and sadness before so much blindness. He concludes by saying, "No sign will be given to this generation." He left them and went toward the other side of the lake. It is useless to show a beautiful picture to one who does not want to open his eyes. People who close their eyes cannot see!

The danger of dominating ideology. Here we can clearly perceive how the yeast of Herod and the Pharisees (Mk 8: 15), the dominating ideology of the time, made people lose their capacity to analyze events objectively. This yeast came from afar and had sunk profound roots in the life of the people. It went so far as to contaminate the disciples' mentality and manifested itself in many ways. With the formation which Jesus gave them, He tried to uproot this yeast.

The following are some examples of this fraternal help which Jesus gave to His disciples:

a) The mentality of a closed group. On a certain day a person not belonging to the community used the name of Jesus to drive out devils. John saw this and forbade it: “We tried to stop him because he was not one of ours” (Mk 9: 38). John thought he had the monopoly on Jesus and wanted to prevent others from using the name of Jesus to do good. John wanted a community closed in upon itself. It was the yeast of the Elected People, the separated People! Jesus responds, “Do not stop him! Anyone who is not against us is for us!” (Mk 9: 39-40).

b) The mentality of a group which considers itself superior to others. At times, the Samaritans did not want to offer hospitality to Jesus. The reaction of some of the disciples was immediate: “May fire descend from heaven and burn them up!” (Lk 9:54). They thought that because they were with Jesus, everyone had to welcome Him, to accept Him. They thought they had God on their side to defend Him. It was the yeast of the Chosen People, the Privileged People! Jesus reproaches them: “Jesus turned and rebuked them” (Lk 9: 55).

c) The mentality of competition and prestige. The disciples discussed among themselves about the first place (Mk 9: 33-34). It was the yeast of class and of competitiveness, which characterized the official religion and the society of the Roman Empire. It was already getting into the small community around Jesus. Jesus reacts and orders them to have a contrary mentality: “If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last” (Mk 9: 35).

d) The mentality of those who marginalize the little ones. The disciples scolded little children. It was the yeast of the mentality of that time, according to which children did not count and should be disciplined by adults. Jesus rebukes the disciples: “Let the little children come to me!” (Mk 10:14). The children become the teachers of the adults: Anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it . (Lk 18:17).

As it happened in the time of Jesus, today also the dominating ideology arises once again and appears even in the life of the community and of the family. The prayerful reading of the Gospel, done in community, can help to change our view of things and to deepen in us conversion and the fidelity which Jesus asks from us.

#### **4) For Personal Confrontation**

Faced with the alternative either to have faith in Jesus or to ask for a sign from heaven, the Pharisees want a sign from heaven. They were not able to believe in Jesus. The same thing happens to me. What have I chosen?

The yeast of the Pharisees prevented the disciples from perceiving the presence of the Kingdom in Jesus. Has some residue of this yeast of the Pharisees remained in me?

## **5) Concluding Prayer**

Lord, You are generous and act generously;  
teach me Your will. (Ps 119:68)

### **Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 19, 2019**

#### *Ordinary Time*

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Lord our God,  
when we do not see clearly in life,  
when suffering comes our way,  
we tend to blame You or people.  
Help us to realize clearly  
how much of the evil around us  
comes from within ourselves:  
from our greed for riches and power,  
from our self-complacency and selfishness.  
Speak to us Your word of forgiveness  
and change us from a silent majority of evil  
into solidarity of love,  
by the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### **2) Gospel Reading - Mark 8:14-21**

The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. Jesus enjoined them, "Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." They concluded among themselves that it was because they had no bread. When he became aware of this he said to them, "Why do you conclude that it is because you have no bread? Do you not yet understand or comprehend? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes and not see, ears and not hear? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many wicker baskets full of fragments you picked up?" They answered Him, "Twelve." "When I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many full baskets of fragments did you pick up?" They answered Him, "Seven." He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

#### **3) Reflection**

Yesterday's Gospel spoke of the misunderstanding between Jesus and the Pharisees. Today's Gospel speaks of the misunderstanding between Jesus and the disciples and shows that the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod (religion and government), had taken

possession of the mentality of the disciples to the point of hindering them from listening to the Good News.

Mark 8: 14-16: Attention to the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod. Jesus warns the disciples to look out for the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod. But they do not understand the words of Jesus. They think that He is speaking like that because they forgot to buy bread. Jesus says one thing and they understood another. This clash was the result of the insidious influence of the yeast of the Pharisees on the mentality and on the life of the disciples.

Mark 8: 17-18a: Jesus' question. In the face of this almost total lack of perception in the disciples, Jesus rapidly asks them a series of questions, without waiting for an answer. They are hard questions which express very serious things and reveal the total lack of understanding on the part of the disciples. Even if it seems unbelievable, the disciples reach the point in which there is no difference between them and the enemies of Jesus. First, Jesus had become sad seeing the hardness of heart of the Pharisees and of the Herodians (Mk 3: 5). Now, the disciples themselves have hardened their hearts (Mk 8: 17). First, those outside (Mk 4:11) do not understand the parables because they have eyes and do not see, listen but do not understand (Mk 4:12). Now, the disciples themselves understand nothing, because they have eyes and do not see, listen, but do not understand (Mk 8:18). Besides, the image of the hardened heart evoked the hardness of heart of the people of the Old Testament who always drifted away from the path. It also evoked the hardened heart of Pharaoh who oppressed and persecuted the people (Ex 4: 21; 7: 13; 8: 11, 15, 28; 9: 7 ). The expression "they have eyes and do not see, listen but do not understand" evoked not only the people without faith criticized by Isaiah (Is 6: 9-10), but also the adorers of false gods, of whom the psalm says, "They have eyes and see nothing, have ears and hear nothing" (Ps 115: 5-6).

Mark 8: 18b-21: The two questions regarding the bread. The two final questions refer to the multiplication of the loaves: How many baskets did they gather the first time? Twelve! And the second time? Seven! Like the Pharisees, the disciples also, though they had collaborated actively in the multiplication of the loaves, did not succeed in understanding the meaning. Jesus ends by saying, "Do you still not understand?" The way in which Jesus asks these questions, one after the other, almost without waiting for an answer, seems to cut the conversation. It reveals a very big clash. What is the cause of this clash?

The cause of the clash between Jesus and the disciples. The cause of the clash between Jesus and the disciples was not due to ill will on their part. The disciples were not like the Pharisees. The Pharisees did not understand, but in them there was malice. They used religion to criticize and to condemn Jesus (Mk 2: 7,16,18,24; 3: 5, 22-30). The disciples were good people. Theirs was not ill will, because even if they were victims of the yeast of the Pharisees and of the Herodians , they were not interested in defending the system of the Pharisees and the Herodians against Jesus. Then, what was the cause? The cause of the clash between Jesus and the disciples had something to do with the Messianic hope. Firstly, among the Jews there was an enormous variety of Messianic

expectations. Second, the diverse interpretations of the prophecies: there were people who expected a Messiah King (cf. Mk 15: 9, 32); others, a Messiah Saint or Priest (cf. Mk 1:24); others, a Messiah subversive Warrior (cf. Lk 23:5; Mk 15: 6; 13: 6-8); others, a Messiah Doctor (cf. Jn 4: 25; Mk 1: 22-27); still others, a Messiah Judge (cf. Lk 3: 5-9; Mk 1:8); others, a Messiah Prophet (6: 4, 14, 65). It seems that nobody expected a Messiah Servant, announced by the Prophet Isaiah (Is 42: 1; 49: 3; 52: 13). They did not consider the messianic hope as a service of the people of God to humanity. Each group, according to their own interests and according to their social class, awaited the Messiah, but wanted to reduce Him to their own hope. This is why the title Messiah, according to the person or social position, could mean very different things. There was a great confusion of ideas! And precisely in this attitude of Servant is found the key which turns on a light in the disciples' darkness and helps them toward conversion. It is only in accepting the Messiah as the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, that they will be capable of opening their eyes and understanding the Mystery of God in Jesus.

#### **4) For Personal Confrontation**

What is for us today the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod? What does it mean today for me to have a hardened heart?

The yeast of Herod and the Pharisees prevents the disciples from understanding the Good News. Perhaps, today the propaganda of television prevents us from understanding the Good News of Jesus?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

I need only say, "I am slipping,"  
for Your faithful love, Yahweh, to support me;  
however great the anxiety of my heart,  
Your consolations soothe me. (Ps 94:18-19)

### **Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 20, 2019**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

God our Father,  
You have promised to remain for ever  
with those who do what is just and right.  
Help us to live in Your presence.  
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 8:22-26

When Jesus and his disciples arrived at Bethsaida, people brought to him a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Putting spittle on his eyes he laid his hands on the man and asked, “Do you see anything?” Looking up the man replied, “I see people looking like trees and walking.” Then he laid hands on the man’s eyes a second time and he saw clearly; his sight was restored and he could see everything distinctly. Then he sent him home and said, “Do not even go into the village.”

## 3) Reflection

- The Gospel today gives an account of the cure of a blind man. This episode of a cure constitutes the beginning of a long instruction from Jesus to the disciples (Mk 8:27 to 10:45) and then ends with the cure of another blind man (Mk 10:46-52). In this broader context, Mark suggests to the readers that those who are truly blind are Peter and the other disciples. All of us are blind! They do not understand the proposal of Jesus when He spoke about the suffering and the cross. Peter accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but not as a suffering Messiah (Mk 8:27-33). He was also affected by the belief of the time which only spoke of a messiah as a glorious king. Peter seemed to be blind. He understood nothing, but wanted Jesus to be as he imagined.
- The Gospel today indicates how difficult it was to cure the first blind man. Jesus had to cure this man in two different stages. The cure of the disciples was also difficult. Jesus had to give a long explanation concerning the significance of the cross to help them understand, because what really produced blindness in them was the cross.
- In the year 70, when Mark was writing, the situation of the communities was not easy. There was much suffering, many crosses. Six years before, in 64, the Emperor Nero had decreed the first great persecution, and many Christians were killed. In the year 70, in Palestine, the Romans were destroying Jerusalem. In the other countries, a great tension between the converted Jews and the non-converted Jews was beginning. The greatest difficulty was the cross of Jesus. The Jews thought that a crucified person could not be the Messiah who was so awaited by the people, because the law affirmed that all those crucified should be considered persons condemned by God (Deut 21:22-23).
- Mark 8:22-26: The cure of a blind man. They brought a blind man, asking Jesus to cure him. Jesus cured him, but in a different way. First of all, He took him outside the village. Then He put some spittle on the eyes, He placed His hands on him and asked, “Do you see something?” The man answered, “I see men; in fact, they seem like trees that walk!” He could see only in part. He exchanged trees for people, or people for trees! Only in a second moment does Jesus cure the blind man and forbids him to enter the village. Jesus did not want any easy advertising!
- As it has been said, this description of the cure of the blind man acts as an introduction to the long instruction from Jesus to cure the blindness of the disciples, and at the end

He finishes with the cure of another blind man, Bartimaeus. In reality the blind man was Peter. We are all blind. Peter did not want the commitment of the Cross! Do we understand the significance of suffering in life?

- Between the two cures of the blind men (Mk 8:22-26 and Mk 10:46-52), is found a long instruction on the Cross (Mk 8:27 to 10:45). It seems a catechism, made of sayings from Jesus Himself. He speaks about the Cross in the life of the disciple. The long instruction consists of three announcements regarding the Passion. The first one is Mark 8:27-38. The second is Mark 9:30-37. The third one is in Mark 10:32-45. Between the first one and the second, there is a series of instructions which indicate the type of conversion that should take place in the life of those who accept Jesus, Messiah Servant (Mk 9:38 to 10:31):

Mk 8:22-26: the cure of a blind man.

Mk 8:27-38: first announcement of the cross.

Mk 9:1-29: instructions to the disciples on the Messiah Servant.

Mk 9:30-37: second announcement of the cross.

Mk 9:38 to 10:31: instructions to the disciples on conversion.

Mk 10:32-45: third announcement of the cross.

Mk 10:46-52: the cure of the blind man Bartimaeus.

The whole of this instruction has as a background the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. From the beginning to the end of this long instruction, Mark tells us that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem where He is going to suffer His death (Mk 8:27; 9: 30,33; 10:1,17,32). The full understanding of following Jesus is not achieved by theoretical ideas, but by practical commitment, walking like Him along the way of service, from Galilee up to Jerusalem. Any one who insists on keeping the idea of Peter, that is, of a glorious Messiah without the cross, will understand nothing and will never be able to have the attitude of a true disciple. He will continue to be blind, exchanging people for trees (Mk 8:24), because without the cross it is impossible to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Jesus.

The journey of following is a road of the gift of self, of abandonment, of service, of availability, of acceptance of conflict, knowing that there will be resurrection. The cross is not an accident on the way, but forms part of this road. Because in a world organized around egoism, love and service can exist only crucified! Anyone who makes his life a service to others, disturbs and bothers those who live attached to privileges, and therefore suffers.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- All believe in Jesus. But some understand Him in one way and others in another. Today, which is the most common Jesus according to the way people think? How does popular belief interfere in the way of seeing Jesus? What do I do so as not to be drawn by the deceit of these popular ideas?

- What does Jesus ask of people who want to follow Him? Today, what prevents you from recognizing and assuming the plans of Jesus?

### **5) Concluding prayer**

Lord, who can find a home in Your tent,  
who can dwell on Your holy mountain?  
Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly,  
who speaks the truth from the heart. (Ps 15:1-2)

## **Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 21, 2019**

### *Ordinary Time*

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Lord God, merciful Father,  
your Son came to set all people free,  
to make the poor rich in faith and hope,  
to make the rich aware of their poverty.  
Unite us all in one trust in you  
and in one common concern for one another;  
give us all your attitude and that of Jesus,  
of not distinguishing between ranks and classes and sexes  
but of seeking together the freedom  
brought us by Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### **2) Gospel Reading - Mark 8,27-33**

Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' And they told him, 'John the Baptist, others Elijah, others again, one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he asked them, 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ.' And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of man was destined to suffer grievously, and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter tried to rebuke him.

But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do.'

#### **3) Reflection**

- Today's Gospel speaks about Peter's blindness who does not understand the proposal of Jesus when he speaks about suffering and of the Cross. Peter accepts Jesus as Messiah, but not a suffering Messiah. He is influenced by the "yeast of Herod and the

Pharisees”, that is, by the propaganda of the government of that time in which the Messiah was a glorious Messiah. Peter seemed to be blind. He was not aware of anything, but wanted Jesus to be as he wished. To understand well the importance and weight of this blindness of Peter it is well to consider it in its literary context.

- Literary context: The Gospel of Mark transmits to us three announcements of the Passion and death of Jesus: the first one in Mark 8, 27-38; the second one in Mark 9, 30-37 and the third one in Mark 10, 32-45. This whole which goes up to Mark 10, 45, is a long instruction of Jesus to the disciples to help them to overcome the crisis produced by the Cross. The instruction is introduced by the healing of a blind man (Mk 8, 22-26) and at the end it is concluded with the healing of another blind man (Mk 10, 46-52). The two blind persons represent the blindness of the disciples. The healing of the first blind man was difficult. Jesus had to do it in two stages. The blindness of the disciples was also difficult. Jesus had to give a long explanation concerning the meaning of the Cross to help them understand why the cross was producing blindness in them. Let us consider closely the healing of the blind man:

- Mark 8, 22-26: The first healing of a blind man. They took a blind man before Jesus, asking Jesus to cure him. Jesus cures him, but in a different way. First, he takes him outside the village. Then he put some of his saliva on the eyes of the blind man and, laid his hands on him and asked him: Can you see anything? The man answered: I see persons; they look like trees that walk! He could only see one part. He exchanged trees for persons, or persons for trees! Jesus cures him only in the second time. This description of the cure of the blind man introduces the instruction to the disciples, in reality the blind man is Peter. He accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but a glorious Messiah. He saw only one part! He did not want the commitment of the Cross! The blindness of the disciples is also cured by Jesus, in different stages, not all at once.

- Mark 8, 27-30: The discovery of reality: Who do people say I am? Jesus asks: “Who do people say I am?” They answered expressing the different opinions: “John the Baptist”. “Elijah or one of the Prophets”. After having heard the opinions of others, Jesus asks: “And you who do you say I am?” Peter answers: “The Lord, the Christ, the Messiah!” That is, the Lord is the one whom the people are expecting! Jesus agrees with Peter, but forbids him to speak about that with the people. Why? Because at that time all expected the coming of the Messiah, but each one in his own way: some expected the king, others the priest, doctor, warrior, judge, prophet! Nobody seemed to be expecting the Messiah, Servant and Suffering, announced by Isaiah (Is 42, 1-9).

- Mark 8, 31-33: First announcement of the Passion. Then Jesus began to teach saying that he is the Messiah Servant and affirms that, as Messiah Servant announced by Isaiah, he will soon be condemned to death in carrying out his mission of justice (Is 49, 4-9; 53, 1-12). Peter is horrified; he calls Jesus apart to rebuke him. And Jesus said to him: “Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do.” Peter thought he had given the right answer. In fact, he had said the correct word: “You are the Christ!” But he does not give it the correct sense. Peter does not understand Jesus. He was like the blind man. He exchanged people for trees! The response of Jesus was very hard: “Get behind me, Satan!” Satan is a Hebrew word which means accuser, the one who leads others away from the way to God. Jesus does not allow anyone to lead him away from his mission. Literally the text says: “Get behind me, Satan!” Peter has to follow Jesus. He must not change things and intend that Jesus follows Peter.

#### **4) For Personal Confrontation**

- We all believe in Jesus. But some believe that Jesus is in one way, others in another way. Which is today the most common image that people have of Jesus? Which is the response which people today would give to Jesus' question? And I, what answer do I give?
- What prevents us today from recognizing the Messiah in Jesus?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

I will praise Yahweh from my heart;  
let the humble hear and rejoice.  
Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh,  
let us acclaim his name together. (Ps 34,2-3)

### **Lectio Divina: Friday, February 22, 2019**

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Almighty God,  
you have given us the witnessing of the apostles  
as the firm rock on which we can rely.  
Where Peter is, there is the Church.  
But we see today that the bark of Peter is rocked;  
we are often like capricious children  
unused to our newfound freedom.  
Make us use this freedom responsibly  
and do not allow us to lose our composure.  
Reassure us that You are always with us  
and keep us optimistic about the future,  
for it is Your future  
and You are our rock for ever.

#### **2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 16:13-19**

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

### 3) Reflection

Today's Gospel presents us three points: the opinion of the people concerning Jesus (Mt 16:13-14), the opinion of Peter regarding Jesus (Mt 16:15-16) and the response of Jesus to Peter (Mt 16:17-19).

Matthew 16:13-14: *The opinion of the people regarding Jesus.* Jesus asks for the opinion of the people regarding who He is. The responses are diverse: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Not one of them gives the right answer. Today, the opinion of the people regarding Jesus is also very varied.

Matthew 16:15-16: *The opinion of Peter regarding Jesus.* Immediately, He asks the opinion of the disciples. Peter becomes the spokesperson and says: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God! The response is not new. The disciples had already said the same thing (Mt 14:33). In the Gospel of John, the same profession of faith is made by Martha (Jn 11:27). It means that through Jesus the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled.

Matthew 16:17-19: *The response of Jesus to Peter.* The responses come from several places: *Blessed are you, Simon.* Jesus proclaims Peter blessed because he had received the revelation from the Father. The response of Jesus is not new. Previously, He had praised the Father for having revealed the Son to little ones and not to the wise (Mt 11:25-27) and had made the same proclamation of blessed to the disciples because they were seeing and hearing things that before nobody knew (Mt 13:16).

- *Peter is Rock (Pietra).* Peter has to be **Rock**, the stable foundation for the Church in such a way that it can resist against the gates of Hell. With these words from Jesus, Matthew encourages the communities which were persecuted by Syria and Palestine. Even if weak and persecuted, the communities have a stable foundation, guaranteed by the words of Jesus. The rock as the basis of faith reminds the people the words of God to the People in exile: Listen to me, you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh. Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father and Sarah who gave you birth. When I called him he was the only one but I blessed him and made him numerous. (Is 51:1-2). It indicates a new beginning.

- *Peter, Rock.* Jesus gives a name to Simon and calls him Rock (Peter). In two ways, he is **rock-foundation**, (Mt 16:18) and is **rock (pietra) a stumbling obstacle**, (Mt 16:23). In our Catholic Church we insist very much on Peter rock-foundation and we forget Peter-stumbling rock or obstacle. On the one hand Peter was weak in his faith, doubtful, and tries to deviate or withdraw from Jesus. He was afraid in the garden, he fell asleep and fled, he did not understand what Jesus was saying. On the other hand, he was like the little ones whom Jesus called blessed. Being one of the twelve, he became their spokesman. Later, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, his image grew and he became a symbol of the community. Peter is firm in faith not because of his own merits, but because Jesus prays for him, in order that his faith would not fail (Lk 22:31-34).

- *Church, Assembly.* The word **church**, in Greek, *eklesia*, appears 105 times in the New Testament, almost exclusively in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles. In the Gospels it appears three times, only in Matthew. The word literally means convoked or chosen. It indicates the people who gather together, convoked by the Word of God and who try to live the message of the Kingdom which Jesus brings. The Church or the

community is not the Kingdom, but it is an instrument and a sign or indication of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is greater. In the Church, in the community, it should appear in the eyes of all what happens when a human group allows God to reign and allows Him to take possession of our life.

- ***The keys of the Kingdom.*** Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom. This same power of uniting or binding and of separating or loosening is also given to the communities (Mt 18:18) and to the other disciples (Jn 20:23). One of the points which the Gospel of Matthew insists the most is reconciliation and pardon or forgiveness. It is one of the more important tasks of the coordinators of the communities. Imitating Peter, they should bind and loose, that is, do in such a way that there be reconciliation, reciprocal acceptance, and construction of the fraternal spirit.

#### **4) Personal questions**

What are the opinions in our community regarding Jesus? Do they enrich the community or do they make the journey and communion more difficult?  
Who is Jesus for me? Who am I for Jesus?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Turn your ear to me, make haste.  
Be for me a rock-fastness,  
a fortified citadel to save me.  
You are my rock, my rampart;  
true to your name, lead me and guide me! (Ps 31,2-3)

### **Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 23, 2019**

*Ordinary Time*

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Lord our God,  
when Your Son was transfigured  
You gave eyes of faith to the apostles  
to see beyond appearances  
and to recognize Jesus as Your beloved Son.  
This vision gave them courage for the hour of trial.  
When our faith and trust  
seem to desert us in dark moments,  
let Your Son take us up to the mountain  
and give us a glimpse of His light,  
that with fresh courage and generosity  
we may see where He wants us to go.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## 2) Gospel Reading - Mark 9:2-13

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; then from the cloud came a voice, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” Suddenly, looking around, the disciples no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them. As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant. Then they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” He told them, “Elijah will indeed come first and restore all things, yet how is it written regarding the Son of Man that he must suffer greatly and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.”

### 3) Reflection

- Today’s Gospel speaks about two facts linked together: the Transfiguration of Jesus and the question regarding the return of the prophet Elijah. At that time people were waiting for the return of the prophet Elijah. Today many people are waiting for the return of Jesus and write on the walls of the city: Jesus will return! They are not aware that Jesus has already returned and is present in our life. Some times, like a sudden lightening, this presence of Jesus bursts into our life and enlightens it, transfiguring it.
- The Transfiguration of Jesus takes place after the first announcement of the death of Jesus (Mk 8:27-30). This announcement had disturbed or upset the minds of the disciples, especially Peter’s (Mk 8:31-33). They were among the poor, but their mind was lost in the ideology of the government and the religion of the time (Mk 8:15). The cross was an obstacle to belief in Jesus. The Transfiguration of Jesus will help the disciples to overcome the trauma of the cross.
- In the year 70 when Mark was writing, the cross continued to be a great impediment for the Jews to accept Jesus as Messiah. They said, “The cross is a scandal!” (1 Cor 1:23). One of the greatest efforts of the first Christians consisted in helping people perceive that the cross was neither a scandal, nor madness, but rather the expression of the power and the wisdom of God (1Cor 1:22-31). Mark contributes to this. He uses the texts and the figure of the Old Testament to describe the Transfiguration. In this way he indicates that Jesus sees the realization of the prophecies, and the cross was a way toward glory.
- Mark 9:2-4: Jesus changes appearance. Jesus goes up a high mountain. Luke says that He goes up to pray (Lk 9:28). Up there, Jesus appears in glory before Peter, James and John. Together with Him appear Moses and Elijah. The high mountain evokes Mount Sinai, where in the past, God had manifested His will to the people, handing them the Law. The white clothes remind us of Moses with a radiant face when he spoke with God on the mountain and received the law (cf. Ex 43:29-35) Elijah and Moses, the two greatest authorities of the Old Testament, speak with Jesus. Moses represents the law, Elijah, prophecy. Luke mentions the conversation concerning the “exodus of Jesus”,

that is, the death of Jesus in Jerusalem (Lk 9:31). It is then clear that the Old Testament, both the law as well as prophecy, already taught that for the Messiah Servant the way to glory had to go through the cross!

- Mark 9:5-6: Peter is pleased, but he does not understand. Peter wants to keep this pleasant moment on the mountain. He offers to build three tents. Mark says that Peter was afraid, without knowing what he was saying, and Luke adds that the disciples were sleepy (Lk 9:32). They were like us: they had difficulty understanding the cross!

- Mark 9:7-9: The voice from Heaven clarifies the facts. When Jesus was covered by glory, a voice came from the cloud and said, “This is My Beloved Son! Listen to Him!” The expression “Beloved Son” reminds us of the figure of the Messiah Servant, announced by the prophet Isaiah (cf. Isa 42:1). The expression: “Listen to Him!” reminds us of the prophecy which promised the coming of a new Moses (cf. Deut 18:15). In Jesus, the prophecies of the Old Testament are being fulfilled. The disciples can no longer doubt. Jesus is truly the glorious Messiah whom they desired, but the way to glory passes through the cross, according to what was announced by the prophecy of the servant (Isa 53:3-9). The glory of the Transfiguration proves this. Moses and Elijah confirm it. The Father guarantees it. Jesus accepts it. At the end, Mark says that after the vision, the disciples saw only Jesus and nobody else. From now on, Jesus is the only revelation of God for us! Jesus is alone, the key to understanding all of the Old Testament.

- Mark 9:9-10: To know how to keep silence. Jesus asked the disciples to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead, but the disciples did not understand. In fact, they did not understand the meaning of the cross, which links suffering to the resurrection. The cross of Jesus is the proof that life is stronger than death.

- Mark 9:11-13: The return of the prophet Elijah. The prophet Malachi had announced that Elijah would return to prepare the path for the Messiah (Mal 3:23-24): this same announcement is found in the Book of Ecclesiasticus/Ben Sira (Sir 48:10). But how could Jesus be the Messiah if Elijah had not yet returned? This is why the disciples asked, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah has to come before?” (Mk 9:11). The response of Jesus is clear: “But I tell you Elijah has come and they have treated him as they pleased, just as the scriptures say about him” (9:13). Jesus was speaking about John the Baptist, who was killed by Herod (Mt 17:13).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Has your faith in Jesus given you moments of transfiguration and of intense joy? How do these moments of joy give you strength in times of difficulty?

- How can we transfigure today our personal and family life as well as our community life?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

All goes well for one who lends generously,  
who is honest in all his dealing;  
for all time to come he will not stumble,  
for all time to come the upright will be remembered. (Ps 112:5-6)

## Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 24, 2019 - 08

*Imitating the mercy of the Father in heaven*

*Luke 6:27-38*

### 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:

Luke tells us (Lk 6:17-19) that as Jesus was coming down the mountain with the Twelve, he met a large crowd who sought to listen to His word and to touch Him, because power emanated from Him and it cured all. Jesus welcomes the crowd and speaks His word to them. The text of the liturgy for this Sunday puts before us a part of the discourse Jesus delivered on that occasion. In Luke's Gospel, those to whom the discourse is addressed are "the disciples" and "a great crowd of people from all parts of Judea and from Jerusalem and from the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon" (Lk 6:17). Perhaps these are Jews (Judea and Jerusalem) and pagans (the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon). In Matthew's Gospel, this same discourse is presented as the New Law of God, as the Ancient Law had been proclaimed from the top of the mountain (Mt 5:1).

#### b) A division of the text as a help to the reading:

Luke 6:27-28: General counsels.

Luke 6:29-30: Concrete examples of the practice of the general counsels.

Luke 6:31: A summary of Jesus' teaching.

Luke 6:32-34: Whoever wishes to follow Jesus must go beyond the morality of the pagans.

Luke 6:35-36: The root of the new morality: imitate the mercy of God the Father.

Luke 6:36-38: Concrete examples of how to imitate God the Father.

#### c) The text:

Jesus said to his disciples: “To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. “Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”



### 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 part of the text did you like best or touched you most?
- b) Why did Jesus pronounce this discourse? Look carefully at the information in the text and try to draw your own conclusions.
- c) According to you, what is the core and root of Jesus’ teaching?
- d) How can we, today, in our consumerist and individualistic society, practice the morality proposed by Jesus? Or, what does “Be merciful even as your Father is merciful” mean today?
- e) Did you find anything in the text that might be a reason for hope and courage?

### 5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the theme.

#### i) The context of Jesus’ discourse:

Luke presents Jesus' teaching as a progressive revelation. Several times, from the beginning of his Gospel up to chapter 6:16, Luke tells his readers that Jesus taught the crowds but does not mention the content of the teaching (Lk 4:15,31,32,44; 5:1,3,15,17; 6:6). Now, however, after saying that Jesus saw the crowd that wished to hear the word of God, Luke presents the first great discourse that begins with the exclamation, "How happy are you who are poor!" (Lk 6:20), "But alas for you who are rich!" (Lk 6:24). Some call this discourse "The Sermon on the Plain", because according to Luke, Jesus came down from the mountain and stopped at a plain where He gave His discourse (Lk 6:17). In Matthew's Gospel, this same discourse takes place on the mountain (Mt 5:1) and is called "The Sermon on the Mount". In Matthew there are nine beatitudes in the sermon, which present a way of life for the Christian communities of Jewish origin. In Luke, the sermon is shorter and more radical and is directed towards the Hellenistic communities made up of rich and poor persons. The verses of the Gospel of the seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time present the core of Jesus' teaching concerning the behavior of those who wish to be His disciples.

## **ii) A Commentary on the text:**

*Luke 6:27a: Jesus speaks to everyone.*

From the beginning of the discourse until now, Jesus had spoken to His "disciples" (Lk 6:20). Here, in Luke's text 6:27a, His audience grows and He addresses Himself to "you who wish to hear", that is, His disciples who are that great crowd of poor and suffering people, coming from all parts (Lk 6:17-19) and to all of us, you and me, who at this very moment "hear" the word of Jesus.

*Luke 6:27b-28: General counsels that define the new teaching.*

The words that Jesus directs to this crowd of poor and suffering people are demanding and difficult: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly." These counsels of Jesus go way beyond the demands, which in those times, people learned from childhood from the scribes and Pharisees during the weekly meetings in the synagogue, that is, "love your neighbor and hate your enemy" (Mt 5:43). The new demands from Jesus go beyond this set and common morality, even to this day, and reveal an aspect of "greater justice" that Jesus requires of those who wish to follow Him (Mt 5:20).

*Luke 6:29-30: Concrete examples of the practice of the new teaching of Jesus!*

Jesus asks me to offer the other cheek to those who strike me on one cheek, and He asks that I do not reclaim it when someone takes what is mine. How are we to understand these words? Must the poor person accept when the rich person strikes him/her, when the rich person steals or exploits him/her? If we take these words literally, these counsels seem to favor the rich. But not even Jesus observed these words literally. When the soldier struck Jesus in the face, he did not offer the other cheek, but reacted strongly: "If there is something wrong in what I said, point it out; but if there is no offense in it, why do you strike me?" (Jn 18:22-23). What Jesus did then, tells us not to take these words literally. Besides, the words that follow in the same discourse help us to understand what Jesus wished to teach (Lk 6:31).

Luke 6:31: *A summary of Jesus' teaching.*

Jesus pronounces this revolutionary sentence: **“Treat others as you wish them to treat you”**. The best commentaries on this teaching are some comments taken from other religions. From Islam: “No one can be a believer unless he loves his brother as himself.” From Buddhism: “There are five ways in which a true leader must treat his friends and dependents: with generosity, courtesy, goodwill, giving to them what they expect and being true to his word”. From Taoism: “Consider the success of your neighbor as your own, and also his misfortune as if it were your own”. From Hinduism: “Do not do to others that which were it to happen to you would cause you pain”. In His teaching, Jesus succeeded in putting into words the deepest and most universal desires of humankind, the desire for fraternity, born of the will to wish others well completely selflessly, without trying to draw any benefit, merit or reward. It is in sincere fraternity, well lived, that the face of God is revealed.

Luke 6:32-34: *Those who want to follow Jesus must go beyond the morality of the pagans.*

What can we think of those who love only those who love them? Do we only do good to those who do good to us? Do we lend only to those who will repay us? In all societies of every kind, the members of a family seek to help each other. Jesus speaks of this universal practice: “Even sinners do that much!” But this universal practice is not enough for those who wish to follow Jesus Christ. Jesus is quite clear on this point. **It is not enough!** It is necessary to take a further step. What step? The answer lies in what follows.

Luke 6:35-36: *The root of the new morality: to imitate the mercy of God the Father.*

By His preaching, Jesus tries to change and convert people. The change He desires is not limited to a simple inversion of the situation so that those who are at the bottom go to the top and those on top go down to the bottom. This would change nothing and the system would go on functioning unchanged. Jesus wants to change the way of life. He wants that His followers have the opposite attitude: “Love your enemies!” The new way He wishes to build comes from a new experience of God, Father of love. The love of God for us is entirely gratuitous. It does not depend on anything we do. Thus true love desires the good of the other independently of anything he or she does for me. In this way, we imitate the mercy of God the Father and we become “children of the Most High, who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked”. We shall become “merciful as your Father is merciful”. These words of Jesus evoke the experience of God that Moses had on Mount Sinai: “Yahweh, Yahweh, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in tenderness and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6).

Luke 6:36-38: *Concrete examples of how to imitate God the Father.*

Do not judge, do not condemn, forgive, give without measure! These are the counsels that Jesus gives to those who were listening to Him on that day. These make explicit and concrete the teachings of Jesus in the previous verse on the merciful love towards enemies and on behavior as children of the Most High. It is the mercy that is shown in the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son and that is revealed in the life of Jesus: “Who sees Me, sees the Father”.

### **iii) Further information for us to understand the text better:**

#### **a) Bless those who curse you:**

The two statements in the same discourse: “Happy you who are poor!” (Lk 6:20) and “Alas you who are rich!” (Lk 6:24) bring the hearers to make a choice, to choose options in favor of the poor. In the Old Testament, at several times, God places people in a position of choice between blessing and cursing. People are given the possibility to choose: “I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live” (Deut 30:19). God does not condemn. It is the people who choose life or death, according to their attitude before God and neighbor. These moments of choice are moments when God *visits* His people (Gen 21:1; 50:24-25; Ex 3:16; 32:34; Jer 29:10; Ps 59:6; Ps 65:10; Ps 80:15, Ps 106:4). Luke is the only Evangelist who makes use of this image of the visit of God (Lk 1:68, 78; 7:16; 19:44; Acts 15:16). For Luke, Jesus is the visit of God who places His people before the choice of blessing or curse: “Happy are you who are poor!” but “Alas you who are rich!” But the people do not recognize God’s visit (Lk 19:44). And today, in our world, whose greatest accomplishment is the growing poverty of so many, are we able to recognize the visit of God?

#### **b) Those to whom the discourse of Jesus is addressed:**

Jesus begins His discourse using the second person plural: “Happy are you who are poor!” – “Alas you who are rich!” However, present before Jesus on that plain, there were no rich people! Only the poor and suffering from all parts were there (Lk 6:17-19). But the text says, “Alas you who are rich!” In passing on the words of Jesus, Luke was thinking also of the Hellenist community of Greece and of Asia Minor in the 80s, 50 years after the time of Jesus. Among these there was discrimination against the poor on the part of the rich (cf. Rev 3:15-17; Jas 2:1-4; 5:1-6; 1Cor 11:20-21), the same discrimination typical of the structure of the Roman Empire. Jesus criticizes the wealthy severely and directly: “You who are rich, you are having your consolation already! Alas for you who have your fill now, you shall go hungry! Alas for you who laugh now, you shall mourn and weep!” This shows that, for Jesus, poverty is not a fatality, but the result of the unjust accumulation of wealth by others. The same may be said for this statement: “Alas for you when the world speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets!” This fourth warning refers to the converted Jews, that is, the children of those who in times past praised the false prophets. In citing these words of Jesus, Luke was thinking of the converted Jews of his time who used their prestige and authority to criticize openness to the pagans.

## **6. Psalm 34 (33)**

### **“Gratitude that springs from a different view”**

I will bless the Lord at all times;  
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.  
My soul makes its boast in the Lord;

let the afflicted hear and be glad.  
O magnify the Lord with me,  
and let us exalt His name together!

I sought the Lord, and He answered me,  
and delivered me from all my fears.  
Look to Him, and be radiant;  
so your faces shall never be ashamed.  
This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him,  
and saved him out of all his troubles.  
The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him,  
and delivers them.

O taste and see that the Lord is good!  
Happy is the man who takes refuge in Him!  
O fear the Lord, you His saints,  
for those who fear Him have no want!  
The young lions suffer want and hunger;  
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Come, O sons, listen to me,  
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.  
What man is there who desires life,  
and covets many days, that he may enjoy good?

Keep your tongue from evil,  
and your lips from speaking deceit.  
Depart from evil, and do good;  
seek peace, and pursue it.

The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous,  
and His ears toward their cry.  
The face of the Lord is against evildoers,  
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

When the righteous cry for help,  
the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles.  
The Lord is near to the broken-hearted,  
and saves the crushed in spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous;  
but the Lord delivers him out of them all.  
He keeps all his bones;  
not one of them is broken.

Evil shall slay the wicked;  
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

The Lord redeems the life of His servants;  
none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.

## **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, February 25, 2019**

*Ordinary Time*

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
keep before us the wisdom and love  
you have revealed in your Son.  
Help us to be like him  
in word and deed,  
for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **2) Gospel Reading - Mark 9:14-29**

As they were rejoining the disciples they saw a large crowd round them and some scribes arguing with them.

At once, when they saw him, the whole crowd were struck with amazement and ran to greet him. And he asked them, 'What are you arguing about with them?' A man answered him from the crowd, 'Master, I have brought my son to you; there is a spirit of dumbness in him, and when it takes hold of him it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and goes rigid. And I asked your disciples to drive it out and they were unable to.' In reply he said to them, 'Faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you?

How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.' They brought the boy to him, and at once the spirit of dumbness threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell to the ground and lay writhing there, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' 'From childhood,' he said, 'and it has often thrown him into fire and into water, in order to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.' 'If you can?' retorted Jesus. 'Everything is possible for one who has faith.' At once the father of the boy cried out, 'I have faith. Help my lack of faith!' And when Jesus saw that a crowd was gathering, he rebuked the unclean spirit. 'Deaf and dumb spirit,' he said, 'I command you: come out of him and never enter him again.'

Then it threw the boy into violent convulsions and came out shouting, and the boy lay there so like a corpse that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him up, and he was able to stand.

When he had gone indoors, his disciples asked him when they were by themselves, 'Why were we unable to drive it out?' He answered, 'This is the kind that can be driven out only by prayer.'

### 3) Reflection

- The Gospel today informs us that the disciples of Jesus were not able to cast out the devil from the body of a boy. The power of evil was greater than their capacity. Today, also, there are many evils which surpass our capacity to face them: violence, drugs, war, sickness, jobless people, terrorism, etc. We make great efforts in life, but it seems that instead of improving, the world becomes worse. What good is there in struggling? Keeping this question in mind, let us read and meditate on today's Gospel.

- Mark 9, 14-22: The situation of the people: despair without solution. Coming down from the mountain of the Transfiguration, Jesus met many people around the disciples. A parent was in despair, because an evil spirit had taken possession of his son. With great detail, Mark describes the situation of the possessed boy, the anguish of the father, the incapacity of the disciples and the reaction of Jesus. Two things strike us in a particular way: on one side, the confusion and the powerlessness of the people and of the disciples in the face of the phenomenon of possession, and on the other hand, the power of faith in Jesus before which the devil loses all his influence. The father had asked the disciples to drive out the devil from the boy, but they were not able to do it. Jesus becomes impatient and says: "Faithless generation! How much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me". Jesus asks information regarding the sickness of the boy. And from the response of the father, Jesus knows that the boy, "from childhood", was affected by a serious illness which endangered his life. The father asked: "But if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us!" The phrase of the father expresses a very real situation of the people: (a) they are faithless; (b) they are not in a condition to solve the problem, but (c) have such good will.

- Mark 9, 23-27: The answer of Jesus: the way of faith. The father answers: Lord, I believe! But help my lack of faith! The response of the father has the central place in this episode. It indicates that this should be the attitude of the disciple, that, in spite of his/her limitations and doubts, he/she wants to be faithful. Seeing that many people were coming, Jesus acted rapidly. He ordered the spirit to get out of the boy and not to return "again ever!" This is a sign of the power of Jesus on evil. It is also a sign that Jesus did not want any popular propaganda.

- Mark 9, 28-29: Deepening this with the disciples. In the house, the disciples want to know why they were not able to drive out the devil. Jesus answers: This is the kind of evil spirit that can be driven out only by prayer! Faith and prayer go together. One does not exist without the other. The disciples had become worse. Before they were capable of driving out the devil (cfr. Mk 6, 7.13). Now, no more. What is lacking? Faith or prayer? Why is it lacking? These are questions which come from the text and enter into our head in a way that we can proceed also to a kind of revision of our life.

• The expulsion of the devils in the Gospel of Mark. During the time of Jesus many persons spoke of Satan and of the expulsion of the devils. People were afraid and, there were some persons who profited and took advantage of the fear of the people. The power of evil had many names: Demon, Devil, Beelzebul, Prince of Demons, Satan, Dragon, Domination, Power, Beast-wild animal, Lucifer, etc. (cfr. Mk 3, 22-23; Mt 4, 1; Rv 12, 9; Rm 8, 38;; Eph 1, 21). Today also, among us the power of evil has many names. It is enough to consult the dictionary and look for the word Devil or Demon. Today, also, many dishonest people enrich themselves, profiting of the fear which people have of the devil. Now, one of the objectives of the Good News of Jesus is, precisely, to help people to free themselves from this fear. The coming of the Kingdom of God means the coming of a stronger power. The strong man was an image which indicated the power of evil which maintained people imprisoned by fear (Mk 3, 27). The power of fear oppresses persons and makes them lose themselves. He does in such a way that they live in fear and death (cfr. Mk 5, 2). It is such a strong power that nobody can stop it (Mk 5, 4). The Roman Empire with its "Legion" (cfr. Mk 5, 9), that is, with its armies, was the instrument used to maintain this situation of oppression. But Jesus is the strongest man who overcomes, seizes and drives out the power of evil! In the Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul gives a list of all the possible powers or demons which could threaten us and he summarizes everything in this way: "I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord!" (Rm 8, 38-39). Nothing of all this! And the first words of Jesus after the Resurrection are: "Do not be afraid! Rejoice! Do not fear! Peace be with you!" (Mk 16, 6; Mt 28, 9-10; Lk 24, 36; Jn 20, 21).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Have you ever lived an experience of powerlessness before some evil or violence? Was this an experience for you only or also for the community? How did you overcome it?
- Which is the type of evil today which can only be overcome with much prayer?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

The precepts of Yahweh are honest,  
joy for the heart;  
the commandment of Yahweh is pure,  
light for the eyes. (Ps 19,8)

## Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 26, 2019

### 1) Opening prayer

Father,  
keep before us the wisdom and love  
You have revealed in Your Son.  
Help us to be like him  
in word and deed,  
for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### 2) Gospel Reading - Mk 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it. He was teaching his disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him. They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they remained silent. For they had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest. Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." Taking a child, he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."

### 3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel narrates the second announcement of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus. Like the first announcement (Mk 8:27-38), the disciples were terrified and afraid. They do not understand the words about the cross because they are not capable of understanding or accepting a Messiah who becomes the servant of the brothers. They continue to dream of a glorious Messiah, and besides that, they show a great incoherence. When Jesus announces His Passion and Death, they discuss who among them will be the greatest. Jesus wants to serve, yet they only think of commanding! Ambition leads them to promote themselves at the cost of Jesus. Even to the present time, this same desire of self promotion exists in our communities.

- In the time of Jesus as well as in that of Mark, there was the "yeast" of a dominating ideology. Today, the ideology of business, consumerism, and television shows, all profoundly influence the thoughts and actions of people. At the time of Mark, the communities were not always capable of maintaining a critical attitude regarding the assimilation of the ideology of the Roman Empire. Do we have the same problem today?

- Mark 9:30-32: The announcement of the Cross. Jesus goes across Galilee, but He does not want people to know it. He is busy with the formation of the disciples and He speaks

with them about the Cross. He says that according to the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 53:1-10), the Son of Man has to be handed over and condemned to death. This indicates the orientation of Jesus toward the Bible, whether in the carrying out of His own mission or in the formation given to His disciples. He drew His teaching from the prophecies. As in the first announcement (Mk 8:32), the disciples listen to Him, but they do not understand what He says about the Cross. But they do not ask for any clarification. They are afraid to show their ignorance! So many are like this today. They read or listen and do not ask questions. The result can be either ignorance, shallow understanding, or imaginative interpretations that are incorrect.

- Mark 9:33-34: The competitive mentality. When they got home, Jesus asked: “What were you arguing about on the road?” They did not answer. It is the silence of the one who feels guilty, “on the road, in fact, they had been arguing which of them was the greatest”. Jesus is a good pedagogue. He does not intervene immediately. He knows how to wait for the opportune moment to fight against the influence of the ideology in those whom He is forming. The competitive mentality and prestige, which characterized the society of the Roman Empire, was already penetrating into the small community which was just being formed! Behold the contrast: incoherence: Jesus is concerned with being the Messiah Servant and they think only in who is the greatest. Jesus tries to descend, they think of going up!

- Mark 9:35-37: To serve instead of commanding. The response of Jesus is a summary of the witness of life which He Himself was giving from the beginning: If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all! The last one does not win a prize nor obtain a reward. He is a useless servant (cfr. Lk 17:10). Power must be used not to ascend and dominate, but to descend and serve. This is the point on which Jesus insists the most and which He gives a greater witness (cf. Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28; Jn 13:1-16). Then Jesus took a little child whom He set among them. A person who only thinks to go up and to dominate would not lend much attention to little ones and to children. But Jesus overturns everything! He says: “Anyone who welcomes a little child such as this in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes not me but the one who sent me”. He identifies Himself with little ones. Anyone who welcomes the little ones in the name of Jesus welcomes God Himself!

- A person is not a saint and is not renewed by the simple notion of “following Jesus”. In the midst of the disciples, as always, the “yeast of Herod and of the Pharisees” (Mk 8:15) could be observed. In today’s Gospel, Jesus appears as a teacher forming His followers. “To follow” was a term that formed part of the educational system of that time. It was used to indicate the relationship between the disciple and the teacher. The relationship teacher-disciple is different from that of professor-pupil. The pupils go to the class of a professor in a defined subject. The disciples “follow” the teacher and live with him, twenty-four hours a day. In this “living together” with Jesus during three years, the disciples will receive their formation. Tomorrow’s Gospel will give us another quite concrete example of how Jesus formed His disciples.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Jesus wants to lower Himself and serve. The disciples want to ascend and to dominate. What is my motivation in life? Does it match with all of my actions? Is it consistent with the instructions from Jesus?
- Do I follow Jesus and be with Him twenty-four hours a day, and allow His way of living to become my way of living and of living together with others?
- Do I follow Jesus by shuffling along the way, not really paying attention, “going along for the ride”? Or am I eager, looking and listening, trying not to miss a moment with Him?
- Many have leadership roles today in society: as a manager, or parent, or teacher, or official. How does one serve and be effective and responsible in that role and still “be last” and serve?
- How does a child learn? By watching every little action the parent does and imitating it! This how to learn as a disciple. Are we learning from Jesus by imitating His every action like children do, or are we too “adult” for that?

#### **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: Wednesday, February 27, 2019**

*Ordinary Time*

#### **1) Opening prayer**

Father,  
keep before us the wisdom and love  
You have revealed in Your Son.  
Help us to be like Him  
in word and deed,  
for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **2) Gospel Reading - Mark 9:38-40**

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us." Jesus replied, "Do not prevent

him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us."

### 3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel narrates quite a beautiful and actual example of the pedagogy of Jesus. It shows us how He helped His disciples to perceive and to overcome the "yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod".

- Mk 9:38-40: A closed mentality: He was not one of ours" Someone who did not belong to the community used the name of Jesus to drive out devils. John, the disciple, sees this and forbids it: We have stopped him because he was not one of us. In the name of the community he forbids that the other one can do a good deed! He thinks that being a disciple, he can have a monopoly on Jesus, and because of this, he wants to forbid that others use the name of Jesus to do good. This was the closed mentality of the "chosen People, a separated People!" Jesus responds: "You must not stop him; no one who works a miracle in my name could soon afterwards speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us." (Mk 9:40). It would be very difficult to find a more ecumenical affirmation than this affirmation of Jesus. For Jesus, what is important is not if the person forms part of the community or not, but rather if the person does the good which the community should do.

- A picture of Jesus, formator of His disciples. Jesus, the Master, is the axis, the center, and the model of formation given to the disciples. By His attitudes He is an example of the Kingdom. He embodies the love of God and reveals it (Mk 6:31; Mt 10:30; Lk 15:11-32). Many small gestures show this witness of life with which Jesus marked His presence in the life of the disciples, preparing them for life and for their mission. This was His way of giving a human form to the experience which He had of God, the Father. The following is a picture of Jesus, the formator of His disciples:

- He involves them in the mission (Mk 6:7; Lk 9:1-2; 10:1),
- when they return He reviews with them all that they have lived (Lk 10:17-20)
- He corrects them when they fail and want to be the first ones (Mk 9:33-35; 10:14-15)
- He waits for the opportune moment to correct them (Lk 9:46-48; Mk 10:14-15)
- He helps them to discern (Mk 9:18-19)
- He challenges them when they are slow (Mk 4:13; 8:14-21)
- He prepares them to face the conflict (Jn 16:33; Mt 10:17-25)
- He orders them to observe reality (Mk 8:27-29; Jn 4:35; Mt 16:1-3)
- He reflects with them on questions of the moment (Lk 13:1-5)
- He confronts them with the needs of the people (Jn 6:5)
- He teaches them that the needs of the people are above the ritual prescriptions (Mt 12:7-12)
- He meets alone with them so as to be able to instruct them (Mk 4:34; 7:17; 9:30-31; 10:10; 13:3)
- He knows how to listen even if the dialogue is difficult (Jn 4:7-42)
- He helps them to accept themselves (Lk 22:32)

- He is demanding and asks them to leave everything out of love for Him (Mk 10:17-31)
- He is severe concerning hypocrisy (Lk 11:37-53)
- He asks more questions than gives responses (Mk 8:17-21)
- He is firm and does not allow himself to deviate from the right path (Mk 8:33; Lk 9:54)
- He prepares them for conflict and persecution (Mt 10:16-25).

• Formation was not, in the first place, the transmission of truths to be remembered, but the communication of the new experience of God and the life which radiates from Jesus for the disciples. The community which was forming around Jesus was the expression of this new experience. Formation led people to have a different way of looking, to have different attitudes. It gave them a new conscience concerning the mission and concerning themselves. It helped them to place themselves at the side of the excluded. And soon afterwards, it produced “conversion” as a consequence of the acceptance of the Good News (Mk 1:15).

#### **4) Personal questions**

- “Anyone who is not against us is for us.” How do we define “for us” and “against us” today with so many variations in Christian beliefs?
- If someone selectively and creatively creates their own “doctrine” and interpretations of Jesus’ teachings, are they “for us” or “against us”?
- How does my formation in Jesus take place in my life? Is it a serious, ongoing process, or whatever comes along?
- Go back to the list of how Jesus does formation. Read each, adding the question “how does He do this for me personally?” at the end of each line. Then answer each for your own formation.

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

Bless Yahweh, my soul,  
 from the depths of my being, His holy name;  
 bless Yahweh, my soul,  
 never forget all His acts of kindness. (Ps 103:1-2)

## Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 28, 2019

*Ordinary Time*

### 1) Opening prayer

Father,  
keep before us the wisdom and love  
You have revealed in Your Son.  
Help us to be like Him  
in word and deed,  
for He lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### 2) Gospel Reading - Mark 9:41-50

Jesus said to his disciples: "Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. "Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another."

### 3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel narrates some advice from Jesus on the relationship of adults with the little ones and the excluded. At that time, many persons were excluded and marginalized. They could not participate. Many of them would lose their faith. The text on which we are going to meditate now contains strange affirmations which, if taken literally, cause perplexity in the reader.
- Mark 9:41: A glass of water will be rewarded. A phrase from Jesus is inserted here: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not lose his reward. Two thoughts: 1) "Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink". Jesus is going to Jerusalem to give His life. A gesture of great donation! But He does not forget the small gestures in life each day: a cup of water, an act of acceptance or kindness, to give alms, so many gestures. Anyone who rejects and despises the brick will never be able to construct a house! 2) "...because you belong to Christ": Jesus identifies Himself with us who want to belong to Him. This means that for Him we have great value. The word here is because, not if. To give a cup

of water because the receiver belongs to Christ also acknowledges Christ! In this act of kindness the giver is also acknowledging Christ by his action.

- Mark 9:42: Who is a cause of scandal for these little ones. Scandal, literally, it is a stone along the road, a stone in the shoe. It is what leads a person away from the right path. To scandalize the little ones is to be the cause of why the little ones go away from the right path and lose their faith in God. Anyone who does this receives the following sentence: “It would have been better to be thrown into the sea with a great millstone hung round his neck!” Jesus identifies Himself with the little ones (Mt 23:40-45). Today, in the whole world, many little ones, many poor people, are leaving the traditional churches. Every year, in Latin America, approximately three million people leave to other churches. They cannot believe what we profess! Why does this happen? Is this an action taken in full knowledge and as a definitive statement? Is it based on a lack of understanding or teaching? Up to what point are we to be blamed for this? Do we also merit having a millstone round our neck?

- Mark 9:43-48: To cut off your hand and your foot and to tear out your eye. Jesus orders the person to cut off the hand, the foot, to tear out the eye, in the case in which they are cause of scandal. And He says: “It is better to enter into life or into the Kingdom with one foot (hand, eye) than to be thrown into hell with two feet, (hands, eyes)”. These phrases are not to be taken literally, but rather, that there is nothing so important that it should be retained if it were to keep a person from entering the Kingdom. They mean that the person has to be rooted in his/her choice of God and of the Gospel. It might seem obvious that a person can’t be more attached to something than their own hand or foot, but many are – to their money, their car or house, their social position, or even more trivial things. It is better to cut off the things that are not in alignment with the priorities of the Kingdom.

The expression “hell”, where their worm will never die nor their fire be put out”, is an image to indicate the situation of a person who remains without God. “Gehenna” was the name of a valley near Jerusalem. Jeremiah condemns it (II Kings 23:10; Jer 7:31; 32:35 et al.; see \*Moloch) as a place where children were cult sacrificed, which is the predominant rabbinical thought. Rabbi David Kimhi’s commentary (ca. 1200 AD) stated it was where the trash of the city was thrown and where a fire was always burning to burn the trash. This place, terrible either way, full of stench, was used by the people to symbolize the situation of the person who did not participate in the Kingdom of God.

- Mark 9:49-50: Salt and Peace. These two verses help us to understand the severe words on scandal. Jesus says: “Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another!” The community, in which the members live in peace with one another, is like a bit of salt which gives flavor to all the meal. To live in peace and fraternally in the community is the salt that gives flavor to the life of the people of the community. It is a sign of the Kingdom, a revelation of the Good News of God. Are we salt? The salt which does not give flavor is good for nothing! Has our salt become insipid?

• Jesus accepts and defends the life of the little ones. Several times, Jesus insists that little ones should be accepted. “Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me” (Mk 9:37). Anyone who gives a cup of water to one of these little ones will not lose his reward (Mt 10:42). He asks not to despise little ones (Mt 18:10). And at the final judgment the just will be received because they would have given something to eat “to one of these little ones” (Mt 25:40). If Jesus insists so much on acceptance of the little ones, it is because there are many simple people considered less, who are not accepted! In fact, women and children were not taken into account (Mt 14 21; 15:38), they were despised (Mt 18:10) and reduced to silence (Mt 21:15-16). Even the Apostles prevented the children from getting close to Jesus (Mt 19:13-14). In the name of the Law of God, misinterpreted by the religious authority of the time, many good people were excluded. Instead of welcoming the excluded, the law was used to legitimize the exclusion. In the Gospels, the expression “little ones” (in Greek it is said elachisto, mikroï or nepioi), sometimes indicates “the children”, and other times it indicates the sections excluded by society. It is not easy to discern. Sometimes the “little ones” in the Gospel means “the children”. This because the children belonged to the category of the “little ones”, of the excluded. Besides, it is not always easy to discern between what comes from the time of Jesus and that which comes from the time of the communities for which the Gospels were written. Even if things were like this, what is clear is the context of exclusion which reigned at the time and which the first communities kept from Jesus: He places Himself on the side of the little ones and the excluded, and takes up their defense.

#### **4) Personal questions**

- Today in our society and in our community, who are the little ones and the excluded? How are they accepted on our part?
- “Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me” (Mk 9:37). How does this apply to welcoming a child versus abortion in our society?
- We spoke of “Anyone who is not against us is for us” yesterday, and it’s relation to other Christian doctrinal interpretations. We talk about ecumenism. Today we talked about so many people leaving to other churches. These are various views on the same thing. How do they fit together?
- “A millstone round the neck”. Does my behavior deserve a millstone or a cord round the neck? What does the behavior of our community deserve?

#### **5) Concluding Prayer**

The Lord forgives all your offenses,  
cures all your diseases,  
He redeems your life from the abyss,  
crowns you with faithful love and tenderness. (Ps 103:3-4)