



Lectio Divina

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Thursday, June 1, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,
guide the course of world events
and give your Church the joy and peace
of serving you in freedom.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 10:46-52

As Jesus left Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus -- that is, the son of Timaeus -- a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and cry out, 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.' And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me.'

Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man over. 'Courage,' they said, 'get up; he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, '*Rabbuni*, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has saved you.' And at once his sight returned and he followed him along the road.

Reflection

The Gospel today describes the cure of the blind man Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 46-52) which closes the long teaching of Jesus about the Cross. At the beginning of this teaching, there was the cure of an anonymous blind man (Mk 8: 22-26). Both cures of blind persons are the symbol of what happened between Jesus and the disciples.

- Mark 10: 46-47: *The shouting of the blind man Bartimaeus.* Finally, after travelling a long distance, Jesus and the disciples reached Jericho, the last stop before going up toward Jerusalem. Bartimaeus, the blind man was sitting at the side of the road. He could not take part in the procession which accompanies Jesus. But he calls out, asking for the help of Jesus: "*Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!*" Throughout the centuries, through the practice of the monks of the desert, this invocation of the poor Bartimaeus became what is usually called: "*The prayer of Jesus.*" The monks repeated it orally, all the time, and from the mouth it went to the heart. The person, after a short time, no longer prays, in the sense that the person becomes prayer.
- Mark 10: 48-51: *Jesus listens to the cry of the blind man.* The cry of the poor man bothers people. Those who are in the procession try to stop the poor man from shouting, but "*he shouted even louder!*" And what does Jesus do? He listens to the call of the poor man, he stops and said: Call him here! Those who wanted to keep him from shouting, to stop *the* disturbing shout of the poor man, now, at the request of Jesus, are obliged to bring the poor man to Jesus. "*Courage, get up because*

Jesus is calling you.” Bartimaeus leaves everything and directs himself to Jesus. He does not have too much. Only a mantle; what he had to cover his body (cfr. Ex 22: 25-26). This was his security, the only thing he possessed. Jesus asks: “*What do you want me to do for you?*” It is not enough to shout. It is necessary to know why we shout! “*Rabbuni, My Lord, let me see again!*” Bartimaeus had called Jesus not with thoughts completely just, because the title “Son of David” was not particularly appropriate. Jesus himself had criticized this (Mk 12: 35-37). But Bartimaeus had greater faith in Jesus than what he could express with his ideas about Jesus. He does not express any demands as Peter did. He knows how to give his life without imposing any conditions, and the miracle takes place.

- Mark 10: 52: “*Your faith has saved you.*” Jesus tells him: “*Go, your faith has saved you.*” In that same instant Bartimaeus began to see again and he followed Jesus along the road. His cure is the result of his faith in Jesus. Once cured, he abandons everything, follows Jesus along the road and goes up with him toward Calvary to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus becomes a model disciple for all of us who want to “follow Jesus along the road” in the direction of Jerusalem. In this decision of walking with Jesus is found the source of courage and the seed of the victory on the Cross. Because the cross is not fatal, nor an exigency from God. It is the consequence of the commitment assumed with God, to *serve* the brothers and sisters and to reject privileges.
- *Faith is a force which transforms persons.* The cure of the blind man Bartimaeus clarifies a very important aspect of how faith in Jesus should be. Peter had said to Jesus: “You are the Christ!” (Mk 8: 29). His doctrine was right, exact, because Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. But when Jesus says that the Messiah has to suffer, Peter reacts and does not accept. Peter had a right doctrine, but his faith in Jesus was not so just. Bartimaeus, on the contrary, had called Jesus with the title of “Son of David!” (Mk 10: 47. Jesus was not too pleased with this title (Mk 12: 35-37). And this is why, even invoking Jesus with a doctrine which is not correct, Bartimaeus had faith and was cured! It was different from that of Peter (Mk 8: 32-33), he believed more in Jesus than in the ideas that he had of Jesus. He was converted and followed Jesus along the road toward Calvary (Mk 10: 52). The total understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained through a theoretical teaching, but with practical commitment, *walking* with him along the road of service and of gratuity, from Galilee to Jerusalem. Anyone who insists in maintaining the idea of Peter, that is, a glorious Messiah without the Cross, will understand nothing of Jesus and will never be able to attain the attitude of a true disciple. Anyone who believes in Jesus and “gives” himself (Mk 8: 35), accepts “to be the last one” (Mk 9: 35), to “drink the cup and to carry the cross” (Mk 10: 38), this person, like Bartimaeus, even having a not too correct idea, will succeed to perceive and “to follow Jesus along the road” (Mk 10: 52). In this certainty of walking with Jesus is found the source of courage and the seed of the victory on the cross.

Personal Questions

- An indiscreet question: “In my way of living faith, am I like Peter or like Bartimaeus?”
- Today, in the Church, is the majority of the people like Peter or like Bartimaeus?

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, June 2, 2023

Prayer

Lord, merciful Father, You chose each of Your children, that they might become heralds of Your love in the world and bring the good fruit of Your Presence to all peoples. May our fruit remain, thanks to our communion with You and with Your Son, Jesus; help us to gather this fruit, which is our Friend and Teacher, who enters every day into the holy temple of our lives. May He renew His covenant with us daily, through faith and prayer full of trusting abandon. Amen.

Reading

The Gospel Reading - Mark 11: 11-26)

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple area. He looked around at everything and, since it was already late, went out to Bethany with the Twelve. The next day as they were leaving Bethany he was hungry. Seeing from a distance a fig tree in leaf, he went over to see if he could find anything on it. When he reached it he found nothing but leaves; it was not the time for figs. And he said to it in reply, "May no one ever eat of your fruit again!" And his disciples heard it. They came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area.

Then he taught them saying, "Is it not written: My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples? But you have made it a den of thieves." The chief priests and the scribes came to hear of it and were seeking a way to put him to death, yet they feared him because the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city. Early in the morning, as they were walking along, they saw the fig tree withered to its roots. Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." Jesus said to them in reply, "Have faith in God. Amen, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it shall be done for him.

Therefore, I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours. When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions."

Meditation

- *"Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple area."* One of the characteristics of this passage is the continuous movement of Jesus, expressed in the repetition and alternation of the verbs "enter" and "leave" (vv. 11; 12; 15; 19). In fact, the Lord continuously comes into our life, into our space, into our experience, and passes and walks with us. Later, He goes - He distances Himself - He leaves us to search and wait, and then He returns again to be found. He does not disdain to enter

the Holy City, into the temple, and thus is within us, in our heart, offering us His visit of salvation.

- *He was hungry.* The verb we find here, from Mark's pen, is the same verb used in Matthew and in Luke in the story of the temptation in the desert (Mt 4: 2; Lk 4: 2) and is used to express a condition of weakness, fragility, need, and tiredness. Jesus searches for something more than a simple fruit to satisfy His hunger. He does not ask something of a fig out of season, but asks of His people, asks of us, the good food of love. That which comes prepared to the table of the covenant, from the "yes," pronounced with trust and abandon.
- *"Seeing from a distance a fig tree in leaf."* The figure of the fig tree, which occupies a central place in this passage, is a very strong symbol of Israel, the chosen people; of the temple and cult rendered to God in its entirety; and finally of ourselves, if we want it, of the most profound truth of our heart.
- The leaves of the fig clearly refer to the experience of Adam in the Garden of Eden, his contact with sin, his nudity, and his consequential shame. Jesus, stopping before this fig during His journey toward Jerusalem and setting His eyes on the leaves that hide the lack of fruit, tears the veil hiding our truth and exposes our heart, not to condemn it, but to save and to heal it. The fruit of the fig is indeed sweet. The Lord searches for the sweetness of love to speak to our life. The barren fig, empty of fruit and life, anticipates the temple emptied of sense, profaned and made useless from rapport with God which is only flight, is in a lack of encounter. Like Adam, then Israel, and perhaps also us.
- *"those selling and buying there."* The scene of the purification of the temple (vv. 15-17), which Mark inserts between the two moments of encounter already anticipated by the curse of the fig tree without fruit, is very strong and animated. This time, we are called to set our attention on the verbs "drive out," "overturned," "did not permit," "selling," "buying," "money-changers," "vendors," "thieves," "carry anything." Jesus inaugurates a new economy in which "you were sold for nothing, and without money you shall be redeemed" (Is 52: 3), "He shall...let my exiles go free without price or ransom" (Is 45: 13) and "you were ransomed...not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ as of a spotless unblemished lamb" (1 Pt 1: 18-19).
- *"house of prayer."* From the holy temple we are led into the house, the dwelling of God, where the true sacrifice is prayer, that is, the face-to-face encounter with Him as children with our Father. Here nothing is bought, there is no money, but only the gift of the heart that opens itself with full trust to prayer and faith.
- *"the fig tree withered to its roots."* It is these themes that the word of Mark wishes to offer for our meditation, continuing the reading of the passage. We must leave the temple to enter into the house. We must leave the sale to enter into the gift and trust. The tree without fruit is withered and seems to be in the middle of the road, indicating the new way to go, with the rising of a new morning (v. 20), a way toward God, and towards our brothers and sisters.
- *"have faith with no doubt."* With this most beautiful expression, Jesus helps us to enter into the depths of ourselves and to make contact with our heart in truth. The Greek text has a wonderful verb, translated here as "doubt," which wishes to express an interior split, a division, a battle between two factions. Jesus invites us to place absolute trust in Him and in the Father, to not become shattered within. In a full and complete way, we can come near to God, and we can be in relationship with Him,

without the need of leaves to mask ourselves, without beginning to count our change and calculate the price to pay, without making separations within ourselves, but offering ourselves completely to Him, as we are, bringing with us the good and sweet fruit of love.

- “*When you stand to pray, forgive.*” And it cannot be any other way than this: the end and the new beginning of the way of faith and prayer, in the life of the Christian, is found in relationship with brothers and sisters, in the encounter with them and in the exchange of reciprocal giving. There is no prayer, cult of God, holy temple, sacrifices pleasing to God, no fruit or sweetness, without love for our brother or sister. Mark calls it forgiveness, Jesus calls it love: the only fruit capable of satisfying our hunger, of relieving our weariness.

Questions for Reflection

- Meditating on this passage I encountered two strong figures: the fig tree and the temple, both without fruit, without life and love. I saw Jesus, who with His coming and His strong and sure work, changed this situation, offering a new aspect to life. Am I able to recognize my need to let myself be reached out to by the Lord, to let myself be touched by Him? Do I see myself, in certain aspects of myself, of my life, as a barren fig, without fruit or like the temple, a cold place of commerce and calculation? Do I feel within myself the desire to be able to give the sweet fruit of love, of friendship, of sharing? Do I hunger for prayer, for a true relationship with the Father?
- Following Jesus along the way, can I also enter into the new morning of His Law and His teaching? Am I able to recognize the cracks that I carry in my heart? Where do I feel most divided, most insecure, most confused? Why can I not completely entrust myself to my Father? Why do I still hobble on two feet, as the prophet Elijah says (cf. I Kings 18: 21). I know that the Lord is God and now I want to follow Him! Not alone, but opening my heart to many brothers and sisters, making myself friend and companion on the journey, to share in the joy and in the struggle, the fear and the enthusiasm of the way; I know with certainty that following the Lord I will be happy. Amen.

Final Prayer

Lord, I want to sing a new song! (Psalm 149)

Sing to the LORD a new song,
a hymn in the assembly of the faithful.
Let Israel be glad in their maker,
the people of Zion rejoice in their king.
Let them praise His name in festive dance,
make music with tambourine and lyre.

For the LORD takes delight in His people,
honors the poor with victory.
Let the faithful rejoice in their glory,
cry out for joy at their banquet,
with the praise of God in their mouths,
and a two-edged sword in their hands

Saturday, June 3, 2023

Prayer

Lord, Father of goodness and mercy, You have sent Your Son Jesus from heaven to reveal to us the authority and the sweetness of Your love. Send us Your Holy Spirit as He descended upon Christ at the baptism in the Jordan River. The heavens open with Your voice of salvation: "You are my Son, my beloved." May our hearts not close, but in full confidence, may we welcome Your light and the embrace of the Father, now and forever. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Mk 11: 27-33

Jesus and his disciples returned once more to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple area, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders approached him and said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority to do them?" Jesus said to them, "I shall ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was John's baptism of heavenly or of human origin? Answer me." They discussed this among themselves and said, "If we say, 'Of heavenly origin,' he will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'Of human origin?'" – they feared the crowd, for they all thought John really was a prophet. So they said to Jesus in reply, "We do not know." Then Jesus said to them, "Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Meditation

- "By what authority?" The word "authority" is central to this short passage and contains the secret of the faith journey and spiritual growth that we can attain if we let ourselves be guided by the Word, in meditation on this Gospel. The provocative question addressed to Jesus by the scribes and chief priests makes us understand how much distance there is between Him and them and why there can be no answer. For the priests and scribes "authority" is "power," "strength," "dominion," "capable of enforcing laws and judging." But for Jesus, "authority" is another thing. In Hebrew, this word "authority" is from a root of the word that also means "similar to." In fact, Jesus makes it clear in the place where He was walking (v. 27), and that would lead us to understand that "authority" is similarity with the Father, the relationship of love with Him, as between Father and Son. It is no coincidence that He immediately points to the baptism of John.
- "The baptism of John" Jesus leads us now clearly to the starting point, the source, where we really find ourselves in the encounter with God on the banks of the River Jordan where He was baptized. He also prepared our place, because like Him, we go down into the water and allow ourselves to be marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. Let us reach out, gather, and visit with these words: "You are my Son, the beloved" (Mk 11). Jesus tells us that there is no other authority, or other greatness or riches than this.
- "From heaven or from human origin?" Do we want to be with God or with men, to follow God or men, or do we want to enter into the light of the opened heavens (Mark 1:10) or remain in the darkness of our loneliness?

- Answer me." It's a beautiful phrase from Jesus, repeated forcefully twice (vv. 29 and 30). He calls for a clear choice, a clear decision, sincere, authentic, and profound. The verb "answer" in Greek means to express the attitude of an ability to distinguish and to separate things well. The Lord wants to invite us to enter into the deepest part of ourselves, to let His words enter and so, in this strong relationship with Him, learn more and more to make the important decisions of our lives and throughout our days.
- But there is something more to this word, so simple and so beautiful. The Hebrew root expresses at the same time response as well as misery, poverty, grief, humility. That is, there can be no real answer, without humility, without listening. Jesus is asking the priests and scribes, and us, to enter into this dimension of life, this attitude of the soul: to be humble before Him and others, recognizing our poverty, our need for Him, because only this may be the real answer to His questions.
- They argued among themselves." Another important verb that helps us to understand a little more about our inner world. This discussion is in fact a "talk through" as we sense from a literal translation of the Greek word used by Mark. These people in this passage are broken inside, are scarred by an injury, are not all in one piece in front of Jesus while talking to each other, bringing together a number of reasons and considerations instead of entering into a relationship and a dialogue with the Father which was inaugurated with the baptism of Jesus. They remain outside and at a distance, as the son of the parable who refuses to join in the feast of love (cf. Lk 15:28). They also do not believe in the Word of God, once again repeated: "You are my Son, my beloved, in You I am well pleased" (Mk 1:11) and continue to seek and desire the strength of "authority" and power rather than the weakness of love.

Questions for Reflection

- The Lord teaches me His authority, even in my life, not domination, oppression or force, but love, and the ability to be alike, to be near. I would like to accept this authority of Jesus in my life. I would truly enter into this relationship of resemblance with Him. Am I ready to engage in this choice? Am I determined to follow this through? Can I do this in all aspects of my life? What is my next step to get there?
- Maybe, approaching this Gospel, I did not expect to come back to the episode of Baptism and the experience so fundamental and the source of the relationship with God the Father. Instead, once again, the Lord wanted to reveal His love so immense, that He does not shirk any effort, any obstacles just to reach me. Is my heart, right now, before Him? Can I hear the voice of the Father speak to me and call me "son," saying my name? Can I accept this statement of love? Do I trust Him, believe Him, and give myself to Him? Do I understand that this involves change and action from me, and does not stop with words and feelings?
- I cannot reflect on this meditation without giving my answer. Jesus asks me specifically, that "answer me" is also addressed to me today. I learned that there can be no answer without a real hearing and listening that can only come from true humility. Do I want to take these steps or just want to continue to respond with my own convictions, my old ways of thinking and feeling, from my conceit and self-sufficiency? What exactly do I need to change within me and around me to answer the way I am invited to?
- One last thing. Looking inside my heart, do I feel divided, as an enemy of Jesus? Is there any wound in me that will not allow me to be a whole Christian, or a friend of

Christ, or His disciple? What is there in my life that is broken, that separates me from Him?

Final Prayer

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.
The decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart.
The command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye.
The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.
The statutes of the LORD are true, all of them just;
More desirable than gold, than a hoard of purest gold,
Sweeter also than honey or drippings from the comb.

Sunday, June 4, 2023

Most Holy Trinity

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.

Reading

A Key to Guide the Reading

- These few verses are part of a reflection of John the evangelist (Jn 3: 6-21), where he explains to his community of the end of the first century, the meaning of the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus (Jn 3: 1-15). In this dialogue, Nicodemus finds it difficult to follow Jesus' thinking. The same happened to the communities. Some of them, still under the influence of the criteria of the past, could not understand the newness that Jesus brought. Our text (Jn 3: 16-18) is an attempt to overcome this difficulty.
- The Church too has chosen these three verses for the feast of the Blessed Trinity. In fact, they are an important key that reveals the importance of the mystery of the Triune God in our lives. When reading, let us try to keep in mind and in our hearts that in this text God is the Father, the Son is Jesus and love is the Holy Spirit. So, let us not try to penetrate the mystery. Let us halt in silence and in wonder!

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Jn 3: 16: Says that the love of God that saves manifests itself in the gift of the Son.
- Jn 3: 17: The will of God is to save, not to condemn.
- Jn 3: 18: God demands of us that we have the courage to believe in this love.

Gospel Text – John 3: 16-18:

16: For this is how God loved the world: He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17: For God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved.

18: No one who believes in Him will be judged; but whoever does not believe is judged already, because that person does not believe in the Name of God's only Son.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection

- What pleased or touched you most?
- After a careful examination of this brief text, what are the recurring key words?
- What is the central experience of the community by the evangelist that reveals itself in the text?
- What does the text tell us about the love of God?
- What does the text tell us about Jesus?
- What does the text tell us about the world?
- What does the text reveal to me?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

a) The Context Within Which the Words of Jesus Appear in the Gospel of John:

- Nicodemus was a doctor who thought he knew the things of God. He watches Jesus with the book of the Law of Moses in his hand to see whether the new things announced by Jesus were in accordance with the book. In the conversation, Jesus points out to Nicodemus (and to all of us) that the only way one can understand the things of God is to be born again! The same thing happens today. Often, we are like Nicodemus: we accept only those things that agree with our ideas. We reject all else, thinking it contrary to tradition. But not all are like this. There are those who allow themselves to be surprised by events and who are not afraid of saying to themselves, "Be born again!"

- When recalling the words of Jesus, the evangelist has before his eyes the situation of the community towards the end of the first century, and it is for them that he writes. Nicodemus' doubts were also those of the community. Thus Jesus' reply was also a reply to the community. Quite probably, the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus was part of the baptismal catechesis, because the text says that people have to be reborn of water and the Holy Spirit (Jn 3: 6). In the brief commentary that follows, we focus on the key words that appear in the text and that are central to the Gospel of John. They serve as key words for the reading of the whole Gospel.

b) Commentary on the Text:

- John 3: 16: To love is to give oneself for the sake of love. The word love, first of all, points to a deep experience in the relationship between persons. It includes feelings and values such as joy, sorrow, suffering, growth, giving up, giving oneself, realization, gift, commitment, life, death, etc. In the OT these values and feelings are summarized in the word *hesed*, which, in our Bibles, is usually translated as charity, mercy, fidelity or love.
In the NT, Jesus revealed this love of God in His meetings with people. He revealed this through feelings of friendship, kindness, as, for example, in His relationship with Martha's family in Bethany: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." He weeps at Lazarus' tomb (Jn 11: 5, 33-36). Jesus faces His mission as a manifestation of love: "having loved His own....He loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). In this love, Jesus reveals His deep identity with the Father: "As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you!" (Jn 15: 9). He also says to us, "Love one another as I have loved you!" (Jn 15: 12). John defines love this way: "This has taught us love – that He gave up His life for us; and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our brothers" (1Jn 3:16). There was no other commandment apart from this for the community, "living the same kind of life as Jesus" (1 Jn 2: 6). Those who live love and reveal it in their words and attitudes, become Beloved Disciples.
- John 3: 17: He loved the world and gave His life to save the world. The word world is found 78 times in John's Gospel, but with different meanings. First, "world" may mean the earth, the space inhabited by human beings (Jn 11: 9; 21: 25) or the created universe (17: 5, 24). In our text, "world" means those who inhabit this earth, the whole of humanity, loved by God, who gave His Son for its sake (cf. Jn 1: 9; 4: 42; 6: 14; 8: 12). It may also mean a large number of people, in the sense of "the whole world" (Jn 12: 19; 14: 27). But in John's Gospel the word "world" means, above all, that part of humanity that is opposed to Jesus and so becomes his "adversary" or "opposition" (Jn 7: 4,7; 8: 23, 26; 9: 39; 12: 25). This "world," contrary to the liberating practice of Jesus, is dominated by the Adversary, Satan, also is called "prince of the world" (14: 30; 16: 11), who persecutes and kills the communities of the faithful (16: 33), creating injustice, oppression, kept up by those in authority, by those who rule the empire and the synagogue. They practice injustice in the name of God (16: 2). The hope that John's Gospel offers to the communities is that Jesus will conquer the prince of this world (12:31). He is stronger than the "world." "In the world you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world" (16: 33).
- John 3: 18: The Only Son of God who gives Himself up for us: One of the most ancient and most beautiful titles that the first Christians chose to describe the mission of Jesus is that of Defender. In Hebrew it is Go'el. This term used to indicate the closest relative, the oldest brother, who had to redeem his brothers who might be threatened with the loss of their properties (cf. Lev 25: 23-55). At the time of the

Babylonian exile, everyone, including the closest relative, lost everything. Then God became the Goêl of His people. He redeemed His people from slavery. In the NT, it is Jesus, the only son, the first-born, the closest relative, who became our Goêl. This term or title is translated diversely as savior, redeemer, liberator, advocate, oldest brother, consoler, and so on (cf. Lk 2: 11; Jn 4: 42; Acts 5: 31, etc.). Jesus takes on the defence and the redemption of His family, of His people. He gave himself entirely, completely, so that we, His brothers and sisters, may live again in fraternal love. This was the service He gave us. It was thus that the prophecy of Isaiah that announced the coming of the Servant Messiah was fulfilled. Jesus Himself said, "For the Son of Man Himself did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom (goêl) for many!" (Mk 10: 45). Paul expresses this discovery in the following sentence: "He loved me and sacrificed Himself for me!" (Gal 2: 20).

c) The Mystery of the Trinity in the Writings of John:

Faith in the Most Blessed Trinity is the beginning and end of our belief. Whatever we say today with so much clarity about the Most Blessed Trinity, may be found in the New Testament. It is found there in seminal form and was developed over the centuries. Of the four evangelists, John is the one who helps us most to understand the mystery of the Triune God.

John emphasizes the deep unity between the Father and the Son. The mission of the Son is to reveal the love of the Father (Jn 17: 6-8). Jesus comes to proclaim, "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10: 30). There is such unity between Jesus and the Father, that those who see the face of the one see also the face of the other. By revealing the Father, Jesus communicates a new spirit, "the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father" (Jn 15: 26). At the Son's request (Jn 14: 16), the Father sends to each one of us this new Spirit to stay with us. This Spirit, who comes from the Father (Jn 14:16) and from the Son (Jn 16: 7-8), reveals the deep unity that exists between Father and Son (Jn 15: 26-27). Christians looked to the unity in God in order to understand the unity that should have existed among them (Jn 13: 34-35; 17: 21).

Today we say, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Apocalypse says, He who is, who was, and who is to come, from the seven spirits in His presence before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the First-born from the dead, the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev 1:4-5). With these names, John tells us what the communities thought about and hoped for from the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

Let us see:

i) In the name of the Father: Alpha and Omega, Is, Was, Will be, Almighty

Alpha and Omega. We would say A to Z (cf. Isa 44: 6; Rev 1: 17). God is the beginning and end of history. There is no room for another God! The Christians could not accept the pretence of the Roman Empire that divinized its emperors. Nothing that happens in life can be interpreted as simple coincidence outside the loving providence of this God of ours.

Is, Was, Will be (Rev 1: 4, 8; 4: 8). Our God is not a distant God. He was with us in the past, is with us now, will be with us in the future. He guides history, is in history, walks with His people. The history of God is the history of His people.

Almighty. This was an imperial title of kings after Alexander the Great. For Christians, the true king is God. This title expresses the creative power with which He guides His people. The title strengthens the certainty of victory and urges us to sing, even now, the joy of the New Heaven and of the New Earth (Rev 21: 2).

ii) The name of the Son: Faithful Witness, First-born among the dead, Prince of the kings of the earth

Faithful Witness: Witness means the same as martyr. Jesus had the courage to witness to the Good News of God the Father. He was faithful until death, and God's answer was the resurrection (Phil 2: 9; Heb 5: 7).

First-born among the dead: First-born is like saying oldest brother (Col 1: 18). Jesus is the first-born who rises again. His victory over death will also be ours, His brothers and sisters!

Prince of the kings of the earth: This was a title given to Roman Emperors as official propaganda. The Christians gave this title to Jesus. To believe in Jesus was an act of rebellion against the empire and its ideology.

These three titles come from the messianic psalm 89, where the messiah is called Faithful Witness (Ps 89:38), First-born (Ps 89: 28). The Most High above the kings of the earth (Ps 89: 28). The first Christians took their inspiration from the Bible in order to formulate their doctrine.

iii) The Name of the Holy Spirit: Seven Lamps, Seven Eyes, Seven Spirits.

Seven Lamps: In Revelation 4: 5, it is said that the seven spirits are the seven lamps burning before the Throne of God. There are seven because they represent the fullness of the action of God in the world. There are seven burning lamps, because they symbolize the action of the Spirit who enlightens, refreshes and purifies (Acts 2: 1). They stand before the Throne always ready to respond to any request from God.

Seven Eyes: In Revelation 5: 6, it is said that the Lamb has seven eyes, symbol of the seven spirits of God sent throughout the earth. What a beautiful image! Suffice it to look at the Lamb to see the Spirit working there where the Lamb looks, for his eyes are the eyes of the Spirit. It is He who always looks at us!

Seven Spirits: The seven evoke the seven gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the prophet Isaiah and that will rest on the Messiah (Isa 11: 2-3). This prophecy comes true in Jesus. The seven Spirits are, at the same time, of God and of Jesus. The same identification of the Spirit with Jesus appears at the end of the seven letters. It is Jesus who speaks in the letters, and at the end of each letter we read, "He who has ears let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches." Jesus speaks, the Spirit speaks. They are one.

Psalm 63: 1-9

O God, My Soul Thirsts for Thee

O God, Thou art my God, I seek Thee,
my soul thirsts for Thee; my flesh faints for Thee,
as in a dry and weary land without water.
So I have looked upon Thee in the sanctuary,
beholding Thy power and glory.
Because Thy steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise Thee.
So I will bless Thee as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on Thy name.
My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat,
and my mouth praises Thee with joyful lips,
when I think of Thee upon my bed,
and meditate on Thee in the watches of the night; for Thou hast been my help,
and in the shadow of Thy wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to Thee;
Thy right hand upholds me.

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.

Monday, June 5, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
your love never fails. Hear our call.
Keep us from danger and provide for all our needs.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 12:1-12

Jesus went on to speak to the priests, the scribes and the elders in parables, 'A man planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug out a trough for the winepress and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad.

When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized the man, thrashed him and sent him away empty handed. Next he sent another servant to them; him they beat about the head and treated shamefully. And he sent another and him they killed; then a number of others, and they thrashed some and killed the rest.

He had still someone left: his beloved son. He sent him to them last of all, thinking, "They will respect my son." But those tenants said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours."

So they seized him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. Now what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and make an end of the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this text of scripture: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing, and we marvel at it?'

And they would have liked to arrest him, because they realized that the parable was aimed at them, but they were afraid of the crowds. So they left him alone and went away.

Reflection

- Jesus is in Jerusalem. It is the last week of his life. He has returned to the portico of the Temple (Mk 11: 27), where he now begins the direct confrontation with the authority. Chapters 11 and 12 describe the diverse aspects of this confrontation: (a) with the men buying and selling in the Temple (Mk 12: 11-26), (b) with the priests, elders and the Scribes (Mk 11: 27 and 12: 12), (c) with the Pharisees and the Herodians (Mk 12: 13-17), (d) with the Sadducees (Mk 12: 18-27), and (e) once again with the Scribes (Mk 12: 28-40). Finally at the end the confrontation with all of them, Jesus comments on the widow's mite (Mk 12: 41-44). Today's Gospel describes part of the conflict with the priests, elders and the Scribes (Mk 12: 1-12). All these confrontations make the disciples and us understand more clearly which is Jesus' project and which is the intention of those who have power.
- Mark 12: 1-9: *The parable of the vineyard: the direct response of Jesus to men of power.* The parable of the vineyard is a summary of the history of Israel. A beautiful summary taken from the Prophet Isaiah (Is 5: 1-7). Through this story, Jesus gives an indirect response to the priests, Scribes and elders who had asked him: *What authority have you for acting like this? Who gave you authority to act like this?*" (Mk 11: 28). In this parable Jesus (a) reveals the origin of his authority: he is the Son, the heir (Mk 12: 6); (b) he denounces the abuse of the authority of the tenants, that is, of the priests and of the elders who were not concerned about the people of God (Mk 12: 3-8); (c) He defends the authority of the prophets, sent by God, but massacred by the tenants of the vineyard! (Mk 12: 2-5); (d) He unmasks the authority which manipulates religion and kills the son, because they do not want to lose the source of income which they have succeeded to accumulate for themselves, throughout the centuries (Mk 12: 7).
- Mark 12: 10-12: *The decision of men of power confirms the denunciation made by God.* The priests, the Scribes and the elders understood very well the meaning of the parable, but they were not converted. Rather, they maintained their own project to arrest Jesus (Mk 12: 12). They rejected "the corner stone" (Mk 12: 10), but they do not

have the courage to do it openly, because they fear the people. Thus, the disciples have to know what awaits them if they follow Jesus!

- *The men of power at the time of Jesus:* In chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel of Mark we see that there are some men today: priests, elders and Scribes (Mk 11, 27); not of tomorrow: Pharisees and Herodians (Mk 12: 13); not of day after tomorrow: Sadducees (Mk 12: 18).
 - -Priests: They were the ones in charge of the worship in the Temple, where the tenth part of the income was collected. The High priest occupied a central place in the life of the people, especially after the exile. He was chosen among the families who had more power and who were richer.
 - -Elders or Chiefs of the people: They were the local chiefs, in the villages and in the cities. Their origin was the heads of the ancient tribes.
 - -Scribes or Doctors of the Law: they were those in charge of teaching. They dedicated their life to the study of the Law of God and taught the people how to observe the Law of God in all things. Not all the Scribes followed the same line. Some of them were with the Pharisees, others with the Sadducees.
 - Pharisees: Pharisee means: separated. They fought in order that by means of the perfect observance of the Law of purity, people would succeed to be pure, separated, and holy as the Law and Tradition demanded! By means of the exemplary witness of their life within the norms of the time, they governed in almost all the villages of Galilee.
 - -Herodians: this was a group bound to Herod Antipas of Galilee who governed from 4 BC until 39 AD. The Herodians formed part of an elite class who did not expect the Kingdom of God in the future, but who considered it already present in Herod's kingdom.
 - Sadducees: They were an elite aristocratic class of rich merchants or owners of large estates. They were conservative. They did not accept the changes defended by the Pharisees, for example, faith in the Resurrection and the existence of the angels.
 - Synedrium: This was the Supreme Tribunal of the Jews with 71 members among high priests, elders, Pharisees and Scribes. It had the role of great power before the people and represented the nation before the Roman authority.

Personal Questions

- Sometimes, as it happened to Jesus, have you felt controlled by the authority of your country, at home, in your family, in your work or in the Church? Which was your reaction then?
- What does this parable teach us concerning the way of exercising authority? And you, how do you exercise your authority in the family, in the community and in your work?

Concluding Prayer

Integrity and generosity are marks of Yahweh for he brings sinners back to the path.

Judiciously he guides the humble, instructing the poor in his way. (Ps 25: 8-9)

Tuesday, June 6, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

your love never fails. Hear our call.

Keep us from danger and provide for all our needs.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 12: 13-17

Next, the priests, the scribes and the elders sent to Jesus some Pharisees and some Herodians to catch him out in what he said. These came and said to him, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man, that you are not afraid of anyone, because human rank means nothing to you, and that you teach the way of God in all honesty. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or not?' Recognizing their hypocrisy he said to them, 'Why are you putting me to the test? Hand me a denarius and let me see it.'

They handed him one and he said to them, 'Whose portrait is this? Whose title?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.' Jesus said to them, 'Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and God what belongs to God.' And they were amazed at him.

Reflection

In today's Gospel, the confrontation between Jesus and the authority continues. The priests and the Scribes had been criticized and denounced by Jesus in the parable of the vineyard (Mk 12: 1-12). Now, they themselves ask the Pharisees and the Herodians to set up a trap against Jesus to be able to condemn him. They ask questions to Jesus concerning the taxes to be paid to the Romans. This was a controversial theme which divided public opinion. The enemies of Jesus want, at all costs, to accuse him and diminish the influence that he had on the people. Groups, which before were enemies between them, now get together to fight against Jesus. This also happens today. Many times, persons or groups, enemies among themselves, get together to defend their privileges against those who inconvenience them with the announcement of truth and of justice.

- Mark 12: 13-14: The question of the Pharisees and the Herodians. The Pharisees and the Herodians were the local leaders in the villages of Galilee. It was a long time since they had decided to kill Jesus (Mk 3: 6). Now, because of the order of the priests and of the elders, they want to know if Jesus is in favor or against the payment of taxes to the Romans, to Caesar. An underhanded or sly question, full of malice! Under the appearance of fidelity to the Law of God, they look for reasons in order to be able to accuse him. If Jesus says "You should pay!" they could accuse him of being a friend of the Romans. If he would say, "No, you do not have to pay!" they could accuse him to the authority of the Romans that he was subversive. This seemed to be a dead alley!
- Mark 12: 15-17: Jesus' answer. Jesus perceives their hypocrisy. In his response he does not lose time in useless discussion, and goes straight to the centre of the question.

Instead of responding and of discussing the affair of the tribute to Caesar, he asks to be shown a coin and he asks: "Whose portrait and inscription is this?" They answered: "Caesar's!" The answer of Jesus: "Then pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." In practice, they already recognized the authority of Caesar. They were already giving to Caesar what belonged to Caesar, because they used his currency, his money to buy and to sell and even to pay the taxes of the Temple! That which interested Jesus was that they "gave to God what belongs to God!", that is, that they restituted the people to God, from their deviation, because with their teaching they blocked the entrance into the Kingdom (Mk 23: 13). Others explained this phrase of Jesus in another way: "Give to God what belongs to God!" that is, practice justice and honesty as the Law of God demands, because your hypocrisy denies to God what is due to him. The disciples have to be aware!

- Taxes, tributes, taxes and *denarii*. "In Jesus' time, the people of Palestine paid many taxes, tributes and the tenth part of their income, both to the Romans as well as to the Temple. The Roman Empire had invaded Palestine in the year 63 A.D. and they imposed many taxes and tributes. According to the estimates made, half or even more of the family salaries were used to pay the tributes, taxes and the tenth part of their income. The taxes which the Romans demanded were of two types: direct and indirect.
 - The Direct tax was on property and on persons. The tax on property (*tributum soli*): the fiscal officers of the government verified how large the property was, the production and the number of slaves and they fixed the amount to be paid. Periodically, there was a verification through the census. The tax on persons (*tributum capitis*): was for the poor class who owned no land. This included both men and women, between 12 and 65 years of age. It was a tax on the force of work; 20% of the income of every person was used to pay taxes.
 - The Indirect tax was placed on transactions of different types: a Crown of gold: Originally, it was a question of a gift to the Emperor, but then it became an obligatory tax. This was paid on special occasions, for example: the feast and the visits of the Emperor. The tax on salt: The salt was the monopoly of the Emperor. It was necessary to pay the tribute on the salt for commercial use. For example, the salt used by fishermen to dry up the fish and to sell it. From this comes the word "salary." A tax on buying and selling: for every commercial use 1% was paid. This money was paid to the fiscal officers during the holidays. When a slave was bought they demanded 4%. In every registered commercial contract, they demanded 2%. The tax for exercising a profession: There was need for everyone to have a license for everything. For example, a cobbler in the city of Palmira paid one denarius a month. A denarius was equivalent to the salary of one day. And even the prostitutes had to pay. A tax for the use of public utilities: Emperor Vespasiano introduced the tax in order to be able to use the public toilets in Rome. He would say: "Money does not stink!"
 - Other taxes and obligations: toll or customs; forced work; special expenses for the army (to give hospitality to the soldiers; to pay for the food of the troops); taxes for the Temple and the worship.

Personal Questions

- Do you know some case of groups or of persons who were enemies between themselves, but who were then united to follow an honest person who bothered or inconvenienced and denounced them? Has this happened sometimes with you?
- What is the sense of this phrase today: "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God"?

Concluding Prayer

Each morning fill us with your faithful love, we shall sing and be happy all our days; Show your servants the deeds you do, let their children enjoy your splendor! (Ps 90: 14,16)

Wednesday, June 7, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

your love never fails. Hear our call.

Keep us from danger and provide for all our needs.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 12: 18-27

Then some Sadducees -- who deny that there is a resurrection -- came to Jesus and they put this question to him, 'Master, Moses prescribed for us that if a man's brother dies leaving a wife but no child, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married a wife and then died leaving no children. The second married the widow, and he too died leaving no children; with the third it was the same, and none of the seven left any children. Last of all the woman herself died. Now at the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be since she had been married to all seven?'

Jesus said to them, 'Surely the reason why you are wrong is that you understand neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For when they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry; no, they are like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising again, have you never read in the Book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him and said: I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is God, not of the dead, but of the living. You are very much mistaken.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel the confrontation between Jesus and the authority continues. After the priests, the elders and the Scribes (Mk 12: 1-12) and the Pharisees and the Herodians (Mk 12: 13-17), now the Sadducees appear who ask a question about resurrection. A controversial theme, which caused argument and discussion among the Sadducees and the Pharisees (Mk 12: 18-27; cf. At 23: 6-1).

- In the Christian communities of the years seventy, the time when Mark wrote his Gospel, there were some Christians who, in order not to be persecuted, tried to reconcile the project of Jesus with the project of the Roman Emperor. The others who resisted the Empire were persecuted, accused and questioned by the authority of by the neighbors who felt annoyed, bothered by their witness. The description of the conflicts of Jesus with the authority was a very great help in order that the Christians did not allow themselves to be manipulated by the ideology of the Empire. In reading these episodes of conflict of Jesus with authority, the persecuted Christians were encouraged to continue on this road.
- Mark 12: 18-23. The Sadducees: The Sadducees were the aristocratic elite of landowners and traders. They were conservative. They did not accept faith in the Resurrection. At that time, this faith was beginning to be evaporated by the Pharisees and popular piety. It urged to the resistance of the people against the dominion of the Romans, and of the priests, of the elders and of the Sadducees themselves. For the Sadducees, the Messianic Kingdom was already present in the situation of well-being in which they were living. They followed the so called "Theology of Retribution" which distorted reality. According to this Theology God rewards with richness and well-being those who observe the Law of God, and he punishes with suffering and poverty those who do evil. This makes one understand why the Sadducees did not want changes. They wanted that religion remain as it was, immutable like God himself. This is why they did not accept the faith in the Resurrection and in the help of the angels, who sustained the struggle of those who sought changes and liberation.
- Mark 12: 19-23. The question of the Sadducees: They go to Jesus to criticize and to ridicule the faith in the Resurrection, to tell about the fictitious case of the woman who got married seven times and at the end she died without having any children. The so-called Law of the levirate obliged the widow who had no children to marry the brother of the deceased husband. The son who would have been born from this new marriage would be considered the son of the deceased husband. And thus, he would have descent. But in the case proposed by the Sadducees, the woman, despite the fact of having had seven husbands, remained without a husband. They asked Jesus: "In the Resurrection, when they will rise, to whom will the woman belong? Because seven had her as wife!" This was to say that to believe in the resurrection led the person to accept what was absurd.
- Mark 12: 24-27: The response of Jesus. Jesus responds harshly: Surely, the reason why you are wrong is that you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." Jesus explains that the condition of persons after death will be totally different from the present condition. After death there will be no marriage, but all will be as the angels in Heaven. The Sadducees imagined life in Heaven as life on earth. And at the end Jesus concludes: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living! You are in great error." The disciples are warned: those who are on the side of these Sadducees will be on the side opposite to God.

Personal Questions

- Today, which is the sense of this phrase: God is not the God of the dead but of the living"?
- Do I also believe the same thing in the resurrection? What does the following mean for me: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and in life everlasting?"

Concluding Prayer

Lord, I lift up my eyes to you who are enthroned in heaven. Just as the eyes of slaves are on their masters' hand, or the eyes of a slave-girl on the hand of her mistress, so our eyes are on Yahweh our God, for him to take pity on us. (Ps 123: 1-2)

Thursday, June 8, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

your love never fails. Hear our call. Keep us from danger and provide for all our needs.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 12: 28-34

One of the scribes put a question to Jesus, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one, only Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true, that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And after that no one dared to question him anymore.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents a beautiful conversation between Jesus and a Doctor of the Law. The doctor wants to know from Jesus which is the first of the commandments. Today, also many persons want to know what is most important in religion. Some say: to be baptized. Others, to pray. Others say: to go to Mass or to participate in the worship on Sunday. Others say: to love your neighbor! Others are worried about the appearance or the charges or tasks in the Church.

- Mark 12: 28: The question of the Doctor of the Law. A doctor of the Law, who had seen the debate of Jesus with the Sadducees (Mk 12: 23-27), was pleased with the response of Jesus, and he perceives in him a great intelligence and wants to profit of this occasion to ask him a question: Which is the first one of all the commandments?" At that time the Jews had an enormous number of norms which regulated, in practice, the observance of the Ten Commandments of the Law of God. Some said: "All these norms have the same value, because they all come from God. It does not belong to us to introduce distinctions in the things of God." Others would say: "Some Laws are more important than others, that is why they oblige more!" The Doctor wanted to know Jesus' opinion.

- Mark 12: 29-31: The response of Jesus. Jesus responds by quoting a passage of the Bible to say that the first commandment is “to love God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength!” (Dt 6: 4-5). At the time of Jesus, the pious Jews made of this text of Deuteronomy a prayer which they recited three times a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. Among them it was known as today we know the Our Father. And Jesus adds, quoting the Bible again: the second one is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other more important commandment than this one.” (Lev 19: 18). A brief and profound response! It is the summary of all that Jesus has taught about God and about life (Mt 7: 12).
- Mark 12: 32-33: The answer of the doctor of the Law. The Doctor agrees with Jesus and draws the conclusion: “To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself; this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.” In other words, the commandment of love is more important than the commandments related to worship and sacrifice in the Temple. This affirmation was already used by the prophets of the Old Testament (Ho 6: 6; Ps 40: 6-8; Ps 51: 16- 17). Today, we would say that the practice of love is more important than novenas, promises, Masses, prayers, and processions.
- Mark 12: 34: The summary of the Kingdom. Jesus confirms the conclusion reached by the Doctor and says: “You are not far from the Kingdom of God!” In fact, the Kingdom of God consists in recognizing that love toward God is equal to the love of neighbor. Because if God is Father, we all are sisters and brothers and should show this in practice, living in community. “On these two commandments depend the Law and the prophets” (Mt 22: 4). The disciples must keep in mind, fix in their memory, in their intelligence, in the heart, in the hands and in the feet this important law of love: God is only attained through the total gift of self to our neighbor!
- The first and most important commandment. The most important and first commandment was and will always be: “to love God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mk 12: 30). In the measure in which the People of God, throughout the centuries, has deepened the meaning and the importance of the love of God, it has become aware that God’s love is true and real only in the measure in which it is made concrete in the love to neighbor. And thus, the second commandment which asks for the love for neighbor, is like the first commandment of God’s love (Mt 22: 39; Mk 12: 31). “Anyone who says I love God, and hates his brother, is a liar” (1 Jn 4: 20). “On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets too” (Mt 22: 40).

Personal Questions

- For you, what is more important in religion and in life? Which are the concrete difficulties that you find, in order to be able to live that which you consider more important?
- Jesus tells the doctor: “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” Today, am I nearer or farther away from the Kingdom of God than the doctor praised by Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Direct me in your ways, Yahweh, and teach me your paths.

Encourage me to walk in your truth and teach me since you are the God who saves me.
(Ps 25: 4-5)

Friday, June 9, 2023

Opening Prayer

Father,
your love never fails. Hear our call.
Keep us from danger and provide for all our needs.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 12: 35-37

While teaching in the Temple, Jesus said, 'How can the scribes maintain that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, moved by the Holy Spirit, said: The Lord declared to my Lord, take your seat at my right hand till I have made your enemies your footstool. David himself calls him Lord; in what way then can he be his son?' And the great crowd listened to him with delight.

Reflection

In the Gospel of day before yesterday, Jesus criticizes the doctrine of the Sadducees (Mk 12: 24-27). In today's Gospel, he criticizes the teaching of the doctors of the Law. And this time his criticism is not directed to the incoherence of their life, but to the teaching which they transmit to the people. On another occasion, Jesus had criticized their incoherence and had said to the people: *"The Scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses: You must, therefore, do and observe what they tell you, but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not observe what they preach"* (Mt 23: 2-3). Now, he shows himself reserved regarding those who taught the Messianic hope, and he bases his criticism on arguments taken from the Bible.

- Mark 12: 35-36: *The teaching of the Doctors of the Law on the Messiah.* The official propaganda both of the government as that of the Doctors of the Law said that the Messiah would have come as the *Son of David*. This was the way to teach that the Messiah would be a glorious king, strong and dominator. This is how the people shouted on Palm Sunday: "Blessed the Kingdom that is coming from our Father David!" (Mk 11: 10). The blind man of Jericho also cried out in this same way: "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!" (Mk 10: 47).
- Mark 12: 37: *Jesus questions the teaching of the doctors about the Messiah.* Jesus questions this teaching of the Scribes. He quotes a Psalm of David: *"The Lord declared to my Lord, take your seat at my right hand, till I have made your enemies your footstool!"* (Ps 110: 1). And Jesus adds: *"If David calls him Lord, how then can he be his son?"* This signifies that Jesus was not completely in agreement with the idea of a Messiah, Glorious Lord, who would have come like a powerful king to dominate and to impose himself on all his enemies. Mark adds that people were pleased with the criticism of Jesus. In fact, history informs that the "poor of Yahweh" (*anawim*) were expecting a Messiah who was not a dominator, but the servant of God for humanity.

- *The diverse forms of Messianic hope.* Throughout the centuries, the Messianic hope grew, assuming diverse forms. Almost all the groups and movements of the time of Jesus were waiting for the coming of the Kingdom, but each one in his own way, the Pharisees, the Scribes, the Essenes, the Zealots, the Herodians, the Sadducees, the popular prophets, the disciples of John the Baptist, the poor of Yahweh. In the time of Jesus, three tendencies in the Messianic hope could be distinguished.
 - *The Messiah personally sent by God:* For some, the future Kingdom should arrive through one sent by God, called Messiah, or Christ. He would have been anointed so as to be able to carry out his mission (Is 61: 1). Some expected that he would be a *prophet*; others, a king, a disciple or a *priest*. Malachi, for example, expects the prophet Elijah (Ml 3: 23-24). Psalm 72 expects an ideal king, a new David. Isaiah expects now a disciple (Is 50: 4), now a prophet (Is 61: 1). The unclean spirit shouted: "I know who you are: the Holy One of God!" (Mc 1: 24). This was a sign that there were people who expected a Messiah who would be a priest (Holy or Sanctifier). The poor of Yahweh (*anawim*) expected the Messiah "Servant of God," announced by Isaiah.
 - *Messianism without the Messiah.* For others, the future would have arrived suddenly, unexpected, without mediations, without help from anyone. God himself would have come in person to carry out the prophecies. There would not have been a Messiah, properly so called. There would be a messianism without a Messiah. Of this we are aware in the Book of Isaiah where God himself arrives with the victory in hand (Is 40: 9-10; 52: 7-8).
 - *The Messiah has already come.* There were also some groups which did not expect the Messiah. According to them the present situation should continue as it was because they thought that the future had already arrived. These groups were not popular. For example, the Sadducees did not expect the Messiah. The Herodians thought that Herod was a messianic king.
- The light of the Resurrection. The Resurrection of Jesus is the light which enlightens unexpectedly all the past. In the light of the Resurrection Christians would begin to read the Old Testament and would discover in it new meaning which before could not be discovered, because the light was missing (cf. 2 Co 3: 15-16). They sought in the Old Testament the words to express the new life which they were living in Christ. There they found the majority of the titles of Jesus: Messiah (Ps 2: 2) Son of man (Dn 7: 13; Ez 2: 1), Son of God (Sl 2: 7; 2 S 7: 13), Servant of Yahweh (Is 42: 1; 41: 8), Redeemer (Is 41: 14; Ps 19: 15; Rt 4: 15), Lord (LXX) (almost 6000 times!). All the great themes of the Old Testament spring up in Jesus and find in him their full realization. In the Resurrection of Jesus springs up the seed and according to everything that has been said by the Fathers of the Church, the whole Old Testament becomes New Testament.

Personal questions

- Which is the hope for the future of today's world in which we live?
- Does Faith in the Resurrection influence the way of living your life?

Concluding Prayer

I am waiting for your salvation, Yahweh,
I fulfil your commandments.

I observe your precepts, your judgements,
for all my ways are before you. (Ps 119: 166, 168)

Saturday, June 10, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
your love never fails.

Hear our call. Keep us from danger and provide for all our needs.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 12: 38-44

In his teaching Jesus said, 'Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted respectfully in the market squares, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets; these are the men who devour the property of widows and for show offer long prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.'

He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; for they have all put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we are getting to the end of the long teaching of Jesus to his disciples. From the first cure of the blind man (Mk 8: 22-26) up to the cure of the blind Bartimaeus in Jericho (10: 46-52), the disciples walked with Jesus toward Jerusalem, receiving much instruction from him about the passion, death and resurrection and the consequences for the life of the disciple. When they reached Jerusalem, they assist to the debates of Jesus with the traders in the Temple (Mk 11: 15-19), with the high priests and the Scribes (Mk 11: 27 and 12: 12), with the Pharisees, Herodians and the Sadducees (Mk 12: 13-27), with the Doctors of the Law (Mk 12: 28-37). Now, in today's Gospel, after the last criticism against the Scribes (Mk 12: 38-40), Jesus instructs the disciples. Jesus sitting opposite the treasury he called their attention on the gesture of sharing of a poor widow. In that gesture they should look for the manifestation of the will of God (Mk 12: 41-44).

- Mark 12: 38-40: The criticism of the doctors of the Law. Jesus calls the attention of the disciples on the arrogant and hypocritical behavior of some of the doctors of the Law. They liked very much to go around the squares in the city wearing long tunics, and to receive the greeting of the people, to occupy the first places in the Synagogue and to have the place of honor in the banquets. They liked to enter into the houses

of the widows and to say long prayers in exchange for money! And Jesus says: "These people will receive a great condemnation!"

- Mark 12: 41-42. The mite of the widow. Jesus and his disciples sitting opposite the treasury of the Temple observed that all left their alms. The poor put in a very small amount, a few cents, the rich put in coins of great value. The Treasury of the Temple received much money. Everyone took something for the maintenance of the cult, to support the clergy and for the maintenance of the building. Part of this money was used to help the poor, because at that time there was no social security. The poor depended on public charity. And the poor who needed greater help, were the orphans and the widows. They had nothing. They depended for everything on the help of others. But even without having anything, they tried to share. In this way, a very poor widow, put in her alms into the treasury of the Temple. Just a few cents!
- Mark 12: 43-44. Jesus indicates where God's will is manifested. What has greater value: the ten cents of the widow or the one thousand dollars of the rich? For the disciples, the one thousand dollars of the rich were much more useful than the ten cents of the widow. They thought that the problems of the people could be solved only with much money. On the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves, they had said to Jesus: "Are we to go and spend two hundred denarii on bread for them to eat?" (Mk 6: 37) In fact, for those who think this way, the ten cents of the widow do not serve for anything. But Jesus says: "This widow who is poor has put into the treasury more than all the others." Jesus has different criteria. He calls the attention of his disciples on the gesture of the widow and teaches them where they and we should seek the manifestation of God's will: in the poor and in sharing. Many poor people today do the same thing. People say: "The poor do not let another poor person starve." But sometimes, not even this is possible. Cicera, the lady of the interior zone of Paraiba, Brazil, who went to live in the periphery of the capital city, would say: "In the interior, people were poor, but there was always a piece of bread to share with the poor person who knocked at the door. Now that I am in the great city, when I see a poor person who knocks at the door, I hide out of shame, because at home I have nothing to share with him!" On the one hand, rich people who have everything, but who do not want to share. On the other side: poor people who hardly have anything, but who want to share the little that they have.
- Alms, sharing, riches. The practice of giving alms was very important for the Jews. It was considered a "good work," because the Law of the Old Testament said: "Because the poor will never be missing in the country; this is why I give you this command, and I say to you: Always be open handed with your brother in your country who is in need and poor" (Dt 15: 11). The alms, deposited in the treasury of the Temple, whether for the worship, or for the needy, for the orphans and for the widows, were considered an action pleasing to God. To give alms was a way of recognizing that all the goods belong to God and that we are simple administrators of these goods, in such a way that there will be abundant life for all. The practice of sharing and of solidarity is one of the characteristics of the first Christian communities: "None of their members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money from the sale of them to present it to the apostles; (Ac 4: 34-35; 2: 44-45). The money from the sale, offered to the apostles, was not accumulated, but rather "it was then distributed to any who might be in need" (Ac 4: 35b; 2: 45). The entrance into the community of persons who were richer introduced into the community the mentality of accumulation and blocked the movement of solidarity and of sharing. James warns these persons: "Now you rich! Lament; weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is rotting; your clothes are all

moth-eaten" (Jm 5: 1-3). To learn the way to the Kingdom, we all need to become pupils of that poor widow, who shared all she had, what was necessary to live (Mk 12: 41-44).

Personal Questions

- How is it that the two cents of the widow can be worth more than one thousand dollars of the rich? Look well at the text and see why Jesus praises the poor widow. What message does this text contain for us today?
- What difficulties and what joys have you found in your life in the practice of solidarity and in sharing with others?

Concluding Prayer

My mouth is full of your praises,
filled with your splendor all day long. Do not reject me in my old age,
nor desert me when my strength is failing. (Ps 71: 8-9)

Sunday, June 11, 2023

Corpus Christi Sunday

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us 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.

Gospel Reading – John 6: 51-58

a) A Key to the Reading:

On the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ we meditate on the last part of the long discourse on the Bread of Life. During this discourse, the Gospel of John helps us to understand the deep meaning of the multiplication of the bread and of the Eucharist. During the reading, we will try to be attentive to the words of Jesus which help people to understand the sign of the Bread of Life.

b) A Division of the Text to Help in the Reading:

- John 6: 51: The initial affirmation which summarizes everything
- John 6: 52: The contrary reaction of the Jews
- John 6: 53-54: Jesus' response affirms what He said before
- John 6: 55-58: Jesus draws the conclusion for life

c) The Text:

51 I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, for the life of the world.' 52 Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' 53 Jesus replied to them, 'In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Anyone who does eat My flesh and drink My blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. 55 For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me and I live in that person. 57 As the living Father sent Me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats Me will also draw life from Me. 58 This is the bread which has come down from heaven; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which part of the text struck me the most? Why?
- How many times in the text is the word life used, and what does it tell us about life?
- Jesus says, "I am the living Bread which has come down from heaven." What does this mean? Look for an answer in the text.
- What does this text tell us about the Person of Jesus: titles, functions, etc.?
- In what way does this text help us to understand better the significance of the Eucharist?

To Go Deeper into the Discourse of the Bread of Life.

a) Context in which our text is situated in the discourse of the Bread of Life:

The discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn 6: 22-71) is a sequence of seven brief dialogues between Jesus and the persons who were with Him after the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus tries to open the eyes of people, making them understand that it is not sufficient to struggle to get the material bread. The daily struggle for material bread does not touch the roots if it is not accompanied by mysticism. The human being does not only live by bread! (Deut 8: 3) The seven brief dialogues are a very beautiful

catechesis which explains to people the profound significance of the multiplication of the loaves and of the Eucharist. Throughout the dialogue appear the exigencies which the living out of faith in Jesus traces for our life. People react. They remain surprised by the words of Jesus. But Jesus does not give in. He does not change His requirements. And because of this, many abandon Him. Even now the same thing happens: when the Gospel begins to demand a commitment, many people abandon it. Insofar as the discourse of Jesus advances, less people remain around Him. At the end, only the twelve remain and Jesus cannot even count on them!

Here is the sequence of the seven dialogues which compose the long discourse on the Bread of Life:

- John 6: 22-27: 1st Dialogue: People seek Jesus because they want more bread
- John 6: 28-33: 2nd Dialogue: Jesus asks the people to work for the true bread
- John 6: 34-40: 3rd Dialogue: The true bread is to do the will of God
- John 6: 41-51: 4th Dialogue: He who opens himself to God accepts Jesus and His proposal
- John 6: 52-58: 5th Dialogue: Flesh and Blood: expression of life and of the total gift
- John 6: 59-66: 6th Dialogue: Without the light of the Spirit these words cannot be understood
- John 6: 67-71: 7th Dialogue: Peter's confession

b) Comment on the seven dialogues which make up the discourse of the Bread of Life:

The year 2005 is the Year of the Eucharist. This is the reason why, instead of commenting only on the eight verses of the Gospel of this Sunday (John 6: 51-58), we have thought of giving a general key to understand the seven brief dialogues which make up the whole discourse. A global vision of the whole will help to clarify the meaning and the importance of the eight verses of the liturgical text of this day of Corpus Christi.

- 1st Dialogue - John 6: 22-27: The people look for Jesus because they want more bread
22 Next day, the crowd that had stayed on the other side saw that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not got into the boat with His disciples, but that the disciples had set off by themselves. 23 Other boats, however, had put in from Tiberias, near the place where the bread had been eaten. 24 When the people saw that neither Jesus nor His disciples were there, they got into those boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. 25 When they found Him on the other side, they said to Him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' 26 Jesus answered, 'In all truth I tell you, you are looking for Me not because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. 27 Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for on Him the Father, God Himself, has set His seal.

The people see the miracle, but they do not understand that it is a question of a sign of something greater and more profound. They stop only on the superficial aspect of the fact, in the distribution of the food. They look for the bread of life, but only for the body. According to the people, Jesus does something which Moses had already done in the past: feed everyone. And the people wanted the past to be repeated. But Jesus asks the

people to take one more step. Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life.

- 2nd Dialogue – John 6: 28-33: Jesus asks the people to work for the true bread
28 Then they said to Him, 'What must we do if we are to carry out God's work?' 29 Jesus gave them this answer, 'This is carrying out God's work: you must believe in the One He has sent.' 30 So they said, 'What sign will You yourself do, the sight of which will make us believe in You? What work will You do? 31 Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as scripture says, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."' 32 Jesus answered them. 'In all truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread; 33 for the bread of God is the bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'

The people asked, 'What must we do if we are to carry out God's work?' And Jesus answers, 'Believe in the One God has sent!' That is, believe in Jesus. And the people react, 'Give us a sign to understand that You are truly the One sent by God. Our fathers ate the manna that Moses gave them! According to the people, Moses is and continues to be the great leader, in whom to believe. If Jesus wants the people to believe in Him, He has to give them a greater sign than that given by Moses. Jesus answers that the bread given by Moses was not the true bread, because it did not guarantee the life of anyone. All died in the desert. The true bread of God is the one which overcomes death and gives life! Jesus tries to help people to liberate themselves from the schema of the past. For Jesus, fidelity to the past does not mean to close up oneself in the things of the past and to refuse or reject renewal. Fidelity to the past means to accept what is new, which is the fruit of the seed planted in the past.

- 3rd Dialogue - John 6: 34-40: The true bread is to do the will of God.
34 'Sir,' they said, 'give us that bread always.' 35 Jesus answered them, 'I am the bread of life. No one who comes to Me will ever hunger; no one who believes in Me will ever thirst. 36 But, as I have told you, you can see Me and still you do not believe. 37 Everyone whom the Father gives Me will come to Me; I will certainly not reject anyone who comes to Me, 38 because I have come from heaven, not to do My own will, but to do the will of Him who sent Me. 39 Now the will of Him who sent Me is that I should lose nothing of all that He has given to Me, but that I should raise it up on the last day. 40 It is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and that I should raise that person up on the last day.'

The people said, 'Lord, give us that bread always!' They thought that Jesus was speaking of a special bread. Then, Jesus answers clearly, 'I am the bread of life!' To eat the bread of heaven is the same as believing in Jesus and accepting the path that He has shown us, that is, "My food is to do the will of the Father who is in heaven!" (Jn 4: 34). This is the true food which nourishes the person, which always gives us new life. It is a seed that guarantees resurrection!

- 4th Dialogue – John 6: 41-51: He who opens himself to God accepts Jesus and His proposal

41 Meanwhile the Jews were complaining to each other about Him, because He had said, 'I am the bread that has come down from heaven.' 42 They were saying, 'Surely this is Jesus son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How can He now say, "I have come down from heaven?" ' 43 Jesus said in reply to them, 'Stop complaining to each other. 44 'No one can come to Me unless drawn by the Father who sent Me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, They will all be taught by God; everyone who has listened to the Father, and learned from Him, comes to me. 46 Not that anybody has seen the Father, except Him who has His being from God: He has seen the Father. 47 In all truth I tell you, everyone who believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are

dead; 50 but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, for the life of the world.'

The discourse becomes more demanding. Now it is the Jews, that is, the leaders of the people, who murmur, "Is He not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He say that He has come down from heaven?" They considered themselves capable of knowing and of recognizing the things that come from God. But they are mistaken. If they were truly open to the things of God, they would feel the impulse of God in themselves which attracts them toward Jesus and would recognize that Jesus comes from God (Jn 6: 45). In the celebration of the Passover, the Jews remembered the bread of the desert. Jesus helps them to take a step forward. The one who celebrates the Passover remembering only the bread which the fathers ate in the desert, will die just as all of them died! The true meaning of the Passover is not that of recalling the manna which in the past fell from heaven, but to accept Jesus, the Bread of Life who came down from Heaven and to follow the path that He has traced. It does not mean to eat the flesh of the paschal lamb, but the flesh of Jesus, who came down from heaven to give life to the world!

- 5th Dialogue - John 6: 52-58: Flesh and Blood: the expression of life and of the total gift.

52 Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?' 53 Jesus replied to them, ' In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Anyone who does eat My flesh and drink My blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. 55 For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me and I live in that person. 57 As the living Father sent Me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats Me will also draw life from Me. 58 This is the bread which has come down from heaven; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.'

The Jews reacted, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" They did not understand these words of Jesus, because the profound respect for life demanded that from the time of the Old Testament it was forbidden to drink blood, because the blood was the sign of life (Deut 12: 16, 23). Besides, it was close to the Passover and in a few days everyone would have eaten the meat and the blood of the Paschal Lamb in the celebration of the night of the Passover. They took the words of Jesus literally. That is why they did not understand. To eat the flesh of Jesus meant to accept Jesus as the new Paschal Lamb. His blood will free them from slavery. To drink the blood of Jesus meant to assimilate His way of life which characterized the life of Jesus. What gives life is not to celebrate the manna of the past, but rather to eat this new bread which is Jesus, His flesh and His blood. Participating in the Eucharistic Supper, we assimilate His life, His gift of self, His dedication.

- 6th Dialogue – John 6: 59-66: Without the light of the Spirit these words cannot be understood,

59 This is what He taught at Capernaum in the synagogue. 60 After hearing it, many of His followers said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?' 61 Jesus was aware that His followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this disturb you? 62 What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before? 63 'It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 64 'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset who did not believe and who was to betray Him. 65 He went on,

'This is why I told you that no one could come to Me except by the gift of the Father.' 66 After this, many of His disciples went away and accompanied Him no more.

Here ends the discourse of Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum. Many of His disciples thought, 'Jesus is exaggerating too much! He is putting an end to the celebration of the Passover! He is taking the central place of our religion!' For this reason many people abandoned the community and no longer followed Jesus. Jesus reacted by saying, "It is the spirit who gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." We should not take what he says literally. It is only with the help of the light of the Holy Spirit that it is possible to understand the full meaning of everything that Jesus says (Jn 14: 25-26; 16: 12-13).

- 7th Dialogue - Jn 6: 67-71: Confession of Peter.

67 Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' 68 Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, 69 and we believe; we have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.' 70 Jesus replied to them, 'Did I not choose the Twelve of you? Yet one of you is a devil.' 71 He meant Judas son of Simon Iscariot, since this was the man, one of the Twelve, who was to betray Him.

At the end only the twelve remained. Jesus said to them, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" For Jesus, what is important is not the number of people who are around Him. He does not change the discourse when the message does not please others. Jesus speaks to reveal the Father and not to please others.

He prefers to remain alone, more than being accompanied by persons who do not accept the Father's project. The response of Peter is beautiful: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life!" Even without understanding everything, Peter accepts Jesus and believes in Him. Despite all his limitations, Peter is not like Nicodemus, who wished to see everything clearly, to confirm his own ideas.

- To deepen more: Eucharist and New Exodus

In describing the multiplication of the loaves, the Gospel of John suggests a parallel with Exodus: Jesus who walks on the water and the discourse of the Bread of Life. This parallel shows that through the Eucharist a new Exodus takes place. The Eucharist helps us to live in a permanent state of Exodus:

- i) The multiplication of the loaves (Jn 6: 1-15):

Jesus has before Him a hungry crowd and the challenge to guarantee bread for all. Even though Moses had to face this challenge during the time of itinerancy of the people in the desert (Ex 16: 1-35; Num 11: 18-23). After having eaten, the people fed and satisfied recognize in Jesus the new Moses, the "Prophet who is to come into the world" (Jn 6: 14), according to what has been announced in the Law of the Covenant (Deut 18: 15-22).

- ii) Jesus walks on the water (Jn 6: 16-21):

In Exodus, the people are itinerant in order to obtain freedom and face and overcome the sea (Ex 14:22). Jesus also, like Moses, dominates and overcomes the sea, preventing the boat of his disciples from being swallowed up by the waves, and does in such a way that they get safely to the other shore.

- iii) The discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn 6: 22-58):

The discourse evokes Chapter 16 of the book of Exodus which describes the story of the manna. When Jesus speaks of "a food which does not perish" (Jn 6: 27) He hears some people "murmuring" or complaining against Jesus

(Jn 6: 41), do the same thing that the Israelites in the desert, who doubted the presence of God in their long journey (Ex 16: 2; 17: 3; Num 11: 1). The Jews doubted the presence of God in Jesus of Nazareth (Jn 6: 42). Jesus is the true Manna who gives us eternal life.

Psalm 85 (84)

Justice and Peace Embrace One Another.

Yahweh, You are gracious to Your land, You bring back the captives of Jacob, You take away the guilt of Your people, You blot out all their sins. You retract all Your anger, you renounce the heat of your fury.

Bring us back, God our Savior, appease Your indignation against us! Will You be angry with us for ever? Will You prolong your wrath age after age? Will You not give us life again, for Your people to rejoice in You? Show us, Lord, Your faithful love, grant us Your saving help.

I am listening. What is God's message? Yahweh's message is peace for His people, for His faithful, if only they renounce their folly. His saving help is near for those who fear Him, His glory will dwell in our land. Faithful love and loyalty join together, saving justice and peace embrace. Loyalty will spring up from the earth, and justice will lean down from heaven.

Yahweh will Himself give prosperity, and our soil will yield its harvest. Justice will walk before Him, treading out a path.

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.

Monday, June 12, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of wisdom and love, source of all good, send your Spirit to teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way of 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.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 1-12

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went onto the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them:

How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance.

Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness: they shall have their fill.

Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them.

Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognized as children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.

Reflection

From today, beginning of the 10th week of Ordinary Time, up to the end of the 21st Week of Ordinary time, the daily Gospels are taken from the Gospel of Matthew. Starting from the beginning of the 22nd week of Ordinary Time, up to the end of the Liturgical Year, the Gospels are taken from the Gospel of Luke.

- In Matthew's Gospel written for the communities of the converted Jews of Galilee and Syria, Jesus is presented as the New Moses, the new legislator. In the Old Testament the Law of Moses was codified in five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Imitating the ancient model, Matthew presents the New Law in five great discourses spread over in the Gospel:
 - a) the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5: 1 to 7: 29);
 - b) the Discourse on the Mission (Mt 10: 1-42);
 - c) The Discourse of the Parables (Mt 13: 1-52);
 - d) The Discourse of the Community (Mt 18: 1-35);
 - e) The Discourse of the Future of the Kingdom (Mt 24: 1 to 25: 46).

The narrative parts, which have been put in among the five Discourses, describe the practice of Jesus and show how He observed the New Law and incarnated it in his life.

- Matthew 5: 1-2: The solemn announcement of the New Law. In agreement with the context of the Gospel of Matthew, in the moment when Jesus pronounces the Discourse on the Mountain, there were only four disciples with him (cf. Mt 4: 18-22). Few people. But an immense multitude was behind him (Mt 4: 25). In the Old Testament, Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Law of God. As it happened to Moses, Jesus went up to the Mountain, and seeing the crowd, he proclaimed the New Law. The solemn way in which Matthew introduces the proclamation of the New Law is significant: "Seeing the crowds, he went onto the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: How blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of Heaven is theirs." The eight Beatitudes open in a solemn way the "Discourse on the Mountain" – the sermon on the Mountain. In them Jesus defines who can be considered blessed, who can enter into the Kingdom. There are eight categories of persons, eight entrance doors to the Kingdom, for the community. There are no other entrances! Anyone

who wants to enter into the Kingdom should identify himself with at least one of these eight categories.

- Matthew 5: 3: Blessed are the poor in spirit. Jesus acknowledges the richness and the value of the poor (Mt 11: 25-26). He defines his own mission in these words: "to proclaim the Good News to the poor" (Lk 4: 18). He himself lives poorly. He possesses nothing for himself, not even a stone where to rest his head (Mt 8: 20). And to anyone who wants to follow him, he orders to choose: God or money! (Mt 6: 24). In Luke's Gospel it is said: "Blessed are you who are poor!" (Lk 6: 20). But who is poor in spirit? It is the poor person who has the same spirit that animated Jesus. It is not the rich person, neither the poor person who has the mentality of a rich person. But rather it is the poor person who acts as Jesus, he thinks of the poor and recognizes the value in him. It is the poor person who says: "I think that the world will be better when the little one who suffers thinks of the least."
 - Blessed the poor in spirit => for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven
 - Blessed the meek => they shall have the earth as inheritance
 - Blessed those who mourn => they will be consoled
 - Blessed those who hunger and thirst for justice => they shall have their fill
 - Blessed are the merciful => they shall have mercy shown them
 - Blessed are the pure in heart => they shall see God
 - Blessed are the peacemakers => they shall be recognized children of God
 - Blessed those persecuted in the cause of justice => theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Matthew 5: 4-9: The new project of life. Every time that in the Bible they try to renew the Covenant, they begin by re-establishing the rights of the poor and of the excluded. Without this, the Covenant cannot be renewed! This is the way the Prophets did, this is how Jesus did. In the Beatitudes, he announces the new Project of God which accepts the poor and the excluded. It denounces the system which excludes the poor and which persecutes those who fight for justice. The first category of the "poor in spirit" and the last category of those "persecuted for the cause of justice" receive the same promise of the Kingdom of Heaven. And they receive it beginning now, in the present, because Jesus says: "theirs **is** the Kingdom!" The Kingdom is already present in their life. Between the first and the last category, there are six other categories which receive the promise of the Kingdom. In them there is the new project of life which wants to reconstruct life totally through a new type of relationship: with **material goods** (the first two); with **persons among themselves** (2nd two); with **God** (3rd two). The Christian community should be an example of this Kingdom, a place where the Kingdom begins and takes shape, form beginning now. The three duos:
 - First duo: the meek and those who mourn: **the meek** are those poor of whom Psalm 37 speaks. They have been deprived of their land and they will inherit it again (Ps 37: 11; cf. Ps 37: 22, 29, 34). Those who mourn are those who weep in the face of injustices in the world and in people (cf. Ps 119: 136; Ez 9: 4; Tb 13: 16; 2 P 2: 7). These two Beatitudes want to reconstruct the relationship with material goods: the possession of the land and of the reconciled world.
 - Second duo: those who hunger and thirst for justice and the merciful: Those who are **hungry and thirsty for justice** are those who desire to renew human living together, in such a way that once again it may be according to the

demands of justice. The **merciful** are those who feel in their heart the misery of others because they want to eliminate the inequality between brothers and sisters. These two Beatitudes want to reconstruct the relationship among persons through the practice of justice and solidarity.

- Third duo: The pure in heart and the peacemakers: The **pure in heart** are those who have a contemplative look which allows them to perceive the presence of God in everything. Those **who promote peace, the peacemakers**, will be called children of God, because they make an effort so that a new experience of God can penetrate in everything and can integrate all things. These two Beatitudes want to build up the relationship with God: to see the presence of God which acts in everything and be called son and daughter of God.
- Matthew 5: 10-12: The persecuted for the cause of justice and of the Gospel. The Beatitudes say exactly the contrary of what society in which we live says. In fact, in society, those who are persecuted for the cause of justice are considered as unhappy, wretched persons. The poor is unhappy. Blessed is the one who has money and can go to the Supermarket and spend as he wishes. Blessed is the one who is hungry for power. The unhappy and wretched are the poor, those who weep! In television, the novels diffuse this myth of the happy and fulfilled person. And without being aware, the novels become the model of life for many of us. Is there still place in our society for these words of Jesus: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice and of the Gospel? Blessed are the poor! Blessed are those who weep!"? And according to me, being a Christian, in fact, who is blessed?

Personal Questions

- We all want to be happy. All of us! But are we truly happy? Why yes? Why no? How can we understand that a person can be poor and happy at the same time?
- In which moments of your life have you felt truly happy? Was it a happiness like the one proclaimed by Jesus in the Beatitudes, or was it of another type?

Concluding Prayer

I lift up my eyes to the mountains; where is my help to come from?

My help comes from Yahweh who made heaven and earth. (Ps 121: 1-2)

Tuesday, June 13, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of wisdom and love, source of all good, send your Spirit to teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way of 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.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 13-16

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You are salt for the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing and can only be thrown out to be trampled under people's feet.

'You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lampstand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.

Reflection

Yesterday, in meditating on the Beatitudes, we passed through the door of entry of the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5: 1-12). Today in the Gospel we receive an important instruction on the mission of the Community. It should be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5: 13-16). Salt does not exist for itself, but to give flavor to the food. Light does not exist for itself, but for the service of people. At the time when Matthew wrote his Gospel, this mission was very difficult for the communities of the converted Jews. In spite that they were living in faithful observance of the Law of Moses, they were expelled from the Synagogues, cut away from their Jewish past. Regarding this, among the converted pagans, some said: "After the coming of Jesus, the Law of Moses has become obsolete." All this caused tension and uncertainty. The openness of some seemed to be criticism of the observance of others, and vice versa. This conflict brought about a crisis which led many to close in their own position. Some wanted to advance, to go ahead, others wanted to place the light under the table. Many asked themselves: "In last instance, which is our mission?" Recalling and updating the words of Jesus, Matthew tries to help them.

- Matthew 5: 13-16: Salt of the earth. By using images of daily life, with simple and direct words, Jesus makes known which is the mission and the reason for being a Christian community: to be salt. At that time when it was very hot, people and animals needed to consume much salt. The salt, which was delivered by merchants in great blocks in the public square, was consumed by the people. What remained fell to the ground and lost its savor. "It no longer serves for anything, but it is thrown out and trampled under people's feet." Jesus recalls this use in order to clarify for the disciples the mission which they have to carry out.
- Matthew 5: 14-16: Light of the world. The comparison is obvious. Nobody lights a candle and places it under the tub. A city built on the hilltop, cannot be hidden. The community should be light, it should enlighten. It should not be afraid to show the good that it does. It does not do it to make itself seen, but what it does can be seen. The salt does not exist for itself. The light does not exist for itself! This is how the community should be. It cannot remain enclosed in itself. "Your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in Heaven."
- Matthew 5: 17-19: Not one dot, not one little stroke will disappear from the Law. Among the converted Jews there were two tendencies. Some thought that it was not necessary to observe the laws of the Old Testament because we are saved by the faith in Jesus and not by the observance of the Law (Rm 3: 21-26). Others thought that they should continue to observe the laws of the Old Testament (Ac 15: 1-2). In each one of the two tendencies there were some more radical groups. Before this conflict, Matthew tries to find a balance, the equilibrium, over and beyond the two extremes. The community should be the space, where this equilibrium can be

attained and lived. The response given by Jesus continued to be very actual: "I have not come to abolish the law, but to complete it!" The communities cannot be against the Law, nor can they close themselves up in the observance of the law. Like Jesus did, they must advance forward, and show in a practical way that the objective which the law wants to attain in life is the perfect practice of love.

- The different tendencies in the first Christian communities. The plan of salvation has three stages united among themselves from the earth to life:
 - a) the Old Testament: the path of the Hebrew People, orientated, guided by the Law of God.
 - b) The life of Jesus of Nazareth: it renews the Law of Moses starting from his experience of God, Father and Mother.
 - c) The life of the communities: through the spirit of Jesus, they tried to live as Jesus lived it.

The union of these three stages generates the certainty of faith that God is in our midst. The intention to break or weaken the unity of this plan of salvation gave rise to various groups and tendencies in the communities:

- The Pharisees did not recognize Jesus as Messiah and accepted only the Old Testament. In the communities there were some people who sympathized with the thought of the Pharisees (Ac 15: 5).
- Some converted Jews accepted Jesus as Messiah, but they did not accept the liberty of spirit with which the communities lived the presence of the Risen Jesus. (Ac 15: 1).
- Others, both converted Jews and pagans, thought that with Jesus had come the end of the Old Testament. From now on, Jesus alone and the life in the Spirit.
- There were also Christians who lived so fully the life in the liberty of the Spirit, that they no longer looked at the life of Jesus of Nazareth, nor the Old Testament (1Co 12: 3).
- Now the great concern of the Gospel of Matthew is that of showing that the Old Testament, Jesus of Nazareth and the life in the Spirit cannot be separated. The three-form part of the same and only project of God and give us the central certainty of faith: The God of Abraham and of Sarah is present in the midst of the communities by the faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

Personal Questions

- For you, in your life experience, for what does salt serve? Is your community salt? For you, what does light signify in your life? How is your community light?
- How do the people of the neighborhood see your community? Does your community have some attraction for others? Is it a sign? Of what? For whom?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh judiciously guides the humble, instructing the poor in his way.

Kindness unfailing and constancy mark all his paths,

for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. (Ps 25: 9-10)

Wednesday, June 14, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

your prophets remind us in season and out of season of our responsibilities toward you and toward the world of people. When they disturb and upset us, let it be a holy disturbance that makes us restless, eager to do your will and to bring justice and love around us.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 17-19

'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, is to disappear from the Law until all its purpose is achieved.

Therefore, anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of Heaven.

Reflection

Today's Gospel (Mt 5: 17-19) teaches how to observe the law of God in such a way that its practice indicates in what its complete fulfilment consists of (Mt 5: 17-19). Matthew writes to help the communities of the converted Jews to overcome the criticism of the brothers of their own race who accused them saying: You are unfaithful to the Law of Moses." Jesus himself had been accused of infidelity to the Law of God. Matthew has the clarifying response of Jesus concerning his accusers. Thus, he gives some light to help the communities solve their problems.

Using images of daily life, with simple and direct words, Jesus had said that the mission of the community, its reason for being, is that of being salt and light! He had given some advice regarding each one of the two images. Then follow two or three brief verses of today's Gospel.

- Matthew 5: 17-18: Not one dot, nor one stroke is to disappear from the Law. There were several different tendencies in the communities of the first Christians. Some thought that it was not necessary to observe the laws of the Old Testament, because we are saved by faith in Jesus and not by the observance of the Law (Rm 3: 21-26). Others accepted Jesus, the Messiah, but they did not accept the liberty of spirit with which some of the communities lived the presence of Jesus. They thought that being Jews they had to continue to observe the laws of the Old Testament (Acts 15: 1, 5). But there were Christians who lived so fully in the freedom of the Spirit, who no longer looked at the life of Jesus of Nazareth, nor to the Old Testament and they even went so far as to say: "Anathema Jesus!" (1 Co 12: 3). Observing these tensions, Matthew tries to find some balance between both extremes. The community should be a space, where the balance can be attained and lived. The answer given by Jesus

to those who criticized him continued to be actual for the communities: "I have not come to abolish the law, but to complete it!" The communities could not be against the Law, nor could they close up themselves in the observance of the law. Like Jesus, they should advance, and show, in practice, which was the objective which the law wanted to attain in the life of persons, that is, in the perfect practice of love.

- Matthew 5: 19: Not one dot or stroke will disappear from the Law. It is for those who wanted to get rid of all the law that Matthew recalls the other parable of Jesus: "Anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the Kingdom of Heaven." The great concern in Matthew's Gospel is to show that the Old Testament, Jesus of Nazareth and the life in the Spirit cannot be separated. The three of them form part of the same and unique project of God and communicate to us the certainty of faith: The God of Abraham and of Sarah is present in the midst of the community by faith in Jesus of Nazareth who sends us his Spirit.

Personal Questions

- How do I see and live the law of God: as a growing horizon of light or as an imposition which limits my freedom?
- What can we do today for our brothers and sisters who consider all this type of discussion as obsolete and not actual? What can we learn from them?

Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, Jerusalem, Zion, praise your God.

For he gives strength to the bars of your gates, he blesses your children within you. (Ps 145: 12-13)

Thursday, June 15, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of wisdom and love, source of all good, send your Spirit to teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way of 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.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 20-26

Jesus said to his disciples: 'For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven.

'You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You shall not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you, anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court; anyone who calls a brother "Fool" will

answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him "Traitor" will answer for it in hell fire.

So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.

Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. In truth I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.'

Reflection

The text of today's Gospel is placed in a larger unity: Mt 5: 20 to Mt 5: 48. In this Matthew shows us how Jesus interpreted and explained the Law of God. Five times he repeats the phrase: "You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, but I say to you!" (Mt 5: 21, 27, 33, 38, 43). According to some Pharisees, Jesus was eliminating the law. But it was exactly the contrary. He said: "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them" (Mt 5: 17). Before the Law of Moses, Jesus has an attitude of **rupture** and of **continuity**. He breaks away from the mistaken interpretation which was closed up in the prison of the letter, but he affirms categorically the last objective of the law: to attain to the greatest justice, which is Love.

In the communities for which Matthew writes his Gospel there were diverse opinions concerning the Law of Moses. For some, it no longer had any sense, for others it should be observed even up to the minimum details. Because of this there were many conflicts and disputes. Some said of the others that they were stupid and idiot. Matthew tries to help both groups to better understand the true sense of the Law and presents some counsels of Jesus to help them face and overcome the conflicts which arose within the families and the communities.

- Matthew 5: 20: Your justice should surpass that of the Pharisees. This first verse gives the general key to everything which follows in Mt 5: 20-48. The Evangelist indicates to the communities how they should practice a greater justice which surpasses the justice of the Scribes and the Pharisees and which leads to the full observance of the law. Then, after this general key on a greater justice, Matthew quotes five very concrete examples of how to practice the Law, in such a way that its observance leads to the perfect practice of love. In the first example of today's Gospel, Jesus reveals what God wanted in giving Moses the fifth commandment, "Do not kill!"
- Matthew 5: 21-22: Do not kill. "You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, you shall not kill and if anyone does kill, he must answer for it before the court." (Ex. 20: 13). To observe fully this fifth commandment, it is not sufficient to avoid murdering. It is necessary to uproot from within oneself everything which in one way or other can lead to murder, for example, anger, hatred, the desire of vengeance, exploitation, etc. "anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court." That is, anyone who is angry against the brother merits or deserves the same punishment of condemnation by the **court** which, according to the ancient law, was reserved to the murderer! But Jesus goes beyond all this. He wants to uproot the origin of murder: "Anyone who calls a brother 'Fool' will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him 'Traitor' will answer for it in hell fire." In other words, I observe truly the commandment "Not to kill if I succeed to take away from my heart any

sentiment of anger which leads to insult the brother. That is, if I attain the perfection of love.

- Matthew 5: 23-24: The perfect worship wanted by God. "If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering." In order to be accepted by God, and be united to him, it is necessary to be reconciled with the brother, with the sister. Before the destruction of the Temple, in the year 70, when the Christians still participated in the pilgrimages to Jerusalem to take their offering to the altar of the Temple, they always remembered this phrase of Jesus. Now in the years 80's, in the moment in which Matthew writes, the Temple and the Altar no longer existed. The community itself had become the Temple and the Altar of God (1 Co 3: 16).
- Matthew 5: 25-26: To be reconciled. One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists the most is reconciliation, because in the communities of that time there were many tensions among the groups which had different tendencies, without any dialogue. Nobody wanted to give in or cede before the other. Matthew enlightens this situation with words of Jesus on reconciliation which demand acceptance and understanding. Because the only sin which God does not forgive is our lack of forgiveness of others (Mt 6: 14). For this reason, he seeks reconciliation first, before it is too late.
- The ideal of greatest justice. Five times, Jesus quotes a commandment or a usage of the ancient law: Do not kill. (Mt 5: 21), Do not commit adultery (Mt 5: 27), Do not bear false witness (Mt 5: 33), Eye for eye, tooth for tooth 5: 38), To love neighbor and to hate the enemy (Mt 5: 43). And five times he criticizes the ancient way of observing these commandments and he indicates a new way to attain justice, the objective of the law (Mt 5: 22-26; 5: 28-32; 5: 34-37; 5: 39-42; 5: 44-48). The word **Justice** is present seven times in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 3: 15; 5: 6, 10, 20; 6: 1, 33; 21: 32). The religious ideal of the Jews of that time was "to be just before God." The Pharisees taught: "A person attains justice before God when he/she observes all the norms of the Law in all the details!" This teaching resulted in a legalistic oppression and produced much anguish in persons of good will, because it was very difficult for a person to be able to observe all the norms (Rm 7: 21-24). This is why Matthew takes some words of Jesus on justice showing that this leads to surpass the justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5: 20). For Jesus, justice does not come from what I do for God observing the law, but from what God does for me, accepting me with love, like a son, like a daughter. The new ideal that Jesus proposes is this: "To be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect!" (Mt 5: 48). That means: I will be just before God, if I try to accept and to forgive persons as God accepts and forgives me gratuitously in spite of my many defects and sins.

Personal Questions

- Which are the more frequent conflicts in my family? And in our community? Is reconciliation easy in the family and in the community? Yes or no? Why?
- The advice of Jesus, how can this help me to improve relationships in the sphere of our family and of the community?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, you visit the earth and make it fruitful, you fill it with riches;
the river of God brims over with water, you provide the grain. (Ps 65: 9)

Friday, June 16, 2023

Sacred Heart of Jesus

Opening prayer

Holy God,

we often turn our hearts into houses of pride and greed rather than into homes of love and goodness where You can feel at home.

Destroy the temple of sin in us, drive out all evil from our hearts and make us living stones of a community in which can live and reign Your Son Jesus Christ, our living Lord for ever and ever.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 25-30

At that time Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased You to do.

Everything has been entrusted to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

'Come to Me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder My yoke and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, My yoke is easy and My burden light.'

Reflection

Today we celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the Gospel we will listen to the invitation of Jesus: "Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart." The Gospel shows the tenderness with which Jesus welcomes, accepts the little ones. He wanted the poor to find rest and peace in Him.

The context of chapters 11 and 12 of Matthew. In this context is stressed and made evident the fact that the poor are the only ones to understand and to accept the wisdom of the Kingdom. Many people did not understand Jesus' preference for the poor and the excluded.

- a) John the Baptist, who looked at Jesus with the eyes of the past, had doubts (Mt 11: 1-15)
- b) The people, who looked at Jesus with a purpose of their own interests, were not able to understand him (Mt 11: 16-19).
- c) The great cities around the lake, which listened to Jesus' preaching and saw the miracles, did not want to open themselves to His message (Mt 11: 20-24).
- d) The wise and the Doctors, who judged everything according to their own

science, were not able to understand Jesus' preaching (Mt 11: 25).

- e) Not even his relatives understood Him (Mt 12: 46-50).
 - f) Only the little ones understood Him and accepted the Good News of the Kingdom (Mt 11: 25-30).
 - g) The others want sacrifice, but Jesus wants mercy (Mt 12: 1-8).
 - h) The reaction against Jesus impels the Pharisees to want to kill Him (Mt 12: 9-14).
 - i) They said that Jesus was Beelzebul (Mt 12: 22-32).
 - j) But Jesus did not draw back. He continues to assume the mission of Servant, as described in the prophecies (Mt 12: 15-21). This is why He was persecuted and condemned to death.
- Matthew 11: 25-26: Only the little ones understand and accept the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus addresses a prayer to the Father: "I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased You to do!" The wise, the doctors of that time, had created a series of laws which they imposed upon the people in the name of God. They thought that God demanded this observance from the people. But the Law of love, brought by Jesus, said the contrary. What is important is not what we do for God, but rather what God, in His great love, does for us! People understood Jesus' words and were filled with joy. The wise thought that Jesus was not right. They could not understand this teaching which modified the relationship of the people of God.
 - Matthew 11: 27: The origin of the New Law: The Son knows the Father. Jesus, the Son, knows the Father. He knows what the Father wanted when, centuries before, He gave the Law to Moses. What the Father wants to tell us He handed to Jesus, and Jesus revealed it to the little ones, because they opened themselves to His message. Today, also, Jesus continues to teach many things to the poor and to the little ones. The wise and the intelligent do well if they become pupils of the little ones!
 - Matthew 11: 28-30: "Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest." Jesus invites all those who are tired to find rest in Him. These are the people who are tired under the weight of the impositions and the observances which the law of purity demanded. And He says, "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." Many times this sentence has been manipulated to ask people to submit themselves, to be passive. What Jesus wants to say is the contrary. He asks people to leave aside the professors of religion of that time, to rest and to begin to learn from Him, from Jesus, who is "gentle and humble of heart." Jesus does not do like the Scribes take pride in their own science, but He is like the people who live humiliated and exploited. Jesus, the new teacher, knows from experience what happens in the heart of the people and how much the people suffer.
 - The invitation of divine wisdom to all those who seek it. Jesus invites all those who are oppressed under the weight of the observance of the law to find rest in Him, because He is gentle and humble of heart, capable of relieving and consoling the people who suffer, who feel tired and depressed (Mt 11: 25-30). In this invitation resound the beautiful words of Isaiah who consoled the people who lived in exile (Isa 55: 1-3). This invitation is bound to divine wisdom, which invites people to the encounter with her (Wis 24: 19), saying, "her ways are filled with delight; her paths all lead to contentment" (Prov 3:17). And He adds: "Wisdom brings up her own children

and cares for those who seek her. Whoever loves her, loves life, those who seek her early will be filled with joy” (Sir 4: 11-12). This invitation reveals a very important characteristic of the feminine face of God: tenderness and acceptance which consoles, which gives life to persons and leads them to feel well. Jesus is defense, the protection and the maternal womb which the Father offers to people who are tired (cfr. Isa 66: 10-13).

Personal Questions

- What produces tension in you and what gives you peace? For you, to live in community, is it a source of tension or of peace?
- How can Jesus’ words help our community to be a place of rest for our life?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is tenderness and pity, slow to anger and rich in faithful love;
His indignation does not last for ever, nor His resentment remain for all time. (Ps 103: 8-9)

Saturday, June 17, 2023

Immaculate Heart of Mary

Opening Prayer

O God, who has prepared a worthy dwelling place of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, through her intercession grant that we, your faithful, may be a living temple of Your glory. We ask this, through Christ our Lord ...

Gospel Reading – Luke 2: 41-51

Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting amid the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety."

And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

Meditation

- "Every year the feast of Passover." These words help us to define the spiritual context in which the passage takes place and thus become, for us, the gateway to enter the mystery of His encounter with the Lord and His work of grace and mercy upon us. Together with Mary and Joseph, with Jesus, we too can live the gift of a new Passover, a "crossing," an excess, a spiritual movement that takes us "beyond." The passage is clear and strong. What the Virgin Mary intuits in this experience with her son Jesus is the step from the street to the heart of the dispersion to interiority, from anguish to peace.

All that remains is to journey down the street and join the feast, the feast of pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover.

- "Their way" This is only the first of a series of verbs of motion, which follow one another along the verses of this passage: "they went," "return to the path," "group" (from the Latin cum-ire, "walking together"); "journey"; "back"; "went down with them," "arrive."

In parallel with this great physical movement, there is also a deep spiritual movement characterized by the verb "look," expressed over and over again: "they began to look for," "returned in search of Him," "looking for You anxiously," "why you sought Me?"

This tells us that the journey, the true path to which the Lord's word calls us, is not a physical journey, but a journey in search of Jesus, of His presence in our lives. And this is the direction in which we move, together with Mary and Joseph.

- "They began to look for Him" Here we can identify the core of the text, its fundamental message. It is important that we open ourselves to a deeper understanding of this reality. Also because Luke uses two different verbs to express the "search," the first indicating accurate, repeated, careful, as some of those who browse, from bottom to top, and second which indicates the search for something that is lost and you want to find. Jesus is the object of all this movement and deep inner being, is the object of desire, the longing of the heart.
- "Distressed" It is great to see how Mary opens her heart to Jesus, telling Him what she felt within herself. She is not afraid to tell the truth to her Son, to tell Him the feelings and experiences that they felt deeply. But what is this anguish, this pain that you saw in Mary and Joseph in search of Jesus, who went missing?

These 3 days of looking, the journey to Jerusalem, and not understanding His words afterward, may also be considered a prefiguring the narrative of His death and Resurrection.

- "Kept all these sayings in her heart" Mary does not understand the words of Jesus, the mystery of His life and His mission and for this remains silent, accepts, makes space, keeps them in her heart. This is the true path of growth in faith and relationship with the Lord.

Once again, Luke gives us a very beautiful and meaningful word which means literally "keeping through." That is the spiritual operation that Mary carries within herself and that give us as a precious gift, a legacy for our good relationship with the Lord, so that it can take us into a journey deep, deep, that does not stop at the surface, or half, which is not coming back, but it goes deep down. Mary takes us by the hand and guides us through all her heart, all her feelings, her experiences. And there, in the secrecy of ourselves, in our hearts, we can learn to find the Lord Jesus, whom perhaps we had lost.

There is also a loss for Mary and Joseph. Up until now, Joseph was identified with "my father." Now it is changed. He is not just her son, or their son, but son of our

Heavenly Father. In all this is another sorrow, one of parents, that they do not understand their child: "But they did not understand what He said to them."

Some Questions

- * There are many foreshadows of the Passion in this passage. Can I identify the depth of things symbolized here?
- Do I feel like I am seeking the Lord? Or does it not seem important? Is it an active part of my life every day?
- Has anxiety, spoken by Mary, ever been my companion on the journey of my life? Maybe, thanks to this passage, I discovered that the anxiety is caused by the absence of the Lord, the loss of God. Does this passage help me, give me a light and a key for my life?
As a parent (past, future, or present), do I see a relationship and partnership with God the Father in raising my children, and do I give room for God to be an active participant in this? Am I a wall between God and them, or am I translator, or do I allow them to build their relationship at the same time?

Closing Prayer

1 Samuel 2: 1-8

And as she worshiped the LORD, she said: "My heart exults in the LORD, my horn is exalted in my God. I have swallowed up my enemies; I rejoice in my victory. There is no Holy One like the LORD; there is no Rock like our God.

"Speak boastfully no longer, nor let arrogance issue from your mouths. For an all-knowing God is the LORD, a God who judges deeds. The bows of the mighty are broken, while the tottering gird on strength. The well-fed hire themselves out for bread, while the hungry batten on spoil. The barren wife bears seven sons, while the mother of many languishes.

The LORD puts to death and gives life; He casts down to the nether world; He raises up again. The LORD makes poor and makes rich, He humbles, He also exalts. He raises the needy from the dust; from the ash heap He lifts up the poor, To seat them with nobles and make a glorious throne their heritage.

For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S,
and He has set the world upon them.

Sunday, June 18, 2023

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Our Father, your Word dwells in the world through the coming of Jesus your Son. He has proclaimed it to us by his teachings, but above all by his works and the gift of his life. The Word became flesh. Before leaving us, he promised us the help of the Spirit so that we could remember all that he had said and understand more deeply the meaning hidden in our hearts hardened by sin. Give us now your revealing and consoling Spirit. May our hearts be inflamed with his presence and your Word become a living and effective provocation to serve you in our brothers and sisters with joy.

Gospel Reading – Mt 9: 36-10: 8

The Context of the Gospel Passage

We are at the beginning of the second of the five "discourses" of Matthew, that of the mission. Jesus, the new Moses, continues to bring to fulfillment (Mt 5: 17) the old law by sending the citizens of the new Kingdom not to judge (Jn 3: 17f; Mt 11: 4-5), but to free his people from all kinds of ailments and diseases as he does. This sending on mission takes place during the public life of Jesus. There will be another, solemn and universal, after the resurrection (Mt 28: 18-20). The twelve apostles, in continuity and rupture with the twelve tribes of Israel, are called to gather the hopes of the old Israel that resembles a disoriented people, like a flock without a shepherd (Mt 9: 36).

A Possible Division of the Passage:

- Matthew 9: 36-38: Narrative introduction
- Matthew 10: 1: The transmission of power
- Matthew 10: 2-4: The names of the Twelve
- Matthew 10: 5-8: Instruction and sending out

The Text:

And when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

And he called his twelve disciples to him, and gave them power over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.

2 The names of the twelve Apostles are these:

Simon first, who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the Alphean, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

5 These twelve Jesus sent out, after giving them these instructions: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles or enter a city of Samaritans; 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 Go and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received it; freely give it.

Silence

Let us welcome the resonance of the Word in us.

Some Questions

- Has the sight of people ever brought up in me a particular feeling?
- Do I remember a moment of compassion that I have had, in what circumstances, have I met someone who has had a great passion for humanity, have I asked God to make me his envoy, to be his apostle? What is the mission entrusted by Jesus to his disciples? Mission impossible, because it is gratuitous?

A Key to the Reading

Jesus, after having proposed his new alternative program to the current mentality (Mt 5), after having announced the overcoming of the law and observance with the greater demands of love (Mt 6-7), after having given testimony with concrete gestures of liberation of what he had announced (Mt 8-9), calls his disciples and sends them to the people giving them his same powers (Mt 10). The community is called to prolong and extend his liberating and salvific restorative action. The new people of God, on the foundation of the twelve apostles, is a priestly, royal, prophetic people (1 Pt 2: 4-9) called to collaborate with Jesus.

Meditation

Going Deeper into Some Particulars.

- **9: 36** And when he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion, because they were oppressed and afflicted, like sheep without a shepherd.
In the introduction, starting from verse 35, the public ministry of Jesus is summarized. It repeats in part 4: 23-25, the introduction to the discourse on the mountain. Our fragment starts from the observation that great crowds followed him. People without a shepherd (1 Kings 22: 17), tired of hearing words without following them in deeds, dejected by the countless observances, oppressed by the leaders who impose incomprehensible laws on them (Mt 23: 1-4). The compassion that Jesus experiences (Mt 15: 30; Lk 9: 11; Jn 6: 5) for the hungry (Mk 6-34) is here directed to the "poor unlearned of the field," cursed by the Pharisees (Jn 7: 49). There is no one who loves them and who looks for them as a good shepherd (Jn 10).
- **9: 37** Then he says to his disciples: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest!"
The mission is compared to the harvest (cf. Lk 10: 2-3; Jn 4: 35-38). There are many people ready to respond to the Gospel, many who are waiting for a word of life. The messengers of peace are always few, the multitude is immense. The exhortation to prayer comes to mean that God is at the origin of the mission, He is responsible for the harvest, to Him we must turn with prayer. The Holy Spirit is already at work, in fact the harvest is available. The harvest is a term originally linked to the final judgment (Is 27: 12; Hos 6: 11; Joel 3: 13). John the Baptist believed that the time of judgment had come (Mt 3: 12). But here it is not the angels who are called to carry out this work, but men to save other men from judgment and not to judge them. We live in a time of mercy; the judgment has not yet come.
- **10:1** And he called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

This calling of the twelve in Matthew is not as in Mark 3: 13-15 or Luke 6: 13. It is not the result of a selection, but of the commission entrusted to them. It is a group already formed (Mt 4: 18; 8: 19-22) that now receives a mandate. The number twelve refers to the twelve tribes of Israel. In order to announce the new law of the new Moses, there is need of a new people that welcomes the word of the new Moses (Jesus). In Sacred Scripture the number twelve indicates, above all, the people of God in its totality. Against the background of the people of the twelve tribes we must place the call of "the twelve" (Mk 9: 35; 10: 32 par.; Jn 6: 70; 20: 24; 1Cor 15: 5 and elsewhere) on the part of Jesus during his ministry in Galilee.

The number twelve is not to be understood in a restrictive sense, but in the sense of excellence. The mission of the disciples is placed in close parallel with the mission of Jesus. The dominant idea is that the ministry of the apostles is the prolongation of that of Jesus. The disciples are given the same "power" that Jesus had (9:6-8; 7:29; 8:9) and the same healing work (4: 23; 9: 35). It is not about a power to guide, to command, but about what is needed to carry out the mission entrusted to them, to serve humanity. The answer is here before the resurrection. The term "apostle" is found only in Matthew, elsewhere it speaks of disciples (11: 1; 20: 17, 26: 14, 20, 20, 47). It is not used as in Luke and Paul to indicate a commission, but in the etymological sense as "commanded" "sent." Therefore, it can be understood as an invitation addressed to all the new Israel through the twelve, pillars of the new people of the new law, that of love. The community of converted Jews to whom Matthew was addressing himself saw here the beginning of the new Israel, the Church.

Continuity and break with the synagogue. 10:2 The names of the twelve Apostles are these: first Simon, called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the Zebedee and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the publican; James the Alphean and Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite and Judas the Iscariot, who betrayed him.

The various lists of the twelve (Mk 3: 16-19; Lk 6: 13-16; Acts 1-13) always place Peter first and Judas last. The names have few annotations that vary in the different lists. It is necessary to note the two pairs of brothers (Simon-Andrew and James-John) as indicating the fraternity as the foundation of the new community. Diversity: a publican, a Canaanite, an Iscariot who will betray him. No great people, nor illustrious, nor trustworthy. The call comes from a free choice of Jesus and not from the merits or the importance of the persons, so that in their weakness the power of God is revealed (1 Cor 27-29).

- **10: 5** These twelve Jesus sent out, after giving them these instructions: "Do not go the way of the Gentiles or enter a Samaritan city; 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 Go and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received it; freely give it.

The instruction for the mission, brought here only in part, is completed at the end of verse 16. Verses 5-8 are exclusive to Matthew, except for the command to proclaim that the kingdom is near (Lk 10: 9, 11). The limitation of the confines of the mission in this context before the resurrection is not in contradiction with Mt 24: 25, after the resurrection, in which it is said to go to the whole world. It underlines the priority to be given to the house of Israel. An interest for "the lost sheep" (Ez 34: 1-16; Is 53-16) first of all and then for those "unknown" (the Gentiles). Matthew highlights God's love for the people of Israel. The mandate entrusted to the apostles is very committed: heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons. Should it be understood in a metaphorical sense? Certainly there are illnesses and deaths that are spiritually no less easy to cure and revive than physical ones; there are also those possessed

by destructive ideologies and mentalities. We must remember that it is Jesus who sends, that nothing is impossible for him: "Believe me: I am in the Father and the Father in me; but believe it by the same works. Truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater works than these, because I go to the Father" (Jn 14: 11-12). John Paul II of venerable memory wrote in the encyclical *Redemptoris missio*: "Liberation and salvation, the gates of the kingdom of God, reach the human person in both its physical and spiritual dimensions" (RM 14).

Mission is therefore made up of preaching and healing, proclamation and human promotion, the coming of the kingdom together with the struggle for justice and peace.

The mission therefore cannot be anything but gratuitous, it does not belong to those who are sent. It cannot be enjoyed for one's own material advantage, thus putting into action the spirit of the beatitudes (Mt 6: 25-34).

Prayer with Psalm 100

Shout to Yahweh, all the earth,

serve Yahweh with gladness, come to him with rejoicing!

Know that Yahweh is God, he has made us, and we are his, his people and the flock of his pasture.

Enter into his gates giving thanks, into his courts singing praises, give thanks to him, bless his name.

For Yahweh is good and his love endures forever, his faithfulness endures from age to age.

Contemplación

O Father, you have made of us a prophetic and priestly people, called to be a visible sign of the new reality of your kingdom; grant that we may live in full communion with you in the sacrifice of praise and in service to our brothers and sisters, so that we may become missionaries and witnesses to the Gospel. Make your compassion our compassion, your missionary urgency our urgency, yes Lord, send me!

Monday, June 19, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

our hope and our strength, without you we falter.

Help us to follow Christ

and to live according to your will.

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 38-42

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer no resistance to the wicked. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if someone wishes to go to law with you to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel forms part of a small literary unit which goes from Mt 5: 17 to Mt 5: 48, in which is described how to pass from the ancient justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5: 20) to the new justice of the Kingdom of God (Mt 5: 48). It describes how to go up to the Mountain of the Beatitudes, from where Jesus announces the new Law of Love. The great desire of the Pharisees was to live in justice, to be just before God. And this is the desire of all of us. Just is the one who succeeds to live where God wants him/her to live. The Pharisees tried to attain justice through the strict observance of the Law. They thought that with their own effort they could succeed in being where God wanted them to be. Jesus takes a stand concerning this practice and announces the new justice which should exceed, surpass the justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5, 20). In today's Gospel we are reaching almost the summit of the mountain. Only a little is lacking. The summit is described in one phrase: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5: 48), on which we will meditate in tomorrow's Gospel. Let us look closely at this last degree which is still lacking to reach the summit of the Mountain, of which Saint John of the Cross says: "Here reign silence and love."

- Matthew 5: 38: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. Jesus quotes a text of the Ancient Law saying: "You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth!" He shortened the text, because the complete text said: "Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, blow for blow" (Ex 21: 23-25). Like in the previous cases, here also Jesus makes a completely new rereading. The principle "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" was already found in the origin of the interpretation which the Scribes made of the law. This principle should be overthrown, because it perverts and destroys the relationship between persons and with God.
- Matthew 5: 39^a: Do not give back evil for evil received. Jesus affirms exactly the contrary: "But I say to you do not offer resistance to the wicked." Before some violence received, our natural reaction is to pay the other one with the same coin. Vengeance asks for "eye for eye, tooth for tooth." Jesus asks to pay back the evil not with evil, but with good. Because if we do not know how to overcome the violence received, the spiral of violence will take up everything and we will not know what to do. Lamech said: For a wound received I will kill a man, and for a scar I would kill a young person. If the vengeance of Cain was worth seven that of Lamech will count for seventy-seven" (Gen 4: 24). And it was precisely because of this terrible act of vengeance that everything ended in the confusion of the Tower of Babel. (Gen 11: 1-9). Faithful to the teaching of Jesus, Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans: "Never pay back evil with evil; let your concern be to do good to all men. Do not allow yourselves to be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good" (Rm 12: 17, 21). To be able to have this attitude is necessary to have much faith in the possibility to recover that the human being has. How can we do this in practice? Jesus offers four concrete examples.
- Matthew 5: 39b-42: the four examples to overcome the spiral of violence. Jesus says: "rather

- (a) if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well;
- (b) if anyone wishes to go to Law with you to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.
- (c) And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him.
- (d) Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away” (Mt 5: 40- 42).

How are these four affirmations to be understood? Jesus himself helps us to understand. When the soldier hit him on the cheek, he did not offer the other cheek. Rather, he reacted with energy: “If there is some offence in what I said, point it out, but if not, why do you strike me?” (Jn 18: 23) Jesus does not teach us to be passive. Saint Paul thinks that paying evil with good “you will make others be ashamed” (Rm 12: 20). This faith in the possibility to recover the human being is possible only beginning from the root which comes from the total gratuity of the creative love which God shows us in the life and the attitudes of Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Have you some time felt within you such a great anger as to want to apply the vengeance “eye for eye, tooth for tooth”? What did you do to overcome this?
- Does life in community, living together, favor today in the Church and in us the creative love which Jesus proposes in today’s Gospel?

Concluding Prayer

Give ear to my words, Yahweh, spare a thought for my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God! To you I pray. (Ps 5: 1-2)

Tuesday, June 20, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength, without you we falter.

Help us to follow Christ
and to live according to your will.

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 43-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have heard how it was said, You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers,

are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we get to the summit of the Mountain of the Beatitudes, where Jesus proclaimed the Law of the Kingdom of God, the ideal of which can be summarized in this lapidarian phrase: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5: 48). Jesus was correcting the Law of God! Five times, one after another, he had already affirmed: "It was said, but I say to you!" (Mt 5: 21, 27, 31, 33, 38). This was a sign of great courage on his part, in public, before all the people gathered there, to correct the most sacred treasure of the people, the origin of their identity, which was the Law of God. Jesus wants to communicate a new way of looking and of practicing the Law of God. The key, so as to be able to get this new look, is the affirmation: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." Never will anyone be able to say: "Today I have been perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect!" We are always below the measure which Jesus has placed before us. Perhaps, because of this, he has placed before us an ideal which is impossible for us mortal beings to attain?

- Matthew 5: 43-45: It was said: You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy. In this phrase Jesus explains the mentality with which the Scribes explained the Law; a mentality which resulted from the divisions among the Jews and the non Jews, between neighbor and non neighbor, between saint and sinner, between the clean and the unclean, etc. Jesus orders to overthrow this pretense, these interested divisions. He orders to overcome divisions. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you! So that you may be children of your Father in Heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike." And from here we draw from the source from which springs the novelty of the Kingdom. This source is proper to God who is recognized as Father, who causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good. Jesus orders that we imitate this God: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (5: 48). And, it is in imitating this God that we can create a just society, radically new.
- Matthew 5: 46-48: Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. Everything is summarized in imitating God: "But I say to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven who causes the sun to rise on the bad as well as on the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? Therefore, you be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5: 43-48). Love is the beginning and the end of everything. There is no greater love than to give one's life for the brother (Jn 15: 13). Jesus imitated the Father and revealed his love. Every gesture, every word of Jesus, from his birth until the hour of his death on the cross, it was an expression of this creative love which does not depend on the gift received, neither does it discriminate the other because of race, sex, religion or social class, but which comes from wishing well in a completely gratuitous way. This was continually growing, from birth until his death on the Cross.
- The full manifestation of the creative love in Jesus. This was when on the Cross he offered forgiveness to the soldier who tortured him and killed him. The soldier, employed by the Empire, placed the wrist of Jesus on the arm of the Cross, placed a nail and began to hammer. He hammered several times. The blood fell flowing down.

The body of Jesus twisted with pain. The mercenary soldier, ignorant of what he was doing and of what was happening around him, continued to hammer as if it was a nail on the wall to hang a picture. At that moment Jesus addresses this prayer to the Father: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing!" (Lk 23: 34).

In spite of all the will of men, the lack of humanity did not succeed to extinguish humanity in Jesus. They take him, they mock him, they spit on his face, they scoff him, they make of him a clown king with a crown of thorns on the head, they scourged him, torture him, make him walk on the streets as if he were a criminal, he has to listen to the insults of the religious authority, on Calvary they leave him completely naked at the sight of all. But the poison of lack of humanity does not succeed to reach the source of humanity which sprang from the Heart of Jesus. The water which sprang from within was stronger than the poison from without, wanting to contaminate everything. Looking at that ignorant and rude soldier, Jesus felt compassion for the soldier and prayed for him and for all: "Father, forgive them!"

And he adds even an excuse: "They are ignorant. They do not know what they are doing!" Before the Father, Jesus is in solidarity with those who torture him and ill treat him. Like the brother who sees his murder brothers before the judge and he, victim of his own brothers, tells the judge: "You know they are my brothers. They are ignorant. Forgive them. They will become better!" It was as if Jesus was afraid that the minimum anger against man could extinguish in him the remaining humanity which still existed. This unbelievable gesture of humanity and of faith in the possibility of recovering that soldier has been the greatest revelation of the love of God. Jesus can die: "It is fulfilled!" And bowing his head he gave up his spirit (Jn 19: 30). In this way he fulfilled the prophecy of the Suffering Servant (Is 53).

Personal Questions

- Which is the most profound reason for the effort which you make to observe God's Law: to merit salvation or to thank for God who in his immense goodness has created you, keeps you alive and saves you?
- What meaning do you give to the phrase: "to be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect?"

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, June 21, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength, without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ

and to live according to your will.

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise, you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven.

So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win human admiration. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'When you are fasting, do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they go about looking unsightly to let people know they are fasting. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put scent on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

Reflection

The Gospel of today continues the meditation on the Sermon on the Mountain. In the previous days we have reflected at length on the message of chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel. In today's Gospel and the following days, we meditate on the message of chapter 6 of this Gospel. The sequence of chapters 5 and 6 can help us to understand it. The passages in italics indicate the text of today's Gospel. The following is the schema:

- Matthew 5: 1-12: The Beatitudes: solemn opening of the New Law
 - Matthew 5: 13-16: The new presence in the world: Salt of the earth and Light of the world
 - Matthew 5: 17-19: The new practice of justice; relationship with the ancient law
 - Matthew 5: 20-48: The new practice of justice: observing the new Law.
 - Matthew 6: 1-4: The new practice of piety: alms
 - Matthew 6: 5-15: The new practice of the works of piety: prayer
 - Matthew 6: 16-18: The new practice of the works of piety: fasting
 - Matthew 6: 19-21: New relationship to material goods: do not accumulate
 - Matthew 6: 22-23: New relationship to material goods: correct vision
 - Matthew 6: 24: New relationship to material goods: God and money
 - Matthew 6: 25-34: New relationship to material goods: abandonment in Providence.
- Today's Gospel treats three themes: alms giving (6: 1-4), prayer (6: 5-6) and fasting (6: 16-18). These are three works of piety of the Jews.

- Matthew 6,1: Be careful not to parade your uprightness to attract attention. Jesus criticizes those who do the good works to be seen by men (Mt 6: 1). Jesus asks to build up interior security not in what we do for God, but in what God does for us. From the advice that he gives there results a new type of relationship with God: "Your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you" (Mt 6: 4). "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Mt 6: 8). "If you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive your failings" (Mt 6: 14). It is a new way which opens itself now to have access to the Heart of God our Father. Jesus does not allow that the practice of justice and of piety be used as a means for self-promotion before God and before the community (Mt 6: 2, 5, 16).
- Matthew 6: 2-4: How to practice almsgiving. To give alms is a way of sharing, very recommended by the first Christians (Ac 2: 44-45; 4: 32-35). The person who practices alms giving and sharing to promote herself before others merits to be excluded from the community, as it happened to Ananias and Saphira (Ac 5: 1-11). Today, in society as well as in the Church, there are persons who make great publicity of the good that they do to others. Jesus asks the contrary: to do good in such a way that the left hand does not know what the right hand does. It is the total detachment and the total gift in total gratuity of the love which believes in God the Father and imitates all that he does.
- Matthew 6: 5-6: How to practice prayer. Prayer places the person in direct relationship with God. Some Pharisees transformed prayer into an occasion to show themselves before others. At that time, when the trumpet sounded in the three moments of prayer, morning, noon, and evening, they should stop in the place where they were to pray. There were people who sought to be in the corners in public places, in such a way that everybody would see that they were praying. Well then, such an attitude perverts our relationship with God. This is false and has no sense. This is why, Jesus says that it is better to close oneself in a room to pray in secret, maintaining the authenticity of the relationship. God sees you even in secret, and he always listens to you. It is a question of a personal prayer, not of a community prayer.
- Matthew 6: 16-18: How to practice fasting. At that time the practice of fasting was accompanied by some very visible external gestures: not to wash one's face, not to comb one's hair, use sober dresses. These were visible signs of fasting. Jesus criticizes this form of fasting and orders to do the contrary, and thus others cannot become aware that you are fasting: bathe, use perfume, and comb your hair well. In this way, only your Father who sees in secret knows that you are fasting and he will reward you.

Personal Questions

- When you pray, how do you live your relationship with God?
- How do you live your relationship with others in the family and in community?

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)

Thursday, June 22, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

our hope and our strength, without you we falter.

Help us to follow Christ

and to live according to your will.

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 6: 7-15

Jesus said to his disciples: 'In your prayers do not babble as the gentiles do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So you should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us. And do not put us to the test, but save us from the Evil One.

'Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the prayer of the Our Father, the Psalm which Jesus has left us. There are two redactions of the Our Father, of Luke (Lk 11: 1-4 and of Matthew (Mt 6: 7-13). The redaction of Luke is briefer. Luke writes for the community coming from paganism. He tries to help the persons who are beginning a path of prayer. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Our Father is found in the part of the Discourse of the Mountain, where Jesus orientates the disciples in the practice of the three works of piety: alms giving (Mt 6: 1-4), prayer (Mt 6: 5-15) and fasting (Mt 6: 26-18). The Our father forms part of a catechesis for the converted Jews. They were used to pray, but they had certain vices which Matthew wanted to correct. In the Our Father, Jesus summarizes all his teaching in seven petitions addressed to the Father. In these seven petitions, he takes the promises of the Old Testament and orders to ask the Father to help us to realize them. The first three refer to our relationship with God. The other four have to do with the community relationship that we have with others.

- Matthew 6: 7-8: The introduction to the Our Father. Jesus criticizes the persons for whom prayer was a repetition of magic formulae, of strong words, addressed to God to oblige him to respond to their petitions and needs. Anyone who prays has to seek, in the first place, the Kingdom, much more than the personal interests. The acceptance of prayer by God does not depend on the repetition of words, but rather on the goodness of God who is Love and Mercy. He wants our good and he knows our needs, even before we pray.

- Matthew 6: 9a: The first words: "Our Father in Heaven!" "Abba, Father, is the name which Jesus uses to address himself to God. It expresses the intimacy that he has with God and manifests the new relationship with God which should characterize the life of people in the Christian communities (Ga 4: 6; Rm 8: 15). Matthew adds to the name of Father the adjective our and the expression in Heaven. The true prayer is a relationship which unites us to the Father, to the brothers and sisters, to nature. Familiarity with God is not intimist but expresses the awareness of belonging to the great human family, in which all persons participate; of all races and of all creeds: Our Father. To pray to the Father is to enter in intimacy with him, it is also to be in harmony with the cry of all the brothers and sisters. It is to seek the Kingdom of God, in the first place. The experience of God the Father is the foundation of the universal fraternity.
- Matthew 6: 9b-10: The three petitions for the cause of God: the Name, the Kingdom, the Will. In the first part of the Our Father, we ask to restore our relationship with God. To do this Jesus asks
 - the sanctification of the Name revealed in Exodus on the occasion of the liberation from Egypt;
 - to ask for the coming of the Kingdom, expected by the people after the fall of the monarchy;
 - to ask for the fulfilment of God's Will, revealed in the Law which was in the center of the Covenant.

The Name, the Kingdom, the Law: are three axis taken from the Old Testament which express how the new relationship with God should be. The three petitions indicate that it is necessary to live in intimacy with the Father, making his Name known, making him loved, doing in such a way that his Kingdom of love and of communion becomes a reality that his Will may be done on earth as it is in Heaven. In heaven, the sun and the stars obey the law of God and create the order of the Universe. The observance of the Law of God "on earth as it is in heaven" should be a source and a mirror of harmony and of well-being for the whole creation. This renewed relationship with God becomes visible only in the renewed relationship among us, which on his part is the object of other four petitions: our daily bread, the forgiveness of debts, not to fall into temptation, to deliver us from evil.

- Matthew 6: 11-13: The four petitions for the brothers: Bread, Forgiveness, Victory, Liberty. In the second part of the Our Father we ask to restore and renew the relationship between persons. The four petitions indicate how the structures of the community and of society should be transformed in such a way that all the children of God may live with equal dignity. The daily bread: "Daily Bread" (Mt 6: 11) recalls the daily manna in the desert (Ex 16: 1-36). The manna was a "test" to see if the people were capable to follow the Law of the Lord (Ex 16: 4), that is, if they were capable to store food only for one day as a sign of faith that Divine Providence passes through the fraternal organization. Jesus invites them to walk toward a new Exodus, toward a new way of fraternal living together which can guarantee bread for all. Forgiveness of debts: the request of "forgiveness of debts" (6: 12) recalls the sabbatical year which obliged creditors to forgive all the debts to the brothers (Dt 15: 1-2). The objective of the sabbatical year and of the jubilee year (Lev 25: 1-22) was to do away with inequalities and to begin anew. How to pray today: "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us"? The rich countries, all of which are Christian, are getting richer, thanks to the external debt. Not to fall into Temptation: the petition "not to fall into temptation" (6: 13) reminds us of the errors committed in the

desert, where the people fell into temptation (Ex 18: 1-7; Nb 20: 1-13; Dt 9: 7-29). To imitate Jesus who was tempted and obtained victory (Mt 4: 1-17). In the desert, the temptation pushed people to follow other paths, to go back, not to undertake the road of liberation and to be demanding on Moses who guided them. Freedom from Evil: evil is the Evil One, Satan, who seeks to deviate and who in many ways, seeks to lead persons not to follow the path of the Kingdom, indicated by Jesus. He tempted Jesus to abandon the Project of the Father and to be the Messiah according to the idea of the Pharisees, the Scribes and other groups. The Evil One takes us away from God and is a reason of scandal. He also entered in Peter (Mt 16: 23) and he also tempted Jesus in the desert. Jesus overcame him. (Mt 4: 1-11).

Personal Questions

- Jesus says "forgive us our debts," but today we say "forgive us our offences," what is easier to forgive offences or to cancel the debts?
- How do you usually pray the Our Father: mechanically or putting all your life and all your efforts in the words you pronounce?

Concluding Prayer

The mountains melt like wax, before the Lord of all the earth.

The heavens proclaim his saving justice, all nations see his glory. (Ps 97: 5-6)

Friday, June 23, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

our hope and our strength, without You we falter. Help us to follow Christ and to live according to Your will.

Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 6: 19-23

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. "The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light; but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness. And if the light in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be."

Reflection

In today's Gospel we continue our reflection on the Sermon on the Mount. The last few days we have reflected on the practice of the three works of piety: almsgiving (Mt 6: 1-

4), prayer (Mt 6: 5-15), and fasting (Mt 6: 16-18). Today's and tomorrow's Gospel presents four recommendations on the relationship with material goods, clearly explaining how to live the poverty of the first Beatitude: (a) not to accumulate (Mt 6: 19-21); (b) to have a correct idea of material goods (Mt 6: 22-23); (c) to not serve two masters (Mt 6: 24); (d) to abandon oneself to Divine Providence (Mt 6: 25-34). Today's Gospel presents the first two recommendations: not to accumulate goods (6:19-21) and not to look at the world with diseased eyes (6: 22-23).

- Matthew 6: 19-21: Do not accumulate treasures on earth. If, for example, today on TV, it is announced that next month sugar and coffee will be lacking in the market, we might all buy the most coffee and sugar we can. We accumulate because we lack trust. During the forty years in the desert, the people were tested to see if they were capable of observing God's Law (Ex 16: 4). The test consisted of this: to see if they were capable of gathering only the necessary manna for a single day and not accumulate for the following day. Jesus says: "Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal. What does it mean to store up treasures in heaven? It is a question of knowing where I place the basis of my existence. If I place it on material goods of this earth, I always run the danger of losing what I have stored up. If I place the basis in God, nobody will be able to destroy it and I will have interior freedom to share with others what I possess. In order that this may be possible and feasible it is important to reach a community life which will favor sharing and reciprocal help, and in which the greatest richness or the treasure is not material riches, but rather the richness or the treasure of fraternal living together born from the certainty brought by Jesus: God is Father and Mother of all. Because there, where your treasure is, is your heart.
- Matthew 6: 22-23: The light of your body is the eye. To understand what Jesus asks it is necessary to have new eyes. Jesus is demanding and asks very much; do not store up (6: 19-21), do not serve God and money together (6: 24), do not worry about what you are to eat or drink (6: 25-34). These demanding recommendations have something to do with that part of human life where people are anguished and worried. It also forms a part of the Sermon on the Mount that is more difficult to understand and practice. This is why Jesus says: "If your eye is diseased" Some translate this as diseased eye and healthy eye. Others translate as mean or poor eye and generous eye. It is the same, in reality, the worse sickness that one can imagine is a person closed up in herself and in her goods and who trusts only worldly things. It is the sickness of being stingy! Anyone who looks at life with this eye lives in sadness and in darkness. The medicine to cure this sickness is conversion, a change of mentality and ideology. To place the basis of life on God allows our look to become generous and life becomes luminous, because it makes sharing and fraternity emerge.
- Jesus wants a radical change. He wants the observance of the Law of the sabbatical year, where it is said that in the community of believers there cannot be poor (Dt 15: 4). Human living together should be organized in such a way that a person should not have to worry about food and drink, about dress and house, about health and education (Mt 6: 25-34). But this is possible if we all seek the kingdom of God and His justice first (Mt 6: 33). The kingdom of God means to permit God to reign: it is to imitate God (Mt 5: 48). The imitation of God leads to a just sharing of goods and of creative love, which brings about a true fraternity. Divine Providence can be mediated by the fraternal organization. It is only in this way that it will be possible to eliminate any worry or concern for tomorrow (Mt 6: 34).

Personal Questions

- We are stewards of what God gives us and He tells us not to store up these goods for ourselves. How do I manage this in real life? What have I stored up? Should I share a little part or everything?
- When I share, or give to others, do I give a little and keep most of it, or give most and keep only what I need for the day?
- In giving, the Church talks of time, talent, and treasure. What would be ways of hoarding these instead of sharing them? Are there other things from God to be given to others? Do I share a little and enjoy the most for myself?

Concluding Prayer

For Yahweh has chosen Zion, He has desired it as a home. Here shall I rest for evermore, here shall I make My home as I have wished. (Ps 132: 13-14)

Saturday, June 24, 2023

Nativity of John the Baptist

Statio

Prayer of Cardinal Mercier to the Holy Spirit

Oh God, who has instructed your faithful, enlightening their hearts with the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us that in the same Spirit we may have the desire to do good and to enjoy always his comfort.

May there be Glory, adoration, love, and blessing to You Eternal Divine Spirit, who has brought to earth for us the Savior of our souls. And may there be glory and honor to His most adorable Heart Who loves us with an infinite love.

Oh Holy Spirit, soul of my soul, I adore You: enlighten me, guide me, strengthen me, console me, teach me what I should do, give me your orders.

I promise to submit myself to all that will happen to me, allowed by You: I ask only that I may know Your Will.

Lectio

Gospel Reading - Luke 1: 57-66, 80

The time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbors and relations heard that the Lord had lavished on her his faithful love, they shared her joy. Now it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother spoke up. 'No,' she said, 'he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'But no one in your family has that name,' and made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him called. The father asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And they were all astonished. At that instant his power of speech returned, and he spoke and praised

God. All their neighbors were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. 'What will this child turn out to be?' they wondered. And indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Meanwhile the child grew up and his spirit grew strong. And he lived in the desert until the day he appeared openly to Israel.

Meditatio

Key to the Reading

This passage of the Gospel forms part of the so-called accounts of the infancy of Jesus. In a particular way this text follows the scene of the Visitation of Mary "in the house of Zechariah" (Lk 1: 40) after the event of the Annunciation of the Angel, the messenger of the new creation.

In fact, the Annunciation inaugurates in a joyful way the fulfilment of God's promise to His People (Lk 1: 26-38). The joy of the new times, which filled Mary, now inundates the heart of Elizabeth. She rejoices with the announcement brought by Mary (Lk 1: 41). Mary, on the other hand, "magnifies the Lord" (Lk 1: 46) because He has worked great things in her, just as He has worked great marvels for His people in need of salvation.

The expression "the time came" reminds us that this reality does not only strike Elizabeth about to give birth but reveals also something of God's project. In fact, Saint Paul tells us that when the completion of the time came, God sent His Only Begotten Son "born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption of sons" of God (Gal 4: 4).

In the Gospel Jesus in fact, speaks about the completion of times, especially in the Gospel of John. Two of these times are the wedding at Cana (Jn 2: 1-12) and the agony on the cross where Jesus exclaims that "all is fulfilled" (Jn 19: 30). In the fulfilment of the times Jesus inaugurates an era of salvation. The birth of John the Baptist inaugurates this time of salvation. In fact, at the arrival of the Messiah he exults and leaps in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth (Lk 1: 44). Later on, he will define himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jesus) who exults and rejoices because of the event of the wedding with the bride, the Church (Jn 3: 29).

The son will not be named as his father Zechariah, but John. Zechariah reminds us that God does not forget His people. In fact, his name means "God remembers." His son will now be called "God remembers," because God's promises were being fulfilled. The prophetic mission of John has to indicate God's mercy. In fact, he will be called Johanan, that is "God is mercy." This mercy is manifested in the visit to the People, precisely "as he had promised by the mouth of his holy prophets of ancient times" (Lk 1: 67-70). Thus, the name indicates the mission of the one about to be born. Zechariah will write the name of his son on a tablet so that all could see with admiration (Lk 1: 63). This tablet is the echo of another inscription, written by Pilate to be fixed on the cross of Jesus. This inscription revealed the identity of the mission of the Crucified: "Jesus, the Nazarene, King of the Jews" (Jn 19: 19). This writing also provoked the admiration of those who were in Jerusalem for the feast.

John is the precursor of Jesus in everything. Already since his birth and childhood he points out to Christ. "Who will this child be? He is "the voice which cries out in the desert" (Jn 1: 23), impelling all to prepare the way of the Lord. He is not the Messiah (Jn 1: 20), but he indicates this with his preaching and above all with his life style of asceticism in the desert. Meanwhile the child grew up and

his spirit grew strong. He lived in the desert until the day he appeared openly to Israel.” (Lk 1: 80).

Questions to Direct the Meditation

- What has struck you in this passage and in the reflection?
- John identifies himself as the friend of the bridegroom. According to you, what is the meaning of this image?
- John the Baptist has always been seen by the Church as its type. He is the one who prepares the way for the Lord. Does this have some relevance for our daily life?

Oratio

Let us bless the Lord together with Zechariah (Lk 1: 68-79)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited his people, he has set them free, and he has established for us a saving power in the House of his servant David, just as he proclaimed, by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times, that he would save us from our enemies and from the hands of all those who hate us, and show faithful love to our ancestors, and so keep in mind his holy covenant.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant us, free from fear, to be delivered from the hands of our enemies, to serve him in holiness and uprightness in his presence, all our days.

And you, little child, you shall be called Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare a way for him, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the faithful love of our God in which the rising Sun has come from on high to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow dark as death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Contemplatio

Let us all together adore the mercy and the goodness of God repeating in silence: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

Sunday, June 25, 2023

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

In the darkness of a starless night, a night of no sense,
you, the Word of life, like lightning in the storm of forgetfulness, entered within the bounds of doubt under cover of the limits of precariousness to hide the light.

Words made of silence and of the ordinary, your human words, heralds of the secrets of the Most High: like hooks cast into the waters of death to find man once more, immersed in his anxious follies, and reclaim him, plundered, through the attractive radiance of forgiveness.

To you, Ocean of Peace and shadow of eternal Glory, I render thanks: Calm waters on my shore that awaits the wave, I wish to seek you!

And may the friendship of the brothers protect me when night falls on my desire for you. Amen.

Reading

The Gospel Text – Mt 10: 26-33

26 'So do not be afraid of them. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. 27 What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. 28 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. 29 Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. 30 Why, every hair on your head has been counted. 31 So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. 32 'So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. 33 But the one who disowns me in the presence of human beings, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.

A Moment of Silence:

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

Meditation

Questions for Reflection:

- There is nothing hidden which will not be revealed: the truth under the veil of silence is spread more than if it is exposed in the avid or greedy hands of men who are deaf to the breath of the Spirit. Where do you place the Word of God that you listen to? In the power of your adventurous thoughts or in the sacrarium of your profound acceptance?
- That which I tell you in the dark, tell it in the daylight: Christ speaks in the dark, in the secret of the heart. To offer his words to the light, these must go through your thought, within your feelings, in your entrails before they come to your lips. The words which you habitually say to others are they words said in the secret of Him or rather syllables of thoughts which just come to mind?
- And do not be afraid of those who kill the body: nothing nor nobody can do you harm if God is with you. They can make you a prisoner, but they cannot take away liberty and dignity from you because these are unseizable by anybody. Fears, worry, suspicions, anxieties... can become a souvenir which is far away. When will you leave all this aside, trusting that God will not abandon you ever and will take care of you?
- Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. God's Providence can be similar to destiny, but it is something different. Sparrows which fall to the ground. It is not God who throws them down, but when they fall the Father is there. It is not God who sends sickness, but when man becomes ill, the Father is there with him. Our things belong to him.

Solitude, which frequently presses on us is not abandonment. Will we look around to encounter the eyes of Christ who lives with us in that moment of desolation?

- If anyone declares himself to be for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father: Give Christ the courage of our faith in him... this is a requirement of life in which God is not an accessory, but daily bread and the identity card of himself. Does this challenge you or does it remain only a hidden desire? Even among the heads or leaders, says John, many believed in him, but did not recognize him openly because of the Pharisees, so as not to be expelled from the Synagogue. Would you risk your name for him?

Key for the Reading:

Do not fear! This is a key word which, repeated three times, gives unity to the passage.

Probably is it a literary unity which joins together four isolated sayings. Faith requires as a basic disposition, not to fear. The themes which emerge:

- public proclamation of the Gospel (vv. 26-27)
- the availability to face martyrdom sacrificing physical life to attain eternal life (v. 28)
- images of trust in Providence (vv. 29-31)
- the courageous profession of faith in Christ (vv. 32-33)

The counter-positions are of a remarkable efficacy: veiled/unveiled, or covered/uncovered, hidden/known, darkness/light, body/soul, acknowledge/deny... which make evident the shore of a life lived evangelically. The veils of knowledge open themselves in the light and on the roofs of the universe the word heard in secret goes forth. The whole man is present to the heart of God, and if the creatures of the earth arouse tenderness, how much more the life of a creature-son. Belonging makes the difference in the witness. One who lives the divine sonship of God cannot deny the paternal roots!

- v. 26. Do not be afraid of them, for everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. That which is covered is not reserved for few but it is simply kept waiting that it be manifested. There is a time to keep hidden and a time to make manifest, as Qohelet would say... to know how to keep the truth in the secret of the days that go by: this is what forges the credibility of the manifestation. A seed cannot be thrown into the air, it is put into the furrow of the heart, it is left to itself while it is transformed in dying, and it is attentively followed until it germinates and comes to light, until the spike will be ripe and ready to be harvested. Every word of God requires that it passes through the furrow of one's own history in order to bear abundant fruit in due time.
- v. 27. What I say to you in the dark, tell it in the daylight, and what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. Jesus speaks in secret; we speak in the light. God speaks, we listen, and we become his mouth for others. The darkness of the listening, of putting it in, of assimilation, precede the dawn of every proclamation. And when from the housetops the good news will be heard, men will be obliged to look up. A treasure of glory is enclosed in every moment of listening, it is a moment of waiting which prepares to the birth of light.
- v. 28. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. One can be afraid of those who

can strike that which is not man in fullness: to stop earthly life is not equal to death. The only really fearful is God. But God also after death preserves the life for man, that is why we should not fear. Whatever can happen, God is with man. This is a certainty which permits us to sail on even in the midst of the most devastating storms, because the treasures of man are taken care of in God, and from the hands of God nobody can snatch the elect.

- v. 29. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Two sparrows, one penny. A minimum value but which is in the thought of the Father. Where life beats, there God is, completely. This attentive care enchants and consoles... and invites to listen to all that vibrates and presents holy images of the Eternal splendour. Two sparrows: two very small creatures of a brief life. The value of things is not given to them because of the greatness or the strength, but from that which animates, that which is "body." Therefore, every space where there is life which accepts the print of the Creator is a place of encounter with Him, it witnesses of his solicitude.
- v. 30. Why every hair on your head has been counted. The solicitude or thoughtfulness of God extends itself even to count the hair on our head. It is absurd, the way the Lord loves! When desolation and abandonment become the words of our today, it will be enough to count some of our hair to remember the presence of God with us. The protection of the Heavenly Father will not be lacking for the disciples of Jesus. The Mystery which embraces all cannot be less towards those who have chosen to follow His Son, leaving the earth of their human securities.
- v. 31. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows! If God uses his thought for two sparrows how much more will he not think of us! Fear disappears before this living image of human and religious sensibility of Christ. God is in favor of man, not against him. And if he keeps silence it is not because of lack of care, but because his thoughts on us have broader perspectives which go beyond the horizons of earthly temporality.
- v. 32. If anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in Heaven. To acknowledge oneself. When you find yourself in a square crowded to the full among unknown faces, you have the experience of being a foreigner. But as soon as you see a familiar face, your heart expands and you make your way until you get close to him. This recognizing others allows to manifest oneself before others and to expose oneself. Christ in the midst of the crowd is the familiar face to recognize him as the Master and Lord of our life. And what fear can we have if we think that he will declare us before his Father in Heaven?
- v. 33. But the one who disowns me in the presence of human beings, I will disown in the presence of my Father in Heaven. Could we think of a revengeful God? this is not a discourse to "put wood into the fire," but a discourse which comes from an existential encounter. Christ will not be able to recognize as his own the one who will have chosen everything outside of him, it is a discourse of fidelity and of respect for the human liberty. God respects the creature to the point of not interfering in the space of his error. The Gospel demands belonging, not words and actions. The heart lives in heaven, when Christ is its beating of life!

Prayer

Psalm 22: 22-31

I shall proclaim your name to my brothers, praise you in full assembly:
'You who fear Yahweh, praise him! All the race of Jacob,
honour him! Revere him, all the race of Israel!'
For he has not despised nor disregarded
the poverty of the poor,
has not turned away his face,
but has listened to the cry for help.
Of you is 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.'
The whole wide world will remember and return to Yahweh,
all the families of nations bow down before him. For to Yahweh, ruler of the nations,
belongs kingly power!
All who prosper on earth will bow before him,
all who go down to the dust will do reverence before him. And those who are dead,
their descendants will serve him,
will proclaim his name to generations still to come;
and these will tell of his saving justice to a people yet unborn:
he has fulfilled it.

Contemplation

Lord, among the veils of what I have received and have not given, may I be able to meditate and to accept everything from you. Let not my proclamation be an unconscious repeater, but rather a word possessed in so far as it has indwelling and digested for a long time. May the beauty of your presence be unveiled to my senses, and in the mystery of your unceasing giving may the veil of the encounter descend bringing you closer. The treasure hidden for centuries is now known, and from darkness to light, the dawn has raised for centuries, in a day without sunset which, shining on that which love has created and the sin being broken, it makes all things new. I will recognize you, my God, before my brothers because it will be impossible for me to hide the lamp that you have lit in my life. Who will give me the words which create me and make of my limitations a marvelous definition of that which I am, I, in particular, like nobody else? Only you, Lord have words of eternal life. And I will eat them and will offer them, at the cost of being devoured with them. It will be sufficient for me to feel that I am a sparrow to find again the hope when the tempest will fall on me, because the pennies that you give for the sparrows are not counted in your knapsack. Amen.

Monday, June 26, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

guide and protector of your people,

grant us an unfailing respect for your name, and keep us always in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 7: 1-5

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; because the judgements you give are the judgements you will get, and the standard you use will be the standard used for you. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the great log in your own? And how dare you say to your brother, "Let me take that splinter out of your eye," when, look, there is a great log in your own?

Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we continue to meditate on the Sermon on the Mountain found in chapters 5 to 7 of the Gospel of Matthew. During the 10th and 11th week we have seen chapters 5 and 6. Beginning today, we will see chapter 7. These three chapters, 5, 6, and 7 offer an idea of how the catechesis was done in the communities of the converted Jews in the second half of the first century in Galilee and in Syria. Matthew unites and organizes the words of Jesus to teach how the new way of living the Law of God should be.

After having explained how to re-establish justice (Mt 5: 17 a 6: 18) and how to restore the order of creation (Mt 6: 19-34), Jesus teaches how the life in community should be (Mt 7: 1-12). At the end he presents some recommendations and final advice (Mt 7: 13-27). Then follows an outline of the entire Sermon on the Mountain:

- Matthew 5: 1-12: The Beatitudes: solemn openness of the New Law.
- Matthew 5: 13-16: The new presence in the world: Salt of the earth and light of the world.
- Matthew 5: 17-19: The new practice of justice: relationship with the ancient law.
- Matthew 5: 20-48: The new practice of justice: observing the new law.
- Matthew 6: 1-4: The new practice of the works of piety: alms giving.
- Matthew 6: 5-15: The new practice of the works of piety: prayer.
- Matthew 6: 16-18: The new practice of the works of piety: fasting.
- Matthew 6: 19-21: The new relationship to material goods: do not store up.
- Matthew 6: 22-23: The new relationship to material goods: a correct vision.
- Matthew 6: 24: The new relationship to material goods: God or money.
- Matthew 6: 25-34: The new relationship to material goods: trust in Providence

- Matthew 7: 1-5: The new community life together: do not judge.
- Matthew 7: 6: The new community life together: do not despise the community
- Matthew 7: 7-11: The new community life: trust in God produces sharing
- Matthew 7: 12: The new community life together: the Golden Rule
- Matthew 7: 13-14: Final recommendations to choose the sure way.
- Matthew 7: 15-20: Final recommendations, the prophet is known by his fruits.
- Matthew 7: 21-23: Final recommendations not only speak but also practice.
- Matthew 7: 24-27: Final recommendations, construct the house on rock

The community lived experience of the Gospel (Mt 7: 1-12) is the touchstone. It is where the seriousness of the commitment is defined. The new proposal of life in community embraces diverse aspects: do not observe the splinter in your brother's eye (Mt 7: 1-5), do not throw your pearls in front of pigs (Mt 7: 6), do not be afraid to ask God for things (Mt 7: 7-11). These advices reach their summit in the Golden Rule: Always treat others as you would like them to treat you (Mt 7: 12). The Gospel of today presents the first part: Matthew 7: 1-5.

- Matthew 7: 1-2: Do not judge and you will not be judged. The first condition for a good life together in community is not to judge the brother or the sister, that is, to eliminate the preconceptions which prevent a transparent community life. What does this mean concretely? John's Gospel gives an example of how Jesus lived in community with the disciples. Jesus says: "I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father" (Jn 15: 15). Jesus is an open book for his companions. This transparency comes from his total trust in the brothers and sisters and has its origin in his intimacy with the Father who gives him the force of opening himself up totally to others. Anyone who lives in this way with his brothers and sisters accepts others as they are, without any preconceptions, without previously imposing any conditions, without judging. Mutual acceptance without any pretension and with total transparency! This is the ideal of the new community life, which has come from the Good News which Jesus has brought to us: God is Father and Mother and, therefore, we are all brothers and sisters. It is a difficult ideal but a very beautiful and attractive as the other one: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.
- Matthew 7: 3-5: You observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the great log in your own. Immediately Jesus gives an example: Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye, and never notice the great log in your own? And how dare you say to your brother, 'Let me take that splinter out of your eye, when look, there is a great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.'" When hearing this phrase, we usually think of the Pharisees who despised the people, considering them ignorant and they considered themselves better than others (cf. Jn 7: 49; 9: 34). In reality, the phrase of Jesus serves for all of us. For example, today many of us Catholics are less faithful to the Gospel than the non-Catholics. We observe the splinter in the eye of our brothers and we do not see the big log of collective powerful pride in our own eyes. This log causes many persons today to have much difficulty to believe in the Good News of Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Do not judge others and eliminate all preconceptions: which is my personal experience on this point?
- Splinter and log: which is the log in me which makes it difficult for me to participate in the life of the family and in community?

Concluding Prayer

Your kindnesses to me are countless, Yahweh; true to your judgements, give me life. (Ps 119: 156)

Tuesday, June 27, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
guide and protector of your people,
grant us an unfailing respect for your name and keep us always in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 7: 6, 12-14

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls in front of pigs, or they may trample them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces. 'So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the Law and the Prophets.

'Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Reflection

- Discernment and prudence in offering things of value. In the relationships with others Jesus, above all, warns about certain dangerous attitudes. The first one of these is not to judge (7: 1-5): it is a true and proper prohibition, "do not judge," it is an action that influences every evaluation of contempt or of condemnation of others. The last judgment is the exclusive competence of God; our figures of measure and our criteria are relative; they are conditioned by our subjectivity. Any condemnation of others becomes a condemnation of oneself, in so far as it places us under the judgment of God and we exclude ourselves from pardon. If your eye is pure, that is to say, is free from every judgment of the brothers you can relate with them in a true way before God. And now we consider the words of Jesus offered to us by the liturgical text: "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls in front of pigs, or they may trample them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces" (7: 6). At first sight this "saying" of Jesus sounds strange to the sensibility of today's

reader. It may represent a true enigma. But it is a way of saying, of a Semitic language which has to be interpreted. At the time of Jesus just as in ancient culture dogs were not greatly appreciated, because they were considered somewhat savage and stray (U. Luz). But let us now consider the positive and didactic-wisdom aspect of the words of Jesus: Do not profane holy things; in last instance it is an invitation to use prudence and discernment. In the Old Testament the holy things are the meat for the sacrifice (Lv 22: 14; Ex 29: 33 ff; Nb 18: 8-19). The approach of the prohibition of throwing the pearls to the pigs is incomprehensible. For the Hebrews the pigs are impure animals, the quintessence of repugnance. On the contrary, the pearls are the most precious things that can exist. The warning of Jesus refers to those who feed the stray dogs with consecrated meat destined to the sacrifice. Such a behavior is evil and usually imprudent because usually those dogs were not fed and therefore, because of their insatiable hunger, they could turn back and attack their "benefactors."

- The pearls at the metaphoric level could indicate the teachings of the wise or the interpretations of the "Torah." In Matthew's Gospel the pearl is the image of the Kingdom of God (Mt 13: 45ff). The interpretation which the evangelist gives mentioning this warning of Jesus is above all theological. Surely, this is the interpretation which seems to be more in harmony with the text and with the ecclesial reading of the words of Jesus: a warning to the Christian missionaries not to preach the Gospel just to anybody. (Gnilka, Luz).
- To follow a path. In the final part of the discourse (7: 13-27), then Matthew includes, among the others, a conclusive admonition of Jesus who invites to make a decisive choice in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven: the narrow door (7: 13-14). The word of Jesus is not only something to be understood and to interpret but, above all, it should become life. Now, to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven it is necessary to follow a path and to enter into the fullness of life through a "door." The theme of the "path, the way" is very dear to the Old Testament (Dt 11: 26-28; 30: 15-20; Jr 21: 8; Ps 1: 6; Ps 118: 29- 30; Ps 138: 4; Ws 5: 6-7 etc.). The road represented by two doors leads to different goals. A significance that is coherent with the admonishments of Jesus would be that, to the wide door is joined the wide path which leads to perdition or damnation, that is to say, to walk on a wide road is always something pleasant, but this is not said in our text. Rather it seems that Matthew agrees with the Jewish conception of the "road"; on the trail of Dt 30: 19 and Jr 21: 8 there are two roads that are in counter-position, that of death and that of life. To know how to choose among the diverse ways of life is decisive for entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who chooses the narrow road that of life should know that it is full of afflictions; narrow means tried by suffering for the sake of faith.

Personal Questions

- What impact does the word of Jesus have in your heart? Do you listen to it in order to live under the gaze of the Father and in order to be transformed personally and in the relationships with the brothers and sisters?
- The word of Jesus, or rather, Jesus Himself is the door who makes us enter into the filial and fraternal life. Do you allow yourself to be guided and attracted by the narrow and demanding path of the Gospel? Or rather do you follow the wide and easy road that consists in doing what pleases or that leads you to satisfy all your desires, neglecting the needs of others?

Concluding Prayer

We reflect on your faithful love, God, in your temple!

Both your name and your praise, God, are over the whole wide world. Your right hand is full of saving justice. (Ps 48: 9-10)

Wednesday, June 28, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

guide and protector of your people,

grant us an unfailing respect for your name,

and keep us always in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 7: 15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves.

You will be able to tell them by their fruits. Can people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, a sound tree produces good fruit but a rotten tree bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit.

Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown on the fire. I repeat, you will be able to tell them by their fruits.'

Reflection

- We are reaching the final recommendations of the Sermon on the Mountain. Comparing the Gospel of Matthew with that of Mark one perceives a great difference in the way in which they present the teaching of Jesus. Matthew insists more on the content of the teaching and organizes it into five great Discourses, of which the first one is the Sermon of the Mountain (Mt 5 to 7). Mark, over fifteen times, says that Jesus taught, but he rarely says what he taught. In spite of this difference, both agree on a point: Jesus taught very much. To teach was what Jesus did the most (Mk 2: 13; 4: 1-2; 6: 34). He used to do it always (Mk 10: 1). Matthew is interested in the content. But does he want to say that Mark does not do it? Depends on what we want to say when we speak about content! To teach is not only a question of communicating a truth in such a way that people learn it by heart. The content is not limited to words, but it is also composed by gestures and consists in the way in which Jesus used to relate himself with persons. The content has never been separated from the person who communicates it. The person, in fact, is the origin of the content. The good content without goodness is like milk spilt on the ground. It does not convince and conversion does not take place.

- The final recommendations and the result of the Sermon on the Mountain in the conscience of the people are the points of the Gospel of today (Mt 7: 15-20) and of tomorrow (Mt 7: 21-29). (The sequence of the Gospel of the days of the week is not always the same as that of the Gospels).
 - Matthew 7: 13-14: Choose the sure way
 - Matthew 7: 15-20: The prophet is known by the fruits
 - Matthew 7: 21-23: Not only speak, but act.
 - Matthew 7: 24-27: Construct the house on rock.
 - Matthew 7: 28-29: The new conscience of the people.
- Matthew 7: 15-16^a: Beware of false prophets. In the time of Jesus, there were prophets of all types, persons who announced apocalyptic messages to involve people in different movements of that time: Essen, Pharisee, Zelots, and others (cf. Ac 5: 36-37). When Matthew writes there were also prophets who announced messages diverse from the one proclaimed by the community. The Letters of Paul mention these movements and tendencies (cf. 1 Co 12: 3; Gal 1: 7-9; 2: 11-14; 6: 12). It must not have been easy for the community to make the discernment of spirits. From here results the importance of the words of Jesus on false prophets. The warning of Jesus is very strong: "Beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves." The same image is used when Jesus sends the disciples on mission: "I am sending you out as sheep among wolves" (Mt 10: 16 e Lc 10: 3). The opposition between the ravenous wolf and the meek sheep is irreconcilable, unless the wolf is converted and loses its aggressiveness as the Prophet Isaiah suggests (Is 11: 6; 65: 25). What is important here in our text is the gift of discernment. It is not easy to discern the spirits. Sometimes it happens that personal interests or of a group lead the person to proclaim false those prophets who announce the truth and disturb. That happened with Jesus. He was eliminated and put to death, considered a false prophet by the religious authority of that time. Every so often, the same thing has happened and continues to happen in our Church.
- Matthew 7: 16b-20: The comparison of the tree and of its fruits. To help to discern the spirits, Jesus uses the comparison of the fruit: "You will be able to tell them by their fruits." A similar criterion had been suggested by the Book of Deuteronomy (Dt 18: 21-22). And Jesus adds: "Can you pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way a sound tree produces good fruit, but a rotten tree bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit. Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. In the Gospel of John, Jesus completes the comparison: "Every branch in me that bears no fruit, he cuts away. Every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes to make it bear even more. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. Those branches will be cut off and thrown into the fire to be burnt" (Jn 15: 2, 4, 6)

Personal Questions

- False prophets! Do you know any case in which a good and honest person who proclaimed a truth which disturbed was condemned as a false prophet?
- In judging from the fruits of the tree of your personal life, how do you define yourself: as false or as true?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, look at my suffering and rescue me,
for I do not forget your Law. Plead my cause and defend me;
as you promised, give me life. (Ps 119: 153-154)

Thursday, June 29, 2023

Sts Peter and Paul, Apostles

Opening Prayer

"Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind with which 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 suffering and death. Thus, the cross which had seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the resurrection and source of new life.

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

Gospel Reading

A Key to the Reading:

The liturgical text of the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul is taken from the Gospel of Matthew: 16: 13-19. In our commentary we also include verses 20 -23, because in the entirety of the text, verses 13 to 23, Jesus turns to Peter and twice calls him "rock." Once he calls him the foundation stone (Mt 16: 18) and once the rock of scandal (Mt 16: 23). Both statements complement each other. While reading the text, it is good to pay attention to Peter's attitude and to the solemn words that Jesus addresses to him on two occasions.

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- 13-14: Jesus wishes to know what people think of him.
- 15-16: Jesus asks the disciples and Peter makes his confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of God!"
- 17-20: Then we have Jesus' solemn reply to Peter (a key phrase for today's feast).
- 21-22: Jesus explains the meaning of Messiah, but Peter reacts and refuses to accept.
- 22-23: Jesus' solemn reply to Peter.

The Gospel Text - Matthew 16: 13-23

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

22 And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men."

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What most caught my attention?
- Who do the people think Jesus is? Who do Peter and the disciples think Jesus is?
- Who is Jesus for me? Who am I for Jesus?
- Peter is rock in two ways: what are they?
- What kind of rock is our community?
- In the text we find several opinions as to who Jesus is and several ways of presenting the faith. Today too, there are several opinions as to who Jesus is. Which opinions does our community know? What kind of mission does that imply for us?

A Key to the Reading

to enter deeper into the theme.

The Context:

In the narrative parts of his Gospel, Matthew follows the sequence of Mark's Gospel. However, he also quotes a source known to him and Luke. Rarely does he give information that is solely his, as in today's Gospel. This text and the dialogue between Jesus and Peter is interpreted variously, even in opposite directions in the various Christian churches. In the Catholic Church, this text forms the basis for the primacy of Peter. Without in any way diminishing the

importance of this text, it might be good to situate it in the context of Matthew's Gospel, where, elsewhere, the qualities ascribed to Peter are also attributed to other persons. They do not belong exclusively to Peter.^z

Commentary on the text:

Matthew: 16: 13-16: The opinions of the people and those of the disciples concerning Jesus.

Jesus wishes to know what people think of him. The answers are quite varied: John the Baptist, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. When Jesus asks the disciples' opinion, Peter replies in their name: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Peter's reply is not new. On a previous occasion, when Jesus walked on the water, the other disciples had made a similar profession of faith: "Truly you are the Son of God!" (Mt 14: 33). This is an acknowledgement that in Jesus the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled. In John's Gospel Martha makes the same profession of faith: "You are the Christ, the Son of God who is come into the world" (Jn 11: 27).

Matthew: 16: 17: Jesus' reply to Peter: Blessed are you, Peter!

Jesus proclaims Peter "blessed" because he has been given a revelation from the Father. Jesus' reply too is not new. On a previous occasion, Jesus had made the same proclamation of blessedness to the disciples because they were hearing and seeing that which no one else knew before (Mt 13: 16), and he praised the Father because he had revealed the Son to little ones and not to the learned (Mt 11: 25). Peter is one of the little ones to whom the Father reveals himself. The perception that God is present in Jesus does not "come from flesh and blood," it is not the result of study or merit of human effort, but a gift that God gives to whom he pleases.

Matthew: 16: 18-20: Peter's qualifications: Being foundation stone and taking possession of the keys of the Kingdom

- Being Rock: Peter has to be rock, that is, he has to be a strong foundation for the Church, so that she may stand up to the assaults of the gates of hell. Through these words addressed by Jesus to Peter, Matthew encourages the suffering and persecuted communities in Syria and Palestine, who saw in Peter the leadership that had marked them from the beginning. In spite of being weak and persecuted, they had a solid foundation, guaranteed by the words of Jesus. In those days, the communities cultivated a very strong sentimental tie with the leaders who had established them. Thus the communities of Syria and Palestine cultivated their relationship with the person of Peter; those of Greece with the person of Paul; some communities in Asia with the person of the beloved Disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypse. Identifying themselves with the leader of their origin helped them to grow better in their identity and spirituality. But this could also give rise to conflict as in the case of the community of Corinth (1Cor 1: 11-12).
- Being rock as foundation of the faith, recalls to mind the word of God to the people in exile in Babylonia: "Listen to me, you who pursue justice, who seek the Lord; look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the pit from which you were quarried; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sara, who gave you birth; when he was but one I

called him, I blessed him and made him many" (Is 51: 1-2). When applied to Peter, this quality of foundation stone points to a new beginning for the people of God.

- The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom to bind and to loose, that is, to reconcile people with God. The same power of binding and loosing is given to the communities (Mt 18: 8) and to the disciples (Jn 20: 23). One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists is reconciliation and pardon (Mt 5: 7, 23-24, 38-42, 44-48; 6: 14-15; 18: 15-35). The reality is that in the 80s and 90s, there were many tensions and divisions within families in the communities in Syria because of faith in Jesus. Some accepted him as Messiah whereas others did not, and this was the source of many contrasting views and conflicts. Matthew insists on reconciliation. Reconciliation kept on being one of the most important tasks of coordinators of the communities. Like Peter they must bind and loose, that is, labour so as to bring about reconciliation, mutual acceptance, and build up true fraternity.
- The Church: the word Church, in Greek *ekklesia*, is found 105 times in the New Testament, almost always in the Acts and the Epistles. We find the word only three times in the Gospels and only in Matthew. The word means "a called assembly" or "chosen assembly." The word applies to the people gathered, called by the Word of God, a people that seeks to live the message of the Kingdom brought by Jesus. The Church is not the Kingdom, but an instrument and a sign of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is greater. In the Church, the community, all must see or should see what happens when a group of people allows God to rule and take possession of its life.
- Matthew: 16: 21-22: Jesus completes what is lacking in Peter's reply, and Peter reacts by not accepting.
Peter had confessed: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" In keeping with the prevailing ideology of the time, he imagined a glorious Messiah. Jesus corrects him: "It is necessary that the Messiah suffer and be killed in Jerusalem." With the words "it is necessary," he says that suffering had been foreseen in the prophecies (Is 53: 2-8). If the disciples accept Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, then they must accept him also as the Servant Messiah who must die. Not just the triumph of glory but also the way of the cross! But Peter will not accept Jesus' correction and tries to change his mind.
- Matthew: 16: 23: Jesus' reply to Peter: rock of scandal.
Jesus' reply is surprising: "Get behind me, Satan, you are a scandal to me, for you do not mind the things of God, but those of men!" Satan is the one who leads us away from the path marked out for us by God. Jesus literally says: "Get behind me!" (in Latin, *vada retro!*). Peter wanted to steer and point the way. Jesus says: "Get behind me!" Jesus not Peter is the one who points the way and sets the rhythm. The disciple must follow the master. He must live in constant conversion. Jesus' word was also a message to all those who led the communities. They must "follow" Jesus and they may not go before as Peter wished to do. It is not only they who are able to point the way or the manner. On the contrary, like Peter, instead of being a rock of support, they can become rock of scandal. Such were some leaders of the communities at the time of Matthew. There were ambiguities. The same may happen among us today.

A Further Explanation of the Gospels Concerning Peter:

A Portrait of St. Peter

Peter was transformed from fisherman of fish to fisherman of men (Mk 1: 7). He was married (Mk 1: 30). He was a good man and very human. He tended naturally to a role of leadership among the twelve disciples of Jesus. Jesus respected this natural quality and made Peter the leader of his first community (Jn 21: 17). Before joining Jesus' community, Peter's name was Simon bar Jona (Mt 16: 17), Simon, son of Jonah. Jesus nicknamed him Cephas or Rock, and this then became Peter (Lk 6: 14).

By nature, Peter could have been anything but rock. He was courageous in speech, but at the hour of danger he fell victim to fear and fled. For instance, when Jesus came walking on the water, Peter asked: "Jesus, can I too come to you on the water?" Jesus replied: "Come, Peter!" Peter then went out of the boat and started walking on the water. But when a bigger wave came along, he got afraid and began to sink. He then cried out: "Save me, Lord!" Jesus took hold of him and saved him (Mt 14: 28-31). At the last supper, Peter said to Jesus: "I shall never deny you, Lord!" (Mk 14: 31); yet a few hours later, in the palace of the high priest, in front of a servant girl, when Jesus had already been arrested, Peter denied Jesus swearing that he had no connection with him (Mk 14: 66-72). In the garden of olives, when Jesus had been arrested, he even used his word (Jn 18: 10), but then fled, leaving Jesus alone (Mk 14: 50). Peter was not naturally rock! And yet the weak and human Peter, so like us, did become rock because Jesus had prayed for him: "Peter, I have prayed for you so that your faith may not fail; and, when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22: 31-32). That is why Jesus was able to say: "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church" (Mt 16: 18). Jesus helped him to become rock.

After the resurrection, in Galilee, Jesus appeared to Peter and asked him twice: "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter replied twice: "Lord, you know that I love you" (Jn 21: 15, 16). When Jesus put the same question to him the third time, Peter was hurt. He must have remembered that he had denied him three times. So he answered: "Lord, you know all things! You know that I love you!" It was then that Jesus entrusted to him the care of the sheep: "Peter, feed my sheep!" (Jn 21: 17). With Jesus' help, the strength of the rock grew in Peter and he revealed himself on the day of Pentecost. On that day, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples, Peter opened the doors of the upper room where they were all gathered behind closed doors for fear of the Jews (Jn 20: 19), and, infused with courage, began to announce the Good News of Jesus to the people (Acts 2: 14-40). From then on he never stopped! On account of this courageous proclamation of the resurrection, he was arrested (Acts 4: 3). During the interrogation he was forbidden to announce the good news (Acts 4: 18), but Peter did not obey the prohibition. He said: "We must obey God rather than man!" (Acts 4: 19; 5: 29). He was arrested again (Acts 5: 18, 26). He was scourged (Acts 5: 40). But he said: "Thank you very much. But we shall go on!" (cfr Acts 5: 42).

Tradition tells us that at the end of his life, when he was in Rome, Peter had another moment of fear. But then he went back, was arrested and condemned to death on the cross. However, he asked that he might be crucified with his head down. He thought that he was not worthy to die in the same way as his master, Jesus. Peter was true to himself to the very end.

Psalm 103 (102)

Thanksgiving

Bless the Lord, O my soul;

and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul,

and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as
you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

The Lord works vindication

and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger for ever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our
iniquities.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the
west,

so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children,
so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.

As for man, his days are like grass;

he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its
place knows it no more.

But the steadfast love of the Lord

is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear him, and his righteousness to
children's children,

to those who keep his covenant

and remember to do his commandments.

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the
voice of his word! Bless the Lord, all his hosts,

his ministers that do his will!

Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul!

Final Prayer

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

Friday, June 30, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

guide and protector of your people,

grant us an unfailing respect for your name, and keep us always in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 8: 1-4

After Jesus had come down from the mountain large crowds followed him. Suddenly a man with a virulent skin-disease came up and bowed low in front of him, saying, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can cleanse me.' Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him saying, 'I am willing. Be cleansed.' And his skin-disease was cleansed at once. Then Jesus said to him, 'Mind you tell no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering prescribed by Moses, as evidence to them.'

Reflection

In chapters 5 to 7 we have heard the words of the New Law proclaimed on the Mountain by Jesus. Now, in chapters 8 and 9, Matthew indicates how Jesus put into practice that which he had just taught. In today's Gospel (Mt 8: 1-4) and of tomorrow (Mt 8: 5-17), we see closely the following episodes which reveal how Jesus practiced the Law: the cure of a leper (Mt 8: 1-4), the cure of the servant of the Roman soldier (Mt 8: 5-13), the cure of Peter's mother-in law (Mt 8: 14-15) and the cure of numerous sick people (Mt 8: 14-17)

- Matthew 8: 1-2: The leper asks: "Lord, if you are willing you can cleanse me." A leper comes close to Jesus. He was one who was excluded. Anybody who would touch him would remain unclean! This is why the lepers had to remain far away (Lv 13: 45-46). But that leper had great courage. He transgresses the norms of religion in order to be able to enter into contact with Jesus. Getting close to him he says: If you are willing you can cleanse me! That is: "It is not necessary for you to touch me! It suffices that the Lord wants it and he will be cured." This phrase reveals two things:
 - 1) the sickness of leprosy which made people unclean;
 - 2) the sickness of solitude to which the person was condemned, separated from society and from religion. It reveals also the great faith of the man in the power of Jesus.
- Matthew 8: 3: Jesus touches him and says: I am willing. Be cleansed. Filled with compassion, Jesus cures two sicknesses. In the first place, in order to cure solitude, loneliness, before saying any word, he touches the leper. It is as if he would say: "For me, you are not excluded. I am not afraid to become unclean by touching you! And I accept you as a brother!" Then he cures the leper saying: I am willing! Be cleansed! The leper, in order to be able to enter in contact with Jesus, had transgressed the norms of the Law. Thus Jesus, in order to help that excluded person and reveal the new face of God, transgresses the norms of his religion and touches the leper.

- Matthew 8: 4: Jesus orders the man to go and show himself to the priest. At that time, a leper in order to be reintegrated into the community needed a certificate of healing confirmed by the priest. It is the same thing today. The sick person gets out of the hospital only if he has a certificate signed by the doctor of the department. Jesus obliges the person to look for that document, in order to be able to live normally. He obliges the authority to recognize that the man had been cured. Jesus not only heals but wants the healed person to be able to live with others. He reintegrates the person in the fraternal life of the community.
The Gospel of Mark adds that the man did not present himself to the priest. Instead, "He went away and started freely proclaiming and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into the town, but stayed outside in deserted places (Mk 1, 45). Why could Jesus no longer enter openly into the town? Because he had touched the leper and had become unclean before the religious authority who embodied the law of that time. And now, because of this, Jesus was unclean and had to be away far from everybody. He could no longer enter into the city. But Mark shows that people cared very little for these official norms, because people came to Jesus from all parts! This was totally overthrowing things! The message which Mark gives us is the following: In order to take the Good News of God to the people, we should not be afraid to transgress the religious norms which are contrary to God's project and which prevent a fraternal spirit and love. Even if this causes some difficulty to the people, as it did to Jesus.
- In Jesus everything is revelation of what he has within himself! He does not only announce the Good News of the Kingdom. He is an example, a living witness of the Kingdom, a revelation of God. In Him appears what happens when a human being allows God to reign, allows God to occupy the center of his life.

Personal Questions

- In the name of the Law of God, the lepers were excluded and they could not live with others. In our Church are there norms and customs which are not written and, which up until now, marginalize persons and exclude them from living together with others and from communion. Do you know any such persons? Which is your opinion concerning this?
- Jesus had the courage to touch the leper. Would you have this courage?

Concluding Prayer

I will bless Yahweh at all times,
his praise continually on my lips.
I will praise Yahweh from my heart;
let the humble hear and rejoice. (Ps 34: 1-2)