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Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Opening Prayer

God of all people,

You know how people hunger and thirst for truth, love and acceptance.

If we accept You and believe in You we see our deepest trust and aspirations being fulfilled by You as we work for the coming of Your kingdom. Help us to let the cup that You pour for us overflow on all Your people, that all may praise You now and forever.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 15: 29-37

Jesus went on from there and reached the shores of the Lake of Galilee, and He went up onto the mountain. He took His seat, and large crowds came to Him bringing the lame, the crippled, the blind, the dumb and many others; these they put down at His feet and He cured them. The crowds were astonished to see the dumb speaking, the cripples whole again, the lame walking and the blind with their sight, and they praised the God of Israel.

But Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, "I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with Me for three days now and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them off hungry, or they might collapse on the way."

The disciples said to Him, "Where in a deserted place could we get sufficient bread for such a large crowd to have enough to eat?" Jesus said to them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." Then He instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and He took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks He broke them and began handing them to the disciples, who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected what was left of the scraps, seven baskets full.

Reflection

Today's Gospel is like the rising sun. It is always the same sun every day which renews life and renders plants fertile. The greatest danger is routine. Routine kills the Gospel and extinguishes the sun of life.

- The elements which form the picture of the Gospel are always the same: Jesus, the mountain, the sea, the crowds, the sick, the needy, the problems of life. However, despite their familiarity they, like the sun, bring a life giving message.
- Like Moses, Jesus goes up to the mountain and the people gather around Him. They bring their problems with them: sickness, blindness, deafness, etc. They are the new People of God who gather around the new Moses. Jesus cures all of them.
- Jesus calls the disciples. He has compassion for the people who have nothing to eat. According to the disciples, the solution must come from outside: "Where to find bread to feed so many people?" According to Jesus, the solution must come from the people through His help: "How many loaves have you?" They answer "seven and a few small fish." With these few loaves of bread and fish, Jesus satisfies the hunger of all, and there are even some left over. If today people would share what they have, there would be no hunger in the world. Many things would be left over! Truly, another world is possible!

- The account of the multiplication of the loaves foretells the Eucharist: "Jesus, took the bread in His hands, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to His disciples."

Personal Questions

- Jesus feels compassion. Is there compassion in me when facing the problems of humanity? Do I do something about it?
- The disciples expect the solution to come from outside. Jesus shows differently. Where do I look for solutions?
- Is every day a routine for me, or do I thank God for another day and creatively seek to do His will?

Concluding Prayer

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In verdant pastures He gives me repose. (Ps 23)

Thursday, December 2, 2021

1st Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

to those who trust in you

and live the gospel of your Son, you are a dependable rock.

In the storms and tensions of our times, may our faith never waver,

but give us the courage to live as we believe, consistently, radically,

that with your Son we may do your will and live in your love now and forever.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 7: 21, 24-27

'It is not anyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven.

Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock." Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock.

But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had!

Reflection

Today's Gospel narrates the end of the Discourse on the Mountain. The discourse on the Mountain is a new reading of the Law of God. It begins with the Beatitudes (Mt 5: 1-

12) and ends with the house built on the rock.

- It is a question of acquiring the true wisdom. A source of wisdom is the Word of God expressed in the Law of God. True Wisdom consists in listening to and practicing the Word of God (Lk 11: 28). It is not sufficient to say: "Lord, Lord!" The important thing is not to say beautiful words about God, but rather to do the Will of the Father and, therefore, to be a revelation of his love and his presence in the world.
- The one who listens to and practices the Word, constructs the house on the rock. The solidity of the house does not come from the house in itself, but rather from the land, from the rock. What does the rock signify? It is the experience of God's love revealed in Jesus (Rm 8: 31-39). There are some persons who practice the Word in order to merit God's love. But love is not bought, purchased, neither do we merit it. (sg 8: 7). The love of God is received gratuitously. Let us put into practice the Word not to merit love, but to say thank you for the love we have received. This is the good earth, the rock, which gives security to the house. The true security comes from the certainty of God's love! It is the rock which sustains us in the moments of difficulty and in storms.
- The Evangelist ends the discourse of the Mountain (Mt 7: 27-28) saying that the crowds remained admired by the teaching of Jesus, because "he taught with authority, and not like the Scribes". The result of the teaching of Jesus is the critical awareness of the people concerning religious authority of the time. Admired and grateful, the people approved the beautiful and diverse teaching of Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Am I among those who say "Lord, Lord", or among those who put the Word into practice?
- Do I observe the Law in order to merit love and salvation or in order to thank God for his love and his salvation?

Concluding Prayer

O Lord, grant salvation! O Lord, grant prosperity!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (Ps 118)

Friday, December 3, 2021

1st Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Lord God, Father of all,

in your Son Jesus Christ

you invite everyone and all to know and love you and to live in your unending peace.

Keep alive in us the zeal

to bring the light of your truth

and the riches of your life and love to all, without any distinction

of race, language, or culture.

May everyone on earth come to know you as the merciful Father of all
through our brother and Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 27-31

As Jesus went on his way two blind men followed him shouting, 'Take pity on us, son of David.' And when Jesus reached the house, the blind men came up to him and he said to them, 'Do you believe I can do this?' They said, 'Lord, we do.' Then he touched their eyes saying, 'According to your faith, let it be done to you.' And their sight returned. Then Jesus sternly warned them, 'Take care that no one learns about this.' But when they had gone away, they talked about him all over the countryside.

Reflection

Once again, today's Gospel places before us the encounter of Jesus with human misery. Jesus does not withdraw, he does not hide. He accepts the persons and in accepting them, full of tenderness, he reveals God's love.

- Two blind men follow Jesus and cry out to him: "Son of David, have pity on us!". Jesus did not like very much the title of Son of David. He criticizes the teaching of the Scribes who said that the Messiah should be the Son of David: "David himself calls him Lord: How then can he be his son?" (Mk 12, 37).
- Reaching home, Jesus asks the blind men: "Do you believe that I can do this?" And they answer: "Yes, Lord!" It is one thing to have the true doctrine in the head, and a very different thing to have the correct faith in the heart. The doctrine of the two blind men was not too right, because they called Jesus Son of David. But Jesus does not care to be called like this, what is important to him is to have a correct faith.
- He touches the eyes and says: "May it be done to you according to your faith!" Immediately the eyes were opened. In spite of the fact that they did not possess a correct doctrine, the two blind men had a correct faith. Today many persons are more concerned about a correct doctrine than of a correct faith.
- It is good not to forget a small detail of hospitality. Jesus reaches the house and the two blind men also enter into the house, as if this was the most natural thing in the world. They feel at ease in Jesus' house And today? A Religious Sister said: "Today the situation of the world is such that I feel mistrustful even toward the poor!" The situation has changed very much from then until now!
- Jesus asks not to diffuse the miracle. But the prohibition was not respected very much. Both of them went out and spread the Good News. To proclaim the Gospel, that is, the Good News, means to share with others the good which God does in our life.

Personal Questions

- Do I have in my life some Good News from God to share with others?
- On which point do I insist more: on a correct doctrine or on a correct faith?

Concluding Prayer

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?
The Lord is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid? (Ps 27)

Saturday, December 4, 2021

1st Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

God of mercy and compassion, in your Son Jesus Christ you have revealed yourself as a God of people.

Turn our empty hearts to you, give us eyes to see the depth of our poverty and our inability to build a better world with our own resources, and then come and build it with us through your Son and our Savior Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 35 – 10: 1, 5-8

Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. And when he saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to his harvest.'

He summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.'

Reflection

The Gospel today has two parts: (a) A brief summary of the apostolic activity of Jesus (Mt 9: 35-38) and (b) The beginning of the "Sermon of the Mission" (Mt 10: 1.5-8). The Gospel of today's Liturgy omits the names of the Apostles which are found in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 10: 2-4).

- Matthew 9: 35: Summary of the apostolic activity of Jesus. "Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and all kinds of illness". Matthew describes in a few words the central points of the missionary activity of Jesus: (a) to travel through all the towns and villages. Jesus does not wait for people to come to him, but he goes out to look for the people travelling himself through the towns and villages. (b) To teach in the Synagogues, that is in the communities. Jesus goes to the place where the people are gathered together around the faith in God. And it is there that He proclaims the Good News of the Kingdom, that is, the Good News of God. Jesus does not teach doctrine as if the Good News were a new catechism, but in everything he says and does, there emerges something of the great Good News which dwells

within Him, that is, God, the Kingdom of God. (c) He cures all kinds of diseases and illness. That which poor people experienced most was illness, all kinds of diseases, and what distinguishes the activity of Jesus is the consolation given to the people, whom he relieves from pain.

- Matthew 9: 36: The compassion of Jesus before the situation of the people". "And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd". Jesus accepts persons as they are before him: sick, exhausted, tired. He behaves like the Servant of Isaiah, whose central message consists in "consoling the people" (cf. Is 40, 1). The attitude of Jesus toward the people was like the attitude of the Servant whose mission was very definite: "He does not cry out or raise his voice, his voice is not heard in the street; he does not break the crushed reed or snuff the faltering wick". (Is 42: 2-3). Like the Servant Jesus also feels sorry seeing the situation of the people who were "tired, exhausted, and dejected like sheep without a shepherd". He begins to be a shepherd, identifying himself with the Servant who said: "The Lord has given me a tongue of a beginner, that I may know how to raise those who are discouraged" (Is 49: 4a). Like the Servant, Jesus becomes the disciple of the Father and of the people and says: "Every morning my ear is attentive so as to listen to the beginners" (Is 49: 4b). And from the contact with the Father, Jesus receives the consolation to communicate it to the poor.
- Matthew 9: 37-38: Jesus involves the disciples in the mission. Before the immensity of the missionary activity, the first thing that Jesus asks of the disciples is to pray: "The harvest is rich but the laborers are few! So ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to his harvest". Prayer is the first form of commitment of the disciples for the mission. Because if one believes in the importance of the mission that one has to carry out, everything possible is done so that it will not die with us, but rather that it continues in others through us and after us.
- Matthew 10: 1: Jesus gave the disciples the power to cure and to cast out devils. "He summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness." The second thing that Jesus asks the disciples is not that they do not begin to teach doctrine and laws, but rather that they help the people to overcome fear of the unclean spirits and to help them in the struggle against illness. Today, what frighten people most are certain missionaries who threaten them with the punishment of God and with the danger of devils. Jesus does the contrary. "If it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out, then the Kingdom of God has indeed caught you unaware". (Lk 11: 20). It is sad to say it, but today there are some persons who need the devils in order to be able to drive them out and gain some money. It would be worthwhile for them to read what Jesus says against the Pharisees and the doctors of the Law (Mt 23).
- Matthew 10: 5-6: Go first to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Jesus sends out the Twelve with these recommendations: "Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town. Go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel".

At the beginning, the mission of Jesus was directed to "the lost sheep of the House of Israel". Who were these lost sheep of the House of Israel? Were they, perhaps, the persons who were excluded, for example, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the unclean, who were considered lost and condemned by the religious authority of the time? Were they those of the directing class, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the elders and the priests who considered

themselves the faithful people of Israel? Or were they the crowds, tired and exhausted, as sheep without a shepherd? Probably, here in the context of the Gospel of Matthew, it is a question of these poor and abandoned people who are accepted by Jesus (Mt 9: 36-37). Jesus wanted the disciples to participate together with him in this mission with these persons. But in the measure in which he takes care of these persons, Jesus himself extends the horizon. In the contact with the Canaanite woman, a lost sheep of another race and another religion, who wishes to be heard, Jesus repeats to his disciples: "I have been sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Mt 15: 24). It is before the insistence of the mother who does not cease to intercede for her daughter that Jesus defends himself saying: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs" (Mt 15: 26). But the reaction of the mother does away with the defence of Jesus: "Ah, yes, Lord, but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table" (Mt 15, 27). And in fact, there were many scraps! Twelve baskets full of pieces of bread which were left over after the multiplication of the loaves for the lost sheep of the House of Israel (Mt 14: 20). The answer of the woman does away with the argument of Jesus. He takes care of the woman: Jesus listens to the woman: "Woman, you have great faith: Let your desire be granted". "And from that moment her daughter was well again" (Mt 15: 28). Through the continuous attention given to the lost sheep of Israel, Jesus discovers that in the whole world there are lost sheep who want to eat the scraps or crumbs.

- Matthew 10: 7-8: Summary of the activity of Jesus. "Go, instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.

Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils. You received without charge, give without charge". How can the closeness of the Kingdom be revealed? The response is simple and concrete: curing the sick, raising the dead, cleaning the lepers, driving out devils and serving gratuitously, without enriching oneself from the service given to the people. Where this takes place, the Kingdom is revealed.

Personal Questions

- We all receive the same mission given by Jesus to the disciples. Are you conscious, aware of this mission? How do you live your mission?
- In your life, have you had any contact with the lost sheep, with people who are tired and exhausted? What lesson did you draw out of this?

Concluding Prayer

The Lord heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds;
he counts out the number of the stars,
and gives each one of them a name. (Sal 147: 3-4)

Sunday, December 5, 2021

Second Sunday of Advent

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 within 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 the Reading:

The Gospel text of the second Sunday of Advent speaks to us of John the Baptist, prophet, in the desert preparing the way for the Lord. For centuries, people were living in expectation of the coming of the Messiah, and the ever more burdensome Roman occupation increased the desire for the coming of the Liberator, the Savior. The presence of John in the desert was a sign that God was once more visiting His people. Redemption was close at hand!

Luke is careful to place the coming of John the Baptist within the socio-political and religious context of the time. On the socio-political level, Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod governor of Galilee, and Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. Then, using a biblical text, Luke places John within the religious context of God's plan and says that he came to prepare the realization of the secular hopes of the Messiah's coming.

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Luke 3: 1-2: Placing John's action in time and space
- Luke 3: 3: A summary of John's political activities
- Luke 3: 4-6: Biblical light shed on John's activities

Text:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What pleased or struck you most in this text? Why?
- *Where* and *when* does John come on the scene? What is the significance of this specifying of the *time* and *place*?
- What is the significance of the biblical references for an understanding of John's activities?
- Desert, way, paths, valley, mountain, hill, winding ways, rough roads: what is the significance of these images to understand better Jesus' activities?
- What is this text's message for us today?

Deepening the Theme

Yesterday's and Today's Contexts:

- Luke places John's activities in the 15th year of Tiberius, Emperor of Rome. Tiberius was emperor from 14 to 37 A.D. In 63 B.C., the Roman emperor had invaded Palestine and imposed a severe form of slavery on the people. Popular uprisings followed each other, especially in Galilee, but were harshly suppressed by the Roman legions. From 4 B.C. to 6 A.D., that is, while Archelaus was governor, violence broke out in Judea. This fact forced Joseph and Mary go back to Nazareth in Galilee and not to Bethlehem in Judea (Mt 2:22). In 6 A.D., Archelaus was deposed, and Judea became a Roman province whose procurator was appointed directly by the Emperor of Rome. Pilate was one of these procurators. He ruled from 25 to 36. This change in the political regime brought a great calm, but occasional uprisings, such as the one of Barabbas (Mk 15: 7), and their immediate repression by the Romans (Lk 13: 1) were reminders of the extremely seriousness of the situation. Any little spark was enough to create the fire of revolt! Calm was just a truce, an occasion offered by history, by God, for people to look again at the journey they had undertaken (cf. Lk 13: 3, 5) and thus, avoid complete destruction. Rome was cruel. Any revolt would spell the end of the Temple and the Nation (Jn 11: 48; cf. Lk 13: 34-35; 19: 41-44).
- It is in this context, about the year 28 A.D., that John the Baptist comes on the scene as prophet in the desert. Luke speaks of the great expectation that arose among the people concerning the preaching of John the Baptist, who proclaimed a baptism of conversion for the forgiveness of sin. Today, too, there is a great desire for conversion and reconciliation with God, which manifests itself in various ways: the search for meaning in life, the search for spirituality, the international movement of the World Social Forum: "A different world is possible!" and many other religious movements. Social workers and politicians are searching for a more human world and thus confirm this desire for conversion or reconciliation with God. Advent is the proper time to renew in us this desire for change, for conversion and for coming closer to God.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Luke 3: 1-2: Recalling the old prophets.

The way Luke introduces the preaching of John is very similar to the introduction to the books of the old prophets. These mentioned the names of the kings of the time

of the prophets' activities. See, for instance, Isaiah (Isa 1: 1), Jeremiah (Jer 1: 1-3), Hosea (Hos 1: 1), Amos (Am 1: 1) and others. Luke does the same thing so as to say that if for nearly 500 years there was no prophet, now a new prophet has come by the name of John, son of Zachary and Elizabeth. Luke is concerned with placing these events in time and space. He introduces the names of the governors and describes the places where John worked. In fact, salvation history is not separate from human and personal history.

This concern of Luke's arouses our curiosity. Today, when a person is ordained to the priesthood or professes final vows, it is customary to print a holy card recalling the date and place of ordination or profession, and some meaningful phrase from the Bible or a saint is included to express the significance of the ordination or profession in the life of the person concerned. However, we never come across a holy card saying, for instance, "In the fifth year of Bush, president of the United States; Blair being president of the council of the United Kingdom; Prodi president of the council of Italy; Zapatero president of the council of Spain; and Joseph Ratzinger Pope, named Benedict XVI, I received my priestly ordination to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to give sight to the blind, to free the oppressed and to proclaim a year of grace of the Lord!" Why does Luke choose to give the dates of salvation history together with those of the history of humankind?

- Luke 3: 3: Repentance and forgiveness.

John goes through the region of the Jordan preaching a baptism of penance so as to obtain pardon for one's sins. Repentance (in Greek: *metanoia*) means change, not just in one's moral behavior, but also and above all in one's mentality. Change in one's way of thinking! People were to become aware that their way of thinking, influenced by the "yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod" (Mk 8: 15), that is, by the government's propaganda and by the official religion, was wrong and had to change. Pardon brings with it reconciliation with God and with the neighbor. In this way, John was proclaiming a new way for the people to relate to God. Reconciliation will also be the mark of Jesus' preaching: reconciliation even "seventy times seven" (Mt 18: 22).

- Luke 3: 4-6: A definition of John's mission.

Luke quotes the following text from Isaiah to assist readers to better understand the meaning of John's preaching: "A voice cries, 'Prepare in the desert a way for Yahweh. Make straight path for our God across the wastelands. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be leveled, every cliff become a plateau, every escarpment a plain; then the glory of Yahweh will be revealed and all humanity will see it together for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken'" (cf. Isa 40: 3-5). In this text, Isaiah proclaimed the people's return from exile to Palestine and he described it as though it were another Exodus. It was as if the people, coming back from the servitude of Babylon, were leaving Egypt and entering once more into the desert. For Luke, Jesus begins a new exodus prepared by the preaching of John in the desert.

The Gospels of Matthew (Mt 3: 3) and Mark (Mk 1: 3) also quote the same section of Isaiah, but they only quote the first part (Isa 40: 3). Luke quotes the full text up to the point where Isaiah says, "and all humanity will see the glory of the Lord" (Isa 40:5). The expression "all humanity" means every human being. This little difference shows Luke's concern for the communities, that the prophets had already foreseen this openness to the pagans! Jesus came not only for the Jews but so that "every human being" might see the saving power of God. Luke wrote his Gospel for the community in Greece who, for the most part, were converted pagans.

Further Information:

- John, the prophet – Since the sixth century before Christ, prophecy had ceased. "No prophet anymore," it was said (Ps 74: 9). People lived in expectation of the prophet promised by Moses (Dt 18: 15; 1 Mac 4: 46; 14: 41). This long waiting period ended with the coming of John (Lk 16: 16). The people did not consider John as a rebel like Barabbas, or like a scribe or Pharisee, but as a prophet longed for by all (Lk 1: 76). Many thought he was the Messiah. Even in Luke's time, in the 80's, there were still those who thought John was the Messiah (Acts 19: 1-6).
- John appears and proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand!" (Mt 3: 2). He was jailed because of his courage in denouncing the errors of the people and of those in authority (Lk 3: 19-20). When Jesus heard that John was in prison, He went back to Galilee and proclaimed the same message as John: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the gospel" (Mk 1: 15). Jesus carries on from where John left off and goes further. The Old Testament ends with John and in Jesus the New Testament begins. Jesus even says, "I tell you, of all the children born to women, there is no one greater than John, yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Lk 7: 28).
- The content of John's preaching (Luke 3: 7-18) – John draws the crowds by preaching a baptism of change and forgiveness of sins. This shows that people were ready to change and wanted to relate to God in a new way. John denounced errors and attacked privileges. He said that being children of Abraham was no guarantee nor did it give any advantage before God. For God, he said, the stone and the child of Abraham were the same, because "God can raise children of Abraham from these stones!" (Lk 3: 8) What advances a person in God's sight is not the privilege of being a child of Abraham but actions that produce good fruit.
- Luke talks of three categories of people who ask of John, "What must we do?": the people (Lk 3: 10), the publicans (Lk 3: 12) and the soldiers (Lk 3: 14). The answer for the people is simple: "Anyone who has two tunics must share with the one who has none, and anyone with something to eat must do the same!" (Lk 3: 11) This is a clear answer: *sharing* of goods is the condition for receiving God's presence and to pass from the Old to the New Testament. In his answer to the publicans (Lk 3: 13) and to the soldiers (Lk 3: 14), John asks for the same thing, but applies it to their situation. The publicans must not receive more than is permitted. The exploitation of the people by the publicans was a plague in the society of those days. Soldiers must not resort to extortion or false accusations and must be satisfied with their wages.
- In the 80's, when Luke is writing, many people still thought that John was the Messiah (cf. Acts 19: 3). Luke quotes John's own words to help readers to place the figure of John within the framework of salvation history. John acknowledges that Jesus is stronger. The difference between him and Jesus is in the gift of the Spirit who will be transmitted through Jesus. Luke shows that John's concept of the Messiah was incomplete. For John, the Messiah would be a severe judge, ready to pass judgment and to punish (Lk 3: 17). Perhaps that is why John, later, had difficulty recognizing Jesus as the Messiah (Lk 7: 18-28), since Jesus did not behave like a severe judge who punished. Rather He said, "I judge no one!" (Jn 8: 15; 12: 47) Rather than judging and punishing, Jesus showed tenderness, welcomed sinners and ate with them.

Praying Psalm 15 (14)

Lord, who can enter your sanctuary?

Yahweh, who can find a home in Your tent, who can dwell on Your holy mountain?

Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly, who speaks the truth from the heart, who keeps the tongue under control, who does not wrong a comrade, who casts no discredit on a neighbor, who looks with scorn on the vile, but honors those who fear Yahweh, who stands by an oath at any cost, who asks no interest on loans, who takes no bribe to harm the innocent. No one who so acts can ever be shaken.

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 that which Your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, Your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Monday, December 6, 2021

2nd Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

you come among your people; to those who are poor and paralyzed you bring them your forgiveness and your tender compassion through your Son Jesus Christ.

God, make us deeply believe that you want to liberate us from our discouragement and powerlessness.

Give us a sincere, trusting hope in your healing, compassionate love, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Luke 5:17-26

Now it happened that he was teaching one day, and Pharisees and teachers of the Law, who had come from every village in Galilee, from Judaea and from Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was there so that he should heal.

And now some men appeared, bringing on a bed a paralyzed man whom they were trying to bring in and lay down in front of him. But as they could find no way of getting the man through the crowd, they went up onto the top of the house and lowered him and his stretcher down through the tiles into the middle of the gathering, in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith he said, 'My friend, your sins are forgiven you.'

The scribes and the Pharisees began to think this over. 'Who is this man, talking blasphemy? Who but God alone can forgive sins?' But Jesus, aware of their thoughts, made them this reply, 'What are these thoughts you have in your hearts? Which of these is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, "Get up and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' -- he said to the paralyzed man - 'I order you: get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.' And immediately before their very eyes he got up, picked up what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

They were all astounded and praised God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.'

Reflection

- Sitting down, Jesus taught. People liked to listen to him. Which was the theme of Jesus' teaching? He always spoke about God, of his Father, but he spoke in a new way, attractive, different from that of the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mk 1: 22, 27). Jesus represented God as the great *Good News* for human life; a God Father/Mother who loves and accepts persons, and a God who does not threaten and does not condemn.
- A paralyzed man is brought by four men. Jesus is for them their only hope. *Seeing their faith, he tells the paralytic: Your sins are forgiven you!* At that time, people believed that the physical defects (paralysis, etc.) were a punishment from God because of some sin committed. For this reason, the paralytics and many other disabled persons felt that they were rejected and excluded by God! Jesus teaches the contrary. Such a great faith of the paralytic was an evident sign of the fact that those who helped them were accepted by God. This is why Jesus declares: *Your sins are forgiven you!* That is: "God does not reject you!"
- The affirmation of Jesus did not coincide with the idea which the Doctors had of God. For this reason, they react: *He is talking blasphemy!* According to their teaching, only God could forgive sins. And only the priest could declare that a person was forgiven and purified. How could Jesus, in their eyes, a simple lay man, ever declare that the paralytic was forgiven and purified from his sins? And then, if a simple lay person could forgive sins, the doctors and the priests would have lost their functions! This is why they react and defend themselves.
- Jesus justifies his action: *Which is easier to say: Your sins are forgiven or to say, Get up and walk?* Evidently, for a man it is easier to say: "Your sins are forgiven", because nobody can verify or prove this fact. But if one says: "Get up and walk", in this case everybody can see if he has or not this power to cure. For this reason, to show that, in the name of God, he had the power to forgive sins, Jesus says to the paralytic: "*Get up and walk!*" He cures the man! He shows that the paralysis is not a punishment from God because of sin, and he shows that the faith of the poor is a proof of the fact that God accepts them in his love.

Personal Questions

- Placing myself in the position of those who helped the paralytic: Would I be capable to help a sick person, take him up to the top of the house and do what the four men did? Do I have such a great faith?
- Which is the image that I have of God in myself and which radiates on others? That of the doctors or that of Jesus? A God of compassion or of threat?

Concluding Prayer

I will hear what God proclaims; the Lord – for he proclaims peace to his people. Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land. (Ps 85)

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

2nd Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, you are near to us in Jesus Christ your Son. When we go astray, you look for us until you find us. Bring us back to you, show us the way to you and to one another through him who is our way, Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 18: 12-14

'Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray?

In truth I tell you, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all.

Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

Reflection

- A parable is not a teaching to be received in a passive way or just to keep in the memory, rather it is an invitation to participate in the discovery of truth. Jesus begins by asking: "What do you think?" A parable is a question with a response which is not defined. The response depends on the reaction and participation of the listeners. Let us then, seek, the answer to this parable of the lost sheep.
- Jesus tells a very brief story and in a very simple way: a shepherd had 100 sheep, he lost one, and leaves the 99 on the mountain and goes to look for the lost sheep. And Jesus asks: "What do you think?" That is: "Would you do the same?" Which would have been the response of the shepherds and of the other persons who were listening to Jesus tell this story? Would they do the same thing? Which is my answer to Jesus' question? Let us think well before answering.
- If you had 100 sheep and you lost one, what would you do? We should not forget that mountains are places which are very difficult to climb, with deep precipices, where dangerous animals live and where robbers hide. And you cannot forget that you have lost only one sheep, and therefore, you still have 99! You have lost very little. Would you abandon the other 99 on those mountains? Perhaps, would not only a person with little common sense do what the shepherd of the parable of Jesus did? Think well!
- The shepherds who heard Jesus' story, perhaps thought and commented: "Only a shepherd without judgment would act that way!" Surely, they would have asked Jesus: "Jesus, excuse us, but who is that shepherd whom you are speaking about? To do that which he has done, is foolish!"
- Jesus answers: "This Shepherd is God, our Father, and the lost sheep is you!" In other words, the one who does this action is God moved by the great love for the little ones, for the poor, the excluded! Only a very great love is capable to do something so foolish. The love with which God loves us exceeds prudence and good human sense. The

love of God commits foolish things. Thank God! If it were not like this, we would be lost!

Personal Questions

- Place yourself in the place of the little lost sheep and enliven your faith and your hope. You are that sheep!
- Take the place of the shepherd and verify, if your love for the little ones is true.

Concluding Prayer

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all you lands. Sing to the Lord; bless his name; announce his salvation, day after day. (Ps 96)

Wednesday, December 8, 2021

Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary

LECTIO

Initial Prayer:

Rejoice, Oh Virgin Mary,

the star of Jacob is already arising, The Scriptures are fulfilled today; The Lord is coming like a promising cloud.

Our God is coming, he is not in silence; be attentive to his greeting.

Sweet is the word of his lips, noble the design of his heart.

It shines like the wings of the dove, the vestment of his messenger; it descends like the zephyr in summer on you, promising, is its comfort.

Our God displays his force, in your flesh he finds repose; in you he finds his sanctuary, praise him and love him forever. Behold, his retinue appears, before him, justice marches.

He will subdue the pride of the powerful and render vigor to the humble.

He will spread out his mercy on the men who fear his name; humble servant of the Lord, weave the praise of Love.

Reading of the Gospel - Luke 1: 26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you.' ²⁹ She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, ³⁰ but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favor. ³¹ Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; ³³ he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.' ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' ³⁵ The angel answered,

'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God.³⁶ And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month,³⁷ for nothing is impossible to God.'³⁸ Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

A moment of silence:

so that the Word of God may enter into our hearts and enlighten our lives.

MEDITATIO

A key to the reading:

Though we take again the themes of Matthew and Mark, the Gospel of Luke is an original composition under many aspects. The Evangelist inserts into his narrative new material in regard to the other Gospel narratives. In the first two chapters which deal with the infancy of Jesus, Luke follows the Jewish tradition, with many direct and indirect references to the Old Testament. The Theology, the symbolism, and the whole of the account of the infancy of Jesus have and find their roots in the Semitic world, different in many verses from the world and the Greek thought. The Evangelist places the beginning of his narrative in the milieu of the '*anawim*', the poor of the Lord, that is, those who are submitted with altruism to God's Will, firm in faith that the Lord will send them salvation in the opportune time. To the '*anawim*' the Lord promises to send the Messiah, sent to bring the news to the afflicted, to soothe the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, release to those in prison, to proclaim a year of favor from Yahweh and a day of vengeance for our God, to comfort all who mourn, to give to Zion's mourners..." (Is 61: 1 ff). This promise of God is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth who entering "into the Synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did" (Lk 4: 16) proclaims that the promise of God pronounced by Isaiah "has been fulfilled today" (Lk 4: 21) in him. Only the '*anawim*' can accept from the Son of Joseph, the carpenter and of Mary (Lk 4: 22; Mt 13: 53-58; Mk 6: 1-5; Jn 1: 45) the Good News of salvation, the others unfortunately are scandalized because of him. The Messiah is humble and sweet, "his mouth" pronounces "words of grace" (Lk 4: 22), and this is why in order to accept him it is necessary to prepare oneself, enter into oneself to accept the promised One of Israel. This is why the Lord admonishes by means of the Prophet: "Seek Yahweh, all you humble of the earth, who obey the commands. Seek uprightness, seek humility: you may perhaps find shelter, on the Day of Yahweh's anger" (Zp 1: 3).

In this context, "In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a Virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary" (Lk 1: 26-27). This Virgin is one of the '*anawim*' to whom the Lord reveals his salvation. With her are found two other '*anawim*' "who were advanced in years" (Lk 1: 7), "a priest called "Zechariah" and "Elizabeth who was childless" and therefore had no children (Lk 1: 5-7). Also, to these two dishonored (Gen 30: 33; 1 Sam 1: 5-8; 2 Sam 6: 23; Ho 9: 11) the salvation of the Lord is announced. Unfortunately, in Jerusalem, in the temple, during the liturgy, place of the revelation, of the power and of the glory of God, this Good News was not accepted by the priest (Lk 1: 8-23). But the Word of God is not bound, and it cannot be limited. In fact, the Holy One of Israel says: "For as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return before watering the earth, fertilizing it and making it germinate to provide seed for the sower and food to eat, so it is with the word that goes from my mouth: it will not return to me unfulfilled or before having carried out my good pleasure and having achieved

what it was sent to do". (Is 55: 10-11). This is why Elizabeth "in her old age has conceived a son and, she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God". (Lk 1: 36-37). This will be the event offered to Mary as a sign of the "power of the Most High." (Lk 1: 35) which will come down upon her like a shadow to conceive the Son of God through the Holy Spirit who will "descend" upon her (Lk 1: 34-35). The Son will be named Jesus, "He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High; the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end" (Lk 1: 31-33). These words of the angel echo or evoke the same addressed to Acaz: "The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, whom she will call Immanuel" (Is 7: 14).

That is why after John was conceived, that is "in the sixth month" (Lk 1: 26) the Good News was received "in a city of Galilee, called Nazareth" (Lk 1: 26) by a young girl, a "virgin promised spouse" (Lk 1: 27). "Nazareth" and "Mary" are in contrast with "Jerusalem" and "priest"; just as the phrase: "he went in" with the word "temple". the Lord reveals himself in humble places and is accepted by humble people from whom, in the judgment of men, "nothing good can come" (Jn 1: 45). Mary is invited to rejoice: "Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1: 28). The presence of the Lord in the midst of his people is the occasion of joy because the presence of the Lord bears salvation and blessing. The invitation of the angel is addressed to the whole People of God in the person of Mary. That is why, the whole People of God is called to rejoice, to be glad in the Lord, their Savior. It is the Messianic joy which is announced to all: "Cry out and shout for joy, you who live in Zion, for the Holy One of Israel is among you in his greatness" (Is 12: 6); "Rejoice, exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem! Yahweh has repealed your sentence; he has turned your enemy away. Yahweh is king among you, Israel, you have nothing more to fear..." (Zp 3: 14-15 ff); "Rejoice, exult daughter of Zion, because behold, I come to live among you" (Zc 2: 14).

The conception of Jesus is a new event, the primacy of the future new creation brought about by the generating power of God who comes to encounter the impossibility of conceiving of Mary because she knows no man (Lk 1: 34). The shadow which the Most High extends on Mary recalls the cloud which accompanied the people in the desert during the day (Ex 13: 22), which overshadowed the Mount Sinai revealing the Glory of the Lord during six days (Ex 19: 16; 24: 17). And also a sign of the protection of God, extended to the just who invokes the name of the Lord and places himself in the hands of God during the trial (Ps 17: 8; 57: 2; 140: 8). In creation, the Spirit of God blew over the water, the sign of the creating power of the word of God (Gen 1: 2).

God exceeds every human capacity; nothing is impossible for him (Lk 1: 47; Gen 18:14; Jer 32: 27). Before the Lord of joy, of life and of salvation, Mary accepts his generating and creative word: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1: 38).

Questions to orientate the meditation and make it relevant:

- The Lord reveals himself to the '*anawim*' of his people. According to you who are the contemporary '*anawim*' among us?
- Many times, we feel that we are in a world hostile to God's revelation. It also seems that he has become silent, that he no longer reveals his word which gives life. Is this true? If he still speaks to us, where can I find his living word? How can I accept it?
- The power of evil seems to envelop our restless world. The diverse modalities of oppression seem precisely to oppress also the God of joy, of freedom, of mercy. Which is your attitude before this reality? Do you feel that today's text inspires you a just attitude before an impossible situation?

- Which do you think is the characteristic of Mary's attitude? Does this reveal something of your own life?

ORATIO

Canticle of Mary:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me.

Holy is his name, and his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him.

He has used the power of his arm, he has routed the arrogant of heart.

He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly.

He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love according to the promise he made to our ancestors - of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Moments for a Prayerful Silence

CONTEMPLATIO

[In the contemplation], in fact, to strong men it is granted to recollect themselves when they desire to remain with themselves, to assiduously cultivate the sprouts of virtue and nourish themselves, happily, from the fruits of Paradise. Here the eye of the serene gaze, is acquired, which wounds the Spouse with love, and through its transparency and purity God is seen. Here is practiced a laborious leisure time and the rest in a quiet action. Here, because of the tiredness of the struggle, God gives to his athletes the desired reward, that is, *the peace which the world ignores, and the joy in the Holy Spirit*.

This is that Rachel who is coming, of a beautiful aspect, which Jacob, even though less fertile of children, loved more than Lia, certainly more fecund but of bleary eyes. In fact, the sons of contemplation are less numerous in regard to those of the action; nevertheless, Joseph and Benjamin, more than the other brothers, are loved by the father.

This is that *best part which Mary has chosen and which will not be taken from her*.

(From the Letter of Saint Bruno to Rudolph il Verde).

Thursday, December 9, 2021

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

You do not abandon those who rely on You. Take us by the hand when we are afraid, help us when we call out to You, for we experience that we are powerless to establish Your kingdom of justice and love.

Send Your Son again among us today to be our Lord and Savior now and forever.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 11-15

"In truth I tell you, of all the children born to women, there has never been anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. Since John the Baptist came, up to the present time, the kingdom of Heaven has been subjected to violence and the violent are taking it by storm.

Because it was towards John that all the prophecies of the prophets and of the Law were leading; and he, if you will believe Me, is the Elijah who was to return. Anyone who has ears should listen!"

Reflection

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives an opinion on John the Baptist. Compared to the persons of the Old Testament, there is no one greater than John. John is the greatest of all: greater than Jeremiah, greater than Abraham, greater than Isaiah! But, compared to the New Testament, John is inferior to all. The smallest in the Kingdom is greater than John! How can we understand this apparently contradictory qualification that Jesus makes about John?

- A short time before, John had sent messengers to ask Jesus: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?" (Mt 11: 3). John seemed to have some doubt concerning Jesus. Jesus, in fact, did not correspond to the idea that he, John, had of the Messiah: a severe judge who had to come to carry out the judgment of condemnation and anger (Mt 3: 7). He was to cut the trees from their roots (Mt 3: 10), clear the threshing floor and throw the dry sticks into the fire (Mt 3: 12). But Jesus, instead of being a severe judge, is the friend of all, "meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11: 29), who receives the sinners and eats with them (Mt 2: 16).
- Jesus responds to John by quoting the prophet Isaiah: "Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, the lame walk, those suffering from diseases are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and the good news is proclaimed to the poor, and blessed is anyone who does not find me a cause of stumbling!" (Mt 11: 5-6, cf. Is 33: 5-6, 29: 18). A hard response ... Jesus asks John to analyze the scripture better in order to change the erroneous vision he had of the Messiah.
- John was great! The greatest of all! And the smallest in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than John. John is the greatest because he was the last echo of the Old Testament. It was John who, because of his fidelity, was finally able to indicate the Messiah to the people: "Behold, here is the Lamb of God!" (Jn 1: 36), and the long history that began with Abraham gains its meaning. But John was not capable by himself of understanding the importance of the kingdom of God in Jesus. He had a doubt: "Are You the one who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?" The ancient history alone does not communicate sufficient light to understand all of the Good News of God which Jesus brings to us. The new was hidden in the old. Saint Augustine said: "*Novum in Vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet*," which means: "The New is hidden in the Old, but the Old reveals its full meaning in the New". The one who is with Jesus and lives with Him receives from Him a light which helps to discover a more profound meaning in the Old. And what is this meaning?
- Jesus offers a key: "The Law and all the prophets have prophesized up to John, and if you would accept it, he is the Elijah who has to come. He who has ears, let him hear!" Jesus does not explain, but says: "He who has ears, let him hear." Elijah had to come to prepare for the coming of the Messiah and to reconstruct the community, "To

reconcile parents to their children and children to their parents" (Mal 3: 24). John announced the Messiah and sought to reconstruct the community (Lk 1: 17). But the most profound mystery escaped him, that of the life of the community. Only Jesus communicated it, announcing that God is Father and therefore, we are all brothers and sisters. This announcement makes us capable of overcoming differences and creating community.

- These are the violent who succeed in conquering the kingdom. The kingdom is not a doctrine, but a new way of living like brothers and sisters, beginning with the announcement that Jesus makes: God is Father of all.

Personal Questions

- The kingdom belongs to those who, like Jesus, have the courage to create community. Do you also have this courage?
- Jesus helped John to better understand the facts by means of the bible. Does the bible help me to better understand the events of my life?

Concluding Prayer

I will extol You, O my God and King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever. The Lord is good to all and compassionate toward all His works. (Ps 145)

Friday, December 10, 2021

2nd Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

too often we are deaf to your voice and to the presence of your Son among us, his people.

Inspire us by your prophets and your Spirit that now is the right moment to change and to commit ourselves to the kind of life and to the justice demanded by the kingdom.

Help us to make people see that your Son is alive among us and that he is our Lord forever.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 16-19

'What comparison can I find for this generation? It is like children shouting to each other as they sit in the market place: we played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn't be mourners.

'For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He is possessed."

The Son of man came, eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."

Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.'

Reflection

- The leaders, the wise, are not always pleased when someone criticizes or challenges them. That happened in the time of Jesus and happens today also, both in society and in the Church. John the Baptist, saw, criticized, and was not accepted. They said: "He is possessed by the devil!" Jesus, saw, criticized and was not accepted. They said: "He has lost his head!", "Crazy!" (Mk 3, 21). "He is possessed by the devil!" (Mk 3, 22), "He is a Samaritan!" (Jn 8, 48), "He is not from God!" (Jn 9, 16). The same thing happens today. There are some persons who hold on to what has always been taught and they do not accept another way of explaining or of living faith. Then they invent reasons and pretexts so as not to adhere: "It is Marxism!", "It is against God's Law!", "It is disobedience to tradition and to the teaching of the Church" and they complain for the lack of coherence of the people. They always invent some pretext so as not to accept the message of God which Jesus announced. In fact, it is relatively easy to find arguments and pretexts to refute those who think in a way different from ours.
- Jesus reacts and renders public their incoherence. They considered themselves wise, but they were like children who wish to amuse the people on the square and they rebel when people do not move according to the music that they play. Or those who consider themselves wise without really having anything truly wise. They only accepted those who had the same ideas as they had. And thus, they themselves, because of their incoherent attitude, condemned themselves.

Personal Questions

- Up to what point am I coherent with my faith?
- Do I have a critical conscience regarding the social and ecclesiastical system which, sometimes, invents reasons and pretexts to legitimize the situation and to prevent any change?

Concluding Prayer

Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked
Nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent,
But delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night. (Ps 1)

Saturday, December 11, 2021

2nd Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

let us never become indifferent to the ardent message which your Son speaks to us in the gospel

When we have become inattentive and uninvolved, send us again prophets to wake us up and to make us attentive again to make your kingdom among us a reality of love of you and of people, of justice and serving love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 17: 10-13

And the disciples put this question to him, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?'

He replied, 'Elijah is indeed coming, and he will set everything right again; however, I tell you that Elijah has come already, and they did not recognize him but treated him as they pleased; and the Son of man will suffer similarly at their hands.'

Then the disciples understood that he was speaking of John the Baptist.

Reflection

The disciples have just seen Moses and Elijah before Jesus in the Transfiguration on the mountain (Mt 17: 3). In general, people believed that Elijah had to return to prepare the coming of the Kingdom. Prophet Malachi said: "Look, I shall send you the prophet Elijah before the great and awesome Day of Yahweh comes. He will reconcile parents to their children and children to their parents, to forestall my putting the country under the curse of destruction!" (Mal 3: 23-24; cf. Eccl. 48: 10). The disciples want to know: What does the teaching of the Doctors of the Law mean, when they say that Elijah has to come before?" Because Jesus, the Messiah, was already there, had already arrived, and Elijah had not come as yet. Which is the value of this teaching of the return of Elijah?

Jesus answers: "Elijah has already come and they have not recognized him; rather, they have treated him as they have wanted. In the same way, they will also make the Son of Man suffer." Then the Disciples understood that Jesus was speaking of John the Baptist.

In that situation of Roman domination which disintegrated the clan and the familiar living together, people expected that Elijah would return to reconstruct the community: to reconcile the parents to their children and the children to their parents. This was the great hope of the people. Today also, the neo-liberal system of communism disintegrates the families and promotes the masses which destroy life.

To reconstruct and remake the social fabric and the community living of the families is dangerous because it undermines the basis of the system of domination. This is why John the Baptist was killed. He had a project to reform human living together (cf. Lk 3: 7-14). He carried out the mission of Elijah (Lk 1: 17). This is why he was killed.

Jesus continues the same mission of John: to reconstruct the life in community. Because God is Father, we are all brothers and sisters. Jesus joins together two loves: love toward God and love toward neighbor and makes them visible in the form of living together. This is why, like John, he was put to death. This is why Jesus, the Son of Man, will be condemned to death.

Personal Questions

- Placing myself in the position of the disciples: does the ideology of consumerism have power over me?
- Placing myself in the position of Jesus: Do I have the force to react and to create a new human way of living together?

Concluding Prayer

May your help be with the man of your right hand, with the son of man whom you

yourself made strong. Then we will no more withdraw from you;
give us new life, and we will call upon your name. (Ps 80)

Sunday, December 12, 2021

Third Sunday of Advent

LECTIO

Opening Prayer

Come, Spirit Creator, enlighten our minds and fill the hearts You have created with Your grace. Be light to our intellect, ardent flame in our hearts; heal our wounds with the balsam of Your love. Light of eternal wisdom, reveal to us the mystery of God the Father and of the Son united in one single love. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Luke 3: 10-18

The crowds asked John the Baptist, "What should we do?" He said to them in reply, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He answered them, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed." Soldiers also asked him, "And what is it that we should do?" He told them, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages." Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people.

MEDITATIO

Silent Prayerful Time

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

A Key to the Reading

An integral part of Luke's Gospel message is the need for conversion: *metanoia*, that is, a change of mind to a way of thinking and acting that is divine. Very often we meet in Luke's Gospel scenes where the mercy of God manifests itself in Jesus Christ towards the poor and humble of heart (Lk 1: 46-55; 2: 1-20; 5: 12-31; 6: 17-38). These scenes stand in contrast to the severe treatment reserved for the rich and proud whose heart is hard and closed to God and the needy neighbor (Lk 16: 19-31; 17: 1-3).

The text of this Sunday's liturgy presents us with this theme. The passage, 3: 10-18, is part of Luke's presentation of John the Baptist's preaching in preparation for the mystery of Jesus. John the Baptist proclaims the imminent coming of the day of the Lord: "Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming?" (Lk 3: 7). The prophets had proclaimed the coming of this day of wrath and salvation, as

also the coming of a messenger known as Elijah (Sir 48: 11), who would prepare the way before the Lord (Mal 3: 1-5). In Christian tradition, John the Baptist is the messenger who prepares for the day of the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah: "someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am" (Lk 3: 16). In fact, John's ministry takes place at a time of great messianic expectations: "A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people" (Lk 3:15) and asks of the Baptist whether he is the Messiah. Later, this question is put to Jesus too (Lk 9: 7-9, 18-21) who then reveals His identity in the implicit confirmation of the profession of faith made by Peter.

In verses 3: 1-18 of Luke's Gospel, we have everything concerning the ministry and mission of John the Baptist. He was sent to baptize as a sign of repentance and to preach the conversion that brings salvation: "produce the appropriate fruits" (Lk 3: 7); "I baptize you with water" (Lk 3: 16). Through his preaching, John "announced the good news" (Lk 3: 18) that salvation was not only reserved for some of the elect but is offered to all, including publicans and soldiers (Lk 3: 10-14), to all those who live and act justly and with charity. Jesus, in His turn, will further clarify this truth by His merciful attitude towards publicans, sinners and those marginalized (Lk 7: 1-10, 36-50; 17: 11-19; 18: 9-14). In fact, the theme of salvation became tied to the coming of the Kingdom of God, which is in our midst (Lk 17: 20-21) and implies social justice and equality among all people (Lk 3: 10-14). Hence salvation is not just an abstract and personal quality but is real and collective. This salvation is offered to us by God in those who are baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire (Lk 3: 16b). "His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out" (Lk 3: 17). Following the Gospel story, we see that several times Jesus will make similar references concerning the coming of the Kingdom through warnings and parables (Lk 13: 1-5; 17: 22-37). We can say that in looking at the ministry and mission of Jesus, Luke lets us see the perfecting of the proclamation and preaching of John. Here we may remember what Jesus said in the synagogue in Nazareth, "This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen" (Lk 4: 21).

A Few Questions

to direct our meditation and practice.

- The need for conversion: metanoia, that is, changing one's imperfect way of thinking to the divine way of thinking and acting. Do I feel this need?
- God's mercy towards the poor and humble of heart manifests itself in Jesus Christ. Do I identify myself with these?
- "A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people" (Lk 3: 15). The early Christians anxiously awaited the second coming of the Lord: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come' Let everyone who listens answer, 'Come'" (Rev 22: 17). Do I await the coming of the Lord, or am I so busy with material life that I am inordinately attached to all things passing?
- In Christian tradition, John the Baptist is the messenger who prepares the people for the first coming of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. The Church has received the same mission of preparing the way of the Lord who will come: "I shall indeed be with you soon!" (Rev 22: 20). What can I do to prepare for the second coming of the Lord?
- Salvation is not reserved for a few elect but is offered to all, including those considered "unworthy" of the salvation of God. In Jesus' time, those included among the "unworthy" were the publicans and pagans. Who are those frequently considered "unworthy" of salvation in our day?

- The theme of salvation is closely related to the coming of the Kingdom of God and has social justice implications: “Now I am making the whole of creation new” (Rev 21: 5). What can I do to promote justice in a way that will affect the structures of social injustice?

ORATIO

Psalm 97 (96: 1-7, 10-12)

The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Clouds and thick darkness are round about Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

Fire goes before Him, and burns up His adversaries round about. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim His righteousness; and all the peoples behold His glory.

All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before Him.

The Lord loves those who hate evil; He preserves the lives of His saints; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to His holy name!

Closing prayer

Word, splendor of the Father, in the fullness of time You came down from heaven to redeem the world. Your Gospel of peace frees us from every fault, pours out light into our minds and hope into our hearts. When, among the splendors of heaven, You will return as judge, welcome us to Your right hand in the assembly of the blessed. Praise be to Christ our Lord, to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.

CONTEMPLATIO

Contemplation is knowing how to adhere with one's mind and heart to the Lord who by His Word transforms us into new beings who always do His will. “Knowing these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (Jn 13: 17)

Monday, December 13, 2021

3rd Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

in a world of injustice, war, and exploitation, in which more and more people have the means to live but not many reasons to live for, you promise us a star to follow, Jesus, your Son.

God, keep in us the hope alive that he will come today and that, if we are willing to take

the demands of the Gospel seriously, we can become indeed a new people completely renewed in Christ, our Savior for ever and ever.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 21: 23-27

Jesus had gone into the Temple and was teaching, when the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him and said, 'What authority have you for acting like this? And who gave you this authority?'

In reply Jesus said to them, 'And I will ask you a question, just one; if you tell me the answer to it, then I will tell you my authority for acting like this.

John's baptism: what was its origin, heavenly or human?' And they argued this way among themselves, 'If we say heavenly, he will retort to us, "Then why did you refuse to believe him?"; but if we say human, we have the people to fear, for they all hold that John was a prophet.'

So their reply to Jesus was, 'We do not know.' And he retorted to them, 'Nor will I tell you my authority for acting like this.'

Reflection

The Gospel today describes the conflict that Jesus had with the religious authority of the time, after that he drove out the merchants from the Temple. The priests and the elders of the people wanted to know with which authority Jesus was doing those things: to go into the Temple and drive out the merchants (cf. Mt 21: 12-13). The authority considered itself the master of all and thought that nobody could do anything without their permission. This is why they persecuted Jesus and tried to kill him. Something similar was also happening in the Christian communities of the years seventy-eighty, the time in which the Gospel of Jesus was written. Those who resisted the authority of the Empire were persecuted. There were others, so as not to be persecuted, tried to reconcile Jesus' project, with the project of the Roman Empire (cf. Ga 6: 12). The description of the conflict of Jesus with the authority of his time was a help for the Christians, so that they could continue fearless in the persecutions and would not allow themselves to be manipulated by the ideology of the Empire. Today, also, some who exercise power, whether in society or in the Church and the family, want to control everything as if they were the masters of all the aspects of the life of the people. They even persecuted those who thought in a different way. Keeping in mind these thoughts and problems, let us read and meditate on today's Gospel.

- Matthew 21: 23: The question of the religious authority to Jesus. "What authority have you for acting like this? And who gave you this authority?" Jesus answered: "And I will ask you a question, just one, if you tell me the answer to it, then I will tell you my authority for acting like this. John's baptism, what was its origin, heavenly or human? Jesus went back to the Temple. When he taught, the chief priests and the elders of the people went close to him and asked: With what authority do you do these things? Who has given you this authority?" Jesus again goes around the great square of the Temple. Then appear some priests and elders to question him. After everything that Jesus had done the day before, they want to know with which authority he does these things. They did not ask which was the true reason which urged Jesus to drive out the merchants from the Temple (cf. Mt 21: 12-13). They only ask with which authority he does those things. They think that they have the right to control everything. They do not want to lose control of things.

- Matthew 21: 24-25^a: The question of Jesus to the authority. Jesus does not refuse answering, but he shows his independence and liberty and says: "I also, will ask you a question, if you tell me the answer to it, then I will tell you my authority for acting like this. John's baptism, what was its origin, heavenly or human?" This was an intelligent question, simple as a dove and cunning as a serpent! (cf. Mt 10: 16). The question shows the lack of honesty of his enemies. For Jesus, the baptism of John came from heaven, came from God. He himself had been baptized by John (Mt 3: 13-17). The men who had power, on the contrary, had plotted or planned the death of John (Mt 14: 3-12). And in this way they showed that they did not accept the message of John and that they considered his baptism like something from men and not from God.
- Matthew 21: 25b-26: Reasoning of the authority. The priests and the elders were aware of the importance or significance of the question and reasoned in the following way: "If we say heavenly, he will retort to us. Then why did you refuse to believe him? If we answer human, then we have the people to fear, for they all hold that John was a prophet". And therefore, so as not to expose themselves they answered: "We do not know!" This is an opportunist response, a pretence and interested one. Their only interest was not to lose their power over the people. Within themselves they had already decided everything: Jesus should be condemned to death (Mt 12: 14).
- Matthew 21: 27: Final conclusion of Jesus. And Jesus says to them: "Nor will I tell you my authority for acting like this." Their total lack of honesty makes them unworthy to receive an answer from Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Have you ever felt that you are being controlled without any right, by the authority of the house, in work, in the Church? Which was your reaction?
- We all have some authority. Even in a conversation between two persons, each one has certain power, a certain authority. How do I use the power, how do I exercise authority: to serve and to liberate or to dominate and control?

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)

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

3rd Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

you are close to the poor and the repentant. Do not allow us to be proud, that we may not trust in ourselves but teach us to be humble and lowly, that we may recognize our limitations and be open to you and to your coming through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 21: 28-32

Jesus asked to the chief priests and the elders of the people: 'What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, "My boy, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not go," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, "Certainly, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will?' They said, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, showing the way of uprightness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.'

Reflection

The Gospel today presents a parable. Like always, Jesus tells a story taken from the daily life of the family; a common story which speaks for itself and does not need much explanation. Immediately, by means of a very simple question, Jesus tries to involve those who are listening and to communicate a message. He involves them in the story without, at the first moment, explaining the objective which Jesus has in mind. After they answer the question, Jesus applies the story to the listeners, and these become aware that alone they condemned themselves.

- Matthew 21, 28-30: The story of the two sons. Jesus asks an initial question: "What is your opinion?" He does this to call the attention of the persons in order that they are attentive to the story which follows. And this is the story: "A man had two sons; he went and said to the first one: My son, go and work in the vineyard today. He answered: I will not go, but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, 'Certainly, sir, but he did not go.'" It is a question of a story of the life of a family in daily life. The persons who listen to Jesus understand what he is speaking about, because they have lived this same thing many times in their own house. But as yet we do not understand what Jesus is thinking. Which is the objective that he wants to attain with this story?
- Matthew 21: 31^a: The involvement of authority in the story of the two sons. Jesus tells the story in the form of a question. At the beginning he says: "What is your opinion?" And at the end he asks: "Which of the two did the father's will?" Those who listen are parents and respond according to what has happened several times with their own sons: The chief priests and the elders will answer: "the first one." This is the response that Jesus wanted to hear from them and from where he takes the evidence to communicate his message.
- Matthew 21: 31b-32: The conclusion drawn by Jesus. "And Jesus says to them: In truth I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the Kingdom of God before you. John came to you, showing the way of uprightness but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. Even after seeing that you refused to think better of it and believe in him."

The conclusion of Jesus is evident and very hard. According to the opinion of the priests and the elders, the tax collectors and the prostitutes were sinners and unclean who did not do the will of the Father. According to the opinion of Jesus, the tax collectors and the prostitutes in fact, said, "I do not want to," but ended by doing the will of the Father, because they repented in listening to the preaching of John the Baptist. While they, the priests and the publicans who officially always say "Yes, Sir, I will go", ended

by not observing the will of the Father, because they did not want to believe in John the Baptist.

Personal Questions

- With which of these two sons do I identify myself?
- Today, who are the prostitutes and the publicans who say: "I do not want to," but who end by doing the will of the Father?

Concluding Prayer

I will praise Yahweh from my heart; let the humble hear and rejoice.

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, let us acclaim his name together. (Sal 34: 2-3)

Wednesday, December 15, 2021

3rd Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Grant, we pray, almighty God, that the coming solemnity of your Son may bestow healing upon us in this present life and bring us the rewards of life eternal.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Gospel Reading - Luke 7: 18b-23

At that time, John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

When the men came to the Lord, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?'"

At that time Jesus cured many of their diseases, sufferings, and evil spirits; he also granted sight to many who were blind.

And Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

Lectio

This text is found both in Matthew and Luke and inserted in the latter between the account of the miracle of the restoration to life of the widow's son at Naim (which is proper to Luke) and the discourse of Jesus with John the Baptist. In this context we can speak of this passage as having the function of moving us from the image of Jesus who heals, even death itself, to the invitation to conversion, recalled by Jesus himself in three successive passages: focusing on John the Baptist, the judgment on his

generation and the acceptance of the gesture of the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee. This text can be understood in a further context: within the entire event of the Baptist and in the prophetic experience of Israel that waits, and that has the experience of listening for the God who comes to them.

The disciples of John have a basic role here, they are open the passage and close it; they are the means of communication between their master, held in Herod's prison (see Lk 3:19-20), and Jesus. They inform the Baptist and two of them are sent on his behalf to return with the direct question to the master of Nazareth: twice Luke puts the question, which is of great importance. And the question is about waiting. John knows that someone must come. The problem is whether it is Jesus or must they wait for another. The fact that John sends the question expressly to Jesus means that he already trusts in him. Perhaps he is mistaken because of the lack of understanding of fulfillment in the biblical image of "the Day of the Lord", which is fundamental to all his preaching (see Lk 3: 7-ff).

It is as if the passage makes a great leap here: the question is left in suspension and instantaneously, the complete healing works of Jesus "for all" are set out, concluding with the the gift of sight to the blind. And after the works comes the response. "Go back," Jesus says to the disciples of John: it is a mission, in the light of what has already transpired - by whatever means - to what has already been announced. (see Lk 3: 8). Now the Good News is complete and happening, since the works that he does are those announced by the prophets (like a "lectio," on various passages of Isaiah; but this time it is the sight to the blind that is mentioned first). This is an unmistakable message for a man like John, to whom the Word of God has come (see Lk 3:2). Finally, there is a blessing which might seem strange for it is expressed negatively: blessed are those who do not find in Jesus a stumbling block, an obstacle in the way faith. How can we understand this? Certainly, it is a blessing further than the message of the Baptist, and is addressed to the listener to the Word.

Meditatio

The context of this text is already indicated to us the relationship between grace and responsibility, between the initiative of God and what is responded to in us. God calls and loves first, but wants a free and responsible assent: such a response is possible because God loves us first.

The fact that the disciples come into play at this point shows that John is not just interested in the present moment, but also the "spiritual decendency" of the movements for whom John is an exponent. Already at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry two disciples of the Baptist become his disciples (see Jn 1:37), and even Paul some years afterwards encounters individuals who have received the baptism of John (see Acts 19: 1-7).

At the heart of this passage is the theme of fulfilled waiting, according to the God's plan, announced and not simply compiled by the prophets of Israel. Even the Word of God does not diminish and lessen the seriousness of the God who loves and offers in his Son mercy and nearness - a possibility to receive with faith just as the healing of the blind suggests. And it is faith that leads to blessedness. That which is proclaimed by Jesus at the end of the passage is understood only if one considers the weight of the responsibility on the part of the observer, where it risks giving scandal; it is then necessary to reflect, casting aside human pretensions and prejudices, in order to freely open oneself with simplicity to what God in Jesus is doing. It is the logic of the Reign of God, that it exceeds the heroism of John (Lk 2: 28).

We must ask ourselves:

- Do we live the Word as the dynamic of conversion?
- Do we read the signs of the living presence of God even in our own times?
- Do we actively trust in the Gospel, as true disciples?

Oratio

Give us, Lord, eyes to see and ears to hear.

Give us, Lord, the courage always to seek the truth and to desire your revelation in prayer.

Give us, Lord, wisdom to walk with others, with those who have understood your ways and who seek to find your presence.

Contemplatio

This passage of the Gospel invites us to recognize the style of Jesus: patient, welcoming, enlightening.

Listening to the Word requires an overall vision of what has been revealed, without being too strict about it: for in each situation Jesus brings enlightenment.

It invites us moreover to know how to read the action of God in the world; that is, to be open to the "signs of the times."

Thursday, December 16, 2021

3rd Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

The consciousness of our guilt saddens us, O Lord, and makes us feel unworthy to serve you, we recognize that we need your salvation and forgiveness of your Father. Once again, send your messenger, because it prepares the way of your Son in front of us: we want to follow it faithfully, leaving us immersed in the baptism of Thy mercy. Give us your joy and save us with the coming of the Redeemer, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Luke 7: 24-30

When the messengers of John the Baptist had left, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John.

“What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine garments?

Those who dress luxuriously and live sumptuously are found in royal palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom Scripture says: *Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, he will prepare your way before you.*

I tell you, among those born of women, no one is greater than John; yet the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.” (All the people who listened, including the tax

collectors, who were baptized with the baptism of John, acknowledged the righteousness of God; but the Pharisees and scholars of the law, who were not baptized by him, rejected the plan of God for themselves.)

Meditation

- We are about to enter the holy days of the Novena of Christmas and the Church invites us today, through the Liturgy of the Word, and make our choice clear, definite and strong: to accept the proposal of John the Baptist, and then we get him in the Way had come to prepare, put it on the side of a sinner and therefore in need of conversion, or the side of those who consider themselves already in possession of salvation and does not need anything.
- This passage of Luke helps us to enter into a dialogue and a strong personal confrontation with Jesus, because He, with his questions and his statements, has put before us in the eyes of the heart the spiritual Path, the road that we may have already come and what still lies ahead.
- The first thing to emphasize is the threefold repetition of the question of Jesus to the crowds: "What did you go see?" It is important, because here the text, if translated literally, says: "What you came to see?" Using this word, the Lord puts in a positive light, highlights a spiritual commitment, a process already begun.
- But at the same time, wants to help us better aware of what happened inside of us, wants to dispel our darkness, he wants to push us toward decisions more authentic and vital. And, as he always did with his disciples, still for us, he breaks the bread of the Word, reveals the meaning of Scripture, to borrow a verse from the prophecy of Malachi, Jesus gives us the real key to the figure John the Baptist. He is the messenger, the messenger of God, which opens and prepares the way for the coming of the Messiah. John is the divide between the Old and New Testaments is the bridge that leads to the true Promised Land, Jesus is the gateway to the Kingdom of God
- But, as Jesus says in the last few verses, it remains a movement of conversion. After being released, after having seen, we must listen and be baptized (v. 29). That is, you have to accept in ourselves to make a path of openness, sincere willingness to the voice of God in all this, without fear, without holding anything, we should immerse ourselves with confidence, just as in baptism. Get off the waters of mercy, and let's you fully accept, in the arms of the Father.
- The song ends with a reference to God's plan, namely for his willingness to love us, his plan of salvation. God desires, wants, desires lead us to Him for salvation and happiness full, but by our response should be a freedom, that of love. And once again, Luke presents us with a clear choice, expressed by two verbs: "recognized right" and "made room." The choice is ours.

Some Questions

- I consider myself among those who came out and saw? I really made this spiritual movement, which led me, at least a little, 'for God, the mystery of his will in my life and the brethren, at situations, even the most tiresome or annoying?

And my eyes were really opened to see, or even to contemplate, being able to go a bit 'over the surface of things, beyond the appearances of people and things?

- I think if it had not yet taken these steps, now, as he was opening up before me such a strong year period of preparation for the Christmas, I want to make this commitment, I want to go out and see God in my life?
- John I is presented in this piece, like a prophet, a messenger, one who prepares the way for. I think this reality, I will open myself to the force to announce the Word of God, I really start listening to the message that God wants to offer to my life, my person? If there is a road mapped out for me, I decided to take it?
- And finally, the most important step. I choose, I too, need to recognize the embrace of the Father? I threw good in the waters of his love to receive a new baptism? I still afraid to let me wet, of being enveloped by him, by his presence, his breath in my life? I want today to begin a new life? And I put a sign to say that my choice is true? Perhaps the confession, Mass attendance in a more diligent?

Yes, I really want to go down in the waters of mercy and totally immerse myself in them, without resistance, without wanting to escape. Amen.

Final Prayer

Only you, my Lord is good.

Protect me, O God, in you I take refuge.

I told the Lord: "My Lord you, only you is my right." Idols of the country, was all powerful gods my favor. Multiply their sorrows who run behind a foreign god. I do not pour out their libations of blood, nor with my lips utter their names.

The Lord is my portion and my cup in your hands is my life. For me the lot fell on delightful places: my heritage is beautiful. Bless the Lord who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.

I have set the Lord always before me, at my right hand, I stand firm. For this rejoices my heart and my soul rejoices.

Friday, December 17, 2021

3rd Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

your Son came among us as one of us, a human being among other people, simple, accessible, yet your human face and the measure of what a human person is. Lord, make us discover ourselves in his mirror: that we are born to be free, to be unselfish, available, committed. Free us from our selfishness, our cowardice and attitudes of conformism, that we may become a bit what you want us to be, like your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 1: 1-17

Roll of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham: Abraham fathered Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers, Judah fathered Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered

Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse; and Jesse fathered King David.

David fathered Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon fathered Rehoboam, Rehoboam fathered Abijah, Abijah fathered Asa, Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat fathered Joram, Joram fathered Uzziah, Uzziah fathered Jotham, Jotham fathered Ahaz, Ahaz fathered Hezekiah, Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, Manasseh fathered Amon, Amon fathered Josiah; and Josiah fathered Jechoniah and his brothers. Then the deportation to Babylon took place. After the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah fathered Shealtiel, Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, Abiud fathered Eliakim, Eliakim fathered Azor, Azor fathered Zadok, Zadok fathered Achim, Achim fathered Eliud, Eliud fathered Eleazar, Eleazar fathered Matthan, Matthan fathered Jacob; and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ.

The sum of generations is therefore: fourteen from Abraham to David; fourteen from David to the Babylonian deportation; and fourteen from the Babylonian deportation to Christ.

Reflection

- The genealogy defines the identity of Jesus. He is the “Son of David and the son of Abraham” (Mt 1: 1; cf 1: 17). Son of David is the response to the expectation of the Jews (2 Sam 7: 12-16). Son of Abraham is a source of blessings for all nations (Gn 12: 13). Both Jews and Pagans see their hope realized in Jesus.
- In the patriarchal society of the Jews, the genealogies indicated only names of men. It is surprising that Matthew also indicates the names of five women among the ancestors of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba (the wife of Uriah) and Mary. Why does Matthew choose precisely these four women as companions of Mary? No queen, no matriarch, none of the fighting women of the Exodus: Why? This is the question which the Gospel of Matthew leaves for us to answer.
- In the life of the four women, companions of Mary, there is something abnormal. The four of them are foreigners, they conceived their sons outside the normal canons and do not respond to the requirements of the Laws of purity of the time of Jesus. Tamar, a Canaanite, widow, she disguised herself as a prostitute to oblige the Patriarch Judah to be faithful to the law, to do his duty and give her a son (Gn 28: 1-30). Rahab, a Canaanite from Jericho, was a prostitute who helped the Israelites enter into the Promised Land (Jos 2: 1-21). Ruth, a Moabite, widow, poor, chose to remain with Naomi and to adhere to the People of God (Rt 1: 16-18). She took the initiative to imitate Tamar and to go and spend the night beside the pile of barley, together with Boaz, obliging him to observe the Law and to give her a son. From the relation between the two, Obed was born, the ancestor of King David (Rt 3: 1-15; 4: 13-17). Bathsheba, a Hittite, the wife of Uriah, was seduced, violated and she conceived and became pregnant from King David, who in addition to this ordered that the husband of the woman be killed (2 Sam 11: 1-27). The way of acting of these four women did not correspond to the traditional norms. In the meantime, these were the initiatives, which were not really conventional, which gave continuity to the lineage of Jesus and led all the people to the salvation of God. All this makes us think and challenges us when we attribute too much value to the rigidity of the norms.
- The calculation of 3 X 14 generations (Mt 1: 17) has a symbolical significance. Three is the number of the divinity. Fourteen is the double of seven. Seven is the perfect

number. By means of this symbolism Matthew expresses the conviction of the first Christians according to which Jesus appears in the time established by God. With his coming history reaches its plenitude, its fullness.

Personal Questions

- Which is the message which you discover in the genealogy of Jesus? Have you found a response which Matthew leaves for us to answer?
- The companions of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, are very different from what we imagined them. Which is the conclusion which you can draw regarding your devotion to the Blessed Virgin?

Concluding Prayer

May his name be blessed forever and endure in the sight of the sun.

In him shall be blessed every race in the world, and all nations call him blessed. (Ps 72: 17)

Saturday, December 18, 2021

3rd Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

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

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

Gospel Reading – Matthew 1: 18-24

Key for reading:

The majority of the members of the Christian Communities in Palestine and in Syria, for whom Matthew wrote his Gospel, were converted Jews. They accepted Jesus as Messiah and believed in Him. They were persecuted because of their faith. Their brother Jews said to them: "You Christians are deceived! Jesus is not, nor can he be the Messiah!" In the text which we are meditating on this Sunday, the concern of Matthew is evident, he wants to confirm the faith of the communities. It is as if he wished to tell us: "You do not live deceived! Jesus is truly the Messiah! "

The intention of Matthew in chapters one and two of his Gospel is to inform the readers concerning Jesus, whose activity will be described beginning in chapter three. In the

first two chapters, Matthew presents the credentials of Jesus, the new Legislator, the new Moses. In the genealogy (Mt 1: 1-17), he had already shown that Jesus belongs to the race of David and of Abraham (Mt 1: 1). In these verses (Mt 1: 18-25) Matthew continues to present Jesus to us describing his birth. He says how Joseph received the news that Mary was with child and, the prophecies which will be realized with the birth of Jesus, showing that he is the expected Messiah. During the reading, it is well to pay attention to what the text tells us on the person of Jesus, especially in what concerns the significance of the two names that he receives.

A Division of the Text to Help the Reading:

- Matthew 1: 18: A legal irregularity in Mary
- Matthew 1: 19: The justice of Joseph
- Matthew 1: 20-21: The explanation or elucidation by the Angel
- Matthew 1: 21-23: The melody in Matthew's Gospel
- Matthew 1: 24-25: The obedience of Joseph.

The Text:

¹⁸ This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. ²⁰ He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.'

²² Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: ²³ Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us.' ²⁴ When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home; ²⁵ he had not had intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus.

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 point of this text struck you the most? Why?
- According to the words of the Angel, who is the Son who will be born of Mary?
- According to the words of Matthew, which prophecy of the Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus?
- Which are the two names which the Child receives, and which is God's project hidden in these names?
- How is Joseph's attitude to be understood? What does this attitude teach us?

- In what exactly does Joseph's "justice" consist?
- Which is our justice, compared with that of Joseph?

Deepening the Theme

Context of the Evangelic Text:

The genealogy of Jesus (Mt 1: 1-17) leaves us with a question. Next to the names of the forty-two paternal ancestors of Jesus (Mt 1: 17), Matthew gives the names of four maternal ancestors only: Tamar (Mt 1: 3), Rahab, Ruth (Mt 1: 4) and the wife of Uriah (Mt 1: 6). The four women conceived their sons outside the parameters of purity or of the legal justice of that time. Therefore, the state of these four women is irregular before the Law. The irregularity of these four ancestors is evident. It is sufficient to read the texts of the Old Testament where their story is described. And thus, at the end of the genealogy arises a question: "And Mary, the spouse of Joseph, from whom Jesus is born (Mt 1: 16), does she also incur in some irregularity of a legal type? The text on which we are meditating this Sunday speaks about this.

Commentary on the Text:

- **Matthew 1: 18: A legal irregularity in Mary**

Mary is with child before going to live with Joseph, her promised spouse. The one who looks at things from outside is aware of an irregularity and will say: "Mary, how horrible!" According to the law of Moses, these errors merited a death penalty (Dt 22: 20). To avoid this mistaken interpretation of facts, Matthew helps the reader to see the other aspect of Mary's pregnancy: "She conceived by the Holy Spirit." To human eyes this may seem a transgression of the Law, but in God's eyes this was exactly the contrary!

- **Matthew 1: 19: The Justice of Joseph**

The pregnancy of Mary takes place before she went to live with Joseph, not because of a human deviation, but because of the divine will. God himself made fun of the law of legal purity in such a way as to make the Messiah be born among us! If Joseph had acted according to the requirements of the law of that time, he would have had to denounce Mary and possibly she would have been stoned. Pregnancy before marriage is irregular and according to the law of legal purity, she should be punished with the death penalty (Dt 22: 20). But Joseph, because he is **just**, does not obey the requirements of the law of purity. His **justice** is greater. Instead of denouncing, he prefers to respect the mystery which he does not understand and decides to abandon Mary in secret. The greatest justice of Joseph saves both the life of Mary and that of Jesus.

Thus, Matthew sends an important message to the communities of Palestine and Syria. It is as if said: "Behold, what would happen if the rigorous observance would be followed, which certain Pharisees demand from you! They would put the Messiah to death!" Later Jesus will say: "If your justice is not greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5: 20).

- **Matthew 1: 20-21: The explanation or elucidation of the Angel and the two names of the Son of Mary: Jesus and Immanuel.**

The Angel of the Lord" helps to discover the deepest dimension of life and of events. He helps to make an X-Ray of events and to perceive God's call which with our human

eyes alone we cannot perceive. The Angel makes Joseph understand that Mary's pregnancy is the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit. God himself, the day of creation, blew over the waters and filled with force the creating Word of God (Gen 1: 2). The new creation takes place in Mary. It is the beginning of the new heaven and the new earth, announced by Isaiah (Is 65: 17). The Son of Mary receives two names: Jesus and Immanuel. **Jesus** means "Yahweh saves". Salvation does not come from what we do but from God, rather from what God does for us. **Immanuel** means "God with us". In the Exodus, when getting out of Egypt, God goes down to be with the oppressed people (Ex 3: 8) and tells Moses: "**I will be with you**" (Ex 3: 12) and from that moment on he never abandons his people. The two names, Jesus and Immanuel, render concrete, and even go beyond the hope of the people.

- **Matthew 1: 22-23: The Melody of Matthew's Gospel**

"All this took place in order that what had been said of the Lord by the prophet could be fulfilled". This phrase or other similar ones are like a melody, words which are repeated many times in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 1: 23; 2: 5, 15, 17, 23; 4: 14; 8: 17; 12: 17; 13: 14, 35; etc.). This reveals the purpose which the author had in mind: to confirm for his readers of Jewish origin the fact that Jesus is truly the promised Messiah. In him the promises of the prophets are fulfilled.

Here Matthew quotes the text of Isaiah: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, whom she will call Immanuel" (Is 7: 14). The title **Immanuel** more than a name reveals the meaning of Jesus for us. Jesus is the proof that God continues to be with us. The name itself of the Child is **Jesus** (Mt 1: 25).

- **Matthew 1: 24-25: The Obedience of Joseph**

Waking up from sleep, Joseph does what the Angel told him and took Mary to his house. And he continues to say that he had no relation with Mary, to confirm that Jesus is born from the Holy Spirit.

Extending the Information:

A key for the Gospel of Matthew - The Gospel of Matthew is addressed to a community of converted Jews, who live a deep crisis of identity in relation to their Jewish past. When in the year 65 AC the revolt broke out against Rome, the Jewish- Christians did not participate and they abandoned Jerusalem. The Pharisees did the same thing. After the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70, the Pharisees reorganized the people who had remained and they lined up, always in a more decisive way, against the Christians, who at the end were excommunicated. This excommunication made the problem of identity even worse. Now, officially excommunicated, they could no longer go to their Synagogue, to their rabbi. And the question arose among them: To whom do the promises belong: to the Synagogue or to the Church? Who is the true People of God, they or we? Is Jesus truly the Messiah? Matthew writes his Gospel for this community. The Gospel of Matthew can be defined by the three following words:

- The Gospel of **consolation** for those excommunicated and persecuted by their brother Jews who do not accept Jesus as the Messiah (Christ); it helps to overcome the trauma or shock of the breaking.
- The Gospel of **revelation**: It shows Jesus as the true Messiah, the new Messiah, in whom is the summit of all the history of the Old Testament with its promises.
- The Gospel of the **new practice**: which describes the practice of Jesus, and shows how to attain a new justice, greater than that of the Pharisees.

This happened in order that it could be realized - by means of this phrase repeated many times in his Gospel, Matthew touches on the point of greatest tension between Christians and Jews. Starting from the Bible, they said: "Jesus is not and cannot be the Messiah!" Starting from the Bible itself, Matthew responds and affirms: "Jesus is truly the Messiah!"

The pregnancy of Mary - Matthew as well as Luke quote the text of Isaiah "A virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, whom she will call Immanuel" (Is 7, 14). But there is a difference. Luke places Mary in the center and gives more importance to the sign of virginity (Lk 1, 31). Matthew places Joseph in the center and gives more importance to the significance of the name Immanuel.

Joseph's dream - the Angel appeared to Joseph in his sleep and helps him to understand. With the help of the Angel, Joseph succeeded in discovering God's action in this event, which according to the opinion of the time, seemed to be only the fruit of deviation and of sin. Angel means messenger. He brings a message and a help to perceive God's action in life. Today there are many Angels who guide us in life. Sometimes they act while we sleep, in our dreams, other times in our meetings, in conversations and in Biblical encounters, in facts, etc. So many Angels, so many Angels!

Prayer

Psalm 72 (71): His Name Endures Forever!

God, endow the king with your own fair judgement, the son of the king with your own saving justice, that he may rule your people with justice, and your poor with fair judgement. Mountains and hills, bring peace to the people! With justice he will judge the poor of the people, he will save the children of the needy and crush their oppressors. In the sight of the sun and the moon he will endure, age after age.

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

In his days uprightness shall flourish, and peace in plenty till the moon is no more. His empire shall stretch from sea to sea, from the river to the limits of the earth. The Beast will cower before him, his enemies lick the dust; the kings of Tarshish and the islands will pay him tribute. The kings of Sheba and Saba will offer gifts; all kings will do him homage, all nations become his servants.

For he rescues the needy who calls to him, and the poor who has no one to help.

He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the needy from death.

From oppression and violence, he redeems their lives, their blood is precious in his sight.

Long may he live; may the gold of Sheba be given him! Prayer will be offered for him constantly, and blessings invoked on him all day.

May wheat abound in the land, waving on the heights of the hills, like Lebanon with its fruits and flowers at their best, like the grasses of the earth.

May his name be blessed forever and endure in the sight of the sun.

In him shall be blessed every race in the world, and all nations call him blessed. Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who alone works wonders; blessed forever his glorious name.

May the whole world be filled with his glory! Amen! Amen!

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.

Sunday, December 19, 2021

4th Sunday of Advent

Opening Prayer

God, we tend to lose ourselves in the hustle and bustle of the day, in our work and in our petty worries. Give us the freshness of heart to seek the things that matter, those that make our lives deeply human, and at the same time open us to Your world and to Your values. Make us long to encounter You with joy, that we may discover again the quality of gratuitous giving, of respect, and of carefree, self-forgetting love, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Gospel Reading – Luke 1: 39-45

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord? Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Reflection

- Luke stresses the readiness of Mary in serving, in being a *handmaid*. The angel speaks about the pregnancy of Elizabeth, and immediately Mary rises and sets out as quickly as she can to go and help her. From Nazareth to the house of Elizabeth there were more than 100 km, at least four days of traveling! There were no buses or trains. Mary begins to *serve* and fulfills her mission on behalf of the people of God.
- Elizabeth represents the Old Testament, which was about to end. Mary represents the New Testament. The Old Testament accepts the New one with gratitude and trust, recognizing in it God's gift which is going to be realized and is going to satisfy people's expectations. In the encounter of the two women the gift of the Spirit is manifested. The child leapt with joy in Elizabeth's womb. This is Elizabeth's faith-filled reading of things.
- The Good News of God reveals His presence in the most common things of human life: two housewives who visit each other to help one another. Visit, joy, pregnancy, children, mutual help, house, family: Luke wants us and the community to see precisely this, and to discover in this, God's presence.

- Elizabeth says to Mary: “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” To this day, these words form part of the most prayed prayer in the whole world: “The Hail Mary.”
- “And blessed is she who has believed that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled”. This is the Elizabeth’s praise of Mary and the message of Luke for the community: to believe in the Word of God, because the Word of God has the power to fulfill all that it proclaims. It is a creative Word. It generates new life in the womb of the Virgin, and in the hearts of people who accept it with faith.
- Mary and Elizabeth already knew one another. In this encounter, they discover in each other a mystery which they had not known as yet, and which fills them with great joy. Today, we also meet people who surprise us because of the wisdom they possess and the witness of faith that they give. Has something similar ever happened to you? Have you met people who have surprised you? What prevents us from discovering and living the joy of God’s presence in our life?
- The attitude of Mary before the Word expresses the ideal which Luke wants to communicate to the community: do not close yourselves off, but get out of yourselves, be attentive to the real needs of people and try to help others as far as possible according to their need.

Personal Questions

- Putting myself in the place of Mary and Elizabeth: am I able to perceive and experience the presence of God in the most simple and common things in everyday life?
- Elizabeth’s praise of Mary: “You have believed!” Her husband had difficulty believing what the angel was telling him. What about me?

Concluding Prayer

We are waiting for Yahweh; He is our help and our shield, for in Him our hearts rejoice, in His holy name we trust. (Ps 33: 20-21)

Monday, December 20, 2021

4th Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

God of the poor and the humble, we thank you today for choosing Mary as the Virgin Mother of Jesus, your Son.

Her faith and willing service opened the way to your new world.

Dispose us to seek your will and to cooperate with your plans, that we too, like Mary, may give to the world its Savior, Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord.

Gospel Reading – Luke 1: 26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called

Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

He went in and said to her, "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you." She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, "Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favor. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end."

Mary said to the angel, "But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God."

Mary said, "You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said." And the angel left her.

Reflection

- The visit of the Angel to Mary reminds us of the visit of God to different women of the Old Testament: Sarah, mother of Isaac (Gen 18: 9-15), Anne, mother of Samuel (1Sam 1: 9-18), the mother of Samson (Jg 13: 2-5). To all of them was announced the birth of a son with an important mission in the realization of God's plan.
- The account begins with the expression "*in the sixth month*." It is the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth. The concrete need of Elizabeth, a woman advanced in age who is expecting her first son with the risk of delivery, this is the background of all this episode. Elizabeth is mentioned at the beginning (Lk 1: 26) and at the end of the visit of the angel (Lk 1: 36, 39).
- The angel says: "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor, the Lord is with you!" Similar words were said also to Moses (Ex 3: 12), to Jeremiah (Jer 1: 8), to Gideon (Jg 6: 12) and to other persons with an important mission in God's plan. Mary is surprised at the greeting and tries to understand the significance of those words. She is realistic. She wants to understand. She does not accept just any inspiration.
- The angel answers: "Do not be afraid!" Just as it happened in the visit of the angel to Zechariah, here also the first greeting of God is always: "**Do not be afraid!**". Immediately the angel recalls the promises of the past which will be fulfilled thanks to the son who will be born and who has to receive the name of Jesus. He will be called the Son of the Most High and in him will be realized the Kingdom of God. This is the explanation of the angel in such a way that Mary is not afraid.
- Mary is aware of, knows the mission which she is about to receive, but she continues to be realistic. She does not allow herself to be drawn by the greatness of the offer and observes her condition. She analyses the offer according to certain criteria which she has available. Humanly speaking, it was not possible: "But how can this come about, I have no knowledge of man?"
- The angel explains that the Holy Spirit, present in God's Word since the Creation (Genesis 1: 2), is capable to realize things which seem impossible. This is why, the Holy One who will be born from Mary will be called Son of God. The miracle repeats itself

up until today. When the Word of God is accepted by the poor, something new happens, thanks to the force of the Holy Spirit! Something new and surprising such as a son is born of a virgin or a son is born to a woman of advanced age, like Elizabeth, of whom all said that she was barren, that she could not have children! And the angel adds: "See, your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God."

- The response of the angel clarifies everything for Mary, and she surrenders: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word." Mary uses for herself the title of Servant, Handmaid of the Lord. This title of Isaiah, which represents the mission of the people not as a privilege, but rather as a *service* to the other people (Is 42: 1-9; 49: 3-6). Later Jesus will define his mission as a service: "I have not come to be served, but to serve!" (Mt 20: 28). He learnt this from his Mother!

Reflection

- What struck you the most in the visit of the Angel Gabriel to Mary?
- Jesus praises his Mother when he says: "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it" (Lk 11: 28). How does Mary relate to the Word of God during the visit of the Angel?

Concluding Prayer

To Yahweh belong the earth and all it contains, the world and all who live there; it is he who laid its foundations on the seas, on the flowing waters fixed it firm. (Ps 24: 1-2)

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

4th Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

God, we tend to lose ourselves in the bustle and stir of the day, in our work and our petty worries.

Give us the freshness of heart to look for the things that matter, those that make our lives deeply human and at the same time open us to your world and to your values.

Make us long to encounter you with joy, that we may discover again the quality of gratuitous giving, of respect, and of carefree, self-forgetting love, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Gospel Reading – Luke 1: 39-45

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah.

She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

She gave a loud cry and said, "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord? Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Reflection

- Luke stresses the readiness of Mary in serving, in being a handmaid. The Angel speaks about the pregnancy of Elizabeth and immediately, Mary rises and sets out as quickly as she could to go and help her. From Nazareth to the house of Elizabeth there were more than 100 km, the minimum, four days of travelling! There were no buses, no trains. Mary begins to serve and fulfils her mission in behalf of the people of God.
- Elizabeth represents the Old Testament which was about to end. Mary represents the New Testament. The Old Testament accepts the New one with gratitude and trust, recognizing in it God's gratuitous gift which is going to be realized and is going to complete the expectation of people. In the encounter of the two women is manifested the gift of the Spirit. The child leapt with joy in Elizabeth's womb. This is the reading of the faith which Elizabeth makes of the things of life.
- The Good News of God reveals his presence in the most common things of human life: two housewives who visit each other to mutually help one another. Visit, joy, pregnancy, children, mutual help, house, family: Luke wants us and the community to precisely perceive this and that we discover in this God's presence.
- Elizabeth says to Mary: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" Up until today, these words form part of the best-known Psalm and mostprayed in the whole world, "*The Hail Mary*."
- "And blessed is she who has believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled". This is the praise of Elizabeth to Mary and the message of Luke for the community: to believe in the Word of God, because the Word of God has the force to fulfil all that which it tells us. It is a creative Word. It generates new life in the womb of the Virgin, in the womb of people who accept it with faith.
- Mary and Elizabeth already knew one another. But in this encounter, they discover, one in one another, a mystery which they had not known as yet, and which fills them with great joy. Today also, we meet persons who surprise us because of the wisdom they possess and the witness of faith that they give. Has something similar happened to you already? Have you met persons who have surprised you? What prevents us from discovering and from living the joy of God's presence in our life?
- The attitude of Mary before the Word expresses the ideal which Luke wants to communicate to the Community: do not close yourselves in self, but get out of self, be attentive to the concrete needs of persons and try to help others as far as possible according to their need.

Personal Questions

- Placing myself in the place of Mary and Elizabeth: am I capable to perceive and experience the presence of God in the most simple and common things in the life of every day?

- The praise of Elizabeth to Mary: "You have believed!" Her husband had difficulty to believe what the angel was telling him. And I?

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, December 22, 2021

4th Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

God of the little ones,

with Mary we rejoice and give you thanks that you let Jesus Christ become one of us and let him bring us the dignity of your sons and daughters. May we live up to that dignity and to the joy that says that we are deeply loved by you. Like you, may we also learn to care for all that is little and brittle and bring your justice to the poor through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading – Luke 1: 46-56

And Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;

because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed,

for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him.

He has used the power of his arm; he has routed the arrogant of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly. He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love

according to the promise he made to our ancestors - of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Mary stayed with her some three months and then went home.

Reflection

The canticle of Mary was one of the canticles of the community of the first Christians. It reveals the level of awareness or consciousness and the firmness of the faith which animated her interiorly. Sung in the community, this canticle of Mary teaches us to pray and to sing.

- Luke 1: 46-50: Mary begins by proclaiming the change which is taking place in her life under the loving look of God, full of mercy. Because of this, she sings joyfully: "I rejoice in God, my Savior."

- Luke 1: 51-53: Afterwards she sings the fidelity of God toward his people and proclaims the change which the arm of the Lord was realizing on behalf of the poor and the hungry. The expression “arm of God” reminds us of the liberation of the Exodus. This is the force of salvation and of liberation of Yahweh which bring about the changes: he has routed the arrogant of heart (Lk 1: 51), he has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly (Lk 1: 52), he has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty (Lk 1: 53).
- Luke 1: 54-55: At the end Mary recalls that all this is the expression of God's mercy toward his people and expression of his fidelity to the promises made to Abraham. The Good News seen not as a reward because of the observance of the Law, but rather as an expression of the goodness and of the fidelity of God to his promises. This is what Paul taught the Galatians and the Romans.

Personal Questions

- The canticles are the thermometer of the life of the community. They reveal the degree of consciousness and of commitment. Examine the canticles of your community.
- Analyze the social conscience which comes from Mary's canticle. In the 20th century after Christ, this canticle was censured by the military of Latin America because it was considered subversive.

Concluding Prayer

The Lord raises the poor from the dust, he lifts the needy from the dunghill to give them a place with princes, to assign them a seat of honor. (1 Sam 2: 8)

Thursday, December 23, 2021

4th Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Lord, loving and mighty God,

you fulfilled your promise to save us when Jesus, your Son, became one of us. We are no longer in the dark, for you let your light shine on us. Bring us your salvation now, set us really free from our sins, let us become fully human with Jesus and go with him in your way of peace and love. Let him be our strength, our constant companion on the road, that through him and growing in his humanity, we may be your beloved sons and daughters. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Luke 1: 57-66

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.

Reflection

In chapters 1 and 2 of his Gospel, Luke describes the announcement of the birth of two little ones, John and Jesus, who will occupy a very important place in the realization of God’s project. What God begins in the Old Testament, begins to be realized through them. This is why, in these two chapters, Luke presents or recalls many facts and persons of the Old Testament and even succeeds in imitating the style of the Old Testament. And all this in order to suggest that with the birth of these two little boys, history completes a turn of 180 degrees and the time of the fulfilment of the promises of God begins through John and Jesus, and with the collaboration of their parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah and Mary and Joseph.

There is a certain parallelism between the announcement and the birth of both children:

- The announcement of the birth of John (Lk 1: 5-25) and of Jesus (Lk 1: 26-38)
- The two mothers who are pregnant meet and experience the presence of God (Lk 1: 27-56)
- The birth of John (Lk 1: 57-58) and of Jesus (Lk 2: 1-20)
- The circumcision in the community of John (Lk 1: 59-66) and of Jesus (Lk 2: 21-28)
- The canticle of Zechariah (Lk 1: 67-79) and the canticle of Simeon with the prophecy of Anna (Lk 2: 29-32)
- The hidden life of John (Lk 1: 80) and of Jesus (Lk 2: 39-52)
- Luke 1: 57-58: Birth of John the Baptist. “The time came for Elizabeth to have her child and she gave birth to a son. When her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had lavished on her his faithful love, they shared her joy”. Like so many women of the Old Testament Elizabeth was sterile: Just like God had pity on Sarah (Gn 16: 1; 17: 17; 18: 12), on Rachel (Gn 29: 31) and on Anna (1 Sm 1: 2, 6, 11) transforming the sterility into fecundity, in the same way he had pity on Elizabeth and she conceived a son. Elizabeth hid herself during five months. When after, the five months, people could see in her body God’s goodness toward Elizabeth, all rejoiced with her. This community environment, in which all got involved in the life of others, both in joy as in sorrow, is the environment in which John and Jesus are born, grew and received their formation. Such an environment marks the personality of a person for the whole life; and it is precisely this community environment that we lack most today.
- Luke 1: 59: To give the name on the eighth day. “On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child and they wanted to call him Zechariah as his father.” The involvement of the community in the life of the family of Zechariah, Elizabeth and John is such that the relatives and neighbors even want to interfere in the choice of the name of the child. They want to give the child the name of his father: Zechariah!” Zechariah means: God has remembered. Perhaps they wanted to express their

gratitude to God for having remembered Elizabeth and Zechariah and for having given them a son in their old age.

- Luke 1: 60-63: His name is John! Elizabeth intervenes and she does not permit the relatives to take care of the question of the name. Recalling the announcement of the name made by the angel to Zechariah (Lk 1: 13), Elizabeth says: "No! He will be called John." In a very small place such as *Ain Karem*, in Judah, the social control is very strong. And when a person gets out of the normal usage of the place, she is criticized. Elizabeth does not follow the usage of the place and chooses a name outside the normal models. This is why the relatives and neighbors complain saying: "No one in your family has that name!" The relatives do not easily give in and make signs to the father to know from him what name he wants for his son. Zechariah asks for a writing tablet and writes: "His name is John." All remained astonished because they must have perceived something of the mystery of God which surrounds the birth of the little child.
- And this perception which people have of the mystery of God present in the common facts of life, Luke wants to communicate it to us, his readers. In his way of describing the events, Luke is not like a photographer who only registers what the eyes can see. He is like a person who uses the X-ray which registers what the human eye cannot see. Luke reads the facts with the X-rays of faith which reveals what the human eye cannot perceive.
- Luke 1: 64-66: The news of the child is diffused. "All their neighbors were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judah. 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". The way in which Luke describes the facts recalls the circumstances of the birth of the persons who in the Old Testament had an important role in the realization of God's project and whose childhood seemed already to be marked by the privileged destiny which they would have: Moses (Ex 2: 1-10), Samson (Jg 13: 1-4 and 13: 24-25), Samuel (1 Sm 1: 13-28 and 2: 11).
- In the writings of Luke, we find many references to the Old Testament. In fact, the first two chapters of his Gospel are not stories in the sense which we, today, give to the story. They are rather, a mirror to help the readers to discover that John and Jesus came to fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament. Luke wants to show that God, through the two children, came to respond to the most profound aspirations of the human heart. On the one side, Luke shows that the New Testament realizes what the Old Testament prefigured. On the other, it shows that the New one exceeds the Old one and does not correspond in everything to what the people of the Old Testament imagined and expected. In the attitude of Elizabeth and Zechariah, of Mary and Joseph, Luke represents a model of how to convert oneself to believe in the New one which is being reached.

Personal Questions

- What has struck you most in the way in which Luke describes the facts of life?
- How do I read the facts of my life? Like a photo or like an X-Ray?

Concluding Prayer

Kindness unfailing and constancy mark all Yahweh's paths, for those who keep his

covenant and his decrees.

Only those who fear Yahweh have his secret and his covenant, for their understanding.
(Sal 25: 10, 14)

Friday, December 24, 2021

4th Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Lord, loving and mighty God,

you fulfilled your promise to save us when Jesus, your Son, became one of us. We are no longer in the dark, for you let your light shine on us. Bring us your salvation now, set us really free from our sins, let us become fully human with Jesus and go with him in your way of peace and love.

Let him be our strength, our constant companion on the road, that through him and growing in his humanity, we may be your beloved sons and daughters. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading – Luke 1: 67-79

Zechariah, father of John, was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

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.

Reflection

- The Canticle of Zechariah is one of the many canticles of the community of the first Christians which we find dispersed in the writings of the New Testament: in the Gospels (Lk 1: 46-55; Lk 2: 14; 2: 29-32), in the Letters of Saint Paul (1 Co 13: 1-13; Eph 1: 3-14; 2: 14-18; Phil 2: 6-11; Col 1: 15-20) and in the Book of Revelation (1: 7; 4: 8; 11: 17-18; 12: 10-12; 15: 3-4; 18: 1 up to 19: 8). These Canticles give us an idea of how faith and the weekly liturgy were lived during those first times. They make us guess that the liturgy was, at the same, a celebration of the mystery, profession of faith, animation of hope and catechesis.
- Here in the Canticle of Zechariah, the members of those first Christian communities, almost all of them Jewish, sang the joy of having been visited by the goodness of

God which, in Jesus, the promises are fulfilled. The Canticle has a beautiful structure, well elaborated. It seems like a slow climbing which leads the faithful toward the height of the mountain, from where they observe the road that they have travelled since the time of Abraham (Lk 1: 68-73), they experience the beginning of the fulfilment of the promises (Lk 1: 74-75) and from there they look ahead, they foresee the road that the child John will have to travel up to the time of the birth of Jesus: the sun of Justice who comes to prepare, for all, the way of Peace (Lk 76-79).

- Zechariah begins praising God because he has visited and redeemed his people (Lk 1: 68) he has established for us a saving power in the House of his servant David (Lk 1: 69), just as he promised by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times (Lk 1: 70). And he describes in what this powerful salvation consists: that he would save us from our enemies and from the hands of those who hate us (Lk 1: 71). This salvation is the result, not of our own effort, but rather of the merciful goodness of God who remembered his holy Covenant and the oath he swore to Abraham, our father (Lk 1: 72). God is faithful. This is the foundation of our security.
- Continuing Zechariah describes in what the oath of God sworn to Abraham consists: it is the hope that “freed from the hands of the enemies we can serve him, without fear, in holiness and uprightness, in his presence, all our days”. This is the great desire of all the people of all times: to live in peace, without fear, serving God and neighbor, in holiness and uprightness, all our days of our life. This is the height of the mountain, the point of arrival, which rose up in the horizon with the birth of John (Lk 1: 73-75).
- Now the attention of the Canticle is addressed toward John, the new born child. He will be a prophet of the Most High, because he will go before the Lord to prepare him the way, to give to his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins (Lk 1: 76-77). Here we have a clear reference to the messianic prophecy which said: “There will be no further need for everyone to teach neighbor or brother, saying, ‘Learn to know Yahweh. No, they will all know me, from the least to the greatest, Yahweh declares, since I will forgive their guilt and never more call their sin to mind” (Jer 31: 34). In the Bible “to know” is synonymous of “to experience.” Forgiveness and reconciliation make us experience the presence of God.
- All this will be the fruit of the merciful action of the heart of God and will be realized fully with the coming of Jesus: The rising Sun has come from on high to give light to those who live in darkness and the dark shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of Peace (Lk 1: 78-79).
- Sometimes it is good to read the Canticle as if it were the first time, in such a way as to be able to discover in it all the novelty of the Good News of God.
- Have you experienced, sometimes, the goodness of God? Have you experienced sometimes, the pardon of God?

Concluding Prayer

I shall sing the faithful love of Yahweh forever, from age to age my lips shall declare your constancy, for you have said: love is built to last forever, you have fixed your constancy firm in the heavens. (Ps 89: 1-2)

Saturday, December 25, 2021

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

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.

Gospel Reading – John 1: 1-18

The Text:

¹ In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him. ⁴ What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men; ⁵ and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. ⁶ A man came, sent by God. His name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, he was to bear witness to the light. ⁹ The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to his own and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name ¹³ who were born not from human stock or human desire, or human will but from God himself. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John witnesses to him. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me has passed ahead of me because he existed before me.' ¹⁶ Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received -- one gift replacing another, ¹⁷ for the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

A Moment of Silence:

Allow the voice of the Word echo within us.

Meditation

Some question for reflection:

- God who is light has chosen to dispel the darkness of man by making himself darkness. Man is born blind (cfr Jn 9: 1-41): blindness is his condition of creature. The symbolical gesture of Jesus in gathering mud to spread over the eyes of the man born blind in John, signifies the newness of the incarnation: it is a gesture of new creation. The

blind man whose eyes are still covered with the mud of creation is asked to make not an act of faith but one of obedience: to go to the pool of Siloe, which means "sent." The one "sent" is Jesus. *Are we able to obey the Word, which comes to us every day?*

- The blind man in the Gospel of John is poor: he has no pretense and asks for nothing. We often live in daily blindness, resigned that we do not deserve better horizons. *Can we see ourselves as having nothing so that the gift of God may be ours too, a gift of the redemption of the flesh, but above all a gift of light and faith?*
- *"The law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known"* (Jn 1: 17-18). The knowledge of what happens in the story of our lives leads us to get out of the blindness of presumption and to contemplate the light that shines on the face of the Son of God. *Our eyes, flooded with light, become open to events. When shall we be able to see God in our midst?*

A Key to the Reading:

John was someone who was able to see the light shining, who saw, heard, and touched the light. In the beginning was the Word: constantly turned towards the love of the Father, the Word became the Father's true explanation, his only exegesis (Jn 1: 18), the revelation of his love. In the *logos* was life and life was light, but the darkness did not welcome the light. In the OT the revelation of the Word is the revelation of light: to this corresponds the fullness of grace, the grace of grace, given to us in Jesus, the revelation of God's unlimited love (Jn 1: 4-5, 16). The whole witness of the OT is a witness of light: from Abraham to John the Baptist, God sends witnesses to his light. John the Baptist is the last of these: he announces the light that is to come into the world and recognizes in Jesus the long-awaited light (Jn 1: 6-8; 15).

Dabar IHWH is God's communication with man, which took place with all those whom God has called and to whom the word of the Lord came (cfr Is 55: 10-11). As Augustine says: *The Word of God is the true light*.

The word comes from the mouth of God, but it keeps its full force, and it is a person who creates and sustains the world. This word that creates and saves is identified with the Torah, which for Israel is the divine revelation in its totality, with Wisdom: *The law will go out from Zion, and the oracle of Yahweh from Jerusalem* (Is 2: 3).

The *memra* (aramaic) is the concept used by John to go from the *dabar* to the *logos*: in the targum the *memra* has a creating function, but above all a revealing function that is expressed particularly through the image of light. In the Targum *Neophiti*, the famous poem of the four nights on Ex 12:42 it is written: *«The first night was when IHWH revealed himself above the world to create it: the world was desert and empty and darkness covered the face of the abyss. And the memra of IHWH was the light that shone»*. In the Targum *Jerushalaim* manuscript 110 says: *"With his word IHWH shone and shed light."*

The midrash stresses that the law was before the world, it was life, it was light: *"The words of the Torah are light for the world"* (Midrash Dt Rabba 7: 3). Only daughter of God, the Torah was written with black fire in the white flame and sits on God's knees while God sits on his throne of glory (cfr Midrash on Psalm 90: 3).

The *logos*-light becomes present in the world. All is life in him: the Word takes the place of the Torah. The signs are transcendent, and more than a substitution we see a fulfilment. If for the Jew the Torah is God's daughter, John shows that she is the *logos* that from the beginning is with God, is God. This *logos* becomes flesh: man, frail, limited, finite, placing his glory in the flesh. He put down his tent, *skené*, among us, he

became the *shekinah* of God among us, and he showed his glory, the overwhelming presence of God to men. The glory that dwelt in the tent of the exodus (Ex 40: 34-38), that dwelt in the temple (1 Kings 8: 10), now dwells in the flesh of the Son of God. This is indeed an epiphany. The *shekinah* is made visible, because the *shekinah* is Christ, place of the presence and of the divine glory. There is one who has seen the glory of God: the only Son full of grace and truth; he comes to reveal to us the face of the Father, the only one who can do this because he has his existence in the bosom of the Father. From this fullness of life comes the new creation. Moses gave the law. Christ gives grace and truth, love and fidelity. In the Son we can contemplate God without dying because whoever sees the Son sees also the Father: Jesus is the exegesis, the narration of the divine life.

And the place of revelation is his flesh. This is why John says at the time of fulfilment: "*We have seen his glory*" (Jn 1: 14), when at the "time of glorification" there is only darkness. The light is hidden when it gives its life for love of men, love to the very end, without restriction, respecting the freedom of man to crucify the Author of life. God is glorified at the moment of the passion: a love completed, definitive, unlimited, a love shown even to its extremist consequences. This is the mystery of the light that becomes a way in the darkness, because love likes the darkness of the night when life becomes more intimate and one's words die to live in the breath of the words of the person loved, the light is in the love that gives light to that hour of expropriation, the hour when one loses oneself to find oneself again in the embrace of life.

Prayer

Jerusalem, take off your dress of sorrow and distress, put on the beauty of God's glory for evermore, wrap the cloak of God's saving justice around you, put the diadem of the Eternal One's glory on your head, for God means to show your splendor to every nation under heaven, and the name God gives you for evermore will be, 'Peace-through-Justice, and Glory-through-Devotion'. Arise, Jerusalem, stand on the heights and turn your eyes to the east: see your children reassembled from west and east at the Holy One's command, rejoicing because God has remembered.

Though they left you on foot driven by enemies, now God brings them back to you, carried gloriously, like a royal throne.

For God has decreed the flattening of each high mountain, of the everlasting hills, the filling of the valleys to make the ground level so that Israel can walk safely in God's glory.

And the forests and every fragrant tree will provide shade for Israel, at God's command; for God will guide Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with the mercy and saving justice which come from him. *Baruc 5: 1-9*

Contemplation

Father of light, I come to you with my whole being. After going through times of goodness and times of slipping into evil I finally understand, because of my experience, that alone I only exist in shadow and darkness. Without your light I cannot see anything. Indeed, you are the source of life; you, Sun of justice, who opens my eyes, you the way that leads to the Father. Today you have come among us, eternal Word, as light that goes on crossing the pages of history to offer humankind the gifts of grace and joy in the desert of famine and emptiness: the bread and wine of your holy Name, which at the hour of the cross will become visible signs of consummated love, give us birth with you from that fertile side that is the Church, the cradle of your life for us. Like Mary, we wish

to stay by your side to learn to be like her, full of grace from the Most High. And when our tents will welcome the cloud of the Spirit in the radiance of one more word, we shall understand the Glory of your Face and we shall bless in an adoring silence without any further hesitation the Beauty of being one with you, living Word of God.

Sunday, December 26, 2021

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Opening Prayer

Father in heaven, You are my creator. You welcome me through Jesus Christ Your Son. You guide me by Your Holy Spirit. Enlighten my mind so that I may understand the meaning of the life You have granted me, the plan You have for me and for those You have placed at my side. Enkindle fire in my heart so that I may follow Your revelation joyfully and enthusiastically. Strengthen my weak will, unite it to the will of others so that together we may do Your will and thus build the world as one family more and more in Your image. You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Lectio: Gospel Reading - Luke 2: 41-52

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 in the midst of 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. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

A Time of Silence

that the Word of God may enter our hearts and enlighten our lives.

Meditatio: A Few Questions

to direct our meditation and practice.

Why does Luke, the Evangelist, tell us this story in Jesus' life? Where is the climax, the

center of the passage? There are times when family (community) relationships become tense and difficult and misunderstandings take place. Do we seek autonomy and independence? Who or what becomes more important at a particular time in our life? Can we organize hierarchically our relationships, our self-affirmation, our values, our tasks, our morality? Today, we often find “extended” families (multi-ethnic communities) with re-married parents, partners, daughters and sons, sisters and brothers, grandparents, parents of one partner and not of the other. On whom can we rely? Can we submit to one person or just rebel?

A Key to the Reading

We find ourselves among the so-called infancy stories according to Luke (chap. 1-2). This is the final passage, a theological and Christological prologue rather than a historical one, where we are presented with motifs that recur later in Luke's catechesis: the Temple, the journey towards Jerusalem, divine filiation, the poor, the merciful Father, etc.

Reading back, in Jesus' childhood there already appear signs of His future life. Mary and Joseph take Jesus to Jerusalem to take part in one of the three pilgrimages (the Passover, Pentecost and the feast of the Tabernacles) prescribed by the law (Deut 16: 16). During the seven days of the feast, people took part in the cult and listened to the Rabbis, who discussed beneath the portico of the Temple. “The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem”, the city the Lord chosen for His throne (2 Kings 21: 4-7; Jer 3: 17; Zech 3: 2), and where the Temple is found (Ps 68: 30; 76: 3; 135: 21), the only place of worship for the Jews (Jn 4: 20). Jerusalem is the place where “all that was written by the prophets concerning the Son of man will be fulfilled” (Lk 18: 21), the place of “His departure” (Lk 9: 31, 51; 24: 18) and of His appearances after the resurrection (Lk 24: 33, 36-49). His parents “sought Him” anxiously and troubled (2: 44, 45, 48, 49). How is it possible to lose a son, not to realize that Jesus is not in the caravan? Is it Christ who has to follow others or vice versa?

“Three days later” the “passion” ends, and they find Jesus in the Temple, among the doctors, teaching to the amazement of all. The characteristics of His mission begin to unfold and this mission is summarized in the first words that Jesus speaks in Luke's Gospel “Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be busy with My Father's affairs?” But who is His father? Why seek Him? This is the same father mentioned in Jesus' last words, in Luke, on the cross: “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit” (23: 46) and at the ascension into heaven “And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised” (24: 49).

Above all, we must seek to obey God, as Peter well understood after Pentecost (Acts 5: 29), seek the Kingdom of God and His justice (Mt 6: 33), seek the Father in prayer (Mt 7: 7-8), seek Jesus (Jn 1:38) and follow Him. Jesus proclaims His dependence - “I must” – on His heavenly Father. He reveals the Father in His immense goodness (Lk 15), but He thus creates a distance, a break, with His family. Before all affective ties, all personal fulfillment, all affairs... comes God's project. “Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, let Your will be done, not Mine” (Lk 22: 42). Simeon's prophecy (Lk 2: 34) begins to happen for Mary, “but they did not understand”. His parents' lack of understanding is also that of His disciples concerning the foretelling of the passion (18: 34). Rebel? Submit? Walk away?

Jesus “went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority,” says Luke, and Mary “stored up all these things in her heart”. Mary's attitude expresses the development of faith in a person who grows and progresses in knowledge of the mystery. Jesus reveals that obedience to God is the essential condition for fulfilling one's life, for a way of sharing in the family and in community. Obedience to the Father

is what makes us brothers and sisters, teaches us to obey each other, to listen to each other and recognize God's plan in each other. Such an atmosphere creates the conditions necessary to grow "in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and men" and to journey together.

Oratio

Psalm 83 (84): The Pilgrim's Hymn

How lovely is Thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at Thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

Blessed are those who dwell in Thy house, ever singing Thy praise! Blessed are the men whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!

Closing Prayer

I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have revealed to me Your goodness and Your love. You really are the only One who can give full meaning to my life. I love my father, but You are my Father; I love my mother, but You are my Mother.

Even if I had not known the love of my parents, I know that You are love, You are with me and You are waiting for me in Your eternal dwelling place prepared for me from the beginning of creation. Grant that, together with me, the members of my family, sisters, and brothers, all those who journey in community with me, may do Your will so as to foreshadow on earth and then enjoy in heaven the wonders of Your love. Amen

Monday, December 27, 2021

Feast of St. John of the Apostle, Evangelist

Opening Prayer

Lord God, you are love itself. We know that you loved us first before we could ever love you. Let this unforgettable experience of your "beloved apostle" John become also our deep and lasting experience.

May the love you have shown us in your Son Jesus Christ move us to love you very deeply in return and overflow on all those we meet in life. We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading – John 20: 2-8

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb," she said, "and we don't know where they have put

him.”

So, Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in.

Simon Peter, following him, also came up, went into the tomb, saw the linen cloths lying on the ground and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed.

Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents to us the passage of the Gospel of John which speaks about the Beloved Disciple. Probably, this text was chosen to read and to meditate on it today, feast of Saint John the Evangelist, for the immediate identification that we all make of the beloved disciple with the apostle John. But the strange thing is that in no passage of the Gospel of John it is said that the beloved disciple is John. But then, from the most remote times of the Church, it has always insisted upon identifying both of these. This is why, in insisting on the similarity between the two, we run the risk of losing a very important aspect of the message of the Gospel in regard to the beloved disciple.
- In the Gospel of John, the beloved disciple represents the new community which is born around Jesus. We find the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the Cross, together with Mary, the mother of Jesus (Jn 19: 26). Mary represents the People of the Old Covenant. At the end of the first century, the time in which the final redaction of the Gospel of John was compiled, there was a growing conflict between the Synagogue and the Church. Some Christians wanted to abandon the Old Testament and remain or keep only the New Testament. At the foot of the Cross, Jesus says: “Woman, behold your son!” and to the Beloved Disciple: “Son, behold your mother!” And both must remain together as mother and son. To separate the Old Testament from the New one, in that time was what we would call today separation between faith (NT) and life (OT).
- In the Gospel today, Peter and the Beloved Disciple, informed by the witness of Mary Magdalene, ran together toward the Holy Sepulchre. The *young one runs faster* than the elderly *one* and reaches the tomb first. He looks inside the tomb, observes everything, but does not enter. He allows Peter to enter first. Here is indicated the way in which the Gospel describes the reaction of the two men before what both of them see: “He entered and saw the linen clothes lying on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen clothes but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, he saw and he believed”. Both of them saw the same thing, but this is said only of the *Beloved Disciple* that he believed: “Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, he saw and he believed.” Why? Is it that Peter did not believe?
- The Beloved Disciple looks, sees in a different way, he perceives more than the others. He has a loving look which perceives the presence of the novelty of Jesus. The morning after that night of working, looking for fish and, then the miraculous catch of fish, it is he, the beloved disciple who perceives the presence of Jesus and says: “It is the Lord!” (Jn 21: 7). On that occasion, Peter informed by the affirmation of the Beloved Disciple, also recognizes, and begins to understand. Peter learns from the

Beloved Disciple. Then Jesus asks three times: "Peter, do you love me?" (Jn 21: 15, 16, 17). Three times Peter answers: "You know that I love you!" After the third time, Jesus entrusts the flock to the care of Peter, and in that moment, Peter also becomes a "Beloved Disciple".

Personal Questions

- All of us who believe in Jesus are today Beloved Disciples. Do I have the same loving look to perceive the presence of God and to believe in his Resurrection?
- To separate the Old Testament from the New one is the same thing as to separate Faith and Life. How do I do and live this today?

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)

Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Holy Innocents

Gospel Reading – Matthew 2: 18-18

When the Magi had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you.

Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him. Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt.

He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, Out of Egypt I called my son.

When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the Magi, he became furious.

He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the Magi.

Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet: A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more.

Lectio

Through the departure of the Magi this text is connected to four passages that have preceded it - that is to the story of their visit. The following context covers a period of many years following the death of Herod and also telling of the return of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to Palestine and their settling down in Nazareth.

The text of the Gospel of the infancy according to Matthew, is contrasted with that which appears in the account of the slavery in Egypt and the Exodus. This is a combination of different elements: the name of Joseph which recalls the son of Jacob who went down to Egypt, the massacre of the children, and the return from Egypt.

It is an angel of the Lord that comes to Joseph, who finds himself in danger, and suggests the flight into a land that at that time, was one of the outlets for Hebrew emigration.

This warning came in a dream and it points to some sort of particular revelation, perhaps more hidden and perhaps requiring deeper consideration. This would again testify to the characteristic wisdom of Mary's spouse. The flight of Joseph, the child and the mother has a temporal characteristic connotation: it happens at night. We find two Old Testament citations, which throw light upon the events being recounted. Hosea and Jeremiah are cited. After the first citation, short and to the point, the scene moves to Herod who orders the systematic killing of the children of Bethlehem and its surrounds; this agrees with other historical sources that describe him as a ruler without scruples, ready to kill even his own children to keep in power. The final Old Testament citation, which is much longer, closes the section. It takes up the lament of the prophet Jeremiah regarding the Assyrian deportation; the Evangelist locates the slaughter that takes place at the very heart of the suffering people of God.

Meditatio

Recalling the experience of exile and slavery of the people of Egypt and their return to their homeland recalls for us the Passover of the Hebrews, thus opening the passage to its greater meaning.

Furthermore, the perspective given by the text underlines the accomplishment of the Word of God within human experience, even in those people who are the most cruel. From this emerges the readiness of God to protect the gift given to humankind throughout history: his own Son. But the Son of God is not preserved from pain, another reason for us to grasp the future characteristic of the Easter event. Jesus is saved at this moment so that he can in the future announce the Word in order to give life when the time comes.

And the protector is Joseph, a wise man, who knows how to listen (see Mt 1: 20 & 2: 19) and act accordingly.

Herod accomplishes his slaughter, driven by his fear of losing his power and infuriated by failed success of his attempted deception of the Magi. The text expresses it as if it was he who was deceived, and thus it shows the evil reasoning of power, its arrogance that believes that the one who opposes is always wrong.

So, we are drawn to ask ourselves why God allows all this. But perhaps this question may conceal our responsibility: our greed and thirst for power, our roots of cruelty that history experiences in every age. And so, God answers the question regarding "the why of evil", and he does it not with words but through incarnation in this our history. Thus establishing a history of salvation.

That is why Easter, with its light, is on the horizon at Christmas.

Oratio

So that we might learn from and listen to the Word and put into practice. For all those who are forced to flee their homeland.

So that we might be aware of the struggles brought about by every form of greed and power seeking, and thus be protected from it.

For all the wounded children of today, the hungry, child-soldiers, the sexually exploited, the sexually abused.

Contemplatio

The text invites us to look into history with the eyes of faith, a history God has chosen to be present to be present in, even beyond all our imaginings. At the same time, God is inviting us to take responsibility for those who, for different reasons, suffer persecution and displacement.

Wednesday, December 29, 2021

The Octave of the Nativity of the Lord

Opening Prayer

God, Father of light,

the old man Simeon recognized your Son as the light that would shine on all.

May we too recognize Jesus, even if he comes to us in a humble way, in the shape and person of children, of old people, of the poor and the little ones.

Make us receive him too as the light not only of our lives but as the bright dawn for all nations.

For you are the Father of all and Jesus belongs to all as their Savior and Lord, now and forever.

Gospel Reading – Luke 2: 22-35

And when the day came for them to be purified in keeping with the Law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord - observing what is written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord - and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is prescribed in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to the restoration of Israel and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said: Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised;

for my eyes have seen the salvation

which you have made ready in the sight of the nations;

a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel.

As the child's father and mother were wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Look, he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed - and a sword will pierce your soul too - so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

Reflection

- The first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke are not a history according to the meaning that we give to history. They rather serve more than everything else, as a mirror in which

the converted Christians from Paganism, discover that Christ had come to fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament and to respond to the more profound aspirations of the human heart. They are then, symbol and mirror of what was happening among the Christians at the time of Luke. The communities coming from Paganism were born from the communities of converted Jews, but they were diverse. The New did not correspond to what the Old imagined and expected. It was a “sign of contradiction” (Lk 2: 34), it caused tension and it was a source of great suffering, of pain. In the attitude of Mary the image of the People of God, Luke represents a model of how to persevere in the New, without being unfaithful to the Old.

- In these two chapters of the Gospel of Luke, everything turns around the birth of the two children: John and Jesus. The two chapters make us feel the perfume of the Gospel of Luke. In them, the environment is one of tenderness and of praise. From the beginning to the end, there is praise and singing, because, finally, the mercy of God has been revealed in Jesus; he fulfils the promises made to the Fathers. And God fulfils them on behalf of the poor, of the *anawim*, like Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, Anne and Simeon, the shepherds. All of them knew how to wait for his coming.
- The insistence of Luke in saying that Mary and Joseph fulfilled everything which the Law prescribes, recalls what Paul writes in the Letter to the Galatians: “When the completion of the time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law so that we could receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4: 4-5).
- The story of the old Simeon teaches that hope, even if not immediately, will be realized someday. It is not frustrated, it is realized. But the way does not always correspond to what we imagine. Simeon was waiting for the glorious Messiah of Israel. Going to the Temple in the midst of many couples who were taking their child, he sees the realization of his hope and of the hope of the People: “My eyes have seen the salvation, which you have made ready in the sight of the nations, a light of revelation for the Gentiles and glory for your People Israel”.
- In the text of today’s Gospel, we have the preferred themes of Luke, that is, a strong insistence on the action of the Holy Spirit, on prayer and on the prayer environment, a continuous attention to the action and participation of the women and a constant concern for the poor and of the message for the poor.

Personal Questions

- Would you be capable to perceive in a poor child the light to enlighten the nations?
- Would you be capable of waiting your whole life for the realization of your hope?

Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh! Sing to Yahweh, all the earth! Sing to Yahweh, bless his name!

Proclaim his salvation day after day. (Ps 96: 1-2)

Thursday, December 30, 2021

Opening Prayer

Almighty Father,

You let humble, faithful people recognize Your Son and welcome Him as the Savior who brought freedom and life to His people. May we too recognize and welcome Jesus in all that is little and humble and with Him grow up in wisdom and grace to the maturity of Your sons and daughters, so that we attain the full image of Jesus. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Luke 2: 36-40

There was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came up just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And as the child grew to maturity, He was filled with wisdom; and God's favor was with him.

Reflection

- In the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel, everything revolves around the birth of two people: John and Jesus. The two chapters make us feel the sense of the Gospel of Luke. In it, the environment is one of tenderness and praise. From the beginning until the end, the mercy of God is sung and praised: The canticles of Mary (Lk 1: 46-55), of Zechariah (Lk 1: 68-79), of the Angels (Lk 2: 14), of Simeon (Lk 2: 29-32). Finally, God comes to fulfill his promises and He fulfills them on behalf of the poor, [1] the *anawim*, those who knew how to persevere and hope in his coming: Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, the shepherds.
- Chapters 1 and 2 of Luke's Gospel are very well known, but do not go far enough. Luke writes by imitating the writings of the Old Testament. It is as if the first two chapters of his Gospel were the last chapter of the Old Testament, which opens the door for the coming of the New. These two chapters are the foundation or bridge between the New and the Old Testaments. Luke wants to show that the prophecies are being realized. John and Jesus fulfill the Old and begin the New.
- Luke 2: 36-37: The life of the Prophetess Anna. "There was a prophetess, Anna, daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. She had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer". Like Judith (Jdt 8: 1-6), Anna was also a widow. Like Deborah (Judge 4: 4), she also was a prophetess, i.e., a person who communicates something of God and who has a special ability in matters of faith to the point of being able to communicate them to others. Anna got married when she was young, and lived seven years married, then she became a widow and continued to dedicate herself to God up to the age of eighty-four years. Today, in almost all of our communities throughout the world,

we find groups of older women, many of them widows, whose life is consumed in prayer and in giving service to their neighbors.

- Luke 2: 38: Anna and the Child Jesus. “She came up just at that moment and began to praise God, and she spoke of the child to all who looked toward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.” She went to the Temple at the moment when Simeon embraces the child and speaks with Mary concerning the future of her son (Lk 2: 25-35). Luke suggests that Anna takes part in this activity. The vision of Anna is one of faith. She sees a child in the arms of His mother and discovers in Him the Savior of the world.
- Luke 2: 39-40: The life of Jesus in Nazareth. “When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And as the child grew to maturity, He was filled with wisdom and God’s favor was with Him”. In these few words, Luke communicates something of the mystery of the Incarnation. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1: 14). The Son of God becomes equal to us in all things and assumes the condition of Servant (Ph 2: 7). He was obedient even unto death and death on the cross (Phil 2: 8). He lived thirty-three years among us, and of these, He lived thirty in Nazareth.

If we want to know how the life of the Son of God was during the years that He lived in Nazareth, we have to learn about the life of the average Nazarene of that time, change his name, give him the name of Jesus and then we will have an idea about the life of the Son of God in these first thirty years, being in everything like us except sin (Heb 4: 15). During these years of His life, “The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him.” In another passage, Luke affirms the same thing using other words. He says that the child “grew in wisdom, age and grace before God and men” (Lk 2: 52).

To grow in wisdom means to assimilate knowledge of what is true or right, just judgement and discernment, as well as prayer, customs, etc. This is learned through living and living together in the natural community of the people. To grow in age means to be born small and to grow and become an adult. This is the process of every human being, with its joys and sadness, its discoveries and frustrations, anger, and love. This is learned by living and by living together in the family, with parents, brothers and sisters, and relatives. To grow in grace means to discover the presence of God in life, His action in everything that happens, and His call. The Letter to the Hebrews says that: “Although He was the Son, He learned obedience through His sufferings” (Heb 5: 8).

Personal Questions

- • Do you know any people like Anna who look on things in life with eyes of faith?
- • To grow in wisdom, age, and grace - how does this take place in my life?

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, December 31, 2021

Octave of the Nativity of the Lord

Opening Prayer

Loving Father,

You gave us your Son Jesus Christ and let him share our poverty.

He brought us grace upon grace, for all that comes from you is a free gift. Accept our thanks for the moments when we accepted your gifts and shared them with one another.

Accept our thanks for the times we listened attentively to your Son's words and put them into practice.

Help us go forward with hope and joy with joy and mutual encouragement with the companion in life you have given us, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading – John 1: 1-18

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him. What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men; and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light; he was to bear witness to the light.

The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognize him. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name who were born not from human stock, or human desire, or human will but from God himself.

The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John witnesses to him. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me has passed ahead of me because he existed before me.' Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received -- one gift replacing another, for the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Reflection

The Prologue is the first thing which one sees in opening the Gospel of John. But it was the *last one* to be written. It is the final summary, placed at the beginning. In it, John describes the way of the Word of God. It was at the side of God, before the creation, and through him all things were created; everything which exists is an expression of the Word of God. As it happens with the Wisdom of God, (Prov 8: 22-31), in the same way also the Word wishes to get closer to us and becomes flesh in Jesus. It comes in our midst and carries out its mission and returned to God. Jesus is this Word of God. Everything that it says and does is communication which reveals the Father to us.

In saying: "*In the beginning was the Word*", John recalls the first phrase of the Bible which says: "*In the beginning God created heaven and earth*" (Gen 1: 1). God created all things by means of his Word. "*He speaks and everything is made*" (Ps 33: 9; 148: 5). All creatures are an expression of the Word of God. This living Word of God, present in all

things, shines in darkness. Darkness tries to overpower it, but it could not succeed. The search for God which is always new, is reborn in the human heart. Nobody succeeds in covering it. We cannot bear to live without God for a long time!

John the Baptist comes to help people to discover and to relish this luminous and consoling presence of the Word of God in life. The witness of John the Baptist has been very important, so much so that many people thought that he was the Christ (Messiah) (Acts 19: 3; Jn 1: 20). This is why *the Prologue* clarifies saying: "John was not the light! He has come to bear witness to the light!"

Thus, as the Word of God manifests itself in nature, in creation, so also it is manifested in the "world," that is in the history of humanity, particularly, in the history of the People of God. But the "world" does not recognize, does not receive the Word. "*He came to his own and his own people did not accept him.*" Here when he says *people*, John wants to indicate the system of the empire as well as that of the religion of the time, both of them closed up in themselves and, because of this, incapable to recognize the Good News (Gospel), the luminous presence of the Word of God.

But the persons who open themselves to accept the Word, become sons and daughters of God. The person becomes son or daughter of God not because of his/her own merits, neither because of belonging to the race of Israel, but because of the simple fact of having trust and believing that God in His goodness, accepts and receives us. The Word of God penetrates within the person and makes the person feel accepted as a son, as a daughter of God. This is the power of the grace of God.

God does not want to remain far away from us. Because of this, His Word, gets closer and becomes present in our midst in the Person of Jesus. The *Prologue* literally says: "And the Word became flesh and *lived among us.*" In ancient times, at the time of Exodus, in the desert, God lived in a tent among the people (Ex 25: 8). Now, the tent in which God dwells with us is Jesus, "filled with grace and truth." Jesus comes to reveal who is this our God, present in everything, from the beginning of creation.

Personal Questions

- Everything that exists is an expression of the Word of God, a revelation of his presence. Am I sufficiently contemplative to be able to receive and experience this universal presence of the Word of God?
- What does it mean for me to be called son of God?

Concluding Prayer

The Lord comes, he is coming to judge the earth; he will judge the world with saving justice, and the nations with constancy. (Ps 96: 13)