



Lectio Divina

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Sunday, May 1, 2022

Third Sunday of Easter

Opening Prayer

Father, send your Holy Spirit that the fruitless night of our life may be transformed into the radiant dawn that enables us to know your Son Jesus present among us. Let your Spirit breathe on the waters of our sea, as he did at the moment of creation, to open our hearts to the invitation of the Lord's love and that we may share in the banquet of his Body and his Word. May your Spirit burn within us, Father, that we may become witnesses of Jesus, like Peter and John and the other disciples, and that we too may go out every day to become fishermen and women for your kingdom. Amen.

The Word of the Lord for Today

A Reading of the Gospel – John 21: 1-19

1 Later on, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples. It was by the Sea of Tiberias, and it happened like this: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two more of his disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said, 'I'm going fishing.' They replied, 'We'll come with you.' They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night.

4 When it was already light, there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus called out, 'Haven't you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered, 'No,' 6 he said, 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something.' So, they threw the net out and could not haul it in because of the quantity of fish. 7 The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' At these words, 'It is the Lord,' Simon Peter tied his outer garment round him (for he had nothing on) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net with the fish; they were only about a hundred yards from land.

9 As soon as they came ashore, they saw that there was some bread there and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it. 10 Jesus said, 'Bringsome of the fish you have just caught.' 11 Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net ashore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and in spite of there being so many the net was not broken. 12 Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, 'Who are you?'. They knew quite well it was the Lord. 13 Jesus then stepped

forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish. 14 This wasthe third time that Jesus revealed himself to the disciples after rising from the dead.

15 When they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others do?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' 16 A second time he said to him, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He replied, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Look after my sheep.' 17 Then he said to him a third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt that he asked him a third time, 'Do you love me?' and said, 'Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. 18 In all truth I tell you, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt

round you and take you where you would rather not go.' 19 In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said, 'Follow me.'

The Context of the Passage:

After this first contact with the passage, I now feel the need to better understand its context. I pick up the Bible and do not allow superficial first impressions influence me. I try to search and listen. I open chapter 21 of John's Gospel, practically at the end of the Gospel. The end of anything usually contains all that went before it, everything that was built up bit by bit. This catch on the lake of Tiberias reminds me strongly and clearly of the beginning of the Gospel where Jesus calls the first disciples, the same ones who are now present with him: Peter, James, John and Nathanael. The meal with Jesus, bread and fish, reminds me of chapter 6 where the great multiplication of the loaves took place, the revelation of the Bread of Life. The intimate and personal conversation between Jesus and Peter, his triple question: "Do you love me?" reminds again of the Easter vigil when Peter had denied the Lord three times.

Then, if I turn back just a little the pages of the Gospel, I find the wonderful passage concerning the resurrection: the haste by night of Mary Magdalene and the other women to the sepulchre, the discovery of the empty tomb, Peter and John's race, their looking into the sepulchre, their contemplation, their faith; I still find the eleven behind locked doors in the cenacle and then the risen Jesus comes in, the gift of the Spirit, the absence and unbelief of Thomas, a belief regained with the second coming in of Jesus; I hear that wonderful proclamation of the beatitude, which is for all of us today, called to believe without having seen.

Then I too go to the waters of that sea, on a night with no catch, empty handed. But it is here and now that I am visited, embraced by the manifestation, the revelation of the Lord Jesus. I too am here, then, to recognize him, to throw myself into the sea and go towards him to share in the banquet, to let him dig deep into my heart with his questions, his words, so that once more He may repeat to me: "Follow me!" and I, at last, may say to him "Here I am!" fuller, truer and stronger and forever.

A Subdivision of the Text:

- **v.1:** With the verb "revealed," John immediately draws our attention to a great event about to take place. The power of Jesus' resurrection has not yet ceased to invade the lives of the disciples and thus of the Church. It is just a matter of being prepared to accept the light, the salvation offered by Christ. As he reveals himself in this text now, so also he will go on revealing himself in the lives of believers, also in our lives.
- **vv. 2- 3:** Peter and the other six disciples go out from the locked cenacle and go to the sea to fish, but after a whole night of labor, they catch nothing. It is the dark, the solitude, the inability of human endeavors.
- **vv. 4-8:** Finally, the dawn comes, light returns and Jesus appears standing on the shore of the sea. But the disciples do not recognize him yet; they need to embark on a very deep interior journey. The initiative comes from the Lord who, by his words, helps them to see their need, their situation: they have nothing to eat. Then he invites them to cast the net again. Obedience to his Word works the miracle and the catch is abundant. John, the disciple of love, recognizes the Lord and shouts his faith to the other disciples. Peter believes and immediately throws himself into the sea to go as quickly as possible to the Lord and Master. The others, however, follow dragging the boat and the net.
- **vv. 9-14:** The scene now changes on land, where Jesus had been waiting for the disciples. Here a banquet takes place: Jesus' bread is joined to the disciples' fish, his

life and his gift become one with their life and gift. It is the power of the Word made flesh, made existence.

- **v. 15-18:** Now Jesus addresses Peter directly heart to heart; it is a very powerful moment of love from which I cannot separate myself, because those same words of the Lord are written and repeated also for me, today. It is a mutual declaration of love repeated three times, capable of overcoming all infidelities and weaknesses. From nowon a new life begins for Peter and for me, if I so desire.
- **v. 19:** This last verse of the text is rather unusual because it is a comment of the Evangelist followed immediately by Jesus' very powerful and definitive word to Peter: "Follow me!", to which there is no other reply than life itself.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

Here I pause a while and gather in my heart the words I have read and heard. I try to do what Mary did, who listened to the words of the Lord and examined them, weighed them and allowed them to speak for themselves without interpreting, changing, diminishing or adding anything to them. In silence I pause on this text and go over it in my heart.

Some Questions

- "*They went out and got into the boat*" (v. 3). Am I also ready to embark on this journey of conversion? Will I let myself be reawakened by Jesus' invitation? Or do I prefer to go on hiding behind my closed doors for fear like the disciples in the cenacle? Do I want to go out, to go out after Jesus, to allow him to lead me? There is a boat ready for me, there is a vocation of love given to me by the Lord; when will I make up my mind to truly respond?
- "...*But caught nothing that night*" (*ibid*). Do I have the courage to hear the Lord say to me that there is emptiness in me, that it is night, that I am empty handed? Do I have the courage to admit that I need him, his presence? Do I want to open my heart to him, my innermost self, that which I constantly try to deny, to hide? He knows everything, he knows my innermost self; he sees that I have nothing to eat, but it is I who must realize this about myself, that must eventually come to him empty handed, even weeping, with a heart full of sadness and anguish. If I do not take this step, the true light, the dawn of my day will never shine.
- "*Throw the net out to starboard*" (v. 6). The Lord speaks clearly to me too in moments when, thanks to a person or a prayer gathering or a Word spoken, I understand clearly what I have to do. The command is very clear; I only need to listen and obey. "*Throw out to starboard*", the Lord says to me. Do I at last have the courage to trust him, or do I wish to go on my own way, in my own way? Do I wish to cast my net for him?
- "*Simon Peter ... jumped into the water*" (v. 7). I am not sure that there is a more beautiful verse than this. Peter jumped in, like the widow at the temple who cast all shehad, like the man possessed who was healed (Mk 5: 6), like Jairus, like the woman with the hemorrhage, like the leper, all of whom threw themselves at Jesus' feet, surrendering their lives to him. Or like Jesus himself who threw himself on the ground and prayed to his Father (Mk 14: 35). Now is my time. Do I also want to throw myself into the sea of mercy, of the Father's love, do I wish to surrender to him my whole life, my whole being, my sufferings, my hopes, my wishes, my sins, my desire

to start again? His arms are ready to welcome me, rather, I am certain that it will be he who will throw his arms around my neck, as it is written ... "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him".

- "*Bring some of the fish you have just caught*" (v. 10). The Lord asks me to join my food with his, my life with his. While the Evangelist is speaking of fish, it is as if he were speaking of people, those whom the Lord himself wishes to save through my efforts at fishing. That is why he sends me. At his table, at his feast, he expects me and expects all those brothers and sisters whom in his love he has placed in my life. I cannot go to Jesus alone. This Word, then, asks whether I am prepared to go to the Lord, to sit at his table, to celebrate Eucharist with him and whether I am ready to spend my life and my energies to bring to him with me many of my brothers and sisters. I must look within my heart sincerely and see my resistance, my closure to him and to others.
- "*Do you love me?*" (v. 15). How can I answer this question? How can I proclaim my love for God when all my infidelities and my denials come to the surface? What happened to Peter is also part of my story. But I do not want this fear to prevent me and make me retreat; no! I want to go to Jesus, I want to stay with him, I want to approach him and say that I love him. I borrow Peter's words and make them mine, I write them on my heart, I repeat them, I give them breath and life in my life and then I gather courage and say to Jesus: "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you". Just as I am, I love him. Thank you, Lord, that you ask me to love and that you expect me, you want me; thank you because you rejoice in my poor love.
- "*Feed my sheep... Follow me*" (vv. 15, 19). That is how the text ends. It is an open-ended ending and still goes on speaking to me. This is the Word that the Lord entrusts to me so that I may put it into practice in my life from this day on. I want to accept the mission that the Lord entrusts to me; I want to answer his call and to follow him wherever he may lead me, every day and in every small matter.

A Key to the Reading

Peter is the first to take the initiative and proclaim to his brothers his decision to go fishing. Peter goes out to the sea, that is, the world, he goes to his brothers and sisters because he knows that he is a fisher of people (Lk 5: 10); just like Jesus, who went out of the Father to come and pitch his tent in our midst. Peter is also the first to react to the words of John who recognizes Jesus on the shore. He ties his garment and throws himself into the sea. These seem to me to be strong allusions to baptism. It is as if Peter wishes to bury completely his past in those waters, just like a catechumen who enters the baptismal font.

Peter commits himself to these purifying waters, he allows himself to be healed: he throws himself into the waters, taking with him his self-conceits, his faults, the weight of his denial, his tears, so as to rise again a new man to meet his Lord. Before he throws himself, Peter ties his garment, just like Jesus did, before him, when he tied a garment to wash the feet of his disciples at the last supper. It is the garment of a servant, of one who gives him/herself to his/her brothers and sisters, and it is this garment that covers his nakedness. It is the garment of the Lord himself, who wraps him in his love and his forgiveness.

Thanks to this love, Peter will be able to come up again from the sea and start all over again. It is also said of Jesus that he came up out of the water after his baptism; Master and disciple share the same verb, the same experience. Peter is now a new man! That is why he will be able to affirm three times that he loves the Lord. Even though

his triple denial remains an open wound, it is not his last word. It is here that Peter experiences the forgiveness of the Lord and realizes the weakness that reveals itself to him as the place of a greater love. Peter receives love, a love that goes well beyond his treachery, his fall, a surfeit of love that enables him to serve his brothers and sisters, to lead them to the green pastures of the Lord Jesus. Not only this, but in this service of love, Peter will become the good Shepherd, like Jesus himself.

Indeed, he too will give his life for his sheep, he will stretch his arms in crucifixion, as we know from history. He was crucified head down, he will be turned upside down, but in the mystery of love he will thus be truly straightened up and fulfil that baptism that began at the moment he threw himself into the sea with a garment tied around him. Peter then becomes the lamb who follows the Shepherd to martyrdom.

A Time of Prayer

Psalm 22

My soul thirsts for you, Lord. Yahweh is my shepherd,
I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows he lets me lie. By tranquil streams he leads me to restore my spirit.
He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name. Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death

I should fear no danger, for you are at my side.

Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.

You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil;
my cup brims over.

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

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

Final Prayer

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

Monday, May 2, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Our living God,
we hunger for lasting life and happiness
and the fulfilment of all our hopes.
Satisfy all our hungers
through your Son Jesus Christ, who is our bread of life. And when he has filled us with

himself,
may he lead and strengthen us to bring to a waiting world
the food of reconciliation and joy, which you alone can give to the full. We ask this
thorough Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 6: 22-29

Next day, the crowd that had stayed on the other side saw that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that the disciples had set off by themselves. Other boats, however, had put in from Tiberias, near the place where the bread had been eaten.

When the people saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into those boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. When they found him on the other side, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?'

Jesus answered: In all truth I tell you, you are looking for me not because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of man will give you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal.

Then they said to him, 'What must we do if we are to carry out God's work?' Jesus gave them this answer, 'This is carrying out God's work: you must believe in the one he has sent.'

Reflection

- In today's Gospel we begin the Discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn 6: 22-71), which is extended during the next six days, until the end of the week. After the multiplication of the loaves, the people follow Jesus. They had seen the miracle; they had eaten and were satiated and wanted more! They were not concerned about looking for the sign or the call of God that was contained in all of this. When the people found Jesus in the Synagogue of Capernaum, he had a long conversation with them, called the Discourse of the Bread of Life. It is not really a Discourse, but it treats of a series of seven brief dialogues which explain the meaning of the multiplication of the bread, symbol of the new Exodus and of the Eucharistic Supper.
- It is good to keep in mind the division of the chapter in order to understand better its significance:
 - 6: 1-15: the great multiplication of the loaves
 - 6: 16-21: the crossing of the lake, and Jesus who walks on the water
 - 6: 22-71: the dialogue of Jesus with the people, with the Jews and with the disciples
 - 1st dialogue: 6: 22-27 with the people: the people seek Jesus and find him in Capernaum
 - 2nd dialogue: 6: 28-34 with the people: faith as the work of God and the manna of the desert
 - 3rd dialogue: 6: 35-40 with the people: the true bread is to do God's will.
 - 4th dialogue: 6: 41-51 with the Jews: the complaining of the Jews
 - 5th dialogue: 6: 52-58 with the Jews: Jesus and the Jews.
 - 6th dialogue: 6: 59-66 with the disciples: reaction of the disciples

- 7th dialogue: 6: 67-71 with the disciples: confession of Peter

The conversation of Jesus with the people, with the Jews and with the disciples is a beautiful dialogue, but a demanding one. Jesus tries to open the eyes of the people in a way that they will learn to read the events and discover in them the turning point that life should take. Because it is not enough to follow behind miraculous signs which multiply the bread for the body. Man does not live by bread alone. The struggle for life without mysticism does not reach the roots. The people, while speaking with Jesus, always remain more annoyed or upset by his words. But Jesus does not give in, neither does he change the exigencies. The discourse seems to be a funnel. In the measure in which the conversation advances, less people remain with Jesus. At the end only the twelve remain there, but Jesus cannot trust them either! Today the same thing happens. When the Gospel begins to demand commitment, many people withdraw, go away.

John 6: 22-27: People look for Jesus because they want more bread. The people follow Jesus. They see that he did not go into the boat with the disciples, and, because of this, they do not understand what he had done to reach Capernaum. They did not even understand the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. People see what has happened, but they cannot understand all this as a sign of something more profound. They stop only on the surface; in being satisfied with the food. They look for bread and life, but only for the body. According to the people, Jesus does what Moses had done in the past: to feed all the people in the desert. According to Jesus, they wanted the past to be repeated. But Jesus asks the people to take a step more and advance. Besides working for the bread that perishes, they should work for the imperishable food. This new food will be given by the Son of Man, indicated by God himself. He brings life which lasts forever. He opens for us a new horizon on the sense of life and on God.

John 6: 28-29: Which is God's work? The people ask: what should we do to carry out this work of God? Jesus answers that the great work of God asks us to "believe in the one sent by God." That is, to believe in Jesus!

Personal Questions

- The people were hungry, they eat the bread and they look for more bread. They seek the miracle and do not seek the sign of God who was hidden in that. What do I seek more in my life: the miracle or the sign?
- Keep silence within you for a moment and ask yourself: "To believe in Jesus: What does this mean for me concretely in my daily life?"

Concluding Prayer

Lord, I tell you my ways and you answer me; teach me your wishes.
Show me the way of your precepts,
that I may reflect on your wonders. (Ps 119: 26-27)

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

Feast of Philip and James, Apostles

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
we praise and thank You on the feast
of Your apostles Philip and James.

Through them many have come to know
that Jesus is alive and risen.
May we too be good witnesses
to the risen Jesus
by the way we live His risen life.
Even though we are flawed and weak,
may people find through us
the way to the Father of Jesus our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 14: 6-14

Jesus said to Thomas, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father. And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it."

Reflection

Today's Gospel, the Feast of the Apostles Philip and James, is the same one we meditated on during the 4th week of Easter. It narrates Philip's request to Jesus: "Show us the Father, and that is enough for us."

- John 14: 6: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: Thomas had addressed a question to Jesus: "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?" (Jn 14:5). Jesus answers, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through Me." Three important words. Without the way, we cannot walk. A "way" is not only a path, but a method of performing or doing. In this case, His way is to be our way. Without the truth one cannot make a good choice. In life, things are not always what they seem to be. We can be easily deceived, especially with fake news, flawed beliefs, and the evil that still inhabits the world. It is important to focus on the Truth and not be deceived. He is the Truth. Without life, there is only death! Jesus explains the meaning. He is the way, because no one "comes to the Father except through Me." And He is the gate through which the sheep go in and out (Jn 10: 9). Jesus is the Truth because looking at Him, we are seeing the image of the Father. "If you know Me, you will know My Father also!" Jesus is Life, because walking like Jesus we will be united to the Father and will have life in us!
- John 14: 7: To know Jesus is to know the Father. Thomas had asked, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus answers, "I am the

Way, the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through Me." And He adds, "If you know Me, you will know My Father also. From this moment you have known Him and have seen Him." This is the first phrase of today's Gospel. Jesus always speaks about the Father, because it was the life of the Father that appeared in everything that Jesus said and did. This continuous reference to the Father causes Philip to ask the question.

- John 14: 8-11: Philip asks, "Show us the Father and then we will be satisfied!" It was the disciples' desire, the desire of many people within the communities of the Beloved Disciple, and it is the desire of many people today. What do people do to see the Father whom Jesus speaks of so much? Jesus' answer is very beautiful, and it is valid even today: "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know Me? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father!" People should not think that God is far away from us, at a distance and unknown. Anyone who wants to know who God the Father is, it suffices for him to look at Jesus. He has revealed Him in the words and gestures of His life! "The Father is in Me and I am in the Father!" Through His obedience, Jesus has fully identified Himself with the Father. At every moment, He did what the Father told Him to do (Jn 5: 30; 8: 28-29, 38). This is why, in Jesus everything is the revelation of the Father! The signs or works are the works of the Father! As people say, "The son is the face of the father!" This is why in Jesus, and for Jesus, God is in our midst.
- John 14: 12-14: The Promise of Jesus. Jesus says that His intimacy with the Father is not a privilege only for Him, but it is possible for all those who believe in Him. We also, through Jesus, are able to do beautiful things for others as Jesus did for the people of His time. He intercedes for us. Everything that people ask from Him, He asks the Father and obtains it always, if it is to serve. Jesus is our defender. He leaves but He does not leave us without defense. He promises that He will ask the Father and the Father will send another defender and consoler, the Holy Spirit. Jesus even said that it is necessary that He leave, because otherwise the Holy Spirit will not come (Jn 16: 7). The Holy Spirit will fulfill the things of Jesus in us, if we act in the name of Jesus and observe the great commandment of the practice of love. In his recent encyclical *Gaudete et exsultate*, Pope Francis quotes *Lumen Gentium*: The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God's holy and faithful people, for "it has pleased God to make men and women holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather as a people who might acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness"

For Personal Confrontation

- Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. How do I define Jesus as the Way in my life? As a model of action, or a map, or something else?
- How can Jesus, as the Truth, be used in my daily life to guide me through the deceptions in the world?
- As Life, how do I use Jesus as a model for my life and decision making?
- As we read today's Gospel, we are almost moved to say "Philip! Haven't you been listening?". Are there times when I don't hear what Jesus is really telling me in my own life as well? What are some of them?

Concluding Prayer

The heavens declare the glory of God, the vault of Heaven proclaims His handiwork, day to day pours forth speech, night to night hands on the knowledge. (Ps 19: 1-2)

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

God, our Father,
you are our faithful God,
even in days of trial for the Church and for each of us personally;
you stay by our side, even if we are not aware of your presence.
Give us an unlimited trust in you and make us ever more aware
that your Son Jesus is the meaning of our lives and that he nourishes us with himself,
today and every day, forever.

Gospel Reading - John 6: 35-40

Jesus answered them: I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever hunger; no one who believes in me will ever thirst. But, as I have told you, you can see me and still you do not believe. Everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me; I will certainly not reject anyone who comes to me, because I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of him who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, but that I should raise it up on the last day. It is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and that I should raise that person up on the last day.

Reflection

- John 6: 35-36: I am the bread of life. The people enthusiastic with the perspective of having bread from heaven of which Jesus speaks and which gives life forever (Jn 6: 33), ask: "Lord, give us always that bread!" (Jn 6: 34). They thought that Jesus was speaking about some particular kind of bread. This is why, the people, interested in getting this bread, ask: "Give us always of this bread!" This petition of the people reminds us of the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. Jesus had said that she could have had within her a spring of living water, welling up to eternal life, and she in an interested way asks: "Lord, give me of that water!" (Jn 4, 15). The Samaritan woman is not aware that Jesus is not speaking about material water. Just as the people were not aware that Jesus was not speaking of material bread. Because of this, Jesus responds very clearly: "I am the bread of life! No one who comes to me will ever hunger; no one who believes in me will ever thirst". To eat the bread of heaven is the same as believing in Jesus. And to believe that he has come from heaven as a revelation of the Father. It is to accept the way which he has taught. But the people, in spite, of having seen Jesus, do not believe in him. Jesus is aware of the lack of faith and says: "You have seen me, and you do not believe".

- John 6: 37-40: To do the will of him who sent me. After the conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus had said to his disciples: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me!" (Jn 4: 34). Here, in the conversation with the people on the bread from heaven, Jesus touches on the same theme: "I have come from heaven not to do my own will, but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me; but that I should raise it up on the last day". This is the food which people should look for: to do the will of the Heavenly Father. And this is the bread which nourishes the person in life and gives him/her life. Eternal life begins here, a life which is stronger than death! If we were really ready to do the will of the Father, we would have no difficulty to recognize the Father present in Jesus.
- John 6: 41-43: The Jews complained. Tomorrow's Gospel begins with verse 44 (John 6: 44-51) and skips verses 41 to 43. In verse 41, begins the conversation with the Jews, who criticize Jesus. Here we will give a brief explanation of the meaning of the word Jews in the Gospel of John in order to avoid that a superficial reading of it, may nourish in us Christians, the sentiment of anti-Semitism. First of all, it is well to remember that Jesus was a Jew and continues to be a Jew (Jn 4: 9). His disciples were Jews. The first Christian communities were all Jewish who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. It was only later, little by little, that in the communities of the Beloved Disciple, Greeks and Christians began to be accepted on the same level of the Jews. They were more open communities.

But this openness was not accepted by all. Some Christians who came from the group of the Pharisees wanted to keep the "separation" between Jews and Pagans (Acts 15: 5). The situation was critical after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. The Pharisees became the dominating religious current in Judaism and began to define the religious directives or norms for the whole People of God: to suppress worship in the Greek language; to adopt solely the Biblical text in Hebrew; to define or determine the list of sacred books, and eliminate the books which existed only in the Greek translation of the Bible: Tobias, Judith, Esther, Baruch, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus and the two Books of the Maccabees: to segregate or separate the foreigners; not eat any food, suspected to be impure or which had been offered to the idols.

All these norms assumed by the Pharisees had some repercussion on the communities of the Jews which accepted Jesus as Messiah. These communities had already journeyed very much. The openness for the Pagans was now irreversible. The Greek Bible had already been used for a long time. Thus, slowly, a reciprocal separation grew between Christianity and Judaism. In the years 85-90 the Jewish authorities began to discriminate those who continued to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt 5: 11-12; 24: 9-13). Those who continued to remain in the faith in Jesus were expelled from the Synagogue (Jn 9: 34). Many Christian communities feared this expulsion (Jn 9: 22) because it meant to lose the support of a strong and traditional institution such as the Synagogue. Those who were expelled lost the legal privileges that the Jews had conquered and gained throughout the centuries in the Empire. The expelled persons lost even the possibility of being buried decently. It was an enormous risk. This situation of conflict at the end of the first century had repercussion in the description of the conflict of Jesus with the Pharisees.

When the Gospel of John speaks of the Jews he is not speaking of the Jewish people as such, but he is thinking much more of those few Pharisee authorities which were expelling the Christians from the Synagogues in the years 85-90, the time when the

Gospel was written. We cannot allow this affirmation about the Jews to make anti-Semitism grow among Christians.

Personal Questions

- Anti-Semitism: look well within yourself and try to uproot any remain of anti-Semitism.
- To eat the bread of heaven means to believe in Jesus. How does all this help me to live the Eucharist better?

Concluding Prayer

Acclaim God, all the earth,
sing psalms to the glory of his name, glorify him with your praises,
say to God, 'How awesome you are! (Ps 66: 1-3)

Thursday, May 5, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

you draw all people to you who believe in your Son Jesus Christ. Faith, Lord, faith it is that we need.

Give it to us, we pray you, a living faith that we can encounter today Jesus Christ, your Son, in your word that you speak to us in the bread that you offer us, and in the food that we can give and can be to one another, in Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit now and forever.

Gospel Reading - John 6: 44-51

'No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They will all be taught by God; everyone who has listened to the Father, and learnt from him, comes to me. Not that anybody has seen the Father, except him who has his being from God: he has seen the Father. In all truth I tell you, everyone who believes has eternal life.'

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Reflection

Up until now the dialogue had been between Jesus and the people. From now on, the Jewish leaders begin to enter into conversation and the discussion becomes tenser.

- John 6: 44-46: Anyone who opens himself to God accepts Jesus and his proposal. The conversation becomes more demanding. Now, it is the Jews, the leaders of the people who complain: "Surely, this is Jesus, son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How can he say: I have come down from heaven?" (Jn 6, 42). They thought they knew the things of God. But they did not know them. If we were truly open and faithful to God, we would feel within us the impulse of God which attracts us toward Jesus and we would recognize that Jesus comes from God, because it is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God; everyone who has listened to the Father and has learnt from him, comes to me."
- John 6: 47-50: Your fathers ate manna in the desert, and they are dead. In the celebration of the Passover, the Jews recalled the bread of the desert. Jesus helps them to take a step ahead. Anyone who celebrates the Passover, recalling only the bread that the fathers ate in the past, will die as all of them did! The true sense of the Passover is not to recall the manna which falls from heaven, but to accept Jesus, the new Bread of Life and to follow the way which he has indicated. It is no longer a question of eating the meat of the paschal lamb, but rather of eating the flesh of Jesus, so that the one who eats it will not die but will have eternal life!
- John 6: 51: Anyone who eats of this bread will live forever. And Jesus ends saying: "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever and the bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world." Instead of the manna and the paschal lamb of the first exodus, we are invited to eat the new manna and the new paschal lamb that was sacrificed on the Cross for the life of all.
- The new Exodus. The multiplication of the loaves takes place close to the Passover (Jn 6: 4). The feast of the Passover was the prodigious souvenir of the Exodus, the liberation of the People from the clutches of Pharaoh. The whole episode which is narrated in chapter 6 of the Gospel of John has a parallel in the episodes related to the feast of the Passover, whether as liberation from Egypt or with the journey of the people in the desert in search of the Promised Land. The discourse of the Bread of Life, in the Synagogue of Capernaum, is related to chapter 16 of the Book of Exodus which speaks about the Manna. It is worthwhile to read all of chapter 16 of Exodus. In perceiving the difficulties of the people in the desert we can understand better the teaching of Jesus here in chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. For example, when Jesus speaks of a "food which does not perish, which endures for eternal life" (Jn 6: 27) he is recalling the manna which produced worms and became rotten (Ex 16: 20) Like when the Jews "complained" (Jn 6: 41), they do the same thing as the Israelites in the desert, when they doubted of the presence of God in their midst during their journey across the desert (Ex 16: 2; 17: 3; Nb 11: 1). The lack of food made the people doubt about God and they began to complain against Moses and against God. Here also, the Jews doubt about God's presence in Jesus of Nazareth and begin to complain (Jn 6: 41-42).

Personal Questions

- Does the Eucharist help me to live in a permanent state of Exodus? Am I succeeding?
- Anyone who is open to truth finds the response in Jesus. Today, many people withdraw and do not find any response. Whose fault is it? Is it of the persons who

know how to listen? Or is it the fault of us, Christians, who do not know how to present the Gospel as a message of life?

Concluding Prayer

Come and listen, all who fear God, while I tell what he has done for me. To him I cried aloud, high praise was on my tongue. (Ps 66: 16-17)

Friday, May 6, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Our living and loving God,

how could we know the depth of your love if your Son had not become flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood?

How could we ever have the courage to live for one another and if necessary to die if he had not given up his body and shed his blood for us?

Thank you for letting him stay in the eucharist with us and making himself our daily bread.

Let this bread be the food that empowers us to live and die as he did, for one another and for you, our living God, for ever and ever.

Gospel Reading - John 6: 52-59

Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'

Jesus replied to them: In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I live in that person. As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me. This is the bread which has come down from heaven; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.

This is what he taught at Capernaum in the synagogue.

Reflection

We are almost at the end of the Discourse of the Bread of Life. Here begins the part of the greatest polemic. The Jews close themselves and begin to discuss on the affirmations of Jesus.

- John 6: 52-55: Flesh and Blood: the expression of life and of the total gift. The Jews react: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" The feast of the Passover was close at hand. After a few days everybody would have eaten the meat of the paschal lamb in the celebration of the night of the Passover. They did not understand the words of

Jesus, because they took them literally. But Jesus does not diminish the exigencies, he does not withdraw or take away anything of what he has said and he insists: "In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person". (a) To eat the flesh of Jesus means to accept Jesus as the new Paschal Lamb, whose blood liberates us from slavery. The Law of the Old Testament, out of respect for life, prohibited to eat the blood (Dt 12: 16, 23; Acts 15: 29). The blood was the sign of life. (b) To drink the Blood of Jesus means to assimilate the same way of life which marked the life of Jesus. What gives life is not to celebrate the manna of the past, but rather to eat this new bread which is Jesus, his flesh and his blood. Participating in the Eucharistic Supper, we assimilate his life, his surrender, his gift of self. "If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and you do not drink his Blood you will not have life in you". They should accept Jesus as the Crucified Messiah, whose blood will be poured out.

- John 6: 56-58: Whoever eats my flesh, will live in me. The last phrases of the discourse of the Bread of Life are of the greatest depth and try to summarize everything which has been said. They recall the mystical dimension which surrounds the participation in the Eucharist. They express what Paul says in the letter to the Galatians: "It is no longer I, but Christ living in me (Ga 2: 20). And what the Apocalypse of John says: "If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person's side" (Rev 3: 20). And John himself in the Gospel: "Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we shall come to him and make a home in him" (Jn 14: 23). And it ends with the promise of life which marks the difference with the ancient Exodus: "This is the bread which has come down from heaven. It is not like the bread our ancestors ate, they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever."
- John 6: 59: The discourse in the Synagogue ends. The conversation between Jesus and the people and the Jews in the Synagogue of Capernaum ends here. As it has been said before, the Discourse of the Bread of Life offers us an image of how the catechesis of that time was, at the end of the first century, in the Christian communities of Asia Minor. The questions of the people and of the Jews show the difficulties of the members of the communities. And the answer of Jesus represents the clarifications to help them to overcome the difficulties, to deepen their faith and to live more intensely the Eucharist which was celebrated above all in the night between Saturday and Sunday, the Day of the Lord.

Personal Questions

- Beginning with the Discourse on the Bread of Life, the celebration of the Eucharist receives a very strong light and an enormous deepening. Which is the light that I see, and which helps me to advance?
- To eat the flesh and blood of Jesus is the commandment that he leaves. How do I live the Eucharist in my life? Even if I cannot go to Mass every day or every Sunday, my life should be Eucharistic. How do I try to attain this objective?

Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, all nations, extol him, all peoples, for his faithful love is strong and his

constancy never-ending. (Ps 117: 1-2)

Saturday, May 7, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Faithful God of the covenant, in the daily choices we have to make, give us the courage to opt always for your Son and his ways and to remain close to him.

Bless the difficult road we have sometimes to take without seeing where it will lead us.

Keep us from making half-hearted decisions when our faith is rather weak
and make us accept all the consequences of our choice.

Keep us always faithful through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 6: 60-69

After hearing it, many of his followers said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?'

Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this disturb you? What if you should see the Son of man ascend to where he was before? 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset who did not believe and who was to betray him. He went on, 'This is why I told you that no one could come to me except by the gift of the Father.'

After this, many of his disciples went away and accompanied him no more. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents the last part of the Discourse of the Bread of Life. It is a question of the discussion of the disciples among themselves and with Jesus (Jn 6: 60-66) and of the conversation of Jesus with Simon Peter (Jn 6: 67-69). The objective is to show the exigencies of faith and the need for a serious commitment with Jesus and with his proposal. Up until this moment everything took place in the Synagogue of Capernaum. The place of this last part is not indicated.

- John 6: 60-63: Without the light of the Spirit these words cannot be understood. Many disciples thought that Jesus himself was going too far! The celebration of the Passover was coming to an end, and he was placing himself in the most central part of the Passover. For this reason, many people separated from the community and no longer went with Jesus. Jesus reacts and says: "It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer". These things which he says should not be taken literally. It is only with the light of the Holy Spirit that it is possible to get the full sense of everything that Jesus says (Jn 14: 25-26; 16: 12-13). Paul in the Letter to the Corinthians will say: "Written letters kill, but the Spirit gives life!" (2 Co 3: 6).

- John 6: 64-66: Some of you do not believe. In his discourse Jesus had presented himself as the food which satisfies hunger and thirst of all those who seek God. In the first Exodus, they have the test of Meriba. Before hunger and thirst in the desert, many doubted of the presence of God in their midst: "The Lord is in our midst, yes or no?" (Ex 17: 7) and they complained against Moses (cf. Ex 17: 2-3; 16: 7-8). They wanted to get away from him and return to Egypt. The disciples fall into this same temptation, they doubt of the presence of Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Before the words of Jesus on "eat my flesh and drink my blood", many complained like the crowds in the desert (Jn 6: 60) and take the decision to break away from Jesus and with the community: "they went away and accompanied him no more" (Jn 6: 66).
- John 6: 67-71: Confession of Peter. At the end only the twelve remain with him. In the face of the crisis produced by his words and his gestures, Jesus turns toward his more intimate friends, represented there by the Twelve and says: "Do you want to go away also?" For Jesus it is not a question of having many people following him. Neither does he change the discourse when the message does not please. He speaks in order to reveal the Father and not to please anyone. He prefers to remain alone, and not be accompanied by persons who are not committed with the Father's project. Peter's response is beautiful: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God!" Even without understanding everything, Peter accepts Jesus as Messiah and believes in him. In the name of the group he professes his faith in the broken bread and in his word. Jesus is the word and the bread which satisfies the new people of God (Dt 8: 3). Despite all his limitations, Peter is not like Nicodemus who wanted to see all things clearly according to his own ideas. But among the twelve there was someone who did not accept the proposal of Jesus. In this more intimate circle, there was an enemy (the Devil) (Jn 6: 70-71) "he who shares my table takes advantage of me" (Si 41: 10; Jn 13: 18).

Personal Questions

- I place myself in Peter's place before Jesus. What response do I give Jesus who asks me: "Do you want to go away also?"
- I place myself in Jesus' place. Today many persons no longer follow Jesus. Whose fault is it?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, I am your servant, I am your servant and my mother was your servant;
you have undone my fetters.

I shall offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of Yahweh. (Ps 116: 16-17)

Sunday, May 8, 2022

Fourth Sunday of Easter

LECTIO

Opening Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, to our hearts and kindle in them the fire of your love, give us the grace to read and re-read this page of the Gospel, to actively, lovingly and operatively remember it in our life. We wish to get close to the mystery of the Person of Jesus contained in this image of the Shepherd. For this, we humbly ask you to open the eyes of our mind and heart in order to be able to know the power of your Resurrection. Enlighten our mind, oh Spirit of light, so that we may understand the words of Jesus, the Good Shepherd; warm up our heart so as to be aware that these words are not far from us, that they are the key of our present experience. Come, oh Holy Spirit, because without you the Gospel will be dead letter; with you the Gospel is the Spirit of Life. Give us, oh Father, the Holy Spirit; we ask this together with Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother and with Elias, your prophet in the name of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

Reading of the Text - John 10: 27-30:

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; ²⁸ and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Moments of Prayerful Silence:

Silence protects the fire of the word which has entered in us through the listening of the Word. It helps to preserve the interior fire of God. Stop for a few moments in the silence, listening to be able to participate in the creative and re-creative power of the divine Word.

MEDITATIO

Key to the Reading:

The passage of the Liturgy of this Sunday is taken from chapter 10 of St. John, a discourse of Jesus during the Jewish Feast of the dedication of the Temple of Jerusalem which was celebrated at the end of December (during which the re-consecration of the Temple, which had been violated by the Syrian-Hellenists, was commemorated, the work of Judas Maccabee in 164 B.C.). The word of Jesus concerning the relation between the Shepherd (Christ) and the sheep (the Church) belongs to a true and proper debate between Jesus and the Jews. They ask Jesus a clear question and demand a response, just as concrete and public: "If you are the Christ, tell us the plain truth" (10: 24). John, other times in the Gospel presents the Jews who intend to get a clear affirmation from Jesus concerning his identity (2: 18; 5: 16; 8: 25). In the Synoptics a similar question is presented during the process before the Chief Priests (Mt 26: 63; Mk 14: 61; Lk 22: 67). Jesus' answer is presented in two stages (vv. 25-31 and 32-39). Let us briefly consider the context of the first stage where our liturgical text is inserted. The Jews have not understood the parable of the Shepherd (Jn 10: 1-21) and now they ask Jesus a clearer revelation of his identity. In itself, the reason for their unbelief is not to be sought in the lack of clarity but in their refusal to belong to his flock, to his sheep. An analogous expression of Jesus may throw light on this as we read in Mk 4: 11: "To you I have made known the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but the others who are on the outside, hear all things by means of parables". The words of Jesus are light only for those who live within the community, for those who decide to remain outside these words are an enigma which disconcerts. To the unbelief of the Jews, Jesus opposes the behavior of those who belong to him and whom the Father has given to him; and also the relationship with them.

Jesus' language is not immediately evident for us; rather in comparing the believers to a flock leaves us perplexed. We are not, at all, strangers to the life of farmers and shepherds, and it is not easy to understand what the flock would represent for a people who are shepherds. The audience to whom Jesus addresses the parable, on the other hand, were precisely shepherds. It is evident that the parable is understood from the point of view of the man who shares almost everything with his flock. He knows his sheep: he sees the quality of each one and every defect; the sheep also experience his guidance: they respond to his voice and to his indications.

- The sheep of Jesus listen to his voice: it is a question not only of an external listening (3: 5; 5: 37) but also of an attentive listening (5: 28; 10: 3) up to an obedient listening (10: 16, 27; 18: 37; 5: 25). In the discourse of the shepherd this listening expresses the trust and the union that the sheep have with the shepherd (10: 4). The adjective "my, mine" does not only indicate the simple possession of the sheep, but makes evident that the sheep belong to him, and they belong in so far as he is the owner (10: 12).
- Here, then, is established an intimate communication between Jesus and the sheep: "and I know them" (10: 27). It is not a question of intellectual knowledge; in the Biblical sense "to know someone" means, above all, to have a personal relation with him, to live in some way in communion with him. A knowledge which does not exclude the human features of sympathy, love, communion of nature.
- In virtue of this knowledge of love the shepherd invites his own to follow him. The listening to the Shepherd involves also a discernment, because among the many different possible voices, the sheep choose that which corresponds to a concrete Person (Jesus). Following this discernment, the response is active, personal and becomes obedience. This results from the listening. Therefore, between the listening and following the Shepherd is the knowledge of Jesus.

The knowledge which the sheep have of Jesus opens an itinerary which leads to love: "I give them eternal life." For the Evangelist, life is the gift of communion with God. While in the Synoptics "life" or "eternal life" is related to the future; in John's Gospel it indicates an actual possession. This aspect is frequently repeated in John's narration: "He who believes in the Son possesses eternal life" (3: 36); "I am telling you the truth: whoever hears my words and believes in him who sent me has eternal life" (5: 24; 6: 47).

The relation of love of Jesus becomes concrete also by the experience of protection which man experiences: it is said that the sheep "will never be lost." Perhaps, this is a reference to eternal damnation. And it is added that "no one will snatch them". These expressions suggest the role of the hand of God and of Christ who prevent the hearts of persons to be snatched by other negative forces. In the Bible the hand, in some contexts, is a metaphor which indicates the force of God who protects (Deut 33: 3; Ps 31: 6). In others, the verb "to snatch" (*harpázö*) suggests the idea that the community of disciples will not be exempt from the attacks of evil and of temptations. But the expression "no one will snatch them" indicates that the presence of Christ assures the community of the certainty of an unflinching stability which allows them to overcome every temptation of fear.

Some Questions:

To orientate the meditative reflection and the updating:

- The first attitude which the Word of Jesus makes evident is that man has "to listen." This verb in Biblical language is rich and relevant: it implies joyous adherence to the content of what is listened to, obedience to the person who speaks, the choice of life of the one who addresses us. Are you a man immersed in listening to God? Are there

spaces and moments in your daily life which you dedicate, in a particular way, to listening to the Word of God?

- The dialogue or intimate and profound communication between Christ and you has been defined by the Gospel in today's Liturgy by a great Biblical verb, "to know" This involves the whole being of man: the mind, the heart, the will. Is your consciousness of Christ firm at a theoretical-abstract level or do you allow yourself to be transformed and guided by his voice on the journey of your life?
- The man who has listened and known God "follows" Christ as the only guide of his life. Is your following daily, continuous? Even when in the horizon one foresees the threat or nightmare of other voices or ideologies which try to snatch us from communion with God?
- In the meditation of today's Gospel two other verbs emerged: we will never be "lost, damned" and nobody will be able to "snatch" us from the presence of Christ who protects our life. This is the foundation and motivation of our daily assurance. This idea is expressed in such a luminous way by Paul: "For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below – there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Rm 8: 38-39). When between the believer and the Person of Jesus is established, a relation made by calls and listening, then life proceeds assured to attain spiritual maturity and success. The true foundation of this assurance lies in discovering every day the divine identity of this Shepherd who is the assurance of our life. Do you experience this security and this serenity when you feel threatened by evil?
- The words of Jesus "I give them eternal life" assure you that the end of your journey as believer, is not dark and uncertain. For you, does eternal life refer to the number of years that you can live or instead does it recall your communion of life with God himself? Is the experience of the company of God in your life a reason for joy?

ORATIO

Psalm 100: 2, 3, 5

Serve the Lord with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing! Know that the Lord is God!

It is he that made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Final Prayer:

Lord, we ask you to manifest yourself to each one of us as the Good Shepherd, who by the force of the Paschal Mystery reconstitutes, animates your own, with your delicate presence, with all the force of your Spirit. We ask you to open our eyes, so as to be able to know how you guide us, support our will to follow you any place where you want to lead us. Grant us the grace of not being snatched from your hands of Good Shepherd and of not being in the power of evil which threatens us, from the divisions which hide or lurk within our heart. You, oh Christ, be the Shepherd, our guide, our example, our comfort, our brother. Amen!

CONTEMPLATIO

Contemplate the Word of the Good Shepherd in your life. The preceding stages of the Lectio Divina, important in themselves, become practical, if orientated to lived experience. The path of the "Lectio" cannot be considered ended if it does not succeed to make of the Word a school of life for you. Such a goal is attained when you experience in you the fruits of the Spirit. These are: interior peace which flourishes in joy and in the relish for the Word; the capacity to discern between that which is essential and work of God and that which is futile and work of the evil; the courage of the choice and of the concrete action, according to the values of the Biblical page that you have read and meditated on.

Monday, May 9, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord God, our Father,
the Spirit of Jesus calls us, as he called your Son, to abandon our old selves and our old world to be free for new life and growth. Forgive us our fear and hesitations, lead us out of our worn-out phrases and habits, and our self-made certainties, steep us in the gospel of your Son, that his good news may become credible in our times and our world.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 10: 1-10

Jesus said: "In all truth I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a bandit. He who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out all those that are his, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger but will run away from him because they do not recognize the voice of strangers." Jesus told them this parable, but they failed to understand what he was saying to them. So, Jesus spoke to them again: In all truth I tell you, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All who have come before me are thieves and bandits, but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: such a one will go in and out and will find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full."

Reflection

In Jesus we have the model of the true shepherd. In him is fulfilled the expectation of the Good Shepherd promised by God: the "Great Shepherd" greater than Moses (Hb 13: 20).

- John 10: 1-6: The gate of the sheepfold. In Jn 10: 1-10 it is said that Jesus is the "gate" to get to the sheep and to be led to the pastures (10: 7, 9-10).

- The theme of the sheep had already been introduced in John 2:15 and in a particular way in 5: 2 where it is indicated that there is a Sheep Pool with five porticos along which were laid the sick to be healed. In this last context the sheep indicate the people who were oppressed by their directors. In Jn 10: 1, Jesus links the theme of the sheep to the atrium or inner courtyard of the Temple, the Jewish institution administered by men of power who trampled on the rights, justice and exploited the people. Such individuals were called by Jesus "thieves and bandits".
- Jesus begins his long presentation before the Pharisees, who were closed up in their unbelief and insufficiency (9: 40-41) with a general affirmation: a more sure way to enter into contact with the sheep is that of entering by the gate of the enclosure in which they are kept. Anyone who enters in a different way is not animated by a reason of love for the sheep, but in order to exploit them for his own interest. This is the sin of those who direct the people: to take hold of everything that belongs to all for themselves. Jesus calls this attitude using the term "thief". This was precisely the accusation that Jesus addressed to the chief priests of the people during his first visit to the Temple (2: 13ss).
- Another term that Jesus uses to indicate those who take away from the people what belongs to them is: "bandit". Such a term indicates those who use violence. Therefore, the chief priests of the Temple oblige the people to submit themselves to the violence of their system (7: 13; 9: 22). The effect of this is that it produces a state of death (5: 3, 21, 25).
- The shepherd enters through the gate to take care of the sheep, not to oppress them or maltreat them. In fact, the sheep recognize his authority (voice) and follow him. The voice of Jesus contains a message of liberation for them that is typical of the Messiah. Besides, his voice is not addressed to an anonymous group of persons, but he calls each one personally. For Jesus no anonymous crowd of people exists, but each person has a face, a name, dignity. The Temple (the enclosure of the sheep) has become a place of darkness, characterized only by economic interests; money has replaced the exclusive attention to God: the Temple has become the business or trading house (Jn 2: 16).
- Jesus leads the people to take them out of the darkness. And he does not do this in a fictitious way, but in a real way, because such is the work which the Father has entrusted to him. The fundamental strokes of this mission are: to enter and to call. Those who respond to that call, to the call to liberty become a new community: "Those who are His own".
- John 10: 7-10: Jesus is the new door. Jesus again uses the symbolism of the gate in vv. 7-8: applying this to himself. He is the new door not only in regard to the old enclosure of Israel represented by the chief priests of the people but also in regard to those who follow him. He reminds the first ones of his legitimacy to be the only place of access for the sheep, because he is the Messiah ready to give his life for the sheep. And it is not by domination or prevarication, that one can approach the sheep to have a relationship with them, but rather by assuming the attitude of the one who gives his life for them. His words are a categorical invitation to change mentality, way of thinking and way of relating.

The entrance through Jesus signifies to consider the good of man as a priority and to commit all our energy to attain this. Anyone who does not enter into this new logic is an oppressor. The reader finds that the words of Jesus addressed to his contemporaries and in a particular way to the chief priests of the people, who have used domination and violence to exploit the people, are truly hard and strong, firm.

He is the new gate in regard to every person. But for men and women of today what does it mean to enter through the door which is Jesus? It implies to "get close to Him", "to trust Him" (Jn 6: 35), to follow Him and to allow ourselves to be guided by His message (8: 31, 51), in definitive it means to participate in the dedication of Jesus so that the true happiness of man may be accomplished.

Personal Questions

- Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he always knows you, but do you recognize him? He is a Shepherd who comes to your life as a door to go out and to enter: do you allow Him to lead you when you relate with others?
- In your community, in your family are you also a door, not to close it, but to remain open to fraternal communication, to allow esteem and hope to go through?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, send out your light and your truth; they shall be my guide,
to lead me to your holy mountain
to the place where you dwell. (Ps 43: 3)

Tuesday, May 10, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord God, our Father,
the Spirit of Jesus calls us, as he called your Son, to abandon our old selves and our old world to be free for new life and growth. Forgive us our fear and hesitations, lead us out of our worn-out phrases and habits, and our self-made certainties, steep us in the gospel of your Son, that his good news may become credible in our times and our world.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 10: 22-30

It was the time of the feast of Dedication in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the Temple walking up and down in the Portico of Solomon. The Jews gathered round him and said, 'How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us openly.'

Jesus replied: I have told you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name are my witness; but you do not believe, because you are no sheep of mine. The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life; they will never be lost, and no one will ever steal them from my hand. The Father, for what he has given me, is greater than anyone, and no one can steal anything from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.

Reflection

Chapters one to twelve of the Gospel of John are called "The Book of Signs." In these chapters we have the progressive revelation of the Mystery of God in Jesus. In the measure in which Jesus makes this revelation, adherence and opposition grow around him according to the vision or idea which each one has of the coming of the Messiah. This way of describing the activity of Jesus does not only serve to inform how adherence to Jesus took place at that time, but also and above all, how this should take place in us today, his readers. At that time, all expected the coming of the Messiah and they had their criteria of how to recognize him. They wanted him to be like they imagined that he should be. But Jesus does not submit himself to that requirement. He reveals the Father as the Father is and not as his listeners would want him to be. He asks for conversion in the way of thinking and of acting. Today, also, each one of us has his/her own likes and own preferences. Sometimes we read the Gospel to see if we find in it a confirmation of our desires. Today's Gospel presents some light concerning this.

- John 10: 22-24: The Jews question Jesus. It was cold; it was the month of October. It was the Feast of the dedication which celebrated the purification of the temple done by Judah Maccabee (2 M 4: 36, 59). It was a very popular Feast with much light. Jesus was out on the square of the Temple, in the Portico of Solomon. The Jews said: "How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us openly." They wanted Jesus to define himself and that they could verify, according to their own criteria, if Jesus was or was not the Messiah. They wanted some proofs. It is the attitude of the one who feels that he dominates the situation. The new ones must present their credentials. Otherwise, they have no right to speak or to act.
- John 10: 25-26: Response of Jesus: the works that I do are my witness. The response of Jesus is always the same: "I have told you, but you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name are my witness; but you do not believe, because you are no sheep of mine". It is not a question of giving proofs. It would be useless. When a person does not want to accept the witness of someone, there is no proof which is valid and which will lead the person to change and think differently. The basic problem is the disinterested openness of the person toward God and toward truth. Where this openness exists, Jesus is recognized by his sheep. "The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice." Jesus will say these words before Pilate (Jn 18: 37). The Pharisees lacked this openness.
- John 10: 27-28: My sheep listen to my voice. Jesus repeats the parable of the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and they know him. This mutual understanding – between Jesus who comes in the name of the Father and the persons who open themselves to truth – is the source of eternal life. This union between the Creator and the creature through Jesus exceeds every threat of death: "They will never be lost, and no one will ever steal them from my hand!" They are safe and secure, and, because of this, they are in peace and enjoy full freedom.
- John 10: 29-30: The Father and I are one. These two verses refer to the mystery of the union between Jesus and the Father: "The Father, for what he has given me, is greater than anyone, and no one can steal anything from my Father's hand. The Father and I are one". These and other phrases make us guess or have a glimpse at something of the greatest mystery: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14: 9). "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10: 38). This union between Jesus and the Father is not something automatic, but rather it is the fruit of obedience: "I always do what pleases my Father" (Jn 8: 29; 6: 38; 17: 4). "My food is to do the will of the Father" (Jn 4: 34; 5: 30). The Letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus learnt obedience from the things that he suffered (Heb 5: 8). "He was obedient until

death and death on the Cross" (Ph 2: 8). The obedience of Jesus is not a disciplinary one, but rather it was prophetic. He obeys in order to be total transparency and, thus, to be the revelation of the Father. Because of this, he could say: "The Father and I are one!" It was a long process of obedience and of incarnation which lasted 33 years. It began with Mary's YES (Lk 1: 38) and ended with: "It is all fulfilled!" (Jn 19: 30).

Personal Questions

- Is my obedience to God, disciplinary or prophetic? Do I reveal something of God or am I only concerned about my own salvation?
- Jesus does not submit himself to the exigencies of those who want to verify if he is the Messiah. In me, is there something of this attitude of dominion and of inquiry of the enemies of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

May God show kindness and bless us and make his face shine on us.
Then the earth will acknowledge your ways, and all nations your power to save. (Ps 67: 2-3)

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
through your Son Jesus Christ you assure us that he came
not to condemn us but to bring us life, a life worth living,
a life that is rich and refreshing us and our world
with love and a spirit of service.
Let Jesus stay with us
as the light in which we see
all that is good and worth living for
and let us share in his life that has no end. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 12: 44-50

Jesus declared publicly: Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in the one who sent me, whoever sees me, sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as light, to prevent anyone who believes in me from staying in the dark anymore.

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them faithfully, it is not I who shall judge such a person, since I have come not to judge the world, but to save the world: anyone who rejects me and refuses my words has his judge already: the word itself that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.

For I have not spoken of my own accord; but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and what to speak, and I know that his commands mean eternal life. And therefore, what the Father has told me is what I speak.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents to us the last part of the Book of Signs (from 1 to 12), in which the Evangelist draws up a balance. Many believed in Jesus and had the courage to manifest their faith publicly. They were afraid to be expelled from the Synagogue. And many did not believe: "Though they had been present when he gave so many signs, they did not believe in him; this was to fulfil the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"Lord, who has given credence to what they have heard from us? And who has seen in it a revelation of the Lord's arm?" (Jn 12: 37-38). After this confirmation, John takes back some of the central themes of his Gospel:

- John 12: 44-45: To believe in Jesus is to believe in him who sent him. This phrase is a summary of the Gospel of John. It is the theme that appears and reappears in many ways. Jesus is so united to the Father that he does not speak in his own name, but always in the name of the Father. He who sees Jesus, sees the Father. If you want to know God, look at Jesus. God is Jesus!
- John 12: 46: Jesus is the light who comes into the world. Here John comes back to what he had already said in the Prologue: "The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone (Jn 1: 9). "The light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it" (Jn 1: 5). Here he repeats: "I have come into the world as light, to prevent anyone who believes in me from staying in the dark anymore". Jesus is a living response to the great questions which move and inspire the search of the human being. It is a light which enlightens the horizon. It makes one discover the luminous side of the darkness of faith.
- John 12: 47-48: I have not come to condemn the world. Getting to the end of a stage, a question arises: "How will judgment be? In these two verses the Evangelist clarifies the theme of judgment. The judgment is not done according to threats, with maledictions. Jesus says: "If anyone hears my words and does not keep them faithfully, it is not I who shall judge such a person, since I have come not to judge the world, but to save the world. Anyone who rejects me and refuses my words has his judge already: the word itself that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. The judgment consists in the way in which the person defines himself before his own conscience.
- John 12: 49-50: The Father commanded me what to say. The last words of the Book of Signs are a summary of everything that Jesus says and does up until now. He reaffirms that which he affirmed from the beginning: "For I have not spoken of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and what to speak, and I know that his commands mean eternal life. And, therefore, what the Father has told me is what I speak." Jesus is the faithful reflection of the Father. For this reason, he does not offer proofs or arguments to those who provoke him to legitimize his credentials. It is the Father who legitimizes him through the works that he does. And saying works, he does not refer to great miracles, but to all that he says and does, even the minutest thing. Jesus himself is the Sign of the Father. He is the walking miracle, the total transparency. He does not belong to himself but is entirely the property of the Father. The credentials of an Ambassador do not come from him, but from the one he represents. They come from the Father.

Personal Questions

- John draws up a balance of the revealing activity of God. If I made a balance of my life, what positive thing would there be in me?
- Is there something in me which condemns me?

Concluding Prayer

Let the nations rejoice and sing for joy, for you judge the world with justice, you judge the peoples with fairness, you guide the nations on earth.

Let the nations praise you, God,
let all the nations praise you. (Ps 67: 4-5)

Thursday, May 12, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

All-powerful God,
your Son Jesus reminds us today
that we are no greater than your and our servant, Jesus, our Lord and master.
Give us the love and endurance to serve you and people
without waiting for awards or gratitude
and to accept the difficulties and contradictions which are part of the Christian life
and which are normal for followers
of him who bore the cross for us, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 13: 16-20

Jesus said to his disciples: 'In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him. 'Now that you know this, blessed are you if you behave accordingly. I am not speaking about all of you: I know the ones I have chosen; but what scripture says must be fulfilled: 'He who shares my table takes advantage of me. I tell you this now, before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe that I am He. In all truth I tell you, whoever welcomes the one I send, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.'

Reflection

- Beginning today, every day for a month, except on feast days, the Gospel of each day is taken from the long conversation of Jesus with the disciples during the Last Supper (Jn 13 to 17). In these five chapters which describe the farewell of Jesus, the presence of those three threads of which we had spoken before, is perceived, those threads which knit and compose the Gospel of John: the word of Jesus, the word of the community and the word of the Evangelist who writes the last redaction of the Fourth Gospel. In these chapters, the three threads are intertwined in such a way that the whole is presented as a unique fabric or cloth of a rare beauty and inspiration, where it is difficult to distinguish what is from one and what is from the other, but where everything is the Word of God for us.

- These five chapters present the conversation which Jesus had with his friends, the evening when he was arrested and was put to death. It was a friendly conversation, which remained in the memory of the Beloved Disciple. Jesus seems to want to prolong to the maximum this last encounter, this moment of great intimacy. The same thing happens today. There is conversation and conversation. There is the superficial conversation which uses words and words and reveals the emptiness of the person. And there is the conversation which goes to the depth of the heart and remains in the memory. All of us, once in a while, have these moments of friendly living together, which expand the heart and constitute the force in moments of difficulty. They help to trust and to overcome fear.
- The five verses of today's Gospel draw two conclusions from the washing of the feet (Jn 1: 1-15). They speak (a) of service as the principal characteristic of the followers of Jesus, and (b) of the identity of Jesus, the revelation of the Father.
 - John 13: 16-17: The servant is not greater than his master. Jesus has just finished washing the feet of the disciples. Peter becomes afraid and does not want Jesus to wash his feet. "If I do not wash you, you can have no share with me" (Jn 13: 8). And it is enough to wash the feet; there is no need to wash the rest (Jn 13: 10). The symbolical value of the gesture of the washing of the feet consists in accepting Jesus as Messiah, Servant, who gives himself for others, and to reject a Messiah, glorious king. This gift of self, servant of all is the key to understand the gesture of the washing of the feet. To understand this is the root of the happiness of a person: "Knowing these things, you will be blessed if you put them into practice". But there were some persons, even among the disciples, who did not accept Jesus, Messiah, Servant. They did not want to be the servants of others. Probably, they wanted a glorious Messiah, King and Judge, according to the official ideology. Jesus says: "I am not speaking about all of you; I know the ones I have chosen; but what Scripture says must be fulfilled: He who shares my table takes advantage of me!" John refers to Judas, whose betrayal will be announced immediately after (Jn 13: 21-30).
 - John 13: 18-20: I tell you this now, before it happens, so that you may believe that I AM HE. It was when the liberation from Egypt at the foot of Mount Sinai that God revealed his name to Moses: "I am with you!" (Ex 3: 12), "I am who I am" (Ex 3: 14). "I Am" or "I AM" has sent me to you!" (Ex 3: 14). The name Yahweh (Ex 3: 15) expresses the absolute certainty of the liberating presence of God at the side of his people. In many ways and on many occasions this same expression I Am is used by Jesus (Jn 8: 24; 8: 28; 8: 58; Jn 6: 20; 18: 5, 8; Mk 14: 62; Lk 22: 70). Jesus is the presence of the liberating face of God in our midst.

Personal Questions

- The servant is not greater than his master. How do I make of my life a permanent service of others?
- Jesus knew how to live together with persons who did not accept him. And I?

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. (Psalm 89: 1-2)

Friday, May 13, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
your Son Jesus Christ is to us
the way that leads to you and to one another, the truth that is good news of love and
hope, the life which he sacrificed to give it.
Help us to show the way to him and to go his way to one another,
to speak the truth that is encouraging and credible, to give life by sharing happiness,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 14: 1-6

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many places to live in; otherwise I would have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you to myself, so that you may be with me where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

Jesus said: I am the Way; I am Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

Reflection

These five chapters (Jn 13-17) are a beautiful example of how the communities of the Beloved Disciple of the end of the first century in Asia Minor, which today is Turkey, carried on the catechesis. For example, in chapter 14, the questions of the three disciples, Thomas (Jn 14: 5), Philip (Jn 14: 8) and Judas Thaddeus (Jn 14: 22) were also the questions and problems of the communities. Thus, the answers of Jesus to the three of them are like a mirror in which the communities found a response to their doubts and difficulties. To understand better the environment in which the catechesis was carried out, it is possible to do what follows. During and after the reading of the text, it is good to close the eyes and pretend that we are in the room in the midst of the disciples, participating in the encounter with Jesus. While we listen, it is necessary to pay attention to the way in which Jesus prepares his friends to separate themselves and reveals to them his friendship, communicating to them security and support.

- John 14: 1-2: Do not let your hearts be troubled. The text begins with an exhortation: "Do not let your hearts be troubled!" And immediately he adds: "In my Father's house there are many places to live in!" The insistence in continuing to use encouraging words which help to overcome the trouble and the divergence is a sign that there was much polemic and divergence among the communities. One would say to the other: "Our way of living the faith is better than yours. We are saved! You live in error: If you want to go to heaven, you have to convert yourselves and live like we do!" Jesus says: "In my Father's house there are many places!" It is not necessary that everybody thinks in the same way. The important thing is that all accept Jesus, the revelation

of the Father and that out of love for him, they have attitudes of understanding, of service and of love. Love and service are the basis which unite the bricks and help the diverse communities to become a Church of brothers and sisters.

- John 14: 3-4: The farewell of Jesus. Jesus says that he is going to prepare a place and that afterwards he will return to take us with him to the Father's house. He wants us to be with him forever. The return which Jesus speaks about is the coming of the Spirit that he sends and who acts in us, in such a way that we can live as he lived (Jn 14: 16-17, 26; 16: 13-14). Jesus ends by saying: "You know the way to the place where I am going!" Anyone who knows Jesus knows the way, because the way is the life that he lived, and which led him through death together to the Father.
- John 14: 5-6: Thomas asks which is the way. Thomas says: "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answers: "I am the Way, I am Truth and Life! No one can come to the Father except through me". Three important words. Without the way we cannot go. Without the truth one cannot make a good choice. Without life, there is only death! Jesus explains the sense. He is the Way, because "No one can come to the Father except through me". And he is the gate through which the sheep enter and go out (Jn 10, 9). Jesus is the truth, because looking at him, we see the image of the Father. "Anyone who knows me knows the Father!" Jesus is the life, because walking like Jesus we will be united to the Father and we will have life in us!

Personal Questions

- What beautiful encounter of the past do you remember, encounters which give you the strength to continue ahead?
- Jesus says: "In my Father's house there are many places." What does this affirmation mean for us today?

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, May 14, 2022

Feast of St. Matthias, Apostle

Opening Prayer

Lord God,
Your apostle Matthias was a witness to the life and death of Jesus Christ and to His glorious resurrection.

May your people also today bear witness to the life of Your Son by living His life as best as they can, and radiating the joy of people who are rising with Him to a new and deeper life.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 9-17

Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. "I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."

Reflection

- John 15: 9-11: Remain in My love, the source of perfect joy. Jesus remains in the love of the Father observing the commandments that He received from Him. We remain in the love of Jesus observing the commandments that He has left for us. And we should observe them in the same measure in which He observed the commandments of the Father: "If you keep My commandments you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and remain in His love. In this union of love of the Father and of Jesus is found the source of true joy: "I have told you this so that My own joy may be in you and your joy be complete."
- John 15: 12-13: To love one another as He has loved us. The commandment of Jesus is only one: to love one another as He has loved us! (Jn 15: 12) Jesus surpasses the Old Testament. The ancient criterion was the following: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 18: 19). The new criterion is this: "Love one another as I have loved you." It is the phrase that we sing even today and which says, "There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's brother!"
- John 15: 14-15: Friends and not servants. "You are My friends if you do what I command you," that is, the practice of love to the point of total gift of oneself! Immediately Jesus presents a very high ideal for the life of His disciples. He says, "I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learned from My Father!" Jesus no longer had any secrets for His disciples. He tells us everything that He has heard from the Father! Behold the wonderful ideal of life in community: to reach a total transparency, to the point of not having any secrets among us and to have full trust in one another, to be able to speak about the experience of God that we have and of life, and thus, be able to enrich one another. The first Christians succeeded in reaching this ideal after many years: "they had one only heart and one only soul" (Acts 4: 32; 1: 14; 2: 42-46).

This statement of Jesus is also a reminder of what it means to believe in Him and be saved (Jn 3: 16). To believe is not an idle thought or a wish. It is an action – many actions. "You are My friends if you do what I command you" means action. Some communities think that one is saved by just a thought on their part, and not doing what Jesus commanded. Love not only describes a relationship, it is also an action verb!

- John 15: 16-17: Jesus has chosen us. We have not chosen Jesus. He met us, called us, and entrusted a mission to us to go and bear fruit - a fruit which lasts. We need Him, but He also chooses to need us and our work to be able to continue to do today for

the people as He did for the people of Galilee. The final recommendation: "This is My commandment: to love one another!"

For Personal Consideration

- To love our neighbor as Jesus has loved us. This is the ideal of every Christian. What are my concrete and real actions that show this?
- Do I make distinctions and only love some, and others not so much?
- All that I have heard from the Father I make known to you. This is the ideal of community: to attain total transparency. How do I live this in my community, including family?
- Using concrete examples, what does Jesus command me to do? How much do I really do?
- Is Jesus' commandment only for certain people or certain parts of the day or week, or is it for all day, every day?

Concluding Prayer

Praise, servants of Yahweh, praise the name of Yahweh.
Blessed be the name of Yahweh, henceforth and forever. (Ps 113: 1-2)

Sunday, May 15, 2022

Fifth Sunday of Easter

LECTIO

Opening Prayer:

Lord Jesus, help us understand the mystery of the Church as community of love. When you gave us the new commandment of love as the charter of the Church, you told us that it is the highest value. When you were about to leave your disciples, you wished to give them a memorial of the new commandment, the new statute of the Christian community. You did not give them a pious exhortation, but rather a new commandment of love. In this "relative absence," we are asked to recognize you present in our brothers and sisters. In this Easter season, Lord Jesus, you remind us that the time of the Church is the time of charity, the time of encounter with you through our brothers and sisters. We know that at the end of our lives we shall be judged on love. Help us encounter you in each brother and sister, seizing every little occasion of every day.

Gospel Reading – John 13: 31-35

31 When he had gone, Jesus said: Now has the Son of man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon. 33 Little children, I shall be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and, as I told the Jews, where I am going, you cannot come.

34 I give you a new commandment: love one another; you must love one another just

as I have loved you. 35 It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence:

The passage of the Gospel we are about to meditate, recalls Jesus' farewell words to his disciples. Such a passage should be considered a kind of sacrament of an encounter with the Person of Jesus.

MEDITATIO

Preamble to Jesus' Discourse:

Our passage is the conclusion to chapter 13 where two themes crisscross and are taken up again and developed in chapter 14: the place where the Lord is going; and the theme of the commandment of love. Some observations on the context within which Jesus' words on the new commandment occur may be helpful for a fruitful reflection on their content.

First, v. 31 says, "when he had gone», who is gone? To understand this we need to go to v. 30 where we read that «as soon as Judas had taken the piece of bread he went out. It was night." Thus, the one who went out was Judas. Then, the expression, "it was night," is characteristic of all the «farewell discourses», which take place at night. Jesus' words in Jn 13: 31-35 are preceded by this immersion into the darkness of the night. What is the symbolical meaning of this? In John, night represents the peak of nuptial intimacy (for instance the wedding night), but also one of extreme anguish. Other meanings of the dark night are that it represents the moment of danger par excellence, it is the moment when the enemy weaves plans of vengeance against us, it expresses the moment of desperation, confusion, moral and intellectual disorder. The darkness of night is like a dead end.

In Jn 6, when the night storm takes place, the darkness of the night expresses an experience of desperation and solitude as they struggle against the dark forces that stir the sea. Again, the time marker "while it was still dark" in Jn 20: 1 points to the darkness which is the absence of Jesus. Indeed, in John's Gospel, the light of Christ cannot be found in the sepulchre, that is why darkness reigns (20: 1).

Therefore, "farewell discourses" are rightly placed within this time framework. It is almost as if the background color of these discourses is separation, death or the departure of Jesus and this creates a sense of emptiness or bitter solitude. In the Church of today and for today's humanity, this could mean that when we desert Jesus in our lives we then experience anguish and suffering.

When reporting Jesus' words in 3: 31-34, concerning his departure and imminent death, John recalls his own past life with Jesus, woven with memories that opened his eyes to the mysterious richness of the Master. Such memories of the past are part of our own faith journey.

It is characteristic of "farewell discourses" that whatever is transmitted in them, especially at the tragic and solemn moment of death becomes an inalienable patrimony, a covenant to be kept faithfully. Jesus' "farewell discourses" too synthesize whatever he had taught and done so as to draw his disciples to follow in the direction he pointed out to them.

A Deepening:

As we read the passage of this Sunday of Easter, we focus, first of all, on the first word used by Jesus in his farewell discourse: "Now". «Now has the Son of man been

glorified». Which «now» is this? It is the moment of the cross that coincides with his glorification. This final part of John's Gospel is a manifestation or revelation. Thus, Jesus' cross is the «now» of the greatest epiphany or manifestation of truth. In this glorification, there is no question of any meaning that has anything to do with "honour" or "triumphalism", etc.

On the one hand there is Judas who goes into the night, Jesus prepares for his glory:

When he had gone, Jesus said: "Now has the Son of man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon" (v. 31-32). Judas' betrayal brings to maturity in Jesus the conviction that his death is "glory." The hour of death on the cross is included in God's plan; it is the "hour" when the glory of the Father will shine on the world through the glory of the "Son of man." In Jesus, who gives his life to the Father at the "hour" of the cross, God is glorified by revealing his divine essence and welcoming humankind into communion with him.

Jesus' (the Son's) glory consists of his "extreme love" for all men and women, even to giving himself for those who betray him. The Son's love is such that he takes on himself all those destructive and dramatic situations that burden the life and history of humankind. Judas' betrayal symbolizes, not so much the action of an individual, as that of the whole of evil humanity, unfaithful to the will of God.

However, Judas' betrayal remains an event full of mystery. An exegete writes: In betraying Jesus, "it is revelation that is to blame; it is even at the service of revelation" (Simoens, *According to John*, 561). In a way, Judas' betrayal gives us the chance of knowing Jesus better; his betrayal has allowed us to see how far Jesus loves his own. Don Primo Mazzolari writes: "The apostles became Jesus' friends, whether good friends or not, generous or not, faithful or not, they still remain his friends. We cannot betray Jesus' friendship: Christ never betrays us, his friends, even when we do not deserve it, even when we rebel against him, even when we deny him. In his sight and in his heart we are always his "friends." Judas is the Lord's friend even at the moment when he carries out the betrayal of his Master with a kiss" (*Discourses* 147).

The New Commandment:

Let us focus our attention on the new commandment.

In v. 33 we note a change in Jesus' farewell discourse. He no longer uses the third person. The Master now addresses "you". This «you» is in the plural and he uses a Greek word that is full of tenderness "children" (*teknia*). In using this word and by his tone of voice and openness of heart, Jesus concretely conveys to his disciples the immensity of the tenderness he holds for them.

What is also interesting is another point that we find in v.34: "that you love one another as I have loved you." The Greek word *kathos* (as) is not meant for comparison: love one another as I have loved you. Its meaning may be consecutive or causal: "Because I have loved you, so also love one another."

There are those who like Fr. Lagrange see in this commandment an eschatological meaning: during his relative absence and while waiting for his second coming, Jesus wants us to love and serve him in the person of his brothers and sisters. The new commandment is the only commandment. If there is no love, there is nothing.

Magrassi writes: "Away with labels and classifications: every brother is the sacrament of Christ. Let us examine our daily life: can we live with our brother from morning till night and not accept and love him? The great work in this case is ecstasy in its etymological sense, that is, to go out of myself so as to be neighbor to the one who needs me, beginning with those nearest to me and with the most humble matters of everyday

life' (Living the church, 113).

For our reflection:

- Is our love for our brothers and sisters directly proportional to our love for Christ?
- Do I see the Lord present in the person of my brother and sister?
- Do I use the daily little occasions to do good to others?
- Let us examine our daily life: can I live with my brothers and sisters from morning till night and not accept and love them?
- Does love give meaning to the whole of my life?
- What can I do to show my gratitude to the Lord who became servant for me and consecrated his whole life for my good? Jesus replies: Serve me in brothers and sisters: this is the most authentic way of showing your practical love for me.

ORATIO

Psalm 23: 1-6:

This psalm presents an image of the church journeying accompanied by the goodness and faithfulness of God, until it finally reaches the house of the Father. In this journey she is guided by love that gives it direction: your goodness and your faithfulness pursue me.

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows he lets me lie. By tranquil streams he leads me to restore my spirit.

He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name. Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death

I should fear no danger, for you are at my side.

Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.

You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup brims over.

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

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

Praying with the Fathers of the Church:

I love you for yourself, I love you for your gifts, I love you for love of you

And I love you in such a way, That if ever Augustine were God And God Augustine,

I would want to come back and be who I am, Augustine, That I may make of you who you are,

Because only you are worthy of being who you are. Lord, you see,

My tongue raves,

I cannot express myself, But my heart does not rave.

You know what I experience And what I cannot express.

I love you, my God,

And my heart is too limited for so much love, And my strength fails before so much love, And my being is too small for so much love. I come out of my smallness
And immerse my whole being in you, I transform and lose myself.
Source of my being, Source of my every good: My love and my God.
(St. Augustine: *Confessions*)

Closing Prayer:

Blessed Teresa Scilli, seized by an ardent desire to respond to the love of Jesus, expressed herself thus:

I love you, O my God, In your gifts;
I love you in my nothingness, And even in this I understand, Your infinite wisdom;
I love you in the many varied or extraordinary events, By which you accompanied my life...
I love you in everything, Whether painful or peaceful; Because I do not seek,
Nor have I ever sought, Your consolations;
Only you, the God of consolations. That is why I never gloried
Nor delighted in,
That which you made me experience entirely gratuitously in your Divine love, Nor did I distress and upset myself,
When left arid and small. (Autobiography, 62)

Monday, May 16, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord God, loving Father,
we look for Your presence in the temple of nature and in churches built by our hands,
and You are there with Your people. But above all, You have made Your temple right in
our hearts. God, give us eyes of faith and love to recognize that You live in us with Your
Son and the Holy Spirit if we keep the word of Jesus Christ,
Your Son and our Lord forever.

Gospel Reading - John 14: 21-26

Jesus said to his disciples: "Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him." Judas, not the Iscariot, said to him, "Master, then what happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. "I have told you this while I am with you. The

Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name -- he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."

Reflection

Chapter 14 of the Gospel of John is a beautiful example of how the catechesis was done in the communities of Asia Minor at the end of the first century. Through the questions of the disciples and the responses of Jesus, the Christians formed their conscience and found an orientation to address their problems. In chapter 14, we find the question of Thomas and the answer of Jesus (Jn 14: 5-7), the question of Philip and the response of Jesus (Jn 14: 8-21), and the question of Judas and the answer of Jesus (Jn 12: 22-26). The last phrase of the answer of Jesus to Philip (Jn 14: 21) forms the first verse of today's Gospel.

- John 14: 21: I shall love Him and reveal myself to Him. This verse presents the summary of the response of Jesus to Philip. Philip had said: "Show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied!" (Jn 14: 8). Moses had asked God: "Show me your glory!" (Ex 33: 18). God answered: "My face you cannot see, for no human being can see Me and survive" (Ex 33: 20). The Father cannot be shown. God lives in inaccessible light (1 Tim 6: 16). "Nobody has ever seen God" (I Jn 4: 12). But the presence of the Father can be experienced through the experience of love. The First Letter of Saint John says: "He who does not love does not know God because God is love." Jesus tells Philip: "Whoever loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I shall love him and reveal Myself to him." By observing the commandment of Jesus, which is the commandment to love our neighbor (Jn 15: 17), the person shows his love for Jesus. And whoever loves Jesus, will be loved by the Father and can be certain that the Father will manifest Himself to him. In the response to Judas, Jesus will say how this manifestation of the Father will take place in our life.
- John 14: 22: The question of Judas is the question of all. The question of Judas: "Lord, what has happened that You intend to show Yourself to us and not to the world?" This question mirrors a problem which is real even today. Sometimes, among us, Christians, there arises the idea of being better than the others and of being loved by God more than others. Do we attribute to God distinction among people?
- John 14: 23-24: The answer of Jesus. The answer of Jesus is simple and profound. He repeats what He had just said to Philip. The problem is not if we, Christians, are loved more by God than others, or that the others are despised by God. This is not the criteria for any preference by the Father. The criteria of the Father is always the same: love. "If anyone loves Me, he will observe My word, and My Father will love him and We shall come to him and make a home in him. Anyone who does not love Me does not keep My words". Independently of whether the person is Christian or not, the Father manifests Himself to all those who observe the commandment of Jesus which is love for neighbor (Jn 15: 17). In what does the manifestation of the Father consist? The response to this question is engraved in the heart of humanity, in the universal human experience. Observe the life of the people who practice love and make their life a gift for others. Examine their experience, independently of religion, social class, race or color. The practice of love gives us a profound peace and it is a great joy that they succeed to live and bear together pain and suffering. This experience is the reflection of the manifestation of the Father in the life of the person. It is the realization of the promise: "I and the Father will come to him and make our home in him."

- John 14: 25-26: The promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus ends his response to Judas saying: I have said these things to you while still with you. Jesus communicates everything which He has heard from the Father (Jn 15: 15). His words are a source of life and they should be meditated on, deepened, and updated constantly in the light of the always new reality which surrounds us. For this constant meditation on His words, Jesus promises us the help of the Holy Spirit: "The Consoler, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in My name will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.

Personal Questions

- Jesus says: We will come to him and make our home in him. How do I experience this promise?
- We have the promise of the gift of the Spirit to help us understand the word of Jesus. Do I invoke the light of the Spirit when I prepare myself to read and meditate on Scripture?
- Do I keep His word in a way that allows the Father and the Son to dwell in me continuously, or is it only on good days or certain times?

Concluding Prayer

Day after day I shall bless You, I shall praise Your name for ever and ever.
Great is Yahweh and worthy of all praise, His greatness beyond all reckoning. (Ps 145: 2-3)

Tuesday, May 17, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, almighty Father,
you have absolute power over the world, and yet you respect the freedom of people,
even of those who persecute your faithful.
Make us realize that our faith does not protect us against the evil
which people bring upon one another,
but that you want us to build according to your plana kingdom of justice, love and
peace.
Help our faith to stand the testwhen our meager efforts fail.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 14: 27-31a

Jesus said to his disciples: "Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

You heard me say: I am going away and shall return. If you loved me you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you this now,

before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe.

I shall not talk to you much longer, because the prince of this world is on his way. He has no power over me, but the world must recognize that I love the Father and that I act just as the Father commanded. Come now, let us go.

Reflection

Here in John 14: 27, begins the farewell of Jesus and at the end of chapter 14, he ends the conversation saying: "Come now, let us go!" (Jn 14: 31). But instead of leaving the room, Jesus continues to speak in three other chapters: 15, 16, and 17. If we read these three chapters, at the beginning of chapter 18, we see the following phrase: "After he had said all this, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron valley where there was a garden into which he went with his disciples" (Jn 18: 1). In Jn 18: 1, there is the continuation of Jn 14: 31. The Gospel of John is like a beautiful building constructed slowly, rock on top of rock, brick upon brick. Here and there, there are signs of rearrangement or adaptation. In some way, all the texts, all the bricks, form part of the building and are the Word of God for us.

- John 14: 27: The gift of Peace. Jesus communicates his peace to the disciples. The same peace will be given after the Resurrection (Jn 20: 29). This peace is an expression of the manifestation of the Father, as Jesus had said before (Jn 14: 21). The peace of Jesus is the source of joy that he communicates to us (Jn 15: 11; 16: 20, 22, 24; 17: 13). It is a peace which is different from the peace which the world gives us, diverse from *Pax Romana*. At the end of the first century the Pax Romana was maintained by force and violent repression against the rebellious movements. Pax Romana guaranteed the institutionalized inequality between the Roman citizens and the slaves. This is not the peace of the Kingdom of God. The Peace which Jesus communicates is what in the Old Testament is called Shalom. It is the complete organization of the whole life around the values of justice, of fraternity and of equality.
- John 14: 28-29: The reason why Jesus returns to the Father. Jesus returns to the Father in order to be able to return immediately. He will say to Mary Magdalene: "Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father" (Jn 20: 17). Going up to the Father, he will return through the Holy Spirit that he will send (cfr. Jn 20: 22). Without the return toward the Father he will not be able to stay with us through the Spirit.
- John 14: 30-31a: That the world may know that I love the Father. Jesus had ended the last conversation with the disciples. The prince of this world wanted to impose himself on the destiny of Jesus. Jesus will die. In reality, the Prince, the Tempter, the Devil, has no power over Jesus. The world will know that Jesus loves the Father. This is the great witness of Jesus which can impel the world to believe in him. In the announcement of the Good News it is not a question of diffusing a doctrine, or of imposing a Canon Law, or of uniting all in one organization. It is a question; above all, of living and radiating what the human being desires and has deeper in his heart: love. Without this, the doctrine, the Law, the celebration will be only a wig on a bald head.
- John 14: 31b: Come now, let us go. These are the last words of Jesus, the expression of his decision to be obedient to the Father and of revealing his love. In the Eucharist, at the moment of the consecration, in some countries, it is said: "On the day before his passion, voluntarily accepted." In another place Jesus says: "This is why the Father loves me: because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from

me: I lay it down of my own free will, and as I have power to lay it down so I have power to take it up again, and this is the command that I have received from my Father." (Jn 10: 17-18).

Personal Questions

- Jesus says: "I give you my peace." How do I contribute to the construction of peace in my family and in my community?
- Looking into the mirror of the obedience of Jesus toward the Father, on which point could I improve my obedience to the Father?

Concluding Prayer

All your creatures shall thank you, Yahweh, and your faithful shall bless you.
They shall speak of the glory of your kingship and tell of your might. (Ps 145: 10-11)

Wednesday, May 18, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, loving Father,
you have given us your Son Jesus Christ as the true vine of life
and our source of strength.
Help us to live his life
as living branches attached to the vine, and to bear plenty of fruit
of justice, goodness and love.
Let our union with him become visible in our openness to one another
and in our unity as brothers and sisters, that he may be visibly present among us now
and forever.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 1-8

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are clean already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you.

Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch -- and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples.

Reflection

Chapters 15 to 17 of the Gospel of John present to us the diverse teachings of Jesus which the Evangelist has put together and placed in the friendly and fraternal context of the last encounter of Jesus with his disciples:

- Jn 15: 1-17: Reflections around the parable of the vine.
- Jn 15: 18 – 16: 4a: Advice of how to behave if we are persecuted.
- Jn 16: 4b-15: Promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- Jn 16: 16-33: Reflections on the farewell and the return of Jesus.
- Jn 17: 1-26: The Testament of Jesus in the form of a prayer.

The Gospels of today and of tomorrow present part of the reflection of Jesus around the parable of the vine. To understand well all the significance of this parable, it is important to study well the words used by Jesus. And it is also important to observe closely a vine or any other plant to see how it grows and how it becomes united to the trunk and the branches, and how the fruit springs from the trunk and the branches.

- John 15: 1-2: Jesus presents the comparison of the vine. In the Old Testament the image of the vine indicated the People of Israel (Is 5: 1-2). The people were like a vine that God planted with great tenderness on the hills of Palestine (Ps 80: 9-12). But the vine does not correspond to that which God expected. Instead of producing good grapes it produces sour fruit which is good for nothing (Is 5: 3-4). Jesus is the newvine, the true vine. In one phrase alone he gives us the comparison. He says: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more." Pruning is painful, but it is necessary. It purifies the vine, and thus it grows and bears more fruit.
- John 15: 3-6: Jesus explains and applies the parable. The disciples are already purified. They have already been pruned by the word that they heard from Jesus. Up until today, God does the pruning in us through his Word which comes to us from the Bible and from many other means. Jesus extends the parable and says: "I am the vine, you are the branches!" It is not a question of two different things: on one side the vine and on the other the branches. No! The vine does not exist without the branches. We are part of Jesus. Jesus is the whole. In order that a branch can produce fruit, it has to be united to the vine. It is only in this way that it can receive the sap. "Without me you can do nothing!" The branch that does not bear fruit will be cut down. It dries up and it is ready to be burnt. It is good for nothing, not even for wood!
- John 15: 7-8: Remain in my love. Our model is that which Jesus himself lives in his relationship with the Father. He says: "As the Father has loved me, I have loved you. Remain in my love!" He insists in saying that we must remain in him and that his words should remain in us. And he even says: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it!" Because what the Father wants the most is that we become disciples of Jesus and, thus, that we bear much fruit.

Personal Questions

- Which has been the different pruning or the difficult moments in my life which have helped me to grow? Which has been the pruning or the difficult moments that we have had in our community, and which have helped us to grow?

- What keeps the life united and alive, capable of bearing fruit, is the sap which goes through it. Which is the sap which goes through our community, and which keeps it alive, capable of bearing fruit?

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, May 19, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
 you want your Church
 to be open to all persons and all nations, for your Son was available to all
 and you love all people. God, give us open minds and open hearts.
 Save us from our narrow prejudices and stop us from trying to create people in our
 own image and likeness.
 We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 9-11

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.

If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete.

Reflection

The reflection around the parable of the vine includes from verses 1 to 17. Today we will meditate on verses 9 to 11; Day after tomorrow, the Gospel skips verses 12 to 17 and begins with verse 18, which speaks about another theme. This is why, today, we include in a brief comment verses 12 to 17, because in them blossoms the flower and the parable of the vine shows all its beauty.

Today's Gospel is formed only of three verses which continue on yesterday's Gospel and give more light to be able to apply the comparison of the vine to the life of the community. The community is like a vine. It goes through difficult moments. It is the time of the pruning, a necessary moment in order to be able to bear more fruit.

- John 15: 9-11: Remain in my love, source of perfect joy. Jesus remains in the love of the Father, by observing the commandments which he receives from him. We remain in the love of Jesus by observing the commandments which he has left for us. And we should observe them in the same way in which he observed the commandments of the Father: "If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love". It is in this union of

the love of the Father and of Jesus that the source of true joy is found: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy be complete".

- John 15: 12-13: Love one another as I have loved you. The commandment of Jesus is only one: "To love one another, as he has loved us!" (Jn 15: 12). Jesus goes beyond the Old Testament. The ancient criterion was: "You will love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 18, 19). The new criterion is: "That you love one another, as I have loved you." Here he says the phrase which we sing even until now: "Nobody has greater love than this: to give one's life for one's friends!"
- John 15: 14-15: Friends and not servants. "You are my friends if you do what I command you", that is, the practice of love up to the total gift of self! Immediately after, Jesus adds a very high ideal for the life of the disciples. He says: "I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father!" Jesus had no more secrets for his disciples. He has told us everything he heard from the Father! This is the splendid ideal of life in community: to attain a total transparency, to the point of not having any secrets among ourselves and of being able to have total trust in one another, to be able to share the experience of God and of life that we have, and in this way enrich one another reciprocally. The first Christians succeeded in attaining this ideal during several years. They were "one only heart and one soul" (Acts 4: 32; 1: 14; 2: 42, 46).
- John 15: 16-17: Jesus has chosen us. We have not chosen Jesus. He has chosen us, he has called us and has entrusted us the mission to go and bear fruit, fruit which will last. We need him, but he also needs us and our work in order to be able to continue to do today what he did for the people of Galilee. The last recommendation: "My command to you is to love one another!"

The symbol of the vine in the Bible. The people of the Bible cultivated the vine and produced good wine. The harvest of the grapes was a feast with songs and dances. And this gave origin to the song of the vine, used by the prophet Isaiah. He compares the people of Israel to the vine (Is 5: 1-7; 27: 2-5; Ps 80: 9, 19). Before him, the prophet Hosea had already compared Israel to an exuberant vine, the more fruit that it produced, the more it multiplied its idolatries (Ho 10: 1). This theme was used by Jeremiah, who compares Israel to a bastard vine (Jer 2: 21), from which the branches were uprooted (Jer 5: 10; 6: 9). Jeremiah uses these symbols because he himself had a vine which had been trampled on and devastated by the invaders (Jer 12: 10). During the slavery of Babylonia, Ezekiel used the symbol of the vine to denounce the infidelity of the people of Israel. He told three parables on the vine: 1) the vine which is burnt and is good for nothing (Ez 15: 1-8); 2) the false vine planted and protected by two waters, symbols of the kings of Babylonia and of Egypt, enemies of Israel. (Ez 17: 1-10). 3) The vine destroyed by the oriental wind, image of the slavery of Babylonia (Ez 19: 10-14). The comparison of the vine was used by Jesus in several parables: the laborers of the vineyard (Mt 21, 1-16); the two sons who have to work in the vineyard (Mt 21: 32-33); the parable of the wicked tenants, who did not pay the landowner, beat the servants and killed the son of the landowner (Mt 21: 33-45); the barren fig tree planted in the vineyard (Lk 13: 6-9); the vine and its branches (Jn 15: 1-17).

Personal Questions

- We are friends and not servants. How do I consider this in my relationship with persons?
- To love as Jesus has loved us. How does this ideal of love grow in me?

Concluding Prayer

Proclaim his salvation day after day, declare his glory among the nations, his marvels to every people! (Ps 96: 2-3)

Friday, May 20, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, loving Father,
 you have given us your Son Jesus Christ as the true vine of life
 and our source of strength.
 Help us to live his life
 as living branches attached to the vine, and to bear plenty of fruit
 of justice, goodness, and love.
 Let our union with him become visible in our openness to one another
 and in our unity as brothers and sisters, that he may be visibly present among us now
 and for ever.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 12-17

Jesus said to his disciples: This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father.

You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; so that the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. My command to you is to love one another.

Reflection

Today Gospel of John 15: 12-17 has already been meditated a few days ago (or it will be read again within a few days). Let us take some of the points considered that day.

- John 15: 12-13: To love one another as he has loved us. The commandment of Jesus is only one: "to love one another as he has loved us!" (Jn 15: 12) Jesus exceeds the Old Testament. The ancient criterion was the following: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lv 18: 19). The new criterion is: "Love one another as I have loved you". It is the phrase that we sing even today and which says: "There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's brother!"
- John 15: 14-15: Friends and not servants. You are my friends if you do what I command you," that is, the practice of love up to the point of the total gift of oneself!

Immediately Jesus presents a very high ideal for the life of his disciples. He says: "I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father!" Jesus no longer had any secrets for his disciples. He tells us everything that he has heard from the Father! Behold the wonderful ideal of life in community: to reach a total transparency, to the point of not having any secrets among us and to have full trust with one another, to be able to speak about the experience of God that we have and of life, and thus, be able to mutually enrich one another. The first Christians succeeded to reach this ideal after many years: "they had one only heart and one only soul" (Ac 4: 32; 1: 14; 2: 42-46).

- John 15: 16-17: Jesus has chosen us. We have not chosen Jesus. He met us, called us and entrusted a mission to us to go and bear fruit, and a fruit which lasts. We need him, but he also wants to need us and our work in order to be able to continue to do today, for the people what he did for the people of Galilee. The last recommendation: This is my commandment: to love one another!"

For Personal Confrontation

- To love our neighbor as Jesus has loved us. This is the ideal of every Christian. How do I live it?
- All that I have heard from the Father I make it known to you. This is the ideal of the community: to attain total transparency. How do I live this in my community?

Concluding Prayer

My heart is ready, God, my heart is ready; I will sing, and make music for you.
Awake, my glory, awake, lyre and harp, that I may awake the Dawn. (Ps 57: 7-8)

Saturday, May 21, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God;
it is good to live in the friendship of your Son Jesus Christ.
Make us realize that also in this love
we are committed to him and share with him for better and for worse,
in misunderstanding and contradiction as well as in joy and intimacy.
Help us to rejoice even when treated
with indifference or ridicule on account of him, for it means that he is still with us
who is our Lord forever.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 18-21

Jesus said to his disciples: "If the world hates you, you must realize that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you do not belong to the world, because my choice of you has drawn you out of the world, that is why the world hates you."

Remember the words I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word, they will keep yours as well. But it will be on my account that they will do all this to you, because they do not know the one who sent me.

Reflection

- John 15: 18-19: The hatred of the world. "If the world hates you, you must realize that it hated me before it hated you". The Christian who follows Jesus is called to live in a way contrary to society. In a world organized according to the egoistic interests of persons and groups which seek to live and radiate the love which will be crucified. This was the destiny of Jesus. This is why when a Christian is very much praised by the power of this world and is exalted as a model for all by mass media; it is good not to trust too much. "If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you do not belong to the world, because my choice of you has drawn you out of the world, that is why the world hates you". It was Jesus' choice which separated us. And if we base ourselves on this gratuitous choice or vocation of Jesus we will have the force to suffer persecution and calumny and have joy, in spite of the difficulties.
- John 15: 20: The servant is not greater than his master. "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word they will keep yours as well". Jesus had already insisted on this same point in the washing of the feet (Jn 13: 16) and in the discourse on the Mission (Mt 10: 24-25).
And it is this identification with Jesus that, throughout the centuries, has given so much force to persons to continue the journey and has been a source of mystical experience for many saints and martyrs.
- John 15: 21: Persecution on account of Jesus. "But it will be on my account that they will do all this to you, because they do not know the one who sent me." The repeated insistence of the Gospel in recalling those words of Jesus which can help the communities to understand the reason for the crisis and persecutions is an evident sign that our brothers and sisters of the first communities did not have an easy life. From the persecution of Nero after Christ up to the end of the first century, they lived knowing that they could be persecuted, accused, imprisoned, and killed any moment. The force which sustained them was a certainty that Jesus communicated that God was with them.

Personal Questions

- Jesus addresses himself to me and tells me: If you belonged to the world, the world would love what is yours. How do I apply this in my life?
- In me there are two tendencies: the world and the Gospel. Which of these two has the priority?

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, May 22, 2022

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Opening Prayer

Shaddai, God of the mountain, You who make of our fragile life the rock of your dwelling place, lead our mind to strike the rock of the desert, so that water may gush to quench our thirst. May the poverty of our feelings cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night and may it open our heart to hear the echo of silence until the dawn, wrapping us with the light of the new morning, may bring us, with the spent embers of the fire of the shepherds of the Absolute who have kept vigil for us close to the divine Master, the flavor of the holy memory.

LECTIO

The Text – John 14: 23-29

23 Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

25 "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. 26 But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. 28 You heard me say to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.'

If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. 29 And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe.

A Moment of Silence:

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

MEDITATIO

Some Questions:

- "And we will come to him and make our home with him": looking in our interior camp, will we find there the tent of the *shekinah* (presence) of God?
- "He who does not love me does not keep my words: Are the words of Christ empty words for us because of our lack of love? Or could we say that we observe them as a guide on our journey?

- “The Holy Spirit will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”: Jesus turns to the Father, but everything which he has said and done remains with us. When will we be able to remember the marvels which divine grace has accomplished in us? Do we receive or accept the voice of the Spirit who suggests in our interior the meaning of all that has taken place, that has happened?
- “My peace I give to you: The peace of Christ is his resurrection”: When will we be able in our life to abandon the anxiety and the mania of doing, which draws us away from the sources of the being? God of peace, when will we live solely from you, peace of our waiting?
- “I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe”: Before it takes place... Jesus likes to explain to us beforehand what is going to happen, so that the events do not take us by surprise, unprepared. But are we ready to read the signs of our events with the words heard from him?

Key for the reading:

To make our home. Heaven does not have a better place than a human heart which is in love. Because a dilated heart extends the boundaries and all barriers of time and space disappear. To live in love is equal to live in Heaven, to live in Him who is love, and eternal love.

- **v. 23:** Jesus answered him: If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. In the origin of every spiritual experience there is always a movement forward. Take a small step, then everything moves harmoniously. And the step to be taken is only one: If a man loves me. Is it really possible to love God? And how is it seen that his face is no longer among the people? To love: What does it really mean? In general, to love for us means to wish well to one another, to be together, to make choices to construct a future, to give oneself... to love Jesus is not the same thing. to love him means to do as he did, not to draw back in the face of pain, of death; to love as he did takes us very far... and it is in this love that the word becomes daily bread to eat and life becomes Heaven because of the Father's presence.
- **vv. 24-25:** *He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.* If there is no love, the consequences are disastrous. The words of Jesus can be observed only if there is love in the heart, otherwise they remain absurd proposals. Those words are not the words of a man, they come for the Father's heart who proposes to each one of us to be like Him. In life it is not so much a question of doing things, even if they are very good. It is necessary to be men, to be sons, to be images similar to the One who never ceases to give Himself completely.
- **vv. 25-26:** These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. To remember is an action of the Spirit; when in our days the past is seen as something lost forever and the future is there as something threatening to take away our joy today, only the divine Breath in you can lead you to remember it. To remember what has been said, every word coming from God's mouth for you, and forgotten because of the fact that time has gone by.
- **v. 27:** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. The peace of Christ

for us is not absence of conflicts, serenity of life, health... but the plenitude of every good, absence of anxiety in the face of what is going to happen. The Lord does not assure us well-being, but the fullness of sonship in a loving adherence to his projects which are good for us. We will possess peace, when we will have learnt to trust in that which the Father chooses for us.

- v. 28: You heard me say to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you'. If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I.

We come back to the question of love. If you loved me, you would have rejoiced. But what is the sense of this expression pronounced by the Master? We could complete the phrase and say: If you loved me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father... but since you think of yourselves, you are sad because I am leaving, going away. The love of the disciples is an egoistic love. They do not love Jesus because they do not think of Him, they think of themselves. Then, the love which Jesus asks, is this love!

A love capable of rejoicing because the other will be happy. A love capable of not thinking of self as the center of all the universe, but as a place in which one feels open to give and to be able to receive: not in exchange, but as the "effect" of the gift received.

- v. 29: *I have told you before it takes place, so when it does take place, you may believe.* Jesus instructs his own because he knows that they will remain confused and will be slow in understanding. His words do not vanish, they remain as a presence in the world, treasures of understanding in faith. An encounter with the Absolute who is always and for always in favor of man.

Reflection:

Love: a magic and ancient word as old as the world, a familiar word which is born in the horizon of every man in the moment in which he is called into existence. A word written in his human fibers as origin and end, as an instrument of peace, as bread and gift, as himself, as others, as God. A word entrusted to history through our history of every day.

Love, a pact which has always had one name alone: man. Yes, because love coincides with man: love is the air that he breathes, love is the food which is given to him, love is the rest to which he entrusts himself, love is the bond of union which makes of him a land of encounter. That love with which God has seen in his creation and has given: "It is something very good." And he has not taken back the commitment taken when man made of himself a rejection more than a gift, a slap more than a caress, a stone thrown more than a silent tear.

He has loved even more with the eyes and the heart of the Son, up to the end. This man who became a burning torch of sin, the Father has redeemed him, again and solely out of love, in the Fire of the Spirit.

ORATIO

Psalm 37,23-31

The steps of a man are from the Lord,
and he establishes him in whose way he delights; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong,
for the Lord is the stay of his hand. I have been young, and now am old;

yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging bread.
He is ever giving liberally and lending,
and his children become a blessing. Depart from evil, and do good;
so shall you abide forever. For the Lord loves justice; he will not forsake his saints.
The righteous shall be preserved for ever,
but the children of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall possess the land,
and dwell upon it forever.
The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice.
The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip.

CONTEMPLATIO

I see you, Lord, dwelling in my days through your word which accompanies me in my more intense moments, when my love for you becomes courageous, audacious and I do not give up in the face of what I feel that does not belong to me. that Spirit which is like the wind: blows where it wants and his voice is not heard, that Spirit has become space in me, and now I can tell you that he is like a dear friend with whom to remember. To go back to remember the words said, to the lived events, to the presence perceived while on the way, does good to the heart.

I feel profoundly this indwelling every time that in silence one of your phrases comes to mind, one of your invitations, one of your words of compassion, your silence. The nights of your prayer allow me to pray to the Father and to find peace. Lord, tenderness concealed in the pleads of my gestures, grant me to treasure all that you are: a scroll which is explained in which it is easy to understand the sense of my existence.

May my words be the dwelling place of your words, may my hunger be your dwelling, bread of life, may my pain be the empty tomb and the folded shroud so that everything that you want may be accomplished, up to the last breath. I love you, Lord, my rock.

Monday, May 23, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
if we really believe in you and in your Son, we cannot be but witnesses.
Send us your Spirit of strength,
that we may give no flimsy excuses for not standing up for you
and for the love and rights of our neighbor.
Make us only afraid
of betraying you and people
and of being afraid to bear witness.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 26-16: 4a

Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness. And you too will be witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.

I have told you all this so that you may not fall away. They will expel you from the

synagogues, and indeed the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy service to God. They will do these things because they have never known either the Father or me. But I have told you all this, so that when the time for it comes you may remember that I told you. I did not tell you this from the beginning, because I was with you;

Reflection

In chapters 15 to 17 of the Gospel of John, the horizon extends beyond the historical moment of the Supper. Jesus prays to the Father "I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me" (Jn 17: 20). In these chapters, there is constant reference to the action of the Spirit in the life of the communities, after Easter.

- John 16: 26-27: The action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the community. The first thing that the Spirit does is to give witness of Jesus: "He will be my witness." The Spirit is not a spiritual being without a definition. No! He is the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father, will be sent by Jesus himself and introduces us into the complete truth (Jn 16: 6). At the end of the first century, there were some Christians who were so fascinated by the action of the Spirit that they no longer looked at Jesus. They affirmed that now, after the Resurrection, it was no longer necessary to look at Jesus of Nazareth, the one "who comes in the flesh." They withdrew from Jesus and remained only with the Spirit. They said: "Jesus is anathema!" (1 Co 12: 3).

The Gospel of John takes a stand and does not permit that the action of the Spirit be separated from the memory of Jesus of Nazareth. The Holy Spirit cannot be isolated with an independent greatness, separated from the mystery of the Incarnation. The Holy Spirit is inseparably united to the Father and to Jesus. He is the Spirit of Jesus that the Father sends to us that same Spirit that Jesus has gained with his death and Resurrection. And we, receiving this Spirit in Baptism, should be the prolongation of Jesus: "And you too will be witnesses!" We can never forget that precisely on the eve of his death Jesus promises the Spirit; in the moment when he gave himself for his brothers.

Today, the Charismatic Movement insists on the action of the Spirit and does much good. It should always insist more, but it should also insist in affirming that it is a question of the Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth who, out of love for the poor and the marginalized, was persecuted, arrested and condemned to death and that, precisely because of this, he has promised us his Spirit in such a way that we, after his death, continue his action and be for humanity the revelation itself of the preferential love of the Father for the poor and the oppressed.

- John 16: 1-2: Do not be afraid. The Gospel tells us that to be faithful to Jesus will lead us to have difficulties. The disciples will be excluded from the Synagogue. They will be condemned to death. The same thing that happened to Jesus will happen to them. This is why at the end of the first century, there were persons who, in order to avoid persecution, diluted or watered down the message of Jesus transforming it into a Gnostic message, vague, without any definition, which was not in contrast with the ideology of the Empire. To them is applied what Paul said: "They are afraid of the cross of Christ" (Ga 6: 12). And John himself, in his letter, will say concerning them: "There are many deceivers at large in the world, refusing to acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in human nature (he became man). They are the Deceiver; they are the Antichrist!" (2 Jn 1: 7). The same concern appears also in Thomas' demand: "Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the

holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe". (Jn 20: 25). The Risen Christ who promises to give us the gift of the Spirit is Jesus of Nazareth who continues to have, even now, the signs of torture and of the cross in his risen Body.

- John 16: 3-4: They do not know what they do. They do all these things "because they have never known either the Father or me". These persons do not have a correct image of God. They have a vague image of God, in the heart and in the head. Their God is not the Father of Jesus Christ who gathers us all together in unity and fraternity. In last instance, it is the same reason which impelled Jesus to say: "Father, forgive them, because they know not what they do (Lk 23: 34). Jesus was condemned by the religious authority because, according to their idea, he had a false image of God. In the words of Jesus there is no hatred or vengeance, but only compassion: they are ignorant brothers who know nothing of our Father.

Personal Questions

- The mystery of the Trinity is present in the affirmation of Jesus, not as a theoretical truth, but as an expression of the Christian with the mission of Christ. How do I live this central mystery of our faith in my life?
- How do I live the action of the Spirit in my life?

Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh:
his praise in the assembly of the faithful! Israel shall rejoice in its Maker,
the children of Zion delight in their king. (Ps 149: 1-2)

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, if we really believe in You and in Your Son, we cannot be but witnesses.
Send us Your Spirit of strength, that we may give no flimsy excuses for not standing up
for You and for the love and rights of our neighbor.

Make us only afraid of betraying You and people and of being afraid to bear witness.
We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 16: 5-11

Jesus said to his disciples: "Now I am going to the one who sent me, and not one of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I told you this, grief has filled your hearts. But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation: sin, because they do not believe in me; righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; condemnation, because the ruler of this world has been condemned."

Reflection

- John 16: 5-7: The sadness of the disciples. Jesus begins with a rhetorical question that makes evident the sadness of the disciples in light of detachment from Jesus: "Now I am going to the One who sent Me; not one of you asks, 'where are you going?'" It is clear that for the disciples, the detachment from the lifestyle lived with Jesus implies suffering. Jesus acknowledges this, saying "Yet you are sad at heart because I have told you this" (v. 6). Saint Augustine explains the sentiment of abandonment of the disciples: "They were afraid to think of losing the visible presence of Christ... they were grieved, saddened in their human affection at the thought that their eyes would no longer be consoled in seeing Him." (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*, XCIV: 4). Jesus tries to dispel this sadness, due to the fact that they will not have His presence, revealing to them His departure. He says that if He does not leave them, the Paraclete will not be able to join them; if He returns to the Father, He will be able to send the Paraclete to the disciples. His departure and the detachment of the disciples makes possibility the coming of the Paraclete: "because unless I go, the Paraclete will not come to you..." (v. 7).
- John 16: 8-11: The Mission of the Paraclete. Jesus continues to describe the mission of the Paraclete. The term "Paraclete" means "advocate," that is, support, assistant. Here the Paraclete is presented as the accuser in a process that is carried out before God and in which the accused is the world, which has made itself guilty for condemning Jesus: "He will show the world how wrong it was, about sin, and about who was in the right and about judgment" (v. 8). The Greek verb *elegken* means that He will make an inquiry, He will question, will test: He will bring to light a reality and will furnish the proof of guilt.
- The object of the confutation is sin: He will give the world the proof of the sin that it has committed regarding Jesus and will expose it. What is the sin in question here?
- that of unbelief (Jn 5: 44ff; 6: 36; 8: 21, 24, 26; 10: 31). Besides, for the world to have thought that Jesus was a sinner (Jn 9: 24; 18: 30) is an inexcusable sin (Jn 15: 21ff).
- In the second place He will "refute" the world "concerning justice." On the juridical level, the notion of justice which adheres more to the text is the one which implies a declaration of guilt or innocence in a judgment. In our context this is the only time that the term "justice" appears in the Gospel of John. Elsewhere there is the term "just." In John 16: 8 justice is linked to all that Jesus has affirmed about Himself, that is, the reason why He is going to the Father. Such a discourse concerns His glorification: Jesus goes to the Father. The disciples will no longer be able to see Him. He is about to trust and to submerge Himself completely in the will of the Father. The glorification of Jesus confirms His divine filiation or sonship and the approbation of the Father regarding the mission which Jesus has accomplished. Therefore, the Spirit will directly show the justice of Christ (Jn 14: 26; 15: 26) protecting the disciples and the ecclesial community.
- The world that has judged Jesus, condemning Him, is condemned by the "prince of this world," because he is responsible for His crucifixion (13: 2, 27). Jesus, in dying on the Cross, is exalted (12: 31) and He has triumphed over Satan. Now the Spirit will give witness to the significance of the death of Jesus which coincides with the fall of Satan (Jn 12: 32; 14: 30; 16: 33).

Personal Questions

- This is the beginning of our exposure to the Trinity. What is my relationship with the Holy Trinity?
- Do you allow yourself to be led by the Spirit, the Paraclete, who gives you certainty of the error of the world and helps you to adhere to Jesus, and therefore, leads you into the truth about yourself?
- Very few go forth with the intention to sin or do evil, but rather, they are misled or confused. What do you do to discern the authentic influence and advice of the Paraclete versus being mislead?

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord God, our Father,
 you are not far away from any of us, for in you we live and move and exist and you live in us through your Holy Spirit. Be indeed with us, Lord, send us your Holy Spirit of truth and through him deepen our understanding of the life and message of your Son, that we may accept the full truth and live by it consistently.
 We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 16: 12-15

Jesus said to his disciples: "I still have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you to bear now. However, when the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking of his own accord, but will say only what he has been told; and he will reveal to you the things to come. He will glorify me, since all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine. Everything the Father has is mine; that is why I said: all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine."

Reflection

In these weeks of *Easter Time*, the Gospels of each day are almost always taken from chapters 12 to 17 of the Gospel of John. That reveals something regarding the origin and the destination of these chapters. They show not only what happened before the Passion and the death of Jesus, but also and above all, the living out of faith of the first communities after the resurrection. They express the Paschal faith which animated them.

- John 16: 12: I still have many things to say to you. The Gospel today begins with this phrase: "I still have many things to say to you, but they would be too much for you to bear now." In these words of Jesus there are two things: the environment of the farewell, which characterized the Last Supper, and the concern of Jesus, the older brother, for his younger brothers, who within a brief time will remain without his

presence. The time left was very short. Within a short time, Jesus will be arrested. The work begun was not yet complete. The disciples were just at the beginning of their apprenticeship. Three years are a very short time to change life and to begin to live and to think in a new image of God. Their formation was not yet finished. Much was still lacking, and Jesus had still many things to teach them and to transmit to them, but he knows his disciples. They are not among the most intelligent. They would not be capable to know now all the consequences and implications of discipleship. They would become discouraged. They would not be able to bear this.

- John 16:13-15: The Holy Spirit will come to their help. "However, when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking of his own accord but will say only what he has been told; and he will reveal to you the things to come. He will glorify me, since all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine." This affirmation of Jesus shows the experience of the first communities. In the measure in which they sought to imitate Jesus, trying to interpret and apply his Word to the various circumstances of their life, they experienced the presence and the light of the Spirit. And this happens even today in the communities which try to incarnate the Word of Jesus in their life. The root of this experience is the words of Jesus: "Everything the Father has is mine that is why I said: all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine."
- The action of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John. John uses many images and symbols to signify the action of the Holy Spirit. Like in creation (Gen 1: 1), the Spirit also descends on Jesus, "in the form of a dove, come from Heaven" (Jn 1: 32). It is the beginning of the new creation! Jesus speaks the words of God and communicates the Spirit without reserve to us (Jn 3: 34). His words are Spirit and Life (Jn 6: 63). When Jesus bids farewell, he said that he would have sent another Paraclete, Consoler, another defender, who will remain with us. It is the Holy Spirit (Jn 14: 16-17). By his Passion, death and Resurrection, Jesus won for us the gift of the Holy Spirit. By Baptism all of us have received this same Spirit of Jesus (Jn 1: 33). When he appeared to the apostles, he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit!" (Jn 20: 22). The Spirit is like the water which springs from within the persons who believe in Jesus (Jn 7: 37-39; 4: 14). The first effect of the action of the Spirit in us is reconciliation: "If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained". (Jn 20: 23). The Spirit which Jesus communicates to us has multiple actions: consoles and spreads (Jn 14: 16), he communicates truth (Jn 14: 17; 16: 13), makes us remember what Jesus taught (Jn 14: 26); will give witness of Jesus (Jn 15: 26); manifests the glory of Jesus (Jn 16: 14); will convince the world concerning sin, justice (Jn 16: 8). The Spirit is given to us so that we can understand the complete meaning of the words of Jesus (Jn 14: 26); 16: 12-13). Encouraged by the Spirit of Jesus we can adore God in any place (Jn 4: 23-24). Here lies the liberty of the Spirit of which Saint Paul speaks: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Co 3: 17).

Personal Questions

- How do I live my adherence to Jesus: alone or in community?
- Has my participation in the community led me, sometimes, to experience the light and the force of the Holy Spirit?

Concluding Prayer

The name of the Lord is sublime, his splendor transcends earth and heaven. For he

heightens the strength of his people, to the praise of all his faithful, the people close to him. (Ps 148: 13-14)

Thursday, May 26, 2022

(If Ascension of the Lord is celebrated on Thursday, see Sunday, May 29)

Opening Prayer

Lord God, our Father,
you are not far away from any of us, for in you we live and move and exist and you live in us through your Holy Spirit. Be indeed with us, Lord, send us your Holy Spirit of truth and through him deepen our understanding of the life and message of your Son, that we may accept the full truth and live by it consistently.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 16: 16-20

Jesus told to his disciples: "In a short time you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again. Then some of his disciples said to one another, 'What does he mean, "In a short time you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again," and "I am going to the Father"? What is this "short time"? We don't know what he means.' Jesus knew that they wanted to question him, so he said, 'You are asking one another what I meant by saying, "In a short time you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again." 'In all truth I tell you, you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy."

Reflection

- John 16: 16: Absence and presence. Jesus says a "little while" (*un mikròn*), that is to say, a very brief period of time, perhaps one "instant." Over and beyond the multiplicity of nuances what we want to stress here is the exiguity of time. Just as the time that Jesus remained as Incarnate Word, with his own, in the same way, the time between his departure and his return, will also be brief. There will be no change in the interior situation of his disciples because the relationship with Jesus does not change: He is permanently close to them. Therefore, the vision of Jesus will not suffer any interruption but will be characterized by the communion of life with Him (Jn 14: 19).

The repeated use of the verb "to see" in v. 16: is interesting: «In a short time you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again». The expression "ashort time you will no longer see me" recalls the way with which the disciples see in the historical Jesus the Son of God; the other expression "a short time later you will seeme again" recalls the experience of the Risen Christ. Jesus seems to want to say to the disciples that for a very short time the conditions to see him still exist, to recognize him in his visible flesh, but later, they will see him in a different vision in so far as he will show himself transformed, transfigured.

- John 16: 17-19: The lack of understanding of the disciples. In the meantime, some disciples do not succeed to understand what this absence signifies, means, that is to say, his going to the Father. They experience a certain disturbance regarding the

words of Jesus and they express this asking four questions, joined together in one same expression: "What he is saying, what does it mean?" Other times the reader has listened to the questions of Peter, of Philip, of Thomas. And of Judah, not Iscariot, and now those disciples who ask for an explanation. The disciples do not succeed to understand what he is speaking about. The disciples have not understood how Jesus can be seen again by them if he goes to the Father (vv.16-19). But the question seems to be concentrated on the expression "a short time" that for the reader seems to be a very long time that never ends, especially when one has anguish and sadness. In fact, the time of sadness does not pass away. An answer of Jesus is expected, but the Evangelist places a repetition of the same question as before: "You are asking one another what I meant by saying: "In a short time you will no longer see me; and then a short time later you will see me again?" (v. 19).

- John 16: 20: The response of Jesus. In fact, Jesus does not respond to the question asked: "What does in a short time, mean?", but he invites them to trust. It is true that the disciples will be tried, tested, they will suffer very much, they will be alone in a hostile situation, abandoned in a world which rejoices because of the death of Jesus, but he assures them that their sadness will be changed into joy. To the time of sadness is opposed a time in which everything will be overturned. That opposing clause "but your sadness will be transformed into joy," underlines such a change of perspective. For the reader it is evident that the expressions "a short time," "in a short time" correspond to that instant or moment in which the situation is overturned, but up to that moment everything will be of sadness and trial.

In last instance, the disciples receive from Jesus a promise of happiness, of joy; in virtue of that instant in which the difficult situation is overturned, to which "his own", the ecclesial community are subjected, they will enter into a reality of the world enlightened by the resurrection.

Personal Questions

- Am I convinced that the moment of trial, of suffering will pass away and He will come back to be with me?"
- «You will be weeping and wailing, but your sorrow will turn into joy." What effect do these words of Jesus have in your human events? How do you live your moments of sadness and of anguish?

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, May 27, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord God, merciful Father,
it is hard for us to accept pain,

for we know that you have made us for happiness and joy.
When suffering challenges us with a provocative "why me?" help us to discover the depth of our inner freedom and love and of all the faith and loyalty of which we are capable,
together with, and by the power of, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 16: 20-23a

Jesus said: 'In all truth I tell you, you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy.'

A woman in childbirth suffers, because her time has come; but when she has given birth to the child she forgets the suffering in her joy that a human being has been born into the world. So it is with you: you are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy, and that joy no one shall take from you.'

Reflection

During these days between the Ascension and Pentecost, the Gospels of the day are taken from chapters 16 to 21 of the Gospel of Saint John, and form part of the Gospel called: "Book of Consolation or of the Revelation acting in the Community" (Jn 13: 1 to 21: 31). This Book is divided as follows: the farewell to the friends (Jn 13: 1a to 14: 31); witness of Jesus and prayer to the Father (Jn 15: 1 to 17: 28); the accomplished work (Jn 18: 1 to 20: 31). The environment of sadness and of expectation. Sadness, because Jesus leaves and the nostalgia invades the heart. Expectation, because the hour is arriving of receiving the promised gift, that of the Consoler who will make all sadness disappear and will once again bring the joy of the friendly presence of Jesus in the midst of the community.

- John 16: 20: The sadness will be transformed into joy. Jesus says: "In all truth I tell you: you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy." The frequent reference to sadness and suffering express the environment of the communities at the end of the first century in Asia Minor (today, Turkey), for which John wrote his Gospel. They lived in a difficult situation of persecution and oppression which caused sadness. The Apostles had taught that Jesus would have returned afterwards, but the "*parusia*", the glorious return of Jesus had not arrived and persecution increased. Many were impatient: "Until when?" (cfr. 2Th 2: 1-5; 2 P 3: 8-9). Besides, a person bears a situation of suffering and of persecution when he/she knows that suffering is the way and the condition to attain perfect joy. And thus, even having death before the eyes, the person bears and faces suffering and pain. This is why the Gospel makes this beautiful comparison with the pangs of childbirth.
- John 16: 21: The comparison with pangs of childbirth. All understand this comparison, especially mothers: "The woman in childbirth suffers because her time has come; but when she has given birth to the child she forgets the suffering in her joy that a human being has been born into the world". The suffering and sadness caused by persecution, even without offering any horizon of improvement, are not the stertor of death, but rather the pangs of childbirth. Mothers know all this by experience. The pain is terrible, but they bear it, because they know that the pain, the suffering is a source of new life. Thus, is the suffering of the persecution of Christians, and thus, any suffering should be believed, that is, in the light of the experience of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

- John 16: 22-23a: Eternal joy. Jesus explains the comparison: "So it is with you: you are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy and that joy no one shall take from you". When that day comes, you will not ask me any questions. This is the certainty that gives courage to the tired and persecuted communities of Asia Minor and which makes one exult with joy in the midst of suffering and pain. As the poet says: "It hurts, but I sing!" Or as the mystic Saint John of the Cross says: "In a dark night, with an inflamed yearning for love, oh happy venture, I went out without being noticed, in my house all slept!" The expression on that day indicates the definitive coming of the Kingdom which brings with it its clarity. In the light of God, there will no longer be need to ask anything. The light of God is the full and total response to all the questions which could arise within the human heart.

For Personal Confrontation

- Sadness and joy. They exist together in life. How do these exist in your life?
- Pangs of childbirth. This experience is found in the origin of life of each one of us. My mother suffered the pain with hope, and this is why I am alive. Stop and think about this mystery of life.

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, May 28, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord God, merciful Father,
it is hard for us to accept pain,
for we know that you have made us for happiness and joy.
When suffering challenges us with a provocative "why me?" help us to discover the depth of our inner freedom and love and of all the faith and loyalty of which we are capable, together with, and by the power of, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 16: 23b-28

Jesus told to his disciples: "In all truth I tell you, anything you ask from the Father he will grant in my name. Until now you have not asked anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and so your joy will be complete. I have been telling you these things in veiled language. The hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in veiled language but tell you about the Father in plain words. When that day comes you will ask in my name; and I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you, because the Father himself loves you for loving me, and believing that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world and now I am leaving the world to go to the Father."

Reflection

- John 16: 23b: The disciples have full access to the Father. This is the assurance that Jesus gives to his disciples: they can have access to God's paternity in union with Him. The mediation of Jesus takes the disciples to the Father. It is evident that the role of Jesus is not that of substituting himself to "his own": He does not assume it by means of a function of intercession, but he unites them to himself, and in communion with Him they present their needs.

The disciples are certain that Jesus can dispose of the riches of the Father: "In all truth I tell you, anything you ask from the Father in my name, he will grant it to you" (v. 23b). In such a way, it means, in union with Him, the petition becomes effective. The object of any petition to the Father has to be always joined to Jesus, that is to say, to his love and to his commitment to give his life for man (Jn 10: 10). The prayer addressed to the Father, in the name of Jesus, in union with Him (Jn 14: 13; 16: 23), is listened to.

Until now you have not asked anything in the name of Jesus, but they will be able to do it after his glorification (Jn 14, 13s) when they will receive the Spirit who will fully enlighten them on His identity (Jn 4, 22ff) and will create the union with Him. His own will be able to ask and receive the fullness of joy when they will go from the sensitive vision of Him to that of faith.

- Jn 16: 24-25: In Jesus the direct contact with the Father. The believers are taken into the relationship between the Son and the Father. In Jn 16: 26 Jesus once again speaks about the link produced by the Spirit and that permits his own to present every petition to the Father in union with Him. That will take place "on that day." What does this mean: "On that day you will ask?" It is the day when He will come to His own and will communicate the Spirit to them (Jn 20: 19, 22). And it is then that the disciples knowing the relationship between Jesus and the Father will know that they will be listened to. It will not be necessary for Jesus to intervene between the Father and the disciples to ask on their behalf, and not because his mediation has ended, but they, having believed in the Incarnation of the Word, and being closely united to Christ, will be loved by the Father as He loves his Son (Jn 17: 23, 26). In Jesus the disciples experience the direct contact with the Father.
- John 16: 26-27: The prayer to the Father. To pray consists, then, to go to the Father through Jesus; to address the Father in the name of Jesus. The expression of Jesus in vv. 26-27: "And I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you; because the Father himself loves you", merits to be given special attention. The love of the Father for the disciples is founded on the adherence of "his own" to Jesus on faith in his provenance, that is to say, the acknowledgment of Jesus as gift of the Father.

After having assimilated the disciples to himself Jesus seems to withdraw from his condition of mediator but in reality, he permits that only the Father to take us and to seize us: "Ask and you will receive and so your joy will be complete" (v. 24). Inserted into the relationship with the Father through union in Him, our joy is complete, and prayer is perfect. God always offers his love to the whole world, but such a love acquires the sense of reciprocity only if man responds. Love is incomplete if it does not become reciprocal: as long as man does not accept it remains in suspense. However, the disciples accept it at the moment in which they love Jesus and thus they render operational the love of the Father. Prayer is this relationship of love. In last instance the history of each one of us is identified with the history of his prayer, even at the moments which do not seem to be such: Longing, yearning is already prayer and in the same way, research, anguish...

Personal Questions

- Do my personal and community prayer take place in a state of calmness, silence of peace and of great peace?
- How much effort or commitment do I dedicate to grow in friendship with Jesus? Are you convinced of attaining a real identity through communion with Him and in the love for neighbor?

Concluding Prayer

God reigns over the nations, seated on his holy throne.
The leaders of the nations rally to the people of the God of Abraham. (Ps 47: 8-9)

Sunday, May 29, 2022

The Ascension of the Lord

Opening Prayer

Shaddai, God of the mountain, You who make of our fragile lifethe rock of your dwelling place, lead our mind
to strike the rock of the desert,
so that water may gush to quench our thirst.
May the poverty of our feelings
cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the nightand may it open our heart to hear
the echo of silence until the dawn,
wrapping us with the light of the new morning, may bring us,
with the spent embers of the fire of the shepherds of the Absolute who have kept vigil
for us close to the divine Master, the flavor of the holy memory.

LECTIO

The text - Luke 24: 46-53

46 and he said to them, 'So it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses to this. 49 'And now I am sending upon you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city, then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.' 50 Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and raising his hands he blessed them. 51 Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven. 52 They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy; 53 and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

A Moment of Silence:

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

MEDITATIO

Some Questions:

- In the name of the Lord: In whose name do I live my daily life?
- To all nations. Am I capable of welcoming all or do I discriminate easily according to my point of view?
- Stay in the city. Do I have staying power in the most difficult situations or do I try, even before I understand their meaning, to eliminate them?
- My prayer. Do I praise the Lord for all he does in my life or do I ask things for myself?

A Key to the Reading:

These few lines speak of life, motion, journey, meeting. This is the aim of the *so it is written* and *all the nations*. Life is marked by witness. The apostles are those sent, they do not bring anything of their own but become life, motion, journey, meeting, a way that brings life wherever they go.

- v. 46. So it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead. What is written? Where? The only scripture we know is that of encounter. It seems that God cannot do without humankind, and so God goes seeking people wherever they are and will not give up until God embraces them. This is what is written: An eternal love, capable of enduring suffering, of drinking the chalice of pain to its dregs, so as to look once more upon the face of the beloved children. In the depths of non-life, Christ descends to take the hand of humankind to lead humankind back home. Three days! Three moments: passion, death, resurrection! This is what is written for Christ and for all those who belong to him. Passion: you surrender trustingly, and the other does with you whatever he wishes, he embraces you or ill-treats you, he welcomes you or rejects you... but you go on loving to the end. Death: a life that cannot be taken back... dies, is snuffed out... but not forever, because death has power over the flesh but the spirit that comes from God goes back to God.

Resurrection: Everything makes sense in the light of Life. Love once given will not die but will always resurrect again.

- v. 47: And in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Jesus' word, spoken in time, does not come to an end. It needs those who proclaim it. The apostles go, sent in the holy name of God. They go to all nations. No longer to one chosen people, but to all who are now chosen. They go to put their arms around the shoulder of their brothers and sisters and to convert them, to turn them around towards them and to tell them: All is forgiven, you can live the divine life once more, Jesus died and rose again for you! Faith is not an invention. I come from Jerusalem, I saw him with my eyes, I experienced him in my life. I am telling you no more than my story, a story of salvation.
- v. 48: You are witnesses to this. We know God from experience. To be witnesses means carrying the word that is Christ written in one's skin, woven syllable by syllable. When one is touched by Christ, one becomes a bright lamp, even without one's knowledge! And if one wanted to put out the flame, it would light up again, because the light comes not from the lamp but from the Spirit poured into the heart and beams eternal communion endlessly.
- v. 49: "And now I am sending upon you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city, then, until you are clothed with the power from on high." Jesus' promises are

always fulfilled. He goes away, but he does not leave his friends orphans. He knows that they need God's constant presence. And God comes back to humankind. This time no longer in the flesh, but invisibly in the fire of an intangible love, in the ardor of a bond that will never be broken, the rainbow of the ratified covenant, the splendor of God's smile, the Holy Spirit. Clothed in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, the apostles will not be afraid and can finally go!

- v. 50: Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and raising his hands blessed them. The moment of separation is a solemn one. Bethany is the place of friendship. Jesus raises his hands and blesses his own. This is a salute and a gift. Goes does not draw away from his own, God simply leaves them to come back in different guise.
- v. 51: Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven. Every separation brings sorrow with it. But in this case the blessing is a legacy of grace. The apostles live in such an intense communion with their Lord that they are not aware of a separation.
- v. 52: They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy. Great is the joy of the apostles, the joy of going through the streets of Jerusalem with a limitless treasure, the joy of belonging. Christ's humanity goes to heaven, to open a gate that will never be shut again. The joy of the superabundance of life that Christ has now poured into their experience will never cease...
- v. 53: And they were continually in the Temple praising God. To stay... is a very important verb for the Christian. To stay presupposes a special strength, the ability not to flee from situations but to live them out savoring them to their depths. To stay: an evangelical program to be shared with all. Then praise flows out sincerely, because in staying God's will is sipped like a healthy and intoxicating drink of bliss.

Reflection:

The witness of charity in the life of the church is without any doubt the clearest mirror for evangelization. It is the instrument that loosens the soil so that when the seed of the Word falls it may bear abundant fruit. The good news cannot choose other ways to touch the hearts of people than that of mutual love, an experience that leads directly to the source: «*This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you*» (Jn 15:12). We find all this in the early Church: «*This is the proof of love, that he laid down his life for us, and we too ought to lay down our life for our brothers*» (1 Jn 3:16).

The disciple who met and knew Jesus, the beloved disciple, knows that he cannot speak of him and not walk the ways he walked. «*I am the way, the truth and the life*» (Jn 14:6). What better words can express that the high road of every evangelization is gratuitous love? Christ is the way of evangelization. Christ is the truth to transmit in evangelizing. Christ is evangelized life. And the love with which he loved us is evangelization, a love given without conditions, that will not retreat but goes forward to the end, faithful to itself even at the price of death on a cross of malediction, to show the face of the Father as one of Love, a love that respects the freedom of human beings, even when this means rejection, contempt, aggression, and death.

«*Christian charity has a great evangelizing force. To the extent that it reveals itself as a sign and a window of God's love, it opens the minds and hearts to the proclamation of the Word of truth. As Paul VI said, today's people who look for authenticity and concreteness, value witnesses more than teachers, and generally will only allow themselves to be guided to discover the depth and the demands of God's love if they have been touched by the tangible sign of charity*» (CEI, Evangelization and the witness

of charity, in *Enchiridion CEI*, vol. 1-5, EDB, Bologna 1996 n. 24). Every pastoral endeavor that wants to show the deep relationship between faith and charity in the light of the Gospel, and that characteristic note of Christian love that is proximity and caring, has the duty of motivating and sustaining openness to others in service. (cfr Lk 10: 34).

ORATIO

Psalm 22: 22-31

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

CONTEMPLATIO

Lord, I know that evangelization requires deep spirituality, authenticity, and holiness of life on the part of witnesses, people of mature faith, able to mix well so as to make their personal experience of faith a meeting place and a place of growth in interpersonal contacts thus building deep relationships open to the Church, the world and history. As yet, I feel inadequate. In a context where images, words, proposals, projects, and records follow each other swiftly and disorient, almost intoxicate thought and confuse feelings, bearing witness is a privileged word for a reflective pause, for a moment of rethinking. But am I one who is carried away by these images, words, and projects? Of one thing I am certain, and this comforts me. Even the most beautiful witness would in the long run be powerless were it not enlightened, justified, made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News, proclaimed by a living witness, sooner or later needs to be proclaimed by the word of life. I will justify my hope by proclaiming your name, your teaching, your life, your promises, your mystery as Jesus of Nazareth and Son of God. This seems to me to be the simplest way to arouse interest in knowing and meeting you, Master and Lord, who have chosen to live as son of man so as to show us the face of the Father. Every pastoral endeavor today that finds itself chained by faith, will be able to ask you, God, that the gates of preaching be reopened to proclaim the mystery of Christ, the kind of preaching that as divine word works wonders in those who believe.

Monday, May 30, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
when your Son Jesus had to pass through trials, he knew that you were with him
and he committed himself into your hands. In this way he brought peace to people.
As people baptized into his name, let your Spirit help us to be brave
when suffering and difficulties come our way, that, like your Son and with him,
we may overcome evil in ourselves and in the world.
May our pains give birth to love and peace and hope for others.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 16: 29-33

The disciples of Jesus said, 'Now you are speaking plainly and not using veiled language. Now we see that you know everything and need not wait for questions to be put into words; because of this we believe that you came from God.' Jesus answered them: Do you believe at last? Listen; the time will come -- indeed it has come already - when you are going to be scattered, each going his own way and leaving me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have hardship but be courageous: I have conquered the world.

Reflection

The context of today's Gospel continues to be the environment of the Last Supper, an environment of fraternity and of farewell, of sadness and of expectation, in which is mirrored the situation of the communities of Asia Minor at the end of the first century. In order to be able to understand the Gospels well, we can never forget that they give the words of Jesus not as if they had been registered in a CD to transmit them literally. The Gospels are pastoral writings which seek to embody and update the words of Jesus in the new situations in which the communities find themselves in the second half of the first century in Galilee (Matthew), in Greece (Luke), in Italy (Mark), and in Asia Minor (John). In the Gospel of John, the words and the questions of the disciples are not only those of the disciples, in fact, they reveal the questions and problems of the communities. They are the mirror in which the communities of that time as well as those of today are recognized with their sadness and their anguishes, with their joys and their hopes. And they find light and strength in the answers of Jesus.

- John 16: 29-30: Now, you are speaking plainly. Jesus had told his disciples: The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and you have believed that I come from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world and now I am leaving the world to go to the Father (Jn 16: 29-30). Listening to this affirmation of Jesus, the disciples answered: "Now you are speaking plainly and not using veiled language. Now we see that you know everything and need not wait for questions to be put into words. Because of this we believe that you came from God". The disciples think that they have understood everything. Yes, truly they got a true light to clarify their problems. But it was still a very dim light. They got the seed, but at that moment, not knowing the tree. The light or the seed was the fundamental intuition of faith according to which Jesus is for us the revelation of God, who is Father: "Now we believe that you came from God." But this was only the beginning, the seed. Jesus himself was and continues to be the great parable or the revelation of God for us. God reaches us and reveals himself to us. But God does not enter into any schema.

He exceeds all, goes beyond our schema and gives us the unexpected surprise which, sometimes, is very painful.

- John 16: 31-32 - You are leaving me alone and yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. Jesus asks: Do you believe at last? He knows his disciples. He knows that there is still much lacking for the understanding of the mystery of God and of the Good News of God. He knows that in spite of the good will and in spite of the light that they have just received in that moment, they still have to face the unexpected and painful surprise of the Passion and Death of Jesus. The small light that they got is not sufficient to overcome the darkness of the crisis: Behold, the time will come, indeed it has come already, when you are going to be scattered, each one going his own way and leaving me alone; and yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. This is the source of certitude of Jesus and through Jesus, this is and will be the source of certitude for all of us: The Father is with me! When Moses was sent to liberate the people from the oppression of the Egyptians, this being his mission, he received this certainty: "Go! I am with you" (Ex 3: 12). The certainty of the liberating presence of God is expressed in the name that God assumes at the moment of the beginning of the Exodus and of the liberation of his people: JHWH, God with us: This is the name for all time (Ex 3: 15). A name which is present more than six thousand times only in the New Testament.
- John 16: 33 - Courage, I have conquered the world! And now we have the last phrase pronounced by Jesus who anticipates the victory, and which will be a source of peace and of strength for the disciples of that time, as well as for all of us, up until now: I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous, I have conquered the world". With his sacrifice out of love, Jesus conquers the world and Satan. His disciples are called to participate in the struggle and the victory. To feel the courage which he gives is already to overcome the battle". (L.A.Schokel)

For Personal Confrontation

- A small light helped the disciples to take a step farther, but it did not light the whole journey. Have you had a similar experience in your life?
- Courage, I have conquered the world! Has this phrase of Jesus helped you sometimes in your life?

Concluding Prayer

Protect me, O God, in you is my refuge.

To Yahweh I say, 'You are my Lord, my happiness is in none. My birthright, my cup is Yahweh; you, you alone, hold my lot secure. (Ps 16: 1-2, 5)

Tuesday, May 31, 2022

Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, loving Father, Mary went with haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth in her hour of need.

May we too rejoice in the Lord when we can hurry to see people to bring them the Lord as we share in their needs and their joys.
With Mary, may we become a blessing to them. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Luke 1: 39-56

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.'

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

Today is the Feast of the Visitation of the Virgin, and the Gospel narrates the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. When Luke speaks of Mary, he thinks of the communities of his time which lived dispersed in the cities of the Roman Empire and offers to them, Mary as a model of how they should relate to the Word of God. Once, hearing Jesus speak about God, a woman in the crowd exclaimed: "Blessed the womb that bore you and the breasts that fed you", praising the mother of Jesus. Immediately Jesus answered: "More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Lk 11: 27-28). Mary is the model of the faithful community which knows how to live and practice the Word of God. In describing the visit of Mary to Elizabeth, he teaches how the communities should act to transform the visit of God into service of the brother and sisters.

The episode of the visit of Mary to Elizabeth also shows another typical aspect of Luke. All the words and the attitudes, especially the Canticle of Mary, form a great celebration of praise. It seems to be a description of a solemn Liturgy. Thus, Luke evokes the liturgical and celebrative environment, in which Jesus was formed and in which the communities should live their own faith.

- Luke 1: 39-40 - Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Luke stresses the haste with which Mary responds to the demands of the Word of God. The angel spoke to her about the pregnancy of Elizabeth and Mary, immediately, rises to verify what the angel had announced, she goes out of the house to help a person in need. From Nazareth to the mountain of Judah there are about 100 kilometers! There were no buses or trains!

- Luke 1: 41-44 - The greeting of Elizabeth. Elizabeth represents the Old Testament which ends. Mary, the New One which is beginning. The Old Testament welcomes, accepts the New One with gratitude and trust, recognizing in it the gratuitous gift of God which comes to realize and to complete whatever expectation people had. In the encounter of the two women, is manifested the gift of the Spirit which makes the child jump with joy in Elizabeth's womb. The Good News of God reveals his presence in one of the most common things of human life: two housewives who exchange the visit to help one another. A visit, joy, pregnancy, children, reciprocal help, house, family: Luke wants to make the communities (and all of us) understand and discover the presence of the Kingdom. The words of Elizabeth, up until now, form part of the best known and most recited Psalm in the world, which is the Hail Mary.
 - Luke 1: 45 - The praise which Elizabeth makes of Mary. "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made by the Lord would be fulfilled". This is Luke's advice to the communities: to believe in the Word of God, because it has the force to realize what it says. It is a creative Word. It generates a new life in the womb of a virgin, in the womb of the poor and abandoned people who accept it with faith.
- Luke 1: 46-56 - The canticle of Mary. Most probably, this canticle was already known and sung in the Communities. It teaches how it should be prayed and sung. In it Mary begins proclaiming the change which has come about in her life under the loving look of God, full of mercy. This is why she sings joyfully: "My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior".
 - Luke 1: 51-53 - she sings the fidelity of God toward his people and proclaims the change which the arm of Yahweh is bringing about in behalf of the poor and the hungry. The expression "arm of God" recalls the liberation of the Exodus. It is this saving force of God which gives life to the change: he has routed the arrogant of heart (1: 51), he has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly (1: 52), he has sent the rich away empty, and has filled the starving with good things (1: 53).
 - Luke 1, 54-55 - at the end, she recalls that all that is the expression of God's mercy toward his people and an expression of his fidelity to the promises made to Abraham. The Good News is not a response to the observance of the Law, but the expression of the goodness and the fidelity of God to the promises made. That is what Paul taught in the letters to the Galatians and to the Romans.
- The second Book of Samuel tells the story of the Ark of the Covenant. David wants to put in his own house, but he is frightened and says: "How can the Ark of Yahweh come to be with me?" (2 Sam 6: 9). Then David ordered that the Ark be placed in the house of Obed-Edom. And the Ark of Yahweh remained three months in the house of Obed-Edom, and the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and his whole family" (2 Sam 6: 11). Mary, waiting for Jesus, is like the Ark of the Covenant which, in the Old Testament, visited the houses of the persons granting benefits. She goes to Elizabeth's house and remained there three months. And while she is in Elizabeth's house, the whole family is blessed by God. The community should be like the New Ark of the Covenant. Visiting the house of the persons, it should take benefits and the grace of God to the people.

Personal Questions

- What prevents us from discovering and living the joy of God's presence in our life?

- Where and how does the joy of the presence of God take place today in my life and in that of the community?

Concluding Prayer

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