



Lectio Divina

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Monday, August 1, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide,
be close to us

and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life.

Keep us safe in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 14: 13-21

When Jesus received this news of John beheading, he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the crowds heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick.

When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' But they answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' So he said, 'Bring them here to me.'

He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples, who gave them to the crowds.

They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps left over, twelve baskets full. Now about five thousand men had eaten, to say nothing of women and children.

Reflection

Context. Chapter 14 of Matthew which contains the account of the multiplication of the loaves, proposes an itinerary that guides the reader in a progressive discovery of faith in Jesus: from the lack of faith on the part of his fellow countrymen to the acknowledgment of the Son of God, passing through the gift of bread. The fellow citizens of Jesus marveled at his wisdom but do not understand that this is what acts behind his works. Besides, having a direct knowledge of Jesus' family, of his mother, of his brothers, and of his sisters, they only succeed in seeing in him his human condition alone: he is the son of the carpenter. Not being understood in his own hometown, from now on, Jesus will live in the midst of his people, to whom he will give all his attention and his solidarity. Healing and feeding the crowds.

The dynamic of the account. Matthew has carefully narrated the episode of the multiplication of the loaves. The episode is enclosed between two expressions of transition in which he tells us that Jesus withdrew "separated himself" from the crowds, from the disciples, from the boat (vv. 13-14; vv. 22-23). Verse 13 does not only serve as transition but offers us the reason why Jesus went to a desert place. Such a device serves to create the environment in which the miracle takes place. The evangelist concentrates the account on the crowd and on the attitude of Jesus regarding the crowd.

- Jesus was moved deeply to pity. At the moment when Jesus arrives he finds himself before a crowd awaiting him; in seeing the crowd he took pity on them and healed their sick. This is a “tired and depressed crowd for they were like sheep without a shepherd” (9: 36; 20: 34). The verb that expresses the compassion of Jesus is really meaningful: “Jesus’ heart was broken”; and this corresponds to the Hebrew verb that expresses the maternal visceral love. This is the same sentiment experienced by Jesus before the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11: 38). Compassion is the subjective aspect of the experience of Jesus that becomes effective with the gift of the bread.
- The gift of the bread. The account of the multiplication of the loaves is opened with the expression, “when evening came” (v. 15) that will introduce the account of the Last Supper (Mt 26: 20) and also that of the burial of Jesus (Mt 27: 57). In the evening, then, Jesus invites the Apostles to feed the crowd. In the middle of the desert, far away from the villages and from the cities, Jesus and the disciples find themselves before a very big human problem; to feed that the big crowd that follows Jesus. But they cannot take care of this task to provide for the material needs of the crowd without the power of Jesus. Their immediate response is that of sending the crowd back home. In the face of human limitations Jesus intervenes and works the miracle satisfying the hunger of all the people who follow him. To feed the crowd is the response of Jesus, from his heart which breaks in the face of a very concrete human need. The gift of the bread is not only sufficient to satisfy the crowd, but it is so superabundant that it becomes necessary to gather what was left over. In v. 19b we can see that Matthew gave a Eucharistic significance to the episode of the multiplication of the loaves: “he raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing and breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples”; the role of the disciples is also made evident in their function of mediation between Jesus and the crowd: “and the disciples distributed to the crowd” (v. 19c). The gestures that accompany the miracle are identical to those that Jesus will fulfil later on the “night when he was betrayed”: he raised his eyes, blessed the bread and breaks it. From here comes the symbolical value of the miracle: it can be considered an anticipation of the Eucharist. Besides, on the part of Jesus, feeding the crowds is “a sign” that he is the Messiah and that he prepares a banquet of joy for the whole humanity. The disciples learn from Jesus, who distributes the bread to them, the value of sharing. A symbolical gesture that contains a real fact that goes beyond the episode itself and is projected on the future: in our daily Eucharistic celebration, where we relive that gesture of the broken bread, it is necessary that it be multiplied throughout the whole day.

Personal Questions

- Do you try to fulfil gestures of solidarity toward those who are close to you or who share close to you the journey of life? In the face of very concrete problems of your friends or relatives, do you know how to offer your help and your availability to collaborate to find a solution?
- Before breaking the bread, Jesus raised his eyes to heaven: do you know how to thank the Lord for the daily gift of bread? Do you know how to share your goods with others, especially with the poorest?

Concluding Prayer

Keep me far from the way of deceit, grant me the grace of your Law.
Do not deprive me of that faithful word,
since my hope lies in your judgements. (Ps 119: 29, 43)

Tuesday, August 2, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide,
be close to us

and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life.

Keep us safe in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 14: 22-36

At once Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he sent the crowds away. After sending the crowds away he went up into the hills by himself to pray.

When evening came, he was there alone, while the boat, by now some furlongs from land, was hard pressed by rough waves, for there was a headwind. In the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the sea, and when the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. 'It is a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.

But at once Jesus called out to them, saying, 'Courage! It's me! Don't be afraid.' It was Peter who answered. 'Lord,' he said, 'if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.' Jesus said, 'Come.' Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord,' he cried, 'save me!' Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'You have so little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' 32 And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. 33 The men in the boat bowed down before him and said, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.'

Having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When the local people recognized him, they spread the news through the whole neighborhood and took all that were sick to him, begging him just to let them touch the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched it were saved.

Reflection

The Gospel today describes the difficult and tiresome crossing of the sea of Galilee in a fragile boat, pushed by a contrary wind. Between the discourse of the Parables (Mt 13) and of the Community (Mt 18), there is once again, the narrative part (Mt 14 to 17). The discourse of the Parables calls our attention again on the presence of the Kingdom. Now, the narrative part shows the reactions in favor and against Jesus provoked by that presence. In Nazareth, he was not accepted (Mt 13: 53-58) and King Herod thought that Jesus was a sort or reincarnation of John the Baptist, whom he had murdered (Mt 14: 1-12). The poor people, though, recognized in Jesus the one who had been sent by God and they followed him to the desert, where the multiplication of the loaves took place (Mt 14: 13-21). After the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus takes leave of the crowd and ordered the disciples to cross the lake, as it is described in today's Gospel (Mt 14: 22-36).

- Matthew 14: 22-24: To begin the crossing asked by Jesus. Jesus obliges the Disciples to go into the boat and to go toward the other side of the sea, where the land of the pagans was. He goes up to the mountain to pray. The boat symbolizes the community. It has the mission to direct itself toward the pagans and to announce

among them the Good News of the Kingdom also, which was the new way of living in community. But the crossing was very tiring and long. The boat is agitated by the wave because the wind is contrary. Despite having rowed the whole night, there is still a great distance left before reaching the land. Much was still lacking in the community to be able to cross and go toward the pagans. Jesus did not go with his disciples. They had to learn to face together the difficulties, united and strengthened by faith in Jesus who had sent them. The contrast is very great: Jesus is in peace together with God, praying on the top of the mountain, and the Disciples are almost lost there below, in the agitated sea.

- The crossing to the other side of the lake also symbolizes the difficult crossing of the community at the end of the first century. They should get out of the closed world of the ancient observance of the law toward the new manner of observing the Law of love, taught by Jesus; they should abandon the knowledge of belonging to the Chosen People, privileged by God among all other peoples, for the certainty that in Christ all peoples would be united into one Only People before God; they should get out from isolation and intolerance toward the open world of acceptance and of gratitude. Today also, we are going through a difficult crossing toward a new time and a new way of being Church. A difficult crossing, but which is necessary. There are moments in life in which we are attacked by fear. Good will is not lacking, but this is not sufficient. We are like a boat faced with the contrary wind.
- Matthew 14: 25-27: Jesus comes close to them but they do not recognize him. Toward the end of the night, that is between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus goes to meet the Disciples. Walking on the water, he gets close to them, but they did not recognize him. They cried out in fear, thinking that it was a ghost. Jesus calms them down saying: "Courage! It is me! Do not be afraid!" The expression "It is me!" is the same one with which God tried to overcome the fear of Moses when he sent him to liberate the people from Egypt (Ex 3: 14). For the communities, of today as well as for those of yesterday, it was and it is very important to be always open to novelty: "Courage. It is me!. Do not be afraid!"
- Matthew 14: 28-31: Enthusiasm and weakness of Peter. Knowing that it is Jesus, Peter asks that he also can walk on the water. He wants to experience the power which dominates the fury of the sea. This is a power which in the bible belongs only to God (Gen 1: 6; Ps 104: 6-9). Jesus allows him to participate in this power. But Peter is afraid. He thinks that he will sink and he cries out: "Lord, save me!" Jesus assures him and takes hold of him and reproaches him: "You have so little faith! Why did you doubt?" Peter has more strength than he imagined, but is afraid before the contrary waves and does not believe in the power of God which dwells within him. The communities do not believe in the force of the Spirit which is within them and which acts through faith. It is the force of the Resurrection (Eph 1: 19-20).
- Matthew 14: 32-33: Jesus is the Son of God. Before the waves that come toward them, Peter begins to sink in the sea because of lack of faith. After he is saved, he and Jesus, both of them, go into the boat and the wind calms down. The other Disciples, who are in the boat, are astonished and bowed before Jesus, recognizing that he is the Son of God: "Truly, you are the Son of God". Later, Peter also professes the same faith in Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (Mt 16: 16). In this way Matthew suggests that it is not only Peter who sustains the faith of the Disciples, but also that the faith of the Disciples sustains Peter's faith.
- Matthew 14: 34-36: They brought all the sick to him. The episode of the crossing ends with something beautiful: "Having made the crossing they came to Gennesaret. When the local people recognized him they spread the news through the whole

neighborhood and took all who were sick to him, begging him just to let them touch the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched it were saved”.

Personal Questions

- Has there been a contrary wind in your life? What have you done to overcome it? Has this happened sometimes in the community? How was it overcome?
- Which is the crossing which the communities are doing today? From where to where? How does all this help us to recognize today the presence of Jesus in the contrary waves of life?

Concluding Prayer

Keep me far from the way of deceit, grant me the grace of your Law.
I have chosen the way of constancy,
I have moulded myself to your judgements. (Ps 119: 29-30)

Wednesday, August 3, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 15: 21-28

Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Lord, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he said not a word in answer to her.

And his disciples went and pleaded with him, saying, 'Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.'

But the woman had come up and was bowing low before him. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.' She retorted, 'Ah yes, Lord; but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your desire be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

Reflection

- Context. The bread of the children and the great faith of a Canaanite woman is the theme presented in the liturgical passage taken from chapter 15 of Matthew who proposes to the reader of his Gospel a further deepening of faith in Christ. The episode

is preceded by an initiative of the Pharisees and Scribes who go down to Jerusalem and cause a dispute to take place with Jesus, but which did not last long, because he, together with his disciples withdrew to go to the region of Tyre and Sidon. While he is on the way, a woman from the pagan places comes to him. This woman is presented by Matthew by the name of a “Canaanite woman” who in the light of the Old Testament, she is presented with great harshness. In the Book of Deuteronomy the inhabitants of Canaan were considered people full of sins, evil and idolatrous people.

- The dynamic of the account. While Jesus carries out his activity in Galilee and is on the way toward Tyre and Sidon, a woman came up to him and began to bother him with a petition for help for her sick daughter. The woman addresses Jesus using the title “Son of David”; a title which sounds strange pronounced by a pagan and that could be justified because of the extreme situation in which the woman lives. It could be thought that this woman already believes in some way, in the person of Jesus as final Savior, but this is excluded because it is only in v. 28 that her act of faith is recognized, precisely by Jesus. In the dialogue with the woman Jesus seems to show that distance and diffidence which reigned between the people of Israel and the pagans. On one side Jesus confirms to the woman the priority for Israel to have access to salvation, and before the insistent prayer of her interlocutor Jesus seems to withdraw, to be at a distance; an incomprehensible attitude for the reader, but in the intention of Jesus it expresses an act of pedagogical value. To the first invocation “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David” (v. 22) Jesus does not respond. To the second intervention this time on the part of the disciples who invite him to listen to the prayer of the woman, he only expresses rejection that stresses that secular distance between the chosen people and the pagan people (vv. 23b-24) But at the insistence of the prayer of the woman who bows before Jesus, a harsh and mysterious response follows: “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to little dogs” (v. 26). The woman goes beyond the harsh response of the words of Jesus and gets a small sign of hope: the woman recognizes that the plan of God being carried out by Jesus initially concerns the chosen people and Jesus asks the woman to recognize that priority; the woman takes advantage of that priority to present a strong reason to obtain the miracle: “Ah yes, Lord, but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters’ table” (v. 27). The woman has exceeded the test of faith: “Woman, you have great faith” (v. 28); in fact, to the humble insistence of her faith corresponds a gesture of salvation.
- This episode addresses an invitation to every reader of the Gospel to have that interior attitude of “openness” toward everyone, believers or not, that is to say, availability and acceptance without distinction toward all men.

Personal Questions

- The disturbing word of God invites you to break open your closeness and all your small plans. Are you capable to accept all the brothers and sisters who come to you?
- Are you aware of your poverty to be capable like the Canaanite woman to entrust yourself to the word of salvation of Jesus.

Concluding Prayer

Lord, do not thrust me away from your presence, do not take away from me your spirit of holiness. Give me back the joy of your salvation, sustain in me a generous spirit. (Ps 51: 11-12)

Thursday, August 4, 2022

Ordinary Time

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide,
be close to us

and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life.

Keep us safe in your love.

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

Gospel Reading – Matthew 16: 13-23

Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?'

And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to say to anyone that he was the Christ. From then onwards Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to rebuke him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord,' he said, 'this must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do.'

Reflection

We are now in the narrative part between the Discourse of the Parables (Mt 13) and the discourse of the Community (Mt 18). In these narrative parts which link together the five Discourses, Matthew usually follows the sequence of the Gospel of Mark. Once in a while, he gives other information, also known by Luke. And here and there, he quotes texts which appear only in the Gospel of Matthew, like for example the conversation between Jesus and Peter, in today's Gospel. This text has different interpretations and even opposed ones in the diverse Christian Churches.

At that time, the communities fostered a very strong affective bond of union with the leaders who had given origin to the community. For example, the communities of Antioch in Syria, fostered their relationship with Peter. Those of Greece, with Paul. Some communities of Asia, with the Beloved disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypse. An identification with these leaders to whom they owed their origin helped the communities to foster better their identity and spirituality. But this could also be a reason for dispute, like in the case of the community of Corinth (1 Co 1: 11-12).

- Matthew 16: 13-16: *The opinions of the people and of the Disciples concerning Jesus.* Jesus asks the opinion of the people concerning his person, the Son of Man. The responses are varied: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the Prophets. When Jesus asks the opinion of the Disciples, Peter becomes the spokesman and says: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" The response is not a new one.

Before, the Disciples had said the same thing (Mt 14: 33). In John's Gospel, the same profession of faith is made by Martha (Jn 11: 27). It means that the prophecies of the Old Testament are realized in Jesus.

- Matthew 16: 17: *The response of Jesus to Peter: "Blessed are you, Simon!"* Jesus proclaims Peter "Blessed", because he has received a revelation from the Father. Here, also, the response of Jesus is not new. Before, Jesus had praised the Father because he had revealed the Son to the little ones and not to the wise (Mt 11: 25-27) and had made the same proclamation of joy to the Disciples who were seeing and hearing new things which, before them, nobody knew nor had heard (Mt 13: 16).
- Matthew 16: 18-20: *The attributions of Peter: To be rock and to receive the keys of the Kingdom.*
 - To be rock: Peter has to be *Rock* that is the stable basis for the Church in such a way that it can resist against the gates of hell. With these words which Jesus addressed to Peter, Matthew encourages the persecuted community of Syria and Palestine who see in Peter the leader who belongs to their origin. In spite of the persecution and the weakness, the community has a firm basis, guaranteed by the word of Jesus. The function of being rock based on faith evokes the word of God to the people in exile: *"Listen to me you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh; consider the rock (pietra) from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug; consider Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave you birth. When I called him, he was the only one, but I blessed him and made him numerous"* (Is 51: 1-2). This indicates that a new beginning of the People of God is with Peter.
 - The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom. The same power of binding and loosing is also given to the communities (Mt 18: 18) and to the other disciples (Jn 20: 23). One of the points in which the Gospel of Matthew insists more is reconciliation and pardon. It is one of the more important tasks of coordinators of the communities. By imitating Peter, they should bind and loosen, that is, do in such a way that there is reconciliation and reciprocal acceptance, construction of fraternity, even up to seventy times (Mt 18: 22).
- Matthew 16: 21-22: Jesus completes what was missing in Peter's response, and Peter reacts. Jesus begins saying: "that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer very much on the part of the Elders, of the high priests and of the Scribes, and would be killed and on the third day, he would rise from the dead." Saying that he had to go and would be killed, or that it was necessary to suffer, he indicated that suffering had been foreseen by the prophecies. The way of the Messiah is not only one of triumph and glory, but also one of suffering and of the cross! If Peter accepts Jesus as the Messiah and son of God, he has to accept him also as Messiah servant who will be killed. But Peter does not accept the correction of Jesus and tries to draw him away. Taking Jesus aside, he began to rebuke him: Heaven preserve you, Lord, this must not happen to you!"
- Matthew 16: 23: the response of Jesus to Peter: stumbling stone. The response of Jesus is surprising. Peter wanted to direct Jesus taking the initiative. Jesus reacts: "Get behind me, Satan. You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do." Peter has to follow Jesus, and not the contrary. Jesus is the one who gives the directions. Satan is the one who draws persons away from the road traced by Jesus. Once again the expression rock – *pietra* - appears, but now in the contrary sense. Peter, at one time is the supporting rock, at other times the stumbling rock! The communities at the time of Matthew were like

that, characterized by ambiguity. This is the way we all are, according to what John Paul II said, that the Papacy itself, was characterized by the same ambiguity of Peter: rock of support for the faith and stumbling rock in the faith.

Personal Questions

- Which are the opinions about Jesus which exist in our community? These differences in the way of living and of expressing faith, do they enrich the community or do they render the way more difficult?
- What type of rock is our community? Which is the mission for us?

Concluding Prayer

Give me back the joy of your salvation, sustain in me a generous spirit.
I shall teach the wicked your paths,
and sinners will return to you. (Ps 51: 12-13)

Friday, August 5, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 16: 24-28

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life? 'For the Son of man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his behavior. In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming with his kingdom.'

Reflection

The five verses of today's Gospel continue with the words of Jesus to Peter which we meditated on yesterday. Jesus does not hide nor lessen the demands of discipleship. He does not allow Peter to take the initiative and puts him in his place: *"Far from me!"* Today's Gospel makes explicit these demands for all of us;

- Matthew 16: 24: "Take up his cross and follow me". Jesus draws the conclusions which are valid even until now: "If anyone wants to follow me, let him renounce himself and

take up his cross and follow me". At that time, the cross was the death sentence which the Roman Empire inflicted on marginalized persons and bandits. To take up the cross and carry it behind Jesus was the same as to accept to be marginalized by the unjust system which legitimized injustice. The Cross is not fatalism, nor exigency from the Father. The Cross is the consequence of the commitment freely taken up by Jesus to reveal the Good News that God is Father and that, therefore, we all have to be accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Because of this revolutionary announcement, Jesus was persecuted and he was not afraid to give his life. Nobody has greater love than this: to give one's life for his friends (Jn 15: 13). The witness of Paul in the letter to the Galatians indicates the concrete significance and importance of all this: "But as for me, it is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world". (Ga 6: 14). And he ends by referring to the marks of the tortures which he suffered: "After this, let no one trouble me, I carry branded on my body the marks of Jesus" (Ga 6: 17).

- Matthew 16: 25-26: "Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it". These two verses make explicit universal human values which confirm the experience of many Christians and non-Christians. To save one's life, to lose one's life, to find one's life. The experience of many is the following: Anyone who is always seeking goods and riches is never satisfied. Anyone who gives himself to others, forgetting himself, experiences a great happiness. This is the experience of the mothers who give themselves, and of so many people who do not think of self but think of others. Many do this and live in this way almost out of instinct, as something which comes from the bottom of the heart. Others act in this way because they have had a painful experience of frustration which has led them to change attitude. Jesus is right in saying: "Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it". The reason is important: "For my sake", or like Mark says: "For the sake of the Gospel" (Mk 8: 35). And he ends saying: "What, then will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life?" This last phrase recalls the Psalm where it is said that no one is capable of paying the ransom for his life: "But no one can ever redeem himself or pay his own ransom to God; the price for himself is too high, it can never be that he will live on forever and avoid the sight of the abyss" (Ps 49: 8-10).
- Matthew 16: 27-28: The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of the Father and he will reward each one according to his behavior. These two verses refer to the hope regarding the coming of the Son of Man in the last times, as judge of humanity, as he is presented in the vision of the Prophet Daniel (Dn 7: 13-14). The first verse says: "The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels and will reward each one according to his behaviour". (Mt 16: 27). This phrase speaks about the justice of the Judge. Each one will receive according to his own behaviour. The second verse says: "There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom". (Mt 16: 28). This phrase is an advertisement to help to perceive the coming of Jesus, the Judge of the actions of life. Some thought that Jesus would have come afterwards (1 Th 4: 15-18). But in fact, Jesus was already present in persons, especially in the poor. But they did not perceive this, Jesus himself had said: "Every time that you have helped the poor, the sick, the homeless, the prisoner, the pilgrim, you helped me, it was me!" (cfr. Mt 25: 34-45).

Personal Questions

- Anyone who loses his life will find it. What experience do I have regarding this?

- The words of Paul: *“As for me, instead, there is no other glory than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified for me and I for the world”*. Do I have the courage to repeat these words in my life?

Concluding Prayer

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, let us acclaim his name together.
I seek Yahweh and he answers me, frees me from all my fears. (Ps 34: 3-4)

Saturday, August 6, 2022

The Transfiguration of Jesus

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us read the scriptures with the same mind that You read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the bible, You helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of Your sentence and death. Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection. Create silence in us so that we may listen to Your voice in creation and in the scriptures, in events and in people, above all, in the poor and suffering. May Your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, may experience the force of Your resurrection and witness to others that You are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice, and peace. We ask this of You, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

Reading

A Key to the Reading

A few days earlier, Jesus had said that He, the Son of Man, had to be tried and crucified by the authorities (Lk 9: 22; Mk 8: 31). According to the information in the gospels of Mark and Matthew, the disciples, especially Peter, did not understand what Jesus had said and were scandalized by the news (Mt 16: 22; Mk 8: 32). Jesus reacted strongly and turned to Peter calling him Satan (Mt 16: 23; Mk 8: 33). This was because Jesus' words did not correspond with the ideal of the glorious Messiah whom they imagined. Luke does not mention Peter's reaction and Jesus' strong reply, but he does describe, as do the other Evangelists, the episode of the Transfiguration. Luke sees the Transfiguration as an aid to the disciples so that they may be able to get over the scandal and change their idea of the Messiah (Lk 9: 28-36). Taking the three disciples with Him, Jesus goes up the mountain to pray, and while He is praying, is transfigured. As we read the text, it is good to note what follows: “Who appears with Jesus on the mountain to converse with Him? What is the theme of their conversation? What is the disciples' attitude?”

b) A division of the text as an aid to the reading:

- Luke 9: 28: The moment of crisis

- Luke 9: 29: The change that takes place during the prayer
- Luke 9: 30-31: The appearance of the two men and their conversation with Jesus
- Luke 9: 32-34: The disciples' reaction
- Luke 9: 35-36: The Father's voice

c) The text:

Jesus took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection

- What did you like most in this episode of the Transfiguration? Why?
- Who are those who go to the mountain with Jesus? Why do they go?
- Moses and Elijah appear on the mountain next to Jesus. What is the significance of these two people from the Old Testament for Jesus, for the disciples, for the community in the 80s and for us today?
- Which prophecy from the Old Testament is fulfilled in the words of the Father concerning Jesus?
- What is the disciples' attitude during this episode?
- Has there been a transfiguration in your life? How have such experiences of transfiguration helped you to fulfill your mission better?
- Compare Luke's description of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Lk 9: 28-36) with his description of the agony of Jesus in the Garden (Lk 22: 39-46). Try to see whether there are any similarities. What is the significance of these similarities?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the theme

a) The context of Jesus' discourse:

In the two previous chapters of Luke's Gospel, the innovation brought by Jesus highlights the tensions between the New and the Old Testaments. In the end, Jesus realized that no one had understood His meaning, much less His person. People thought that He was like John the Baptist, Elijah or some other prophet (Lk 9: 18-19). The disciples accepted Him as the Messiah, but a glorious Messiah, according to the expectations issued by the government and the official religion of the temple (Lk 9: 20-21). Jesus tried to explain to His disciples that the journey foreseen by the prophets was one of suffering because of its commitment to the excluded, and that a disciple could only be a disciple if he/she took up his/her cross (Lk 9: 22-26). But Jesus did not meet with much success. It is in such a context of crisis that the Transfiguration takes place.

In the 30s, the experience of the Transfiguration had a very important significance in the life of Jesus and the disciples. It helped them overcome the crisis of faith and to change their ideals concerning the Messiah. In the 80s, when Luke was writing for the Christian communities in Greece, the meaning of the Transfiguration had already been deepened and broadened. In the light of Jesus' resurrection and of the spread of the Good News among the pagans in almost every country, from Palestine to Italy, the experience of the Transfiguration began to be seen as a confirmation of the faith of the Christian communities in Jesus, *Son of God*. The two meanings are present in the description and interpretation of the Transfiguration in Luke's Gospel.

A Commentary on the Text:

Luke 9: 28 - *The moment of crisis.*

On several occasions Jesus entered into conflict with the people and the religious and civil authorities of his time (Lk 4: 28-29; 5: 21-20; 6: 2-11; 7: 30, 39; 8: 37; 9: 9). He knew they would not allow Him to do the things He did. Sooner or later they would catch Him. Besides, in that society, the proclamation of the Kingdom, as Jesus did, was not to be tolerated. He either had to withdraw or face death! There were no other alternatives. Jesus did not withdraw. Hence the cross appears on the horizon, not just as a possibility but as a certainty (Lk 9: 22). Together with the cross there also appears the temptation to go on with the idea of the *Glorious Messiah* and not of the *Crucified, suffering servant*, announced by the prophet Isaiah (Mk 8: 32-33). At this difficult moment Jesus goes up the mountain to pray, taking with Him Peter, James, and John. Through His prayer, Jesus seeks strength not to lose sense of direction in His mission (cf. Mk 1: 35).

Luke 9: 29 - *The change that takes place during the prayer.*

As soon as Jesus starts praying, His appearance changes and He appears *glorious*. His face changes and His clothes become white and shining. It is *the glory* that the disciples imagined for the Messiah. This transformation told them clearly that Jesus was indeed the Messiah expected by all. But what follows the episode of the Transfiguration will point out that the way to glory is quite different from what they imagined. The Transfiguration will be a call to conversion.

Luke 9: 30-31 - *Two men appear speaking with Jesus.*

Together with Jesus and in the same glorious state there appear Moses and Elijah, the two major exponents of the Old Testament, representing the Law and the Prophets. They speak with Jesus about “the Exodus brought to fulfilment in Jerusalem”. Thus, in front of the disciples, the Law and the Prophets confirm that Jesus is truly the *glorious* Messiah, promised in the Old Testament and awaited by the whole people. They further confirm that the way to *glory* is through the painful way of the exodus. Jesus’ exodus is His passion, death and resurrection. Through His “exodus” Jesus breaks the dominion of the false idea concerning the Messiah spread by the government and by the official religion and that held all ensnared in the vision of a glorious, nationalistic messiah. The experience of the Transfiguration confirmed that Jesus as Messiah Servant constituted an aid to free them from their wrong ideas concerning the Messiah and to discover the real meaning of the Kingdom of God.

Luke 9: 32-34 - *The disciples’ reaction.*

The disciples were in deep sleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus in His glory and the two men with Him. But Peter’s reaction shows that they were not aware of the real meaning of the *glory* in which Jesus appeared to them. As often happens with us, they were only aware of what concerned them. The rest escapes their attention. “Master, it is good for us to be here!” And they do not want to get off the mountain any more! When it is question of the cross, whether on the Mount of the Transfiguration or on the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:45), they sleep! They prefer the *glory* to the *cross*! They do not like to speak or hear of the cross. They want to make sure of the moment of glory on the mountain, to extend it, and they offer to build three tents. Peter did not know what he was saying.

While Peter was speaking, a cloud descended from on high and covered them with its shadow. Luke says that the disciples became afraid when the cloud enfolded them. The cloud is the symbol of the presence of God. The *cloud* accompanied the multitude on their journey through the desert (Ex 40:34-38; Num 10:11-12). When Jesus ascended into heaven, He was covered by a cloud and they no longer saw Him (Acts 1:9). This was a sign that Jesus had entered forever into God’s world.

Luke 9: 35-36 - *The Father’s voice.*

A voice is heard from the cloud that says: “This is My Son, the Chosen, listen to Him”. With this same sentence the prophet Isaiah had proclaimed the Messiah-Servant (Isa 42:1). First Moses and Elijah, now God Himself presents Jesus as the Messiah-Servant who will come to glory through the cross. The voice ends with a final admonition: “Listen to Him!” As the heavenly voice speaks, Moses and Elijah disappear and only Jesus is left. This signifies that from now on only He will interpret the scriptures and the will of God. He is the Word of God for the disciples: “Listen to Him!”

The proclamation “This is My Son, the Chosen; listen to Him” was very important for the community of the late 80s. Through this assertion God the Father confirmed the faith of Christians in Jesus as *Son of God*. In Jesus’ time, that is, in the 30s, the expression *Son of Man* pointed to a very high dignity and mission. Jesus Himself gave a relative meaning to the term by saying that all were children of God (cf. John 10: 33-35). But for some the title *Son of God* became a resume of all titles, over one

hundred that the first Christians gave Jesus in the second half of the first century. In succeeding centuries, it was the title of *Son of God* that the Church concentrated all its faith in the person of Jesus.

A Deepening:

- The Transfiguration is told in three of the Gospels: Matthew (Mt 17: 1-9), Mark (Mk 9: 2-8) and Luke (Lk 9: 28-36). This is a sign that this episode contained a very important message. As we said, it was a matter of great help to Jesus, to His disciples and to the first communities. It confirmed Jesus in His mission as Messiah-Servant. It helped the disciples to overcome the crisis that the cross and suffering caused them. It led the communities to deepen their faith in Jesus, Son of God, the One who revealed the Father and who became the new key to the interpretation of the Law and the Prophets. The Transfiguration continues to be of help in overcoming the crisis that the cross and suffering provoke today. The three sleeping disciples are a reflection of all of us. The voice of the Father is directed to us as it was to them: "This is My Son, the Chosen; listen to Him!"
- In Luke's Gospel there is a great similarity between the scene of the Transfiguration (Lk 9: 28-36) and the scene of the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Olives (Lk 22: 39-46). We may note the following: in both scenes Jesus goes up the mountain to pray and takes with Him three disciples, Peter, James and John. On both occasions, Jesus' appearance is transformed and He is transfigured before them; glorious at the Transfiguration, perspiring blood in the Garden of Olives. Both times heavenly figures appear to comfort Him, Moses and Elijah and an angel from heaven. Both in the Transfiguration and in the Agony, the disciples sleep, they seem to be outside the event and they seem not to understand anything. At the end of both episodes, Jesus is reunited with His disciples. Doubtless, Luke intended to emphasize the resemblance between these two episodes. What would that be? Perhaps it is to show that understanding takes time and effort, even for the Apostles, so we should persevere and not be asleep, especially at those crucial moments in our lives when He is revealing Himself to us personally. It is in meditating and praying that we shall come to understand the meaning that goes beyond words, and to perceive the intention of the author. The Holy Spirit will guide us.
- Luke describes the Transfiguration. There are times in our life when suffering is such that we might think: "God has abandoned me! He is no longer with me!" And then suddenly we realize that He has never deserted us, but that we had our eyes bandaged and were not aware of the presence of God. Then everything is changed and transfigured. It is the transfiguration! This happens every day in our lives.

Psalm 42 (41)

"My Soul Thirsts for the Living God!"

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so longs my soul for Thee, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and behold the face of God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
while men say to me continually, "Where is your God?"
These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,

and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.

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

My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember Thee from the land of Jordan
and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

Deep calls to deep at the roar of Your torrents;
all Thy waves and breakers have gone over me.

By day the Lord commands His steadfast love;
and at night His song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God, my rock:

"Why hast Thou forgotten me?

Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

As with a deadly wound in my body,
my adversaries taunt me,

while they say to me continually,

"Where is your God?"

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him,
my help and my God.

Final Prayer

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

Sunday, August 7, 2022

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. You who have already come to make us faithful, come now to make us blessed.

You who have come so that, with your help, we may glory in the hope of sharing in the glory of the children of God,

come again that we may also glory in its possession. It is you who confirm, consolidate, perfect and bring to fulfilment.

The Father created us, the Son redeemed us:

fulfil then that which is yours. Introduce us to the whole truth,

to the enjoyment of the highest Good,

to the vision of the Father, the abundance of all delights, the joy of joys. Amen

(Gualtiero di S. Vittore)

Lectio

A Key to the Reading - Luke 12: 32-48

We have here a double context: the formation of the disciples during Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem (9:51-19,28) and the reaction of the converted pagans in the communities of Luke after their initial enthusiasm and the prolonged coming of the Lord. The disciples are scared (9:45) at the new idea of the mission of Jesus who has to suffer (9:22.43-44), and in them continues to dominate the more comforting idea of a glorious Messiah. Similarly, in the new Christian communities (in the 80's), there begins to grow a revival of the pagan spirit. Better wait before converting definitely and deeply, put off this change of life and way of thinking. Jesus assures his disciples with three parables and makes them reflect on the meaning of meeting with God, on the meaning of vigilance and of the responsibility of each one in the present situation.

A Suggested Division of the Text:

- 12: 32-35 - Introduction
- 12: 36-38 - the parable of the master who returns from his wedding
- 12: 39 - the parable of the thief who forces his way
- 12: 40-41 - the disciples implicated
- 12: 42-46 - the parable of the steward
- 12: 47-48 - conclusion

The Text:

32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. 35 "Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, 36 and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them. 38 If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants! 39 But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have been awake and would not have left his house to be broken into. 40 You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour." 41 Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" 42 And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? 43 Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. 44 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 45 But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful. 47 And that servant who knew his master's will but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. 48 But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

A Few Questions:

- What did I feel when I read the text? Fear, trust, surprise, joy, hope, confusion. . .?
- How far does Christian life mean joy to me and how far is it a burden? How far is it a matter of duty and how far of love?
- What do I feel when I think of a sudden death for me?
- How far is communion with God still an expectation for me and how far something that I already possess?
- How does the pagan thinking of “carpe diem”, contrary to Gospel values, manifest itself today?
- In my life, what does it mean to be vigilant, faithful, working for the Kingdom and prepared?

A Commentary:

This is a catechesis on the return of the Lord.

- 12: 32 There is no reason for fear.
Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you his kingdom.
When the disciples are facing fear, Jesus consoles them with the metaphor of the flock (Jn 10; 21: 15-17) and the good shepherd. One must fear false prophets (Mt 7:15). The Father's will is that not one be lost (Mt 18: 12-16), He will give us everything (Rom 8: 28-32). A place has been prepared for us from the beginning of time (Mt 25: 34), we are heirs with the Son (1Pt 1: 3-5).
- 12: 33-34 Today we welcome the richness of possessing God, the only good. God alone suffices!
Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.
Jesus had said that we must not store up treasures (Mt 6:20-21). The Christian community had understood the meaning of freedom from attachment to goods and the sharing of them (Acts 4:34) because time was short (1Cor 7:29-31). The new life in Christ becomes the criterion for ownership of any possession.
- 12: 35 A daily commitment.
Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning;
Because it has pleased the Father to give us the kingdom, we must be ready to take possession of it, after we have left behind every hindrance. The Jews girded their long robes at the waist so as to be able to work better. Elijah girds himself in order to run (1Kings 18: 46). The attitude that Jesus recommends to those who are expecting his coming is that of getting down to work and not to give in to mediocrity (1Ts 5: 6-8; 1Pt 5: 8; 1: 13). Vigilance is fundamental for the Christian. The Christian's way of life is more than just an attitude for he/she has now put on Christ and is dedicated to his Kingdom.
- 12: 37-38 Meeting God will be wonderful.

Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants!

The action of the master who serves his servants is quite surprising! This was what Jesus did when he washed the feet of his disciples (Jn 13: 4-5). The division of the night into parts (Mk 13: 35) according to Roman custom, makes it more difficult for those watching. For those who are creatively faithful to the Lord, the future is guaranteed.

- 12: 39 Let us not waste time (and money!) in trying to look into the future.
But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have been awake and would not have left his house to be broken into.
One argument in favor of vigilance is that we do not know when the Lord will come (Mt. 24: 42-51). Both the day of the final judgement and of our individual death are unknown. His coming cannot be foreseen (Ap 3: 3). This made a great impression on the disciples (1Ts 2: 1-2; 2Pt 3: 10).
- 12: 40-41 Love not formal membership must be our strength.
You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour. Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?"
Peter, his old self, still thinks of getting some privileges because he had left everything behind to follow Jesus (Mt 19: 27). Jesus helps Peter grow in conscience by answering indirectly through the parable of the good steward.
Conversion is a life-long process, also for those who feel close to the Lord. 12: 42-44 Combining vigilance and faithful service to the task entrusted to us.
And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.
Luke uses "steward" rather than "servant" (Mt 24: 45) almost suggesting the question made by Peter. Those responsible, particularly, have to be faithful in their service.
- 12: 45-46 Not putting off our conversion to an indefinite tomorrow.
But if that servant says to himself, "My master is delayed in coming," and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him with the unfaithful.
There are those who welcomed enthusiastically the Gospel message, but now, faced with present difficulties and consequent commitments, begin to take up once more their old habits: violence, intemperance, not following instincts. All values that are contrary to the Gospel.
- 12:47 Giving according to the measure that we have received.
That servant who knew his master's will but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating.
The Lord will reward each one according to his/her deeds (Mt 16:27) and according to the grace received (Rom 11:11-24). Jews, pagans, converted persons or those faithful to their religion will be judged according to their right conscience.
- 12: 48 For great will be the eternal communion with God.
Everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

St. John of the Cross says that at the end of life we will be judged on love. See also Mt 25:15- 16.

Psalm 33: 1-5; 13-15; 18-22

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.

Praise the Lord with the lyre,

make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! Sing to him a new song,
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

For the word of the Lord is upright; and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves
righteousness and justice;

the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. The Lord looks down from heaven,
he sees all the sons of men; from where he sits enthroned

he looks forth on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all,
and observes all their deeds.

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast
love,

that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.

Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield.

Yea, our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.

Let thy steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in thee.

Closing Prayer

Father, may the same faith burn in our hearts as that flame that urged Abraham to live
on earth as a pilgrim. May our light never dim, so that, vigilant in expectation of your
hour, we may be ushered by you into our eternal homeland (*Collect 19th Sunday C*).

Monday, August 8, 2022

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you
Father.

Increase your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 17: 22-27

When they were together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, 'The Son of man is going to be
delivered into the power of men; they will put him to death, and on the third day he will
be raised up again.' And a great sadness came over them.

When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel came to Peter and
said, 'Does your master not pay the half-shekel?' 'Yes,' he replied, and went into the
house. But before he could speak, Jesus said, 'Simon, what is your opinion? From
whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?' And
when he replied, 'From foreigners,' Jesus said, 'Well then, the sons are exempt.

However, so that we shall not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook;

take the first fish that rises, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for yourself.'

Reflection

The five verses of today's Gospel speak about two very different themes between them. (a) The second announcement of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus (Mt 17: 22-23); (b) they inform on the conversation of Jesus with Peter about paying the taxes and the dues to the temple (Mt 17: 24-27).

- Matthew 17: 22-23: *The announcement of the death and resurrection of Jesus.* The first announcement (Mt 16: 21) had produced a strong reaction on Peter who did not want to know anything about suffering nor the cross. Jesus had answered just as strongly: "*Get behind me, Satan!*" (Mt 16: 23). Here, in the second announcement, the reaction of the disciples is less strong, less aggressive. The announcement produces sadness. It seems that now they begin to understand that the cross forms part of the journey. The proximity of the death and the suffering weigh heavily on them, giving rise to a great discouragement. Even if Jesus tries to help them, the resistance of centuries against the idea of a crucified Messiah, was much greater.
- Matthew 17: 24-25a: *The question which the tax collectors ask Peter concerning the taxes.* When they reached Capernaum, the tax collector of the taxes of the Temple asks Peter: "Does your Master not pay the half-shekel for the Temple?" Peter answered: "Yes". From the time of Nehemias (V Century BC), the Jews who had returned from the exile of Babylonia, committed themselves solemnly in the Assembly to pay the diverse taxes and dues in order to allow the Temple to continue to function and to take care of the maintenance both of the priestly service and of the building of the Temple. (Ne 10: 33-40). From what we can see from Peter's response, Jesus paid the taxes like any other Jew.
- Matthew 17: 25b-26: The question of Jesus to Peter concerning the taxes. The conversation between Jesus and Peter is very strange. When they reach home, Jesus asked: "Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?" Peter responds: "From foreigners". And Jesus says: "Therefore, the sons are exempt!" Probably, here we can see a discussion between the Christian Jews before the destruction of the Temple, in the year 70. They asked themselves if they had to continue or not to pay the taxes of the Temple, as they did before. By Jesus' response they discover that they are not obliged to pay this tax: "The sons are exempt!" The sons are the Christians, but even if they are not obliged to pay, the recommendation of Jesus is to pay in order not to cause scandal.
- Matthew 17: 27: *The conclusion of the conversation on the paying of the tax.* The solution which Jesus gives to this situation is even stranger. He tells Peter: "*However, so that we shall not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook: take the first fish that rises, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for yourself.*" This was a strange miracle, strange like that of the 2000 pigs which threw themselves into the sea (Mk 5: 13). Whichever is the interpretation of this miraculous fact, this way of resolving the problem suggests that it is a question that is not too important for Jesus.

Personal Questions

- The suffering of the Cross discourages and saddens the disciples. Has this already happened in your life?

- How do you interpret the episode of the coin found in the mouth of the fish?

Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh from the heavens, praise him in the heights.
Praise him, all his angels,
praise him, all his host! (Ps 148: 1-2)

Tuesday, August 9, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 18: 1-5, 10, 12-14

At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?' So he called a little child to him whom he set among them. Then he said, 'In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. 'Anyone who welcomes one little child like this in my name welcomes me.

'See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that therein heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven.

'Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? In truth I tell you, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all. Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

Reflection

Here, in Chapter 18 of the Gospel of Matthew begins the fourth great discourse of the New Law, the Discourse of the Community. As has already been said before (on Monday of the 10th Week of the Year), the Gospel of Matthew written for the communities of the Christian Jews of Galilee and of Syria, present Jesus as the new Moses. In the Old Testament, the Law of Moses was codified in the five books of the Pentateuch.

Imitating the ancient model, Matthew represents the New Law in five great Discourses:

- (a) The Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5: 1 to 7: 29);
- (b) the Discourse of the Mission (Mt 10: 1-42);
- (c) The Discourse of the Parables (Mt 13: 1-52);
- (d) The Discourse of the Community (Mt 18: 1-35);
- (e) The discourse of the Future of the Kingdom (Mt 24: 1 to 25: 46).

The narrative parts which are inserted among the five Discourses describe the practice of Jesus and show how he practiced and embodied the New Law in his life.

The Gospel today gives the first part of the Discourse of the Community (Mt 18: 1-14) which has as key word “the little ones.” The little ones are not only the children, but also the poor persons, those who are not important in society and in the community, and also the children. Jesus asks that these “little ones” should always be the center of the concern of the communities because “The Father in Heaven does not will that one of these little ones should be lost” (Mt 18: 14).

- Matthew 18: 1: The question of the disciples which provokes the teaching of Jesus. The disciples want to know who is the greater in the Kingdom. The simple fact of this question reveals that they had not understood anything or very little the message of Jesus. The whole *Discourse of the Community*, is in order to make them understand that among the followers of Jesus the spirit of service should prevail, the gift of self, of pardon, of reconciliation and of gratuitous love, without seeking one’s own interest and one’s own promotion.
- Matthew 18: 2-5: The fundamental criterion: the little one and the greater one. The disciples ask for a criterion so as to be able to measure the importance of the persons in the community: “Who is the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus answers that the criterion are the littler ones! The little ones are not socially important; they do not belong to the world of the great. The disciples have to become children. Instead of growing up, to the heights, they must grow down and toward the periphery, where the poor and the little ones live. In this way, they will be the greater in the Kingdom! The reason is the following: “Anyone who receives one of these little ones receives me”. Jesus identifies himself with them. The love of Jesus for the little ones cannot be explained. Children have no merit. It is the complete gratuity of the love of God which manifests itself and asks to be imitated in the community of those who call themselves disciples of Jesus.
- Matthew 18: 6-9: Do not scandalize the little ones. These four verses concerning the scandal to little ones are omitted from today’s Gospel. We give a brief commentary on them. To scandalize the little ones means: to be the cause for them to lose their faith in God and to abandon the community. Matthew keeps a very hard phrase of Jesus: “Anyone who scandalizes even one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a mill stone tied around his neck and then be thrown into the sea”. It is a sign that at that time many little ones no longer identified themselves with the community and sought another refuge. And today, in Latin America, for example, every year, approximately three million persons abandon the historical Church and go toward the Evangelical churches. This is a sign that they do not feel at home among us. What is lacking in us? Which is the cause of this scandal of the little ones? In order to avoid the scandal, Jesus orders to cut the foot or take out the eye. This phrase cannot be taken literally. It means that we should be very firm, strict in fighting against scandal which draws the little ones away. We cannot, in any way, allow that the little ones should feel marginalized in our community; because in this case, the community would not be a sign of the Kingdom of God.
- Matthew 18: 10-11: The angels of the little ones are in the presence of the Father. Jesus recalls Psalm 91. The little ones take Yahweh as their refuge and make the most High their fortress (Ps 91: 9) and because of this: “No disaster can overtake you, no plague come near your tent; he has given angels orders about you to guard you wherever you go. They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone” (Ps 91: 10, 12).
- Matthew 18: 12-14: The parable of the one hundred sheep. According to Luke, this parable reveals the joy of God on the conversion of a sinner (Lk 15: 3-7). According to Matthew, it reveals that the Father does not want that not even one of the little ones be lost. In other words, the little ones should be the pastoral priority of the Community, of the Church. They should be in the center of the concern of all. Love

toward the little ones and the excluded should be the axis of the community of those who want to follow Jesus; because it is in this way that the community becomes the proof of the gratuitous love of God who accepts all.

Personal Questions

- Who are the poorest persons of our neighborhood? Do they participate in our community? Do they feel at home, or do they find in us a cause to withdraw?
- God the Father does not want any of the little ones to get lost. What does this mean for our community?

Concluding Prayer

Your instructions are my eternal heritage, they are the joy of my heart.
I devote myself to obeying your statutes, their recompense is eternal. (Ps 119: 111-112)

Wednesday, August 10, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading - John 12: 24-26

Jesus said to his disciples: In all truth I tell you, unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Whoever serves me, must follow me, and my servant will be with me wherever I am. If anyone serves me, my Father will honor him.

Reflection

- This passage contains solemn and crucial words concerning the modality with which the mission of Jesus and of his disciples “produces much fruit.” But in this solemn and central declaration of Jesus; “unless a wheat grain falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a large harvest” (v. 24), it is inserted in that narrative context of 12: 12-36 where the encounter of Jesus as Messiah with Israel is narrated and the rejection of the Jews of his Messianic proposal. Which are the principal themes that describe the Messianism of Jesus? The Jews expected a Messiah who would be a powerful king, who would continue with the royal style of David and would restore to Israel its glorious past. Instead, Jesus, places in the center

of his Messianism the gift of his life and the possibility given to man to be able to accept God's project on his life.

- The story of a seed. The gift of his life, as a crucial characteristic of his Messianism, Jesus outlines it with a mini parable. He describes a central and decisive event of his life drawing from the agricultural environment from where he takes the images to render his parables interesting and immediate. It is the story of a seed: a small parable to communicate with the people in a simple and transparent way: a seed begins its course or journey in the dark meander of the earth, where it is suffocated and withers but in the Spring, it becomes a green stalk and in the Summer a spike charged with grain. The focal points of the parable are two: the production of much fruit; the finding of eternal life. The seed that breaks through the darkness of earth has been interpreted by the First Fathers of the Church as a symbolical reference to the Incarnation of the Son of God. In the ground it seems that the vital force of the seed is destined to get lost because the seed withers and dies. But then the surprise of nature: in the summer when the spikes turn golden, the profound secret of that death is revealed. Jesus knows that death is becoming imminent, threatens on his person, even though he does not see it as a beast that devours. It is true that it has the characteristics of darkness and of being ripped, but for Jesus it contains the secret force typical of childbirth, a mystery of fecundity and of life. In the light of this vision one can understand another expression used by Jesus: "Anyone who loves his life will lose it and anyone who hates his own life in this world will preserve it for eternal life". Anyone who considers his own life as a cold property to be lived in egoism is like a seed closed in itself and without any perspective of life. On the contrary who "hates his life", a very sharp Semitic expression to indicate the renunciation of only fulfilling oneself applied to the axis of the meaning of an existence on the donation to others; it is only thus that life becomes creative: it is a source of peace, of happiness and of life. It is the reality of the seed that sprouts. But the reader can also get in the mini parable of Jesus another dimension, that of the "Passover". Jesus knows that in order to lead humanity to the threshold of divine love he has to go through the dark way of death on the cross. On the trail of this life the disciple also faces his own "hour", that of death, with the certainty that it will lead to eternal life, that is to say, to full communion with God.
- In synthesis. The story of the seed is that of dying in order to multiply itself; its function is that of a service to life. The annihilation of Jesus is comparable to the seed of life buried in the earth. In Jesus' life to love is to serve and to serve is to lose oneself in the life of others, to die to oneself in order to allow others to live. While his "hour" is approaching, the conclusion of his mission, Jesus assures his own with the promise of a consolation and of a joy without end, accompanied, by every type of disturbance or trouble. He gives the example of the seed that has to wither and of the woman who has to give birth in the pangs of childbirth. Christ has chosen the cross for himself and for his own: anyone who wants to be his disciple is called to share his same itinerary. He has always spoken to his disciples in a radical way: «Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, will save it" (Lk 9: 24).

Personal Questions

- Does your life express the gift of yourself? Is it a seed of love that makes love be born? Are you aware that in order to be a seed of joy, so that there will be joy in the field of wheat grain the moment of sowing is necessary?

- Can you say that you have chosen the Lord if later you do not embrace the cross with him? When the hard struggle breaks out in you between “yes” or “no,” between courage and fear, between faith and unbelief, between love and egoism, do you feel lost thinking that such temptations are not suitable to those who follow Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

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

Thursday, August 11, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 18: 21-19: 1

Then Peter went up to Jesus and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?'

Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times.

'And so the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet, with the words, "Be patient with me and I will pay the whole sum." And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him, saying, "Pay what you owe me." His fellow servant fell at his feet and appealed to him, saying, "Be patient with me and I will pay you." But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt.

His fellow-servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him.

Then the master sent for the man and said to him, "You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you?" And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.'

Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and he left Galilee and came into the territory of Judea on the far side of the Jordan.

Reflection

In yesterday's Gospel we have heard the words of Jesus concerning fraternal correction (Mt 18: 15-20). In the Gospel today (Mt 19: 21-39) the central theme is pardon and reconciliation.

- Matthew 18: 21-22: Forgive seventy times seven! Before the words of Jesus on fraternal correction and reconciliation, Peter asks: "How often must I forgive? Seven times?" Seven is a number which indicates perfection and, in the case of the proposal of Peter, seven is synonymous of always. But Jesus goes beyond. He eliminates all and whatever possible limitation there may be to pardon: "Not seven I tell you, but seventy-seven times". It is as if he would say "Always, NO! Peter. But seventy times seven always!". And this because there is no proportion between God's love for us and our love for our brother. Here we recall the episode of the Old Testament of Lamech: "Lamech says to his wives, Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; listen to what I say: I killed a man for wounding me, a boy for striking me. Sevenfold vengeance for Cain, but seventy-sevenfold for Lamech" (Gen 4: 23-24). The task of the communities is to invert the process of the spiral of violence. In order to clarify his response to Peter, Jesus tells them the parable of pardon without limits.
- Matthew 18: 23-27: The attitude of the master. This parable is an allegory, that is, Jesus speaks about a master, but thinks of God. This explains the enormous contrasts of the parable. As we will see, in spite that it is a question of daily ordinary things, there is something in this story which does not take place in daily life. In the story which Jesus tells, the master follows the norms of the law or rights of that time. It was his right to take a laborer with all his family and to keep him in prison until he would have paid his debt carrying out his work as a slave. But before the request of the debtor servant, the master forgives the debt. What strikes us is the amount: ten thousand talents! One talent was equal to 35 kg, and so according to the estimate made, ten thousand talents were equal to 350 tons of gold. Even if the debtor and his family would have worked their whole life, they would never have been capable to earn 350 tons of gold. The extreme estimate is made on purpose. Our debt before God is countless and unpayable!
- Matthew 18: 28-31: The attitude of the laborer. As soon as he went out, that servant found a fellow servant as himself who owned him one hundred denarii and, he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him saying: Pay what you owe! This servant owed him one hundred denarii; that is the salary of one hundred days of work. Some have estimated that it was a question of 30 grams of gold. There was no comparison between the two! But this makes us understand the attitude of the laborer: God forgives him 350 tons of gold and he is not capable to forgive 30 grams of gold. Instead of forgiving, he does to the companion what the master could have done with him but did not do it. He puts in prison his companion according to the norms of the law until he would have paid his debt. This is an inhuman attitude, which also strikes the other companions. Seeing what had happened, the other servants were sad and went to refer to their master everything which had happened. We also would have done the same; we would also have had the same attitude of disapproval.
- Matthew 18: 32-35: The attitude of God "Then the master called that man and said to him: "You wicked servant! I have forgiven you all your debt because you appealed to me. Were you not bound then to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you? And, angry, the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt." Before God's love who pardons gratuitously our debt of 350 tons of gold, it is more than fair, than just that we should forgive our brother who has a small debt

of 30 grams of gold. God's forgiveness is without any limit. The only limit for the gratuity of God's mercy comes from ourselves, from our incapacity to forgive our brothers! (Mt 18: 34). This is what we say and ask for in the Our Father: "Forgive us our offences as we forgive those who offend us" (Mt 6: 12-15).

- The community: an alternative space of solidarity and fraternity. The society of the Roman Empire was hard and heartless, without any space for the little ones. They sought some refuge for the heart and did not find it. The Synagogues were very demanding and did not offer a place for them. In the Christian communities, the rigor of some concerning the observance of the Law in the daily life followed the same criteria as society and as the Synagogue. Thus, in the communities, the same divisions which existed in society and in the Synagogue, between rich and poor, dominion and submission, man and woman, race and religion, began to appear. The community instead of being a place of acceptance became a place of condemnation. By uniting the words of Jesus, Matthew wants to enlighten the journey of the followers of Jesus, in order that the communities may be an alternative place of solidarity and of fraternity. They should be Good News for the poor.

Personal Questions

- To forgive. There are people who say: "I forgive but I do not forget!" And I? Am I capable to imitate God?
- Jesus gives us the example. At the time of death he asks pardon for his murderers (Lk 13: 34). Am I capable to imitate Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

From the rising of the sun to its setting, praised be the name of Yahweh!
Supreme over all nations is Yahweh,
supreme over the heavens his glory. (Ps 113: 3-4)

Friday, August 12, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 19: 3-12

Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and to put him to the test they said, 'Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?'

He answered, 'Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man leaves his father and mother and

becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh? They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide.' They said to him, 'Then why did Moses command that a writ of dismissal should be given in cases of divorce?'

He said to them, 'It was because you were so hard-hearted, that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning. Now I say this to you: anyone who divorces his wife -- I am not speaking of an illicit marriage -- and marries another, is guilty of adultery.'

The disciples said to him, 'If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry.'

But he replied, 'It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted. There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.'

Reflection

- Context. Up to Chapter 18 Matthew has shown how the discourses of Jesus have marked the different phases of the progressive constitution and formation of the community of disciples around their Master. Now in Chapter 19: 1 this small group withdraws from the territory of Galilee and arrives in the territories of Judaea. The call of Jesus that involves his disciples advances more until the decisive choice: the acceptance or rejection of the person of Jesus. Such a phase takes place along the road that leads to Jerusalem (chapters 19-20), and finally with the arrival in the city and to the Temple (Chapters 21-23). All the encounters that Jesus experiences in the course of these chapters take place along this journey from Galilee to Jerusalem.
- The encounter with the Pharisees. Passing through Trans-Jordanian (19, 1) the first encounter is with the Pharisees and the theme of the discussion of Jesus with them becomes a reason for reflection for the group of the disciples. The question of the Pharisees concerns divorce and places Jesus in difficulty, particularly, the more solid and stable reality for every Jewish community. The intervention of the Pharisees wants to accuse Jesus because of his teaching. It is a question of a true process: Matthew considers it as "testing him", "a way of tempting him". The question is really a crucial one: "Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatsoever?" (19: 3). The awkward malicious attempt of the Pharisees to interpret the text of Dt 24, 1 to place Jesus in difficulty does not escape the attention of the reader: "Suppose a man has taken a wife and consummated the marriage, but she has not pleased him and he has found some impropriety of which to accuse her, he has, therefore, made out a writ of divorce for her and handed it to her and then dismissed her from his house". This text had given place, throughout the centuries, to innumerable discussions: to admit divorce for any reason whatsoever; to request a minimum of bad behavior, a true adultery.
- It is God who unites. Jesus responds to the Pharisees having recourse to Gn 1: 17: 2: 24, which presents the question about the primary will of God, the Creator. The love that unites man to woman, comes from God and because of its origin, it unifies and cannot be separated. If Jesus quotes Gn 2: 24: "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife and they become one flesh" (19: 5), it is because he wants to underline a particular and absolute principle: it is the creating will of God that unites man and woman. When a man and a woman unite together in marriage, it is God who unites them; the term "*coniugi*" - couple - comes from the verb joined together, to unite, that is to say, that the joining together of the two partners sexually is the effect of the creative word of God. The response of Jesus to

the Pharisees reaches its summit: marriage is indissoluble from its original constitution. Jesus continues this time drawing from Mt 2: 13-16: to repudiate the wife is to break the covenant with God and according to the prophets this covenant has to be lived, above all, by the spouses in their conjugal union (Ho 1-3; Is 1: 21-26; Jr 2: 2; 3: 1, 6-12; Ez 16; 23; Is 54: 6-10; 60-62). The response of Jesus appears as a contradiction to the Law of Moses which grants the possibility to grant a writ of divorce. To motivate his response Jesus reminds the Pharisees: if Moses gave this possibility, it is because you were so hardhearted (v. 8), more concrete, because of your indocility to the Word of God. The Law of Gn 1: 26; 2: 24 had never been modified, but Moses was obliged to adapt it to an attitude of indocility. The first marriage was not annulled by adultery. To contemporary man and particularly, to the ecclesial community the word of Jesus clearly says that there should be no divorces; and, just the same, we see that there are; in pastoral life the divorced persons are accepted, to whom the possibility of entering into the Kingdom is always open. The reaction of the disciples is immediate: "If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry" (v. 10). The response of Jesus continues to sustain the indissolubility of matrimony, impossible for the human mentality but possible for God. The eunuch of whom Jesus speaks is not the one who is unable to generate but the one, who separated from his wife, continues to live in continence, he remains faithful to the first conjugal bond: he is an eunuch as regards all other women.

Personal Questions

- As regards marriage do we know how to accept the teaching of Jesus with simplicity, without adapting it to our own legitimate choices to be comfortable?
- The evangelical passage has reminded us that the design of the Father on man and on woman is a wonderful project of love. Are you aware that love has an essential law: it implies the total and full gift of one's own person to the other?

Concluding Prayer

God, create in me a clean heart, renew within me a resolute spirit,
do not thrust me away from your presence,
do not take away from me your spirit of holiness. (Ps 51: 10-11)

Saturday, August 13, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading – Matthew 19: 13-15

The people brought little children to Jesus, for him to lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples scolded them, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of Heaven belongs.' Then he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

Reflection

The Gospel today is very brief; only three verses. The Gospel describes how Jesus accepts the children.

- Matthew 19: 13: *The attitude of the disciples concerning the children.* People brought little children to Jesus, for him to lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples scolded the mothers.
- Why? Perhaps because this was according to the severe norms of the Law of purity, the small children in the conditions in which they lived were considered unclean, impure. If they touched Jesus, he would become impure. Because of this, it was important to avoid that they should get close to him and that they touch him. Because it already had happened one time, when a leper touched Jesus. Jesus became unclean, impure and could no longer enter the city. He had to remain in deserted places (Mk 1: 4-45).
- Matthew 19: 14-15: *The attitude of Jesus: he accepts and defends the life of the children.* Jesus reproved the disciples and said: *Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs.* Jesus does not care about transgressing the norms which prevent fraternity and acceptance to be given to the little ones. The new experience of God, the Father has marked the life of Jesus and gives him new eyes to perceive and to value the relationship between persons. Jesus gets on the side of the little ones, of the excluded and assumes their defense. It impresses when we see together everything which the Bible says regarding the attitudes of Jesus in defense of the life of the children, of the little ones:
 - *To give thanks for the Kingdom present in the little ones.* Jesus' joy is great when he sees that the children, the little ones understand the things of the Kingdom which he announced to the people. "Father, I thank you!" (Mt 11: 25-26) Jesus recognizes that the little ones understand more about the things of the Kingdom, than the doctors!
 - *To defend the right to shout or cry out.* When Jesus, entered the Temple, he upset the tables of the money changers, and the children were those who shouted: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Mt 21: 15). Criticized by the high priests and the Scribes, Jesus defends them and in his defense, he recalls the Scriptures (Mt 21: 16).
 - *To identify oneself with the little ones.* Jesus embraces the little ones and identifies himself with them. Anyone who accepts a little one accepts Jesus (Mk 9: 37). "In so far as you have done it to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me". (Mt 25: 40).
 - *To accept and not to scandalize.* One of the hardest words of Jesus is against those who are a cause of *scandal* for the little ones, that is, who are the cause why the little ones no longer believe in God. Because of this, it would have been better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around their neck (Lk 17: 1-2; Mt 18: 5-7). Jesus condemns the system, both the political one as well as the religious one, which is the reason why the little ones, the humble people, lose faith in God.

- *To become like children.* Jesus asks his disciples to become like children and to accept the Kingdom as children do. Without this, it is impossible to enter into the Kingdom (Lk 9: 46-48). It indicates that the children are professors of the adults. That was not normal. We are accustomed to the contrary.
- *To accept and to touch.* (Today's Gospel). The mothers with their children who get close to Jesus to ask him to bless the children. The Apostles react and drive them away. Jesus corrects the adults and accepts the mothers with the children. He *touches* the children and embraces them. "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them!" (Mk 10: 13-16; Mt 19: 13- 15). According to the norms of that time, both the mothers and their small children, practically, lived in a state of legal impurity. Jesus does not allow himself to be drawn by this.
- *To accept and to take care.* Many are the children and the young people whom he accepts, takes care of and rises from the dead: the daughter of Jairus, who was 12 years old (Mk 5: 41- 42), the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mk 7: 29-30), the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7: 14-15), the epileptic child (Mk 9, 25-26), the son of the Centurion (Lk 7: 9-10), the son of the public officer (Jn 4: 50), the boy with five loaves of bread and two fishes (Jn 6: 9).

Personal Questions

- Children: what have you learnt from children throughout the years of your life? And what do children learn about God, about Jesus and his life, from you?
- Which is the image of Jesus which I give to children? A severe God, a good God, distant or absent?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, give me back the joy of your salvation, sustain in me a generous spirit.
I shall teach the wicked your paths,
and sinners will return to you. (Ps 51: 12-13)

Sunday, August 14, 2022

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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 – Luke 12: 49-53 (59)

49 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! 50 There is a baptism I must still receive, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! 51 'Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 52 For from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; 53 father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law.' 54 He said again to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud looming up in the west you say at once that rain is coming, and so it does. 55 And when the wind is from the south you say it's going to be hot, and it is. 56 Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it you do not know how to interpret these times? 57 'Why not judge for yourselves what is upright? 58 For example: when you are going to court with your opponent, make an effort to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer and the officer have you thrown into prison. 59 I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the very last penny.'

A Moment of Silence:

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

MEDITATIO

Some Questions:

- *I have come to bring fire to the earth:* Fire presupposes a vehemence of sentiment and a center of life because where there is light, heat, force, movement, there is life. And not a life which is stagnant, but a life which is continuously nourished. Does the fire of the life of God burn in me?
- *Why not judge for yourselves what is upright?* The invitation to discern personally is even more urgent in a world in which opinions run after each other and form a "mass"... How much do I allow myself to be conditioned by the judgements and criteria chosen by others?
- *Make an effort to settle with him on the way...* You are walking to go to the tribunal because you think you are right, but the opponent also has the same certainty. How do I feel before the one whom I feel is hostile toward me? Do I feel sure of myself to the point of going to the tribunal or rather do I try to agree with my opponent on the way?

Detailed Analysis of the Text:

- *v. 49. I have come to bring fire to the earth; and how I wish it were blazing already!* The fire which is not extinguished comes from Heaven, it is the fire of the Spirit which makes of all things that exist, the luminous and warm expression of the divine Presence among us. The Baptism of love. The light is born, the bread is born, the water is born, God is born! The Cross, a new Bethlehem, House of the perfect Bread, a new Emmaus, the hostel of the broken Bread, a new Bethany, House of the perfumed Bread offered to men forever.
- *v. 50. There is a baptism I must still receive; and what constraint I am under until it is completed!* Anguish, the symptom of those fears which from within get hold of one

and disfigure, distort and leave without breath, Jesus also experienced this. What can one do against anguish? Nothing can be done but only wait so that what is good is fulfilled and that the fears be involved in the event itself. Anguish clasps tightly and can demolish every possibility of interior movement. The anguish of the one who trusts and accepts life, even if it clasps the person tightly in a terrible vice like grip, does not demolish, but rather fortifies in so far as it renders the waiting free or devoid of illusions and of easy hopes.

- **V. 51.** *Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.* Man seeks peace. But what peace? The peace of “do not disturb me”, the peace of “let us not make problems”, the peace of “everything is fine”, a superficial peace. This peace is the earthly peace. Jesus has come to bring us the true peace, the fullness of the gifts of God. This peace then, is no longer called peace, but in so far as it is against the apparent peace, it is called, in the eyes of man “division” It can well be said that the peace of Christ elects or chooses and in so far as it elects, it distinguishes, like a magnet which in a magnetic field attracts to itself what is of the same “nature”, but it does not attract anything which is not of a similar nature.
- **vv. 52-53.** For from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law. Everything which divides does not come from God, because in God there is unity. But in His name it is possible even to go beyond the natural commandment. Honor your father and mother, says the ancient law. And the new law which is that of love without limit even goes to say: He who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of me. Division in this case can be understood as the priority of love, a hierarchy of values. To God, the source of life corresponds the first place. To the father and the mother who have accepted, welcomed life, the second place... such an order is in the logical nature of that order. It is not an honor to the father and the mother to disobey God or to love Christ less. Because the love for father and mother is a love of response, the love of God is generating love.
- **vv. 54-55.** He said again to the crowds, “When you see a cloud looming up in the west you say at once that rain is coming, and so it does. And when the wind is from the south you say it is going to be hot, and it is. Before reproaching the crowds, Jesus appreciates the good that they are capable of. If a cloud comes from the west, it is rain that comes. And man has this certainty as a result that he has been observing the natural phenomena up to the point of formulating laws. If the wind comes from the south, it will be hot. Confirmed and reflected upon, regulates the consequences for us.
- **v. 56.** Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it you do not know how to interpret these times? Why not use the same criteria for the events of the present moment? History speaks for itself. Why not evaluate it on the basis of experience? The logic which binds premises and consequences is the same one on human events and on supernatural ones. The world of relationships, the world of religious convictions, the world of human expectations... everything is subject to the same law. Then, if Christ has been expected for centuries as the fulfilment of the promises of God, and if this Jesus of Nazareth fulfils the works of faith with the finger of God, why doubt that the Kingdom of God has arrived? This is hypocrisy. It is not to want to admit God’s fidelity and to insist and persist to wait for the fulfilment of what we have seen.
- **v. 57.** *Why not judge for yourselves what is upright?* What is upright can always be judged. It does not serve to wait for the judgement of others. And just the same, we are always bound to the thought and the words of others, to what happens and to

what is projected, to perspectives of success and to thousands of hesitations. To trust one's correct judgement is wise!

- **v. 58.** When you are going to court with your opponent, make an effort to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer and the officer have you thrown into prison. The wisdom and the judgement of Jesus are directed toward something truly useful. Do not expect to receive justice, because no one is just to the point of being able to avoid being condemned to prison. We are all sinners! And therefore, instead to appealing to a false justice, that for which you consider yourself worthy to be absolved, better appeal to harmony. Try to reach an agreement so as not to be led before the judge. You judge the facts and conclude that it is always better not to feel oneself free from guilt. Saint Paul says it: Neither do I judge myself... my judge is the Lord. Yes He...
- **v. 59.** *I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the very last penny.* Who has no debts? Why do we want to live our life in a court to constantly decide who is guilty and who is innocent? Would it not be better to live simply, in agreement and harmony with everyone, since all seek to want what is good and all have fragility and weakness as the coin with which to pay?

Reflection:

If we too could bring fire to the earth of our heart! A fire capable of extending itself without causing a great fire, but creating cordial bonds of union and a lively exchange... The one who plays with fire will certainly have his hands burnt, but what a great benefit for all. Fire divides, it creates circles of encounter and barriers of inaccessible passages. Like in all divine things we find ourselves in at a crossroads section: with Christ or against Him. Yes, because we must never forget that He is a sign of contradiction for all times, a stumbling stone for those who look to the top expecting miracles and prodigies and a corner stone for the one who looks at His tired hands and grasps tightly the hands of a carpenter trying to construct the house of hope, the Church. A time of grace: How not recognize it? If you go by a lighted fire, you feel the heat. Christ is the lighted fire or flame! If you cross a torrent flowing with water, on a suffocating hot day of summer, you feel the freshness and feel attracted by the movement of the water which comes toward you to quench your thirst and to give you moments of relief. And Christ is the water which gushes out for eternal life! If at night you listen to the silence, you cannot but feel anxious waiting for the light of the new day which will rise. And Christ is the Sun who rises! It is the word which at night is silence and in the East it becomes a syllable of a new dialogue. Why not become aware that it is just that all hostility falls and walk with anyone recognizing him as a brother? If you consider him an enemy, you are going to seek justice... If you consider him as a brother, the thought comes to your mind to take care of him and to walk together a part of the road, to share with him your anguishes and your anxieties, and to listen to him about his difficulties. Why do you want at all costs to pay your debt up to the last penny?

ORATIO

Psalm 32

How blessed are those whose offence is forgiven, whose sin blotted out.
How blessed are those to whom Yahweh imputes no guilt, whose spirit harbors no deceit.
I said not a word,

but my bones wasted away from groaning all the day; day and night your hand lay heavy upon me;
my heart grew parched as stubble in summer drought. I made my sin known to you, did not conceal my guilt.
I said, 'I shall confess my offence to Yahweh.' And you, for your part, took away my guilt, forgave my sin.
That is why each of your faithful ones prays to you in time of distress.
Even if great floods overflow, they will never reach your faithful. You are a refuge for me, you guard me in trouble,
with songs of deliverance, you surround me.
I shall instruct you
and teach you the way to go;
I shall not take my eyes off you. Be not like a horse or a mule;
that does not understand bridle or bit; if you advance to master them,
there is no means of bringing them near. Countless troubles are in store for the wicked,
but one who trusts in Yahweh
is enfolded in his faithful love. Rejoice in Yahweh,
exult all you upright, shout for joy,
you honest of heart.

CONTEMPLATIO

Lord, you who search into my heart and make of my fears the paths to create the newness of gifts, enter into my anguishes. There where I lose my hope and where the tremor devours me, there where every spark of grace burns my securities and makes of me a pile of ashes, there enkindle anew the fire of your love. Give a look or gaze capable of penetrating reality and of fixing it on your gaze which waits for me beyond the veil of all appearances. Do not allow that I be driven away from my desire of communion. And also there where in your name I would find opposition, resistance, adversity, may be able to enter into the anguish of division to maintain alive the flame of the encounter with you!

Monday, August 15, 2022

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

LECTIO

Opening Prayer:

Holy Spirit, Spirit of Wisdom, of Science, of Intelligence, of Counsel, fill us, we pray, with the knowledge of the Word of God, fill us with every kind of spiritual wisdom and intelligence, so as to be able to understand it at depth. May we, under your guidance be able to understand the Gospel of this Marian solemnity. Holy Spirit, we need you, you, the only one who continually moulds in us the figure and the form of Jesus. And we turn to you, Mary, Mother of Jesus and of the Church, you who have lived the inebriating and totalizing Presence of the Holy Spirit, you who have experienced the power of his force in you, who has seen it operating in your Son Jesus from the time when he was in the maternal womb, open our heart and our mind, so that they may be docile to listen to the Word of God.

Reading of the Gospel – 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.

Moments of prayerful silence:

Silence is a quality of the one who knows how to listen to God. Try to create in yourself an atmosphere of peace and of silent adoration. If you are capable to be in silence before God, you will be able to listen to his breath which is Life.

MEDITATIO

Key to the Reading:

Blessed are you among women

In the first part of today's Gospel, the words of Elizabeth resound: "Blessed are you among women", preceded by a spatial movement. Mary leaves Nazareth, situated in the North of Palestine, to go to the South, approximately fifty kilometres, to a place which tradition has identified as the present day Ain Karem, not too far from Jerusalem. The physical movement shows the interior sensibility of Mary, who is not closed on herself, to contemplate, in a private and intimate way, the mystery of the Divine Maternity which is being accomplished in her, but she is projected to the path of charity. She moves in order to go and help her elderly cousin.

Mary's going to Elizabeth has the added connotation 'in haste' which Saint Ambrose interprets as follows: "Mary set out in haste to the hill country, not because she did not believe the prophecy or because she was uncertain of the announcement or doubted of the proof, but because she was pleased with the promise and desirous to devotedly fulfil a service, with the impulse that she received from her intimate joy... The grace of the Holy Spirit does not entail slowness". The reader, though, knows that the true reason of the trip is not indicated, but can get it through information deduced from the context. The angel had communicated to Mary the pregnancy of Elizabeth, already in the sixth month (cfr. v. 37). Besides the fact that she remained there three months (cfr. v. 56), just the time so that the child could be born, allows us to understand that Mary intended to help her cousin. Mary runs, and goes where there is an urgent need, the need for help, showing, in this way, a clear sensibility and concrete availability. Together with Mary, Jesus, in his mother's womb, moves with her. From here it is easy to deduce the Christological value of the episode of the visit of Mary to her cousin: above all, the

attention is for Jesus. At first sight, it could seem to be a scene concentrated on the two women, in reality, what is important for the Evangelist is the prodigious fact present in their conceiving. Mary moving tends, in last instance, to have the encounter between the two women.

As soon as Mary enters into the house and greets Elizabeth, the small John leaped in her womb. According to some this leaping is not comparable to the changing place of the *foetus*, which is experienced by every pregnant woman. Luke uses a particular Greek verb which precisely means “jumping”. Wishing to interpret the verb a bit literally, it could be indicated with “dancing”, thus excluding a physical phenomenon only. Someone has thought that this ‘dance’ could be considered as a form of ‘homage’ which John renders to Jesus, inaugurating, though not yet born, that attitude of respect and of subjection which will characterize his life: “After me is coming someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals” (Mk 1, 7). One day, John himself will give witness: “it is the bridegroom who has the bride; and yet the bridegroom’s friend, who stands there and listens to him, is filled with joy at the bridegroom’s voice. This is the joy that I feel and it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow less” (Jn 3, 29-30). Thus Saint Ambrose comments: “Elizabeth was the first one to hear the voice, but John is first to perceive the grace”. We find a confirmation of this interpretation in the words themselves of Elizabeth which, repeating the same Greek verb in v. 44. which was already employed in v. 41, says: “The child in my womb leapt for joy”. Luke, with these particular details, has wished to evoke the prodigies which took place in the intimacy of Nazareth. It is only now, thanks to the dialogue with an interlocutor, the mystery of the divine maternity leaves aside its secrecy and its individual dimension, to become a notable fact, and object of appreciation and of praise.

The words of Elizabeth, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord?” (vv. 42-43). With a Semitic expression which is equivalent to a superlative (“among women”), the Evangelist wishes to attract the attention of the reader on the function of Mary: to be the “Mother of the Lord.” And, then, a blessing is reserved for her (“Blessed are you”) and a blessed Beatitude. In what does this one consist? It expresses Mary’s adherence to the Divine Will. Mary is not only the receiver of a mysterious design which makes her blessed, but also a person who knows how to accept and adhere to God’s will. Mary is a creature who believes, because she trusts in a plain, simple word and which she has vested with her “yes” of love. And Elizabeth acknowledges this service of love, identifying her as “blessed as mother and blessed as believer.”

In the meantime, John perceives the presence of his Lord and exults, expressing with that interior movement the joy which springs from that contact of salvation. Mary will be the interpreter of that event in the hymn of the Magnificat.

A song of love:

In this song Mary considers herself part of the *anawim*, of the “poor of God”, of those who “fear God” placing in Him all their trust and hope and who, on the human level, do not enjoy any right or prestige. The spirituality of the *anawim* can be synthesized with the words of Psalm 37: 79: “In silence he is before God and hopes in him”, because “those who hope in the Lord will possess the earth”.

In Psalm 86: 6 the one who prays, turning to God says: Give your servant your force”: Here the term ‘servant’ expresses his being subjected, as well as the sentiment of belonging to God, of feeling secure with him.

The poor, in the strictly Biblical sense, are those who place their trust unconditionally in God; this is why they are to be considered, qualitatively, the best part, of the People of Israel.

The proud, instead, are those who place all their trust in themselves.

Now, according to the Magnificat, the poor have a thousand reasons to rejoice, because God glorifies the *anawim* (Psalm 149: 4) and humbles the proud. An image taken from the New Testament, which expresses very well the attitude of the poor of the Old Testament, is that of the Publican who with humility beats his breast, while the Pharisee being complacent of his merits is being consumed by his pride (Lk 19: 9-14). Definitely, Mary celebrates all that God has done in her and all that he works in every creature. Joy and gratitude characterize this hymn to salvation which recognizes the greatness of God, but which also makes great the one who sings it.

Some Question for Meditation:

- Is my prayer, above all, the expression of a sentiment or celebration and acknowledgement of God's action?
- Mary is presented as the believer in the Word of the Lord. How much time do I dedicate to listening to the Word of God?
- Is your prayer nourished from the Bible, as was that of Mary? Or rather am I dedicated to devotions which produce a continuous tasteless and dull prayer? Are you convinced that to return to Biblical prayer is the assurance to find a solid nourishment, chosen by Mary herself ?
- Are you in the logics of the Magnificat which exalts the joy of giving, of losing in order to find, of accepting, the happiness of gratuity, of donation?

ORATIO

Psalm 44 (45)

The Psalm in this second part, glorifies the Queen. In today's Liturgy these verses are applied to Mary and celebrate her greatness and beauty.

In your retinue are daughters of kings,
the consort at your right hand in gold of Ophir. Listen, my daughter,
attend to my words and hear; forget your own nation
and your ancestral home,
then the king will fall in love with your beauty; he is your lord, bow down before him.
Her companions are brought to her,
they enter the king's palace with joy and rejoicing.

Final Prayer:

The prayer which follows is a brief meditation on the maternal role of Mary in the life of the believer: "Mary, woman who knows how to rejoice, who knows how to exult, who allows herself to be invaded by the full consolation of the Holy Spirit, teach us to pray so that we may also discover the source of joy. In Elizabeth's house, your cousin, feeling accepted and understood in your most intimate secret, you burst out in a hymn of exultation of the heart, speaking of God, of you about your relationship with him, and of the unprecedented adventure already begun of being the Mother of Christ and of all of us, holy people of God. Teach us to give our prayer a rhythm of hope and tremors of joy, sometimes worn out by bitter whining and soaked with melancholy almost as obliged. The Gospel speaks to us about you, Mary, and of Elizabeth: both of you kept in your heart something, which you did not dare or you did not wish to manifest to anyone. But each one of you, felt understood by the other, on that prophetic day of the Visitation and you pronounced words of prayer and of feast. Your encounter becomes Liturgy of thanksgiving and of praise to your ineffable God. You, woman of a profound joy, you sang the Magnificat, in rapture and amazed at all that the Lord was operating in his humble servant. Magnificat is the cry, the explosion of joy, which explodes within each one of us, when one feels accepted and understood."

CONTEMPLATIO

The Virgin Mary, the temple of the Holy Spirit, accepted with faith the Word and surrendered herself completely to the power of Love. Because of this she became the Icon of interiority, that is all recollected under the look of God and abandoned to the power of the Most High. Mary keeps silence about herself, because everything in her can speak about the wonders of the Lord in her life.

Tuesday, August 16, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,
may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 19: 23-30

Jesus said to his disciples, 'In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven.'

When the disciples heard this they were astonished. 'Who can be saved, then?' they said. Jesus gazed at them. 'By human resources', he told them, 'this is impossible; for God everything is possible.'

Then Peter answered and said, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What are we to have, then?'

Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, when everything is made new again and the Son of man is seated on his throne of glory, you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much, and also inherit eternal life.

'Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'

Reflection

The Gospel today is the immediate continuation of yesterday's Gospel. It gives the commentary of Jesus regarding the negative reaction of the young rich man.

- *Matthew 19, 23-24: The camel and the eye of the needle.* After the young man left, Jesus comments his decision and says: "In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven." Two observations concerning this affirmation of Jesus:
 - a) the proverb of the camel and of the eye of the needle was used to say that something was impossible and unthinkable, humanly speaking.

- b) The expression “that someone rich enters the kingdom of Heaven,” is a question, in the first place, not of entrance into Heaven after death, but of entering into the community around Jesus. And even now this is true.

It is very difficult for the rich to enter and to feel at home in the communities which try to live the Gospel according to the demands of Jesus and which try to be open to the poor, the migrants and to those excluded by society.

- *Matthew 19: 25-26: The fear of the disciples.* The young man had observed the commandments, but without understanding the reason for the observance. Something similar was happening with the disciples. When Jesus called them, they did exactly the same thing which Jesus had asked the young man: they left everything and followed Jesus (Mt 4: 20, 22). But they were astonished at this affirmation of Jesus concerning the impossibility for someone rich to enter the Kingdom of God. This was a sign that they had not understood well the response which Jesus had given to the young rich man: “Go, sell all you possess, give it to the poor and then come and follow me!” Because if they had understood, they would not have remained so surprised by the requests of Jesus. When wealth or the desire for riches occupies the heart and the look, the person does not succeed to understand the sense of life and of the Gospel. God alone can help! “This is impossible for man, but for God all is possible!”
- *Matthew 19: 27: The question of Peter.* The background of the misunderstanding of the disciples appears in the question asked by Peter: “Look, we have left everything and have followed you. What are we to have then?” In spite of the beautiful generosity of abandoning everything, they still have the old mentality. They have abandoned everything in order to get something in exchange. They still had not understood well the sense of service and of gratuity.
- *Matthew 19: 28-30: The response of Jesus.* “In truth I tell you, when everything is made new again and the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much and also inherit eternal life. Many, who are first, will be last, and the last, first”. In this response, Jesus describes the new world, the foundation of which had been placed by his work and that of the disciples. Jesus stresses three important points:
 - (a) The disciples will sit on twelve thrones next to Jesus to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (cfr. Rev 4, 4).
 - (b) In exchange they will receive many things which they had abandoned: houses, brothers, sisters, mother, children land and will inherit eternal life.
 - (c) The future world will be the reverse of the present world. There, the last ones will be the first ones and the first ones will be the last ones. The community around Jesus is the seed and the manifestation of this new world. Up until now the small community of the poor continues to be the seed and manifestation of the Kingdom.

Every time that in the history of the people of the Bible a new movement arises to renew the Covenant, it begins by re-establishing the rights of the poor, of the excluded. Without that, the Covenant will not be reconstructed. This is the sense and the reason for the insertion and the mission of the community of Jesus, in the midst of the poor. It draws from the roots and it inaugurates the New Covenant.

Personal Questions

- To abandon houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children fields, for the sake of Jesus: how does this take place in your life? What have you already received in exchange?
- Today, the majority of poor countries is not of a Christian religion, while the majority of the rich countries are. How can the saying be applied today that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle?

Concluding Prayer

Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as
 death I should fear no danger,
 for you Lord, are at my side.
 Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me. (Ps 23: 4)

Wednesday, August 17, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,
 may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared
 for us beyond all our imagining.
 We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and
 the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 20: 1-16

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Now the kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner going out at
 daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for
 one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard.

Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace and
 said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage." So they went.
 At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the
 same. Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing
 around, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" "Because
 no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You go into my vineyard too."
 In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay
 them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first." So those who
 were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each.
 When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius
 each. They took it, but grumbled at the landowner saying, "The men who came last
 have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have
 done a heavy day's work in all the heat."

He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not
 agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as
 much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be
 envious because I am generous?"

Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents a parable which is found only in Matthew's Gospel. It is not in the other Gospels. Like in all parables, Jesus tells a story about daily elements, daily things of the life of the people. He presents a picture of the social situation of his time, in which the auditors recognize themselves. But, at the same time, in the story of this parable, there are things which never take place in the reality of the life of the people. And this, because speaking about the master, Jesus thinks about God, about his Father. And this is why in the story of the parable; the master does things which are surprising which never take place in the daily life of the auditors. But, in this strange attitude of the master, it is necessary to find the key to understand the message of the parable.

- Matthew 20: 1-7: The five times that the landowner goes out to look for laborers. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard". This is how the story begins and it speaks for itself and does not need too many comments. In what follows, the landowner goes out four times to call other workers to go and work in his vineyard. Jesus refers to the terrible lack of work at that time. Now some details of the story:
 - (a) the landowner himself goes out personally five times to contract workers.
 - (b) When he contracts the workers, he fixes the salary only for the first group: one denarius a day. To those of nine o'clock in the morning he says: I will give you what is just, fair. With the others, he does not fix anything. He contracted them only to work in the vineyard.
 - (c) At the end of the day, when it was the time to pay the workers, the landowner orders the administrator to carry out this service.
- Matthew 20: 8-10: The strange way of fixing the accounts at the end of the day. When it was evening, the landowner of the vineyard told his administrator: Call the workers and pay them, beginning from the last ones to the first ones. Here, at the time of drawing the accounts, something strange takes place, which does not happen in normal life. It seems that things are inverted. The administrator begins to pay those who were contracted just an hour before. The salary is the same for all: one denarius as it was agreed with the first ones who were contracted at the beginning of the day. When the first came, they expected to get more but they too received one denarius each. Why does the landowner act like that? Would you do the same? It is precisely in this surprising gesture of the landowner that the key of understanding this parable is hidden.
- Matthew 20: 11-12: The normal reaction of the workers before the strange attitude of the landowner. The last ones also receive their salary as those who were contracted first. The story says that these began to grumble against the landowner and said: "The men who came last have done only one hour and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat." This is the normal reaction of a good sense. I think that all of us would have had the same reaction and would have said the same thing to the landowner. Would we have not?
- Matthew 20: 13-16: The surprising explanation of the landowner who gives the key of the parable. The response of the landowner is the following: "My friend, I am not being unjust to you. Did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you; have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?" These words

give the key which explains the attitude of the landowner and indicates the message which Jesus wants to communicate to us:

- (a) The landowner was not unjust, because he acts according to what he had agreed with the first group of workers: one denarius a day.
- (b) It is the sovereign decision of the landowner to give to the last ones the same amount that he had agreed upon with those of the first hour. These do not have the right to complain and claim anything.
- (c) Acting with justice, the landowner has the right to do the good that he wants with the things that belong to him. The worker, on his part has this same right.
- (d) The last question touches on the central point: Why should you be envious because I am generous? God is different and his thoughts are not our thoughts (Is 55: 8-9).

The background of the parable is the circumstance of the time, for Jesus as well as for Matthew. The workers of the first hour are the Jewish People, called by God to work in his vineyard. They bear the weight of the day, from Abraham to Moses, for over one thousand years. Now at the eleventh hour, Jesus calls the pagans, the gentiles to work in his vineyard and they succeed in having the preference in the heart of God. "Thus the first ones will be last and the last will be first."

Personal Questions

- Those of the eleventh hour arrive, they have advantages and receive priority in regard to entrance into the Kingdom of God. When you wait in line for two hours, and a person arrives, and without saying anything she places herself before you. Would you accept this? Can these two situations be compared?
- God's action surpasses our calculations and our human way of acting. He surprises us and sometimes is uncomfortable. Has this happened to you in your life? What lessons have you drawn from this?

Concluding Prayer

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. (Ps 23: 6)

Thursday, August 18, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,
may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 22: 1-14

Jesus began to speak to them in parables once again, 'The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come. Next he sent some more servants with the words, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, my banquet is all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding." But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them. The king was furious. He despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the main crossroads and invite everyone you can find to come to the wedding."

So these servants went out onto the roads and collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. When the king came in to look at the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And the man was silent. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

For many are invited but not all are chosen.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents the parable of the banquet which we also find in the Gospel of Matthew and of Luke, but with significant differences, which result from the point of view of each Evangelist. The background which leads both Evangelists to repeat this parable is the same. In the communities of the first Christians, both those of Matthew and those of Luke, the problem of living together between the converted Jews and the converted pagans, continued to be very alive. The Jews had ancient norms which prevented them from eating together with the pagans. Even entering into the Christian communities, many Jews kept the ancient custom of not sitting at the same table with the pagans. Thus, Peter had conflicts in the communities of Jerusalem, because he had entered the house of Cornelius, a pagan, and for having eaten together with him (Ac 11: 3). This same problem existed, though in a diverse way, in the communities of Luke and of Matthew. In Luke's community, in spite of the difference in race, of class and of gender, they had a great ideal of sharing and of communion (Ac 2: 42; 4: 32; 5: 12). For this reason, in Luke's Gospel (Lk 14: 15-24), the parable insists on the invitation addressed to all. The master of the feast, angry and upset because the first guests, who were invited, did not arrive, sends his servants to call the poor, the cripple, the blind, and invites them to participate in the banquet. But there is still place. Then, the master of the feast orders that all be invited, until his house is full. In Matthew's Gospel, the first part of the parable, (Mt 22: 1-10) has the same objective as that of Luke's Gospel. It succeeds in saying that the master of the feast orders to let the "good and the bad" enter (Mt 22: 10). But at the end, he adds another parable (Mt 22: 11-14) concerning the wedding garment, which insists on that which is specific of the Jews, the need of purity in order to be able to present oneself before God.

- Matthew 22: 1- 2: The invitation addressed to all. Some manuscripts say that the parable was told for the chief priests and for the elders of the People. This affirmation can serve even as a key for the reading, because it helps one to understand some strange points which appear in the story which Jesus is telling. The parable begins like this: "The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding." This initial affirmation recalls the most profound hope: the desire of the people to be with God always. Several times the Gospel refers to this hope,

suggesting that Jesus, the son of the King, is the bridegroom who comes to prepare the wedding (Mk 2: 19); Rev 21: 2; 19: 9).

- *Matthew 22: 3-6: The invited guests do not want to come.* The king invites in a more insisting way, but the guests do not want to come. "But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business; and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them". In Luke what prevents them from accepting the invitation are the duties of daily life. The first one says: "I have bought a piece of land and must go to see it." The second one: "I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out". The third one: "I have just got married and so am unable to come!" (cf. Lk 14: 18-20). According to the norms and customs of the time, those persons had the right and even the duty not to accept the invitation they had received (cf. Dt 20: 5-7).
- *Matthew 22: 7: An incomprehensible war!* The reaction of the king before the refusal is surprising. "Then the king was furious and he despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town." How is such a violent reaction to be interpreted? The parable was told for the chief priests and for the elders of the people (Mt 22: 1), for those responsible for the nations. Many times, Jesus had spoken to them about the need for conversion. He even shed tears over the city of Jerusalem and said: "If you too had only recognized on that day the way to peace! But in fact, it is hidden from your eyes. Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation". (Lk 19: 41-44). The violent reaction of the king in the parable probably refers to the fact of the prevision of Jesus. Forty years later, Jerusalem was destroyed (Lk 19: 41-44; 21: 6;).
- *Matthew 22: 8-10: The banquet was not cancelled.* For the third time, the king invites the people. He tells his servants: "The wedding banquet is ready, but those invited were unworthy; go to the main crossroads and invite everyone you can find to come to the wedding.

Going out on the streets, those servants collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests." The bad who were excluded because they were considered to be impure from participation in the worship with the Jews, are now invited, specifically, by the king to participate in the feast. In the context of that time, the bad were the pagans. They also, are invited to participate in the wedding feast.

- *Matthew 22: 11-14: The wedding garment.* These verses tell us that the king went into the wedding hall and saw someone who was not wearing a wedding garment. And the king asked: "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And he was silent. The story says that the man was bound hands and feet and thrown into the darkness outside. And the story concludes: "Many are invited but not all are chosen".

Some scholars think that it is a question of a second parable which was added to lessen the impression which one has after the first parable, which speaks about "the good and the bad" who enter into the feast (Mt 22: 10). Even if one admits that it is not the observance of the Law which gives us salvation, but rather faith in the gratuitous love of God, that, in no way, diminishes the need for purity of heart as a condition to be able to appear before God.

Personal Questions

- Who are the persons who are normally invited to our feasts? Why? Who are the persons who are not invited to our feasts? Why?
- Which are the reasons which today prevent many persons from participation in society and in the Church? Which are some of the reasons that persons give to exclude themselves from the duty to participate in the community? Are those reasons just?

Concluding Prayer

Do not thrust me away from your presence,
do not take away from me your spirit of holiness. Give me back the joy of your salvation,
sustain in me a generous spirit. (Ps 51: 11-12)

Friday, August 19, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,
may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared
for us beyond all our imagining.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 22: 34-40

The Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to put
him to the test, one of them put a further question, 'Master, which is the greatest
commandment of the Law?'

Jesus said to him, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second
resembles it: You must love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments
hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.'

Reflection

- The text is enlightened. Jesus is in Jerusalem and precisely in the Temple where a
process between he and his adversaries is taking place, the chief priests and the
Scribes (20: 18; 21: 15), between the chief priests and the elders of the people (21: 23) and
between the chief priests and the Pharisees (21: 45). The point of controversy of the
debate is: the identity of Jesus or of the Son of David, the origin of his identity, and,
therefore, the question regarding the nature of the Kingdom of God. The evangelist
presents this plot of debates with a sequence of controversies that present a growing
rhythm: the tribute to be paid to Caesar (22: 15-22), the resurrection of the dead (22: 23-
33), the greatest commandment (22: 34-40), the Messiah, son and Lord of David (22: 41-
46). The protagonists of the first three discussions are representatives of the official
Judaism who try to place Jesus in difficulty on some crucial questions. These disputes
are addressed to Jesus in so far as he is "Master" (*Rabbi*), this title tells the reader the
understanding that the interlocutors have of Jesus. But Jesus takes this occasion to

lead them to ask themselves a more crucial question: the last time they took position concerning his identity (22: 41-46).

- The greatest commandment. On the trail of the Sadducees who have preceded, the Pharisees ask Jesus a burning question: which is the greatest commandment? The Rabbis always first made evident the multiplicity of the prescriptions (248 commandments) the question is asked to Jesus regarding which is the fundamental precept. Just the same the Rabbis themselves had created a true survey to reduce them as far as possible: David lists eleven (Ps 15: 2-5), Isaiah six (Is 33: 15), Micah three (Mi 6: 8), Amos two (Am 5: 4) and Habakkuk only one (Hab 2: 4). But the intention of the Pharisees regarding their question, goes beyond every type of survey, it is a question of the essence itself of the prescriptions. Jesus, in answering binds together love of God and love of neighbor, so much so as to unite them in only one, but without renouncing to give priority to the first one, which subordinates, in a close way, the second one. Thus, all the prescriptions of the Law, they were 613, are placed in relationship with this unique commandment: the whole Law finds its significance and foundation in the one of love. Jesus carries out a process of simplification of all the precepts of the Law: anyone who puts into practice the only commandment of love does not only observe the Law, but also the prophets (v. 40). Just the same, the novelty of the response is not so much in the material content as in its realization: in Jesus, the love of God and love of neighbor have their own context, their last solidity. That is to say, that God's love and of neighbor, shown and realized in some way in his person, guides man to place himself before God and before others through love. The only commandment in two, God's love and love for neighbor, become the supporting column, not only of the Scriptures, but also of the life of the Christian.

Personal Questions

- Is love for God and for neighbor only a vague sentiment, an emotion, a passing motion or a reality that affirms your whole person: heart, will, intelligence and human relationships?
- You were created out of love. Are you aware that your fulfilment takes place in God's love, to love Him with the whole heart, with the whole soul, with the whole mind? Such a love demands a confirmation of charity toward the brothers and sisters and their situation of life. Do you practice this in daily life?

Concluding Prayer

Let them thank Yahweh for his faithful love, for his wonders for the children of Adam! He has fed the hungry to their hearts' content, filled the starving with good things. (Ps 107: 8-9)

Saturday, August 20, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,

may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 23: 1-12

Then addressing the crowds and his disciples Jesus said, 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do and observe what they tell you; but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader headbands and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honor at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted respectfully in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. 'You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.

Reflection

Today's Gospel is part of a long criticism of Jesus against the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23: 1-39). Luke and Mark mention only a few lines of this criticism against the religious heads of the time. It is only the Gospel of Matthew which has a longer presentation of this. This very severe text makes us foresee the polemics which existed in the communities of Matthew with the communities of the Jews of Galilee and Syria of that time.

In reading this text, which is strongly contrary to the one of the Pharisees, we have to be very attentive so as not to be unjust against the Jewish People. We Christians, for centuries, have had attitudes against the Jews and, for this reason, against the Christians. What is important in meditating these texts is to discover their objective. Jesus condemns the lack of coherence and of sincerity in the relationship with God and with the neighbor. He is speaking about hypocrisy, that of yesterday as well as that of today, of our hypocrisy!

- Matthew 23: 1-3: *The basic error: they say, but they do not do.* Jesus addresses himself to the multitude and to the disciples and criticizes the Scribes and the Pharisees. The reason for attacking them is the incoherence between their words and their acts. They speak but they do not do. Jesus recognizes the authority and the knowledge of the Scribes *"The Scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses! You must, therefore, do and observe what they tell you, but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach"*.
- Matthew 23: 4-7: *The fundamental error is manifested in diverse ways.* The fundamental error is incoherence: *"They say, but they do not do"*. Jesus enumerates the diverse points which reveal this incoherence. Some Scribes and Pharisees imposed heavy laws upon the people. They knew the Laws well, but they did not practice them; neither did they use their knowledge to lessen the weight imposed upon the people. They did everything possible to be seen and praised, they wore special tunics for prayer, and they liked the first places and to be greeted in the public squares. They wanted to be called "Teacher". They represented a type of community which maintained, legitimized, and nourished the difference of social classes. It

legitimized the privileges of the great and the inferior position of the little ones. Now, if there is something which displeases Jesus, it is appearances which deceive.

- Matthew 23: 8-12: *How to overcome the fundamental error.* How should a Christian community be? All the community functions should be assumed as a service: *"The greatest among you must be your servant!"* You should call nobody Teacher (Rabbi), nor Father, nor Guide; because the community of Jesus has to maintain, legitimize and nourish not the differences, but rather the fraternal spirit. This is the fundamental Law:
 - "You are all brothers and sisters!" The fraternal spirit comes from the experience that Jesus is Father, and makes of all of us brothers and sisters. "Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up."
 - The group of the Pharisees! The group of the Pharisees was born in the II century before Christ, with the proposal of a more perfect observance of the Law of God, especially regarding the prescriptions on purity. They were more open to novelty than the Sadducees. For example, they accepted faith in the Resurrection and faith in the angels, something which the Sadducees did not accept. The life of the Pharisees was an exemplary witness: they prayed and studied the Law during eight hours a day; they worked eight hours in order to be able to survive; they dedicated eight hours to rest. This is the reason why people respected them very much. And in this way, they helped people to keep their own identity and not to lose it, in the course of centuries.
 - The so-called Pharisaic mentality. With time, the Pharisees took hold of power and no longer listened to the appeals of the people, nor did they allow them to speak. The word "Pharisee" means "separated". Their observance was so strict and rigorous that they separated themselves from the rest of the people. This is why they were called "separated." From this comes the expression "pharisaic mentality". It is typical of the persons who think to obtain justice through the rigid and rigorous observance of the Law. Generally, they are persons who are afraid, who do not have the courage to assume the risk of liberty and of the responsibility. They hide themselves behind the Law and the authority. When these persons obtain an important function, they become harsh and insensitive and indifferent to hide their own imperfection.
 - Rabbi, Guide, Teacher, Father. These are four titles that Jesus prohibits people to use. Today, in Church, the priests are called "Father." Many study in the University of the Church and obtain the title of "Doctor" (Teacher). Many persons receive spiritual direction and take advice from persons who are called "Spiritual directors" (Guides). What is important is to take into account the reason which impelled Jesus to prohibit the use of these titles. If these were used by persons in order to affirm their position of authority and their power, these persons would be in error and would be criticized by Jesus. If these titles were used to nourish and deepen the fraternal spirit and service, they would not be criticized by Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Which is my reason for living and working in community?
- How does the community help me to correct and to improve my motivations?

Concluding Prayer

I am listening.
What is God's message?
Yahweh's message is peace for his people,
for his faithful, if only they renounce their folly. (Ps 85: 8)

Sunday, August 21, 2022

2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

LECTIO

Opening Prayer:

We come before you, Father, and because we do not know how to talk to you, to help us we use the words your Son Jesus pronounced on our behalf. Help us to listen to the upsetting message of this word: «Try your best to enter by the narrow door, because I tell you, many will try to enter and will not succeed». This is a word you repeat to everyone who listens to your Son's Gospel. Help us to understand it. So that we may be able to read your Scripture and savor it, feel it burn like a fire in us, we implore you, Father, send us your Spirit. And you Mary, Mother of contemplation who have kept the words and events of Jesus in your heart for a long time, grant us to contemplate the Word, to listen to it and allow it to penetrate our hearts.

Reading of the Gospel – Luke 13: 22-30

22 He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, 24 "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When once the householder has risen up and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us.' He will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' 27 But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!' 28 There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. 29 And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

A Few Moments of Prayerful Silence:

To listen devoutly to the voice of God, we need silence and interior calm. We need to create in our hearts «a quiet corner where we can make contact with God» (E. Stein) and be able to establish deep communication between ourselves and the Word. If we do not stand before God in silence, in silence and gazing on his face, we will form words but we will be saying nothing.

MEDITATIO

A Key to the Reading:

This Sunday's passage is found in the second part of Luke's Gospel where Jerusalem, the object of Jesus' existential and theological journey, is mentioned several times of which three are part of the post-Paschal liturgical way: Lk 9:51 (13th Sunday of Ordinary Time "C"), Lk 13:22-30 (21st Sunday of Ordinary Time "C") and Lk 17:11 (28th Sunday of Ordinary Time "C"). The proclamation of a journey, placed at the beginning of the Gospel text, helps the readers to remember that they are also journeying towards Jerusalem with Jesus. The journey towards the holy city is the thread that runs through the whole of the second part of the Gospel (Lk 9:51-19,46) and most of what is said is introduced by verbs of movement presenting Jesus and his disciples as pilgrims or itinerants. Jesus' journey towards the holy city is not strictly speaking a geographical journey, but corresponds to a theological and spiritual journey. This kind of journey involves also the disciple and the reader of the Gospel: going on «the journey» of Jesus makes us as if like itinerants whose mandate is to preach the Gospel.

On this journey Jesus faces conflicts with the Jewish world, and in Lk 13:10-30 includes three episodes: 13:10-17 (the healing of the crippled woman), 18-21 (the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast) and in 22-30 (the discourse on the narrow door). This last is the text the liturgy of the Word presents to us this Sunday. It begins with the journey as a background to Jesus' words as he went «through towns and villages...teaching» (v.22). It is characteristic of Luke to note Jesus' ministry as a journey.

Now, at one stage on this journey towards Jerusalem, someone puts a question to Jesus: how many will be saved? Jesus' reply does not mention any number of those who will be saved but contains an exhortation and a warning, «try», points to an attitude to be assumed: «to enter by the narrow door». This image recalls in the mind of the disciples and of Luke's community the need to address their preoccupation with the burdensome commitment that the journey of faith demands. Immediately after this, Jesus introduces the true and proper teaching with a parable that is associated with the image of the narrow door, the parable of the master of the house who, after having closed the door of the house, will not allow anyone in (v.25). This detail brings to mind the end of the parable of the ten virgins in Mt 25,10-12. These examples tell us that there is an intermediate time when we must commit ourselves to receive salvation before the door is closed definitively and irreversibly.

Partaking in even the founding moments in the life of the community, like at the supper of the Lord («we have eaten and drunk in your presence») and the proclamation of the Word («you have taught in our squares»), if not backed up by a life commitment, cannot avoid the danger of condemnation. Luke's Gospel likes to present Jesus as taking part at the table of those who invite him, but not all who sit at the table with him have an automatic right to the definitive salvation that he proclaimed through the image of a banquet. Thus, also, having heard his teaching does not automatically guarantee salvation. In fact, in Luke, listening to Jesus' word is an indispensable condition for discipleship, but it is not enough. Disciples need to make the commitment to follow the master, keeping his teaching and bearing fruit through perseverance (Lk 8:15).

Those who have not been able to enter by the narrow door before it is closed are called «doers of iniquity»: they are those who did not commit themselves to putting God's plan into practice. Their future situation is presented figuratively with an expression that tells of the irreversibility of their not being saved: «Then there will be weeping and grinding of teeth» (v.28).

Interesting is the reference to the great biblical patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and to all the prophets: they will enter and be part of the kingdom of God. If to Jesus' contemporaries this affirmation could seem to indicate that salvation was the privilege

of the Jews, for Christians of Luke's community it constituted a warning not to think of salvation as an automatic consequence. The kingdom that Jesus proclaims becomes the place where the disciples meet and come from the «east and west, from north and south» (v.29). Jesus' discourse introduces a dynamic of salvation that involves the whole of humanity and is addressed especially to the poor and sick (Lk 14:15-24). Luke, more than the other Evangelists, is sensitive to the proclamation of a universal salvation and presents Jesus as offering the promise of salvation no longer just to Israel, but to all peoples. The final affirmation comes as a sign of this changed condition of salvation: «there are those now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last» (v.30). This affirmation shows how God upsets and turns upside down the mechanisms of human logic: no one must trust in a position attained, but everyone is invited to constantly tune into the Gospel's wavelength.

Some Questions:

- The narrow door of salvation reminds us of the necessity of all to be committed to receiving this gift. The image does not say that God wishes to make it difficult to obtain salvation, but it emphasizes the co-responsibility of men and women, the concreteness of the effort involved in this commitment to obtain salvation. According to Cyprian, going through the narrow door means a transformation: «*Who does not wish to be transformed as soon as possible into the image of Christ?*». The image of the narrow door is a symbol of the work of transformation to which the believer is committed through a slow and progressive effort on him/herself in order to refine him/herself and be molded by the Gospel. More correctly, the one who does not commit him/herself to any kind of reciprocal relationship with God, with others and with the world, risks perdition. Often the temptation is to propose other doors, seemingly easier and more useful, like those of selfishness, avoiding God's friendship and relationships with others. Are you committed to build relationships or are you intent on being selfish? Are you convinced that salvation is offered you through the relational dimension of communion with God and others?
- Salvation is possible for all. Everyone may attain it, but such a gift from Jesus requires an effective and personal response from us. In Jesus' teaching we do not find the use of any threat to render people aware regarding salvation, but only an invitation to be fully aware of the extraordinary and irreversible opportunity of the gift of mercy and life before God and in dialogue with Him. Towards what and towards whom is your life pointing? How do you use your freedom? Are you able to welcome God's invitation to be co-responsible for your salvation or have you surrendered to waste and perdition?
- If we consider the question of that person who asked Jesus: "Sir, will there be only few saved?", no one can consider him/herself privileged. Salvation belongs to all and all are called. The door to salvation may be closed for those who expect to enter with the unwieldy luggage of personal inconsistencies. Do you feel the desire to enter and be part of that «infinite throng from east and west who will sit at the table of the kingdom of God»? And if you see yourself as last (small, simple, sinner, bent by suffering...) if you live with love and hope, do not despair. Jesus said that the last will be first.

ORATIO

Psalm 117: 1-2

Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!
For great is his steadfast love toward us;

and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!

Closing Prayer:

Lord, grant that we may feel the life of your Word we have heard; break, we beseech you, the knots of our uncertainty, our quibbles, our “ifs” and “buts” that hold us back from entering into salvation through the narrow door. Grant that we may welcome without fear, without too many doubts, the Word of God that invites us to commit ourselves and work hard at our life of faith. Lord, grant that through the Word we have heard this Sunday, the day of the Lord, we may be freed from false security concerning our salvation and may your Word bring us joy, strengthen, purify, and save us. And you, Mary, model of those who listen and of silence, help to be alive and authentic, to understand that, in virtue of the Word, whatever is difficult becomes easy, whatever is obscure becomes light.

CONTEMPLATIO

Contemplation is the peak of any biblical reading after we have meditated and prayed. To contemplate is to enter, through listening to the Word, into a faith and love relationship with God who is life and truth and who in Christ has revealed to us his face. The Word of God unveils that hidden face in every page of Sacred Scripture. Suffice it to look in admiration, be open to the light, allow it to penetrate us. It is the ecstasy experienced before the beautiful and the good. Extend into your daily life this climate of great communication experienced with God in listening to his Word, and preserve the taste of the beauty in your dialogue with others in whatever work you do.

Monday, August 22, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,
may we love you in all things and above all things
and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 1: 26-38

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

Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called

Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.'

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

Reflection

Today is the Feast of Mary Queen. The text of the Gospel on which we meditate describes the visit of the angel to Mary (Lk 1: 26-38). The word of God comes to Mary not through a Biblical text, but rather through a profound experience of God, manifested in the visit of the Angel. In the New Testament, many times, the Angel of God is God himself. It was thanks to the meditation on the written Word of God in the Bible that Mary was capable to perceive the living Word of God in the visit of the Angel. The same thing happens today with God's visits in our life. The visits of God are frequent. But because of lack of assimilation and meditation of the written Word of God in the Bible, we are not aware of God's visit in our life. The visit of God is so present and so continuous that, many times, we do not perceive it and, because of this, we lose a great occasion to live in peace and with joy.

- Luke 1: 26-27: The word enters into our life. Luke presents the persons and the places: a Virgin called Mary, betrothed to a man called Joseph, of the House of David.
- Nazareth was a small city in Galilee. Galilee was in the periphery. The center was Judah and Jerusalem. The Angel Gabriel was sent by God to this young virgin who lived in the periphery. The name Gabriel means God is strong. The name Mary means loved by Yahweh or Yahweh is my Lord.
- The story of the visit of God to Mary begins with the expression: "In the sixth month." It refers to the "sixth month" of pregnancy of Elizabeth, relative of Mary, a woman of a certain age, who needs help. The concrete need of Elizabeth serves as a background to the whole episode. It is found at the beginning (Lk 1: 26) and at the end (Lk 1: 36, 39).
- Luke 1: 28-29: Mary's reaction. The angel had appeared to Zechariah in the Temple. The Angel appears to Mary in her house. The Word of God reaches Mary in the environment of her daily life. The Angel says: "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you!" These are words similar to those which were said to Moses (Ex 3: 12), to Jeremiah (Jr 1: 8), to Jedaiah (Jz 6: 12), to Ruth (Rt 2: 4) and to many others. These words open the horizon for the mission which these persons of the Old Testament have to carry out in the service of the People of God. Deeply disturbed by this greeting, Mary tries to understand what it means. She is realistic, she uses her head. She wants to understand. She does not simply accept any apparition or inspiration.
- Luke 1: 30-33: The explanation of the angel. "Do not be afraid, Mary!" This is always the first greeting of God to human beings: do not be afraid! Immediately after that, the angel recalls the great promises of the past which will be realized through the son who will be born from Mary. This son must receive the name of Jesus. He will be called the son of the Most High and in him finally, will be realized the Kingdom of God promised to David, which all were anxiously waiting for. This is the explanation which the Angel gave to Mary so that she would not be afraid.
- Luke 1: 34: New question asked by Mary. Mary becomes aware of the important mission which she is about to receive, but she continues to be realistic. She does not allow herself to be transported by the greatness of the offer and looks at her condition." But how can this come about? I have no knowledge of man". She

analyses the offer according to criteria that we, human beings, have available. Because, humanly speaking, this was not possible that this offer of the Word of God would be realized at that moment.

- Luke 1: 35-37: New explanation by the angel. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God." The Holy Spirit, present in God's Word since Creation (Gn 1: 2), can realize things which seem impossible. This is why, the holy One who will be born from Mary will be called Son of God. When today God's Word is received, accepted by the poor who have no studies, something new takes place thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit! Something new and surprising like the son who is born to a virgin or like the son born from Elizabeth, a woman who was already old, of whom everybody said that she could have no children! The angel adds: "And I tell you this too, your cousin Elizabeth is now in her sixth month!"
- Luke 1: 38: Mary gives herself. The response of the angel clarifies everything for Mary. She gives herself to what the angel was asking for: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord! May it be done to me according to your word". Mary calls herself Servant, handmaid of the Lord. This title comes from Isaiah, who presents the mission of the people not as a privilege, but rather like a service to others (Is 42: 1-9; 49: 3-6). Later, the son who was about to be generated at that moment, will define his mission saying: "I have not come to be served but to serve!" (Mt 20: 28). He learns from his Mother!
- Luke 1: 39 - The way that Mary finds to render service. The Word of God reaches Mary and makes her get out of self in order to serve others. She leaves the place where she was and goes toward Judah, at a distance of more than four days journey, in order to help her cousin Elizabeth. Mary begins serving and fulfils her mission in behalf of the People of God.

Personal Questions

- How do you perceive God's visit in your life? Have you been visited already? Have you been a visit from God in the life of others especially for the poor? How does this text help us to discover the visits of God in our life?
- The word of God became incarnate in Mary. How is the Word of God taking flesh in my personal life and in the life of the community?

Concluding Prayer

Let them thank Yahweh for his faithful love, for his wonders for the children of Adam! He has fed the hungry to their hearts' content, filled the starving with good things. (Ps 107: 8-9)

Tuesday, August 23, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values

that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.

In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 23: 23-26

Jesus said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You pay your tithe of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law-justice, mercy, good faith! These you should have practiced, those not neglected. You blind guides, straining out gnats and swallowing camels!

'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance. Blind Pharisee! Clean the inside of cup and dish first so that it and the outside are both clean.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents two other times that this expression was used: 'Alas for you...' when Jesus speaks against the religious leaders of his time. The two 'Alas for you...' of today denounce the lack of coherence between word and attitude, between exterior and interior. Today we continue our reflection which we began yesterday.

- Matthew 23: 23-24 - The fifth 'Alas for you...' against those who insist on the observance and forget mercy. You pay your tithe of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice, mercy and fidelity". This fifth 'Alas for you...' of Jesus is against the religious leaders of that time and can be repeated against many religious of the following century even up to our time. Many times, in the name of Jesus, we insist on details and we forget mercy. For example, Jansenism reduces lived faith to something arid, insisting on the observance and penance which led people away from the way of love. The Carmelite Sister Teresa of Lisieux grew in the Jansenism environment which marked France at the end of the XIX century. Beginning from a personal painful experience, she knew how to recover the gratuity of love of God, a force which should animate the observance of the norms from within; because without love, the observance makes an idol of God.
- Matthew 23: 25-26 - The sixth 'Alas for you...' against those who clean things on the outside and are dirty inside. "You clean the outside of the cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance. In the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus criticizes those who observe the letter of the Law and transgress the spirit of the Law. He says: "You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You shall not kill, and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say to you anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court. Anyone who calls his brother 'Fool' will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him 'Traitor' will answer for it in hell fire. You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery, but I say this to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5: 21-22. 27-28). It is not sufficient to observe the letter of the Law. It is not sufficient not to kill, not to rob, not to commit adultery, not to swear in order to be faithful to what God asks of us. The one who observes fully the Law of God is the one who, besides observing the letter, goes deeply to the root and pulls out from within "the desires of extortion and intemperance" which may lead to murder, theft, and adultery. The fullness of the law is realized in the practice of love.

Personal Questions

- There are two expressions of 'Alas for you...' two reasons to receive the criticism from Jesus. Which of these two applies to me?
- Observance and gratuity: Which of these applies to me?

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, August 24, 2022

St. Bartholomew, Apostle

Opening Prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - John 1: 45-51

The next day, Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?' Philip replied, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming he said of him, 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception.' Nathanael asked, 'How do you know me?' Jesus replied, 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree.' Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.' Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.'

And then he added, 'In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man.'

Reflection

- Jesus returned to Galilee. He met Philip and called him telling him: "Follow me!" The purpose of the call is always the same: "to follow Jesus". The first Christians sought to preserve the names of the first disciples, and of some they even kept their family names and the name of their place of origin. Philip, Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida (Jn 1: 44). Nathanael was from Cana. Today many forget the names of the persons who were at the origin of their communities. To remember the names is a way of preserving the identity.

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

Personal Questions

- Which is the title of Jesus that pleases you the most? Why?
- Have you had an intermediary between you and Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Upright in all that he does,
Yahweh acts only in faithful love. (Ps 145: 17)

Thursday, August 25, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.

In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 24: 42-51

Jesus said to his disciples: 'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. 'Who, then, is the wise and trustworthy servant whom the master placed over his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed that servant if his master's arrival finds him doing exactly that. In truth I tell you, he will put him in charge of everything he owns. But if the servant is dishonest and says to himself, "My master is taking his time," and sets about beating his fellow-servants and eating and drinking with drunkards, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.'

Reflection

The Gospel today speaks about the coming of the Lord at the end of time and exhorts us to be watchful, to watch. At the time of the first Christians, many persons thought that the end of this world was close at hand and that Jesus would have returned afterwards. Today many persons think that the end of the world is close at hand. And therefore, it is well to reflect on the meaning of vigilance, of watching.

- Matthew 24: 42: Watch. "So stay awake! Watch, because you do not know the day when your master is coming". Concerning the day and the hour of the end of the world, Jesus had said: "But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, no one but the Father!" (Mk 13: 32). Today, many people live concerned thinking about the end of the world. Have you seen when walking through the streets of the city that it is written on the walls: "Jesus will return!" And how will this coming be? After the year 1000, basing themselves on the Gospel of John, people began to say (Rev 20: 7): "1000 years have gone by, but 2000 will not pas by!" This is why, as the year 2000 approached, many were worried. There were even some people who were anguished because of the proximity of the end of the world, so much so that they committed suicide. Others, reading the Apocalypse of John, even were able to foretell the exact hour of the end. But the year 2000 came and nothing happened. The end of the world does not arrive! Many times, the affirmation "Jesus will return" is used to frighten people and oblige them to belong to a given church! Others, because they have waited so long and have speculated so much concerning the coming of Jesus, are not aware of his presence among us, in the most common things of life, in the facts of every day.
- The same problems existed in the Christian communities of the first centuries. Many persons of the communities said that the end of this world was close at hand and that Jesus would have returned. Some of the community of Thessalonica in Greece, basing themselves on the preaching of Paul said: "Jesus will return!" (1 Th 4: 13-18; 2 Th 2: 2). And this is why, there were even persons who no longer worked because they thought that the coming of the end was so close at hand, within a few days or a few weeks so, "Why work, if Jesus will return afterwards?" (cf. 2 Th 3: 11). Paul responds that it was not so simple as they imagined. And to those who had stopped working

he would say: "Anyone who does not want to work, has no right to eat!" Others remained looking up at the sky, waiting for the return of Jesus in the clouds (cf. Ac 1: 11). Others rebelled because he delayed coming back (2 P 3: 4-9). In general, the Christians lived with the expectation of the imminent coming of Jesus. Jesus was coming to realize or carry out the Final Judgement to end with the unjust history of this world and to inaugurate the new phase of history, the definitive phase of the New Heaven and the New Earth. They believed that this would have taken place within one or two generations. Many persons would still be alive when Jesus would have appeared again, glorious in Heaven (1Th 4: 16-17; Mc 9: 1). Others, tired of waiting would say: "He will never come back!" (2 P 3).

- Up until now the coming of Jesus has not arrived! How can this delay be understood? It is because they are not aware that Jesus has already returned and lives in our midst: "I am with you always, till the end of time." (Mt 28: 20). He is already at our side, in the struggle for justice, for peace, for life. The fullness has not as yet been attained, but a guarantee of the Kingdom is already in our midst. This is why, we expect with a firm hope the full liberation of humanity and of nature (Rm 8: 22-25). And while we wait and struggle, we say with certainty: "He is already in our midst" (Mt 25: 40).
- Matthew 24: 43-51: The example of the householder and of his servants. "Consider this: if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house." Jesus says this very clearly. Nobody knows anything regarding the hour: "Concerning this day and this hour, nobody knows anything, neither the angels, or the Son, but only the Father. What is important is not to know the hour of the end of this world, but rather to be capable to perceive the coming of Jesus who is already present in our midst in the person of the poor (cf. Mt 25: 40) and in so many other ways and events of our daily life. What is important is to open the eyes and to keep in mind the commitment of the good servant of whom Jesus speaks about in the parable.

Personal Questions

- On which signs do people base themselves to say that the end of the world is close at hand? Do you believe that the end of the world is close at hand?
- What can we respond to those who say that the end of the world is close at hand? Which is the force which impels you to resist and to have hope?

Concluding Prayer

Day after day I shall bless you, Lord,
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)

Friday, August 26, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 25: 1-13

Jesus said to his disciples: “Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like this: Ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones, though they took their lamps, took no oil with them, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, “Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him”. Then all those wedding attendants woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, “give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out.” But they replied, “There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves.” They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other attendants arrived later. “Lord, Lord,” they said, “open the door for us.” But He replied, “In truth I tell you I do not know you.” So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.

Reflection

Today is the Feast of Saint Edith Stein who in Carmel took the name of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. For this reason, the Gospel today narrates the parable of the ten virgins who had to welcome the bridegroom when he arrived to the wedding.

- Matthew 25: 1^a - The beginning: “At that time”. The parable begins with these two words: “At that time”. It is a question of the coming of the Son of Man (cfr. Mt 24, 37). Nobody knows when this day, this time will come, “not even the angels in Heaven nor the Son himself, but only the Father” (Mt 24, 36). The fortune tellers will not succeed in giving an estimate. The Son of Man will come as a surprise, when people less expect him (Mt 24: 44). It can be today, it can be tomorrow, that is why the last warning of the parable of the ten Virgins is: “Keep watch!” The ten girls should be prepared for anything which may happen. When the Nazi Policemen knocked at the door of the Monastery of the Carmelite Sisters of Echt in the Province of Limburgia, in the Netherlands, Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was prepared. She took on the Cross and followed the way to martyrdom in the extermination camp out of love for God and for her people. She was one of the prudent virgins of the parable.
- Matthew 25: 1b-4 - The ten virgins ready to wait for the bridegroom. The parable begins like this: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like this: ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom”. It is a question of the girls who have to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding feast. Because of this, they have to take the lamps with them, to light the way, and also to render the feast more joyful with more light. Five of them were prudent and five were foolish. This difference is seen in the way in which they prepare themselves for the role that they have to carry out. Together with the lighted lamps, the prudent ones had taken some oil in reserve, preparing themselves in this way for anything which could happen. The foolish ones took only the lamps and they did not think to take some oil in reserve with them.

- Matthew 25: 5-7 -The unforeseen delay of the arrival of the bridegroom. The bridegroom was late. He had not precisely indicated the hour of his arrival. While waiting the attendants went to sleep. But the lamps continue to burn and use the oil until gradually they turned off. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, there was a cry: "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him!" All the attendants woke up, and began to prepare their lamps which were burning out. They had to put in some of the oil they had brought in reserve so that the lamps would not burn out.
- Matthew 25: 8-9 - The different reactions before the delay of the bridegroom. It is only now that the foolish attendants become aware that they should have brought some oil in reserve with them. They went to ask the prudent ones: "Give us some of your oil, our lamps are going out". The prudent ones could not respond to this request, because at that moment what was important was not for the prudent ones to share their oil with the foolish ones, but that they would be ready to accompany the bridegroom to the place of the feast. For this reason they advised them: "You had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves."
- Matthew 25: 10-12 - The fate of the prudent attendants and that of the foolish ones. The foolish ones followed the advice of the prudent ones and went to buy some oil. During their brief absence the bridegroom arrived, and the prudent ones were able to accompany him and to enter together with him to the wedding feast. But the door was closed behind them. When the others arrived, they knocked at the door and said: "Lord, Lord, open the door for us!" and they received the response: "In truth I tell you, I do not know you".
- Matthew 25: 13 - The final recommendation of Jesus for all of us. The story of this parable is very simple and the lesson is evident: "So stay awake and watch, because you do not know either the day or the hour". The moral of the story: do not be superficial, look beyond the present moment, and try to discover the call of God even in the smallest things of life, even the oil which may be lacking in the small light or lamp.

Personal Questions

- Has it happened to you sometimes in your life to think about having oil in reserve for your lamp?
- Do you know the life of Saint Edith Stein, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross?

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, August 27, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
 help us to seek the values

that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.

In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 25: 14-30

Jesus said to his disciples: 'It is like a man about to go abroad who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to a third one, each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out on his journey. The man who had received the five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. The man who had received two made two more in the same way. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Now a long time afterwards, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with five talents; here are five more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness." Next the man with the two talents came forward. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness."

Last came forward the man who had the single talent. "Sir," said he, "I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back."

But his master answered him, "You wicked and lazy servant! So, you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have got my money back with interest. So now, take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has. As for this good-for-nothing servant, throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents to us the parable of the talents. This parable was between two other parables: the Parable of the Ten virgins (Mt 25: 1-13) and the Parable of the final Judgement (Mt 25: 31-46). These three parables clarify and orientate persons concerning the coming of the Kingdom. The parable of the Ten Virgins insists on vigilance: the Kingdom may arrive at any moment. The Parable of the final Judgement says that in order to possess the Kingdom it is necessary to accept the little ones. The Parable of the talents orientates on what to do to make the Kingdom grow. It speaks of the gifts and the charisma which persons receive from God. Every person has qualities, knows something that he/she can teach others. Nobody is only a pupil; nobody is only a teacher. We all learn from one another.

A key to understand the parable: one of the things which has greater influence on the life of the people is the idea which we have of God. Among the Jews who followed the Pharisees, some imagined that God was a severe judge, who treated persons according to the merit they had gained through the observance of the Law. That produced fear in

the persons and prevented them from growing. And, especially, prevented them from opening a space within them, to receive and accept the new experience of God which Jesus communicated. In order to help these persons, Matthew tells the story of the talents.

- Matthew 25: 14-15 - *The door of entrance in the parable.* Jesus tells the story of a man, who before going abroad, entrusted his goods to his servants, giving them five, two and one talents, according to the capacity of each one. One talent was equal to 34 kg. of gold, which is not something small! In last instance, each one receives the same amount, because he receives *"according to his capacity"*. Anyone who has a big cup, receives a full cup. The man went on his journey, abroad where he remained for a long time. The story produces a certain moment of suspense. One does not know for what purpose the man entrusts his money to the servants; neither does one know the end.
- Matthew 25: 16-18 - *The way of acting of each one of the servants.* The two first ones work and make the money produce a double amount. But the one who received one talent buried it so as not to lose it. It is a question of the goods of the Kingdom which are given to persons and to the communities according to their capacity. Everyone receives some good of the Kingdom, but not all respond in the same way!
- Matthew 25: 19-23 - *Rendering an account of the first and the second servants, and response of the master.* After a long time, the man returned. The first two servants say the same thing: *"Sir, you entrusted me with five/two talents, here are five/two more that I have made"*. And the master gives the same response: *"Well done, good and trustworthy servant, you have shown you are trustworthy in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness"*.
- Matthew 25: 24-25 - *Rendering of account of the third servant.* The third servant comes and says: *"Sir, I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered, so I was afraid and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is!"* In this phrase we have a mistaken idea of God which is criticized by Jesus. The servant considers God as a severe master. Before such a God, the human being is afraid and hides behind the exact and narrow-minded observance of the Law. The person thinks that acting in this way, the severity of the legislator will not punish him. In reality, such a person does not believe in God, but believes only in self and in the observance of the Law. This person closes up in self, separates herself from God and cannot be concerned about others. This person becomes incapable to grow and develop like a free person. This false image of God isolates the human being, kills the community, puts an end to joy and impoverishes life.
- Matthew 25: 26-27 - *The response of the Master to the third servant.* The response of the master is ironic. He says: *"Wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered; you should have deposited my money with the bankers and on my return I would have got my money back with interest!"* The third servant was not coherent with the severe image which he had of God. If he imagined that God was severe, he should have, at least, placed the money in the bank. Then, he is condemned not by God but by the mistaken idea that he had of God and which makes him more immature and fearful than what he should have been. It was not possible for him to be coherent with the erroneous image which he had of God, because fear dehumanized and paralyzed life.
- Matthew 25: 28-30 - *The last word of the Lord which clarifies the parable.* The master orders to take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has." This is the key which

clarifies everything. In reality, the talents, the “money of the master”, the goods of the Kingdom, are love, service, sharing. It is everything which helps the community to grow and reveals the presence of God. Anyone who closes himself in self out of fear of losing the little that he has, at the end will lose even the little that he has. But the person who does not think of self, and gives herself to others, grows and receives in turn, in an unexpected way, everything which she has given and even more. Anyone who loses his life will find it, and anyone who has the courage to lose his life will find it”.

The different money of the Kingdom. There is no difference between those who have received more and those who have received less. All have their gift according to their capacity. What is important is that this gift be placed at the service of the Kingdom and make the goods of the Kingdom grow. These gifts are love, fraternal spirit, sharing. The principal key of the parable does not consist in making the talents render something, but rather in relating with God in a correct way. The two first servants ask for nothing, they do not seek their own good, they do not want things for themselves, they do not close up in self, they do not calculate. In the most natural way, almost without being aware and without seeking their own merit, they begin to work, in such a way that the gift received from God may render for God and for the Kingdom. The third servant is afraid, and because of this does nothing. According to the norms of the ancient law, he acts correctly. He responds to the exigencies. He loses nothing and gains nothing. And because of this he loses even what he had. The Kingdom is a risk. Anyone who does not want to run risks will lose the Kingdom!

Personal Questions

- In our community, do we try to know and value the gifts of each person? Is our community a place where persons are able to make known their talents and make them available to others? Sometimes, the gifts of some generate envy and competitiveness in others. How do we react?
- How is the following phrase to be understood: *“For anyone who has will be given more and will have in abundance; but anyone who does not have will be taken away even what he has”*?

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, August 28, 2022

22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Listening to the Text

Initial Prayer:

Lord, we all have an insatiable need to listen to you, and you know it, because your yourself has created us like that. “You alone have words of eternal life” (Jn 6: 68). We believe in these words, we are hungry and thirsty for these words; for these words, in

humility and love, we commit all our fidelity. "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3: 9). It is the frantic prayer of Samuel who does not know; ours is somewhat different, but it has been precisely your voice, your Word, which has changed the shaking of the ancient prayer in the yearning for communion of a son who cries to his Father: Speak for your son is listening.

Reading of the Gospel – Luke 14: 1, 7-14:

1 Now it happened that on a Sabbath day he had gone to share a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees; and they watched him closely.

7 He then told the guests a parable, because he had noticed how they picked the places of honor. He said this, 8 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in the place of honor. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, 9 and the person who invited you both may come and say, "Give up your place to this man." And then, to your embarrassment, you will have to go and take the lowest place. 10 No; when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that, when your host comes, he may say, "My friend, move up higher." Then, everyone with you at the table will see you honored. 11 For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be raised up.' 12 Then he said to his host, 'When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relations or rich neighbors, in case they invite you back and so repay you. 13 No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; 14 then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you and so you will be repaid when the upright rise again.'

Moment of Prayerful Silence:

In order to be affected by the word of Christ and so that the Word made flesh, who is Christ, can dwell in our heart and that we can adhere, it is necessary that there be listening and profound silence.

The Word is Enlightened (Lectio)

Context:

The parable on the choice of place is narrated on a Saturday when Jesus is already in Jerusalem, where the Paschal Mystery will be fulfilled, where the Eucharist of the new Covenant will be celebrated, to which then follows, the encounter with the living one and the entrusting of mission of the disciples which prolongs thus the historical mission of Jesus. The light of the Passover makes all those who are called to represent him as servant, *diakonos*, within the community, gathered around the table, to see the road that the Lord follows. It is the theme of the guests at table or of joyful living together of Saint Luke. Jesus has realized the most beautiful reality, proclaimed and taught at table in a joyful, sociable frame.

In chapter 14, Luke, with his art of a capable narrator, paints a picture, in which he superimposed two images: Jesus at table defines the face of the new community, convoked around the Eucharistic table. The page is subdivided in two scenes: first, the invitation to dinner in the house of one of the chief Pharisees, on a feast day, Saturday (Lk 14: 15-16), which also concerns the problem of the guests: who will participate at the table of the Kingdom? This is prepared beginning now in the relationship with Jesus, who convokes around himself the persons in the community-Church.

Exegesis:

- **Saturday a day of feast and of liberation**

This is the passage in Luke: *"On a Sabbath day he had gone to share a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees; and they watched him closely."* (Lk 14: 1). On a

feast day Jesus is invited by the one who is responsible for the movement of the observant or Pharisees. Jesus is at table. The first episode takes place in this context: the healing of a man with dropsy prevented by his physical disability to participate at table. Those who are sick in their body are excluded from the community by the observants as the Rule of Qumran says. The meal on Saturday has a festive and sacred character especially for the observant of the Law. In fact, on Saturday, there is a weekly remembrance of Exodus and of the creation. Jesus, precisely on that Saturday gives back freedom and reintegrates in full health the man with dropsy.

He, therefore, justifies his gesture before the teachers and the observant of the Law with these words: "*Which of you here if his ass or ox falls into a well, will not pull it out on a Sabbath day?*" God is interested in persons and not only in the property or possessions of man. Saturday is not reduced to external observance of the sacred rest, but is in favor of man. With this concern turned toward man, is also given the key to define the criteria of convocation in this community symbolized by the table: How to choose the place? Whom to invite and who participates at the end in the Banquet of the Kingdom? The gesture of Jesus is a program: Saturday is made for man. On Saturday he does that which is the fundamental significance of the celebration of the memory of the getting out of Egypt and of creation.

- **On the choice of places and of the guests**

The criteria to choose the places are not based on precedence, on the roles or the fame or renown, but are inspired on the acts of God who promotes the last ones, "*because the one who raises himself up will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be raised up*" (Lk 14: 11). This principle which closes the parable of the new etiquette, that of the turning over of the worldly criteria, refers to God's action by means of the passive form "*will be raised up*". God raises up the little ones and the poor as Jesus has done introducing the man with dropsy, who was excluded, to the table to eat together in the Sabbatical feast.

Then we have the criteria for the choice of guests. The criteria of recommendation and of corporative solidarity are excluded: "*Do not invite your friends, or your brothers or your relations or rich neighbors...*" "*On the contrary, when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind...*" (Lk 14: 12, 13).

The list begins with the poor, who in Luke's Gospel are the beneficiaries of the Beatitudes: "*Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven*". In the list of the guests the poor are mentioned as the physically disabled, the handicapped, excluded from the confraternity of the Pharisees and from the ritual of the time (cf. 2 Sam 5: 8; Lv 21: 18).

This same list is found in the parable of the great banquet: the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame, take the place of the respectful guests. (Lk 14: 21).

This second parable on the criteria of choice of the guests is proclaimed with this proclamation: "*Then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you and so you will be repaid when the upright rise again*" (Lk 14: 14), at the end of time when God will manifest his sovereignty communicating eternal life. At this point there is a phrase of one of the invited guests which is like a souvenir between the two small parables and the parable of the great banquet: "*Blessed is anyone who will share the meal in the Kingdom of God*" (Lk 14: 15). This word which recalls the Beatitude of the Kingdom and the condition to participate in it through the image of the banquet, "*to eat the bread*", introduces the parable of the great banquet in its eschatological meaning. But this final banquet, which is the Kingdom of God and the full communion with Him, is prepared at present by sitting and eating together at the same table. Jesus narrates this parable to interpret the convocation of men with the announcement of the Kingdom of God and through his historical action.

The Word Enlightens Me (To Meditate)

- When Jesus was in the house of the Pharisee who had invited him to eat observes how those invited try to get the first places. It is a very common attitude in life, not only when one is at table: each one tries also to get the first place regarding attention and consideration on the part of others. Everyone, beginning by ourselves, we have this experience. But let us pay attention, the words of Jesus which exhort to abstain from seeking the first place are not simply an exhortation of good education; they are a rule of life. Jesus clarifies that it is the Lord to give to each one the dignity and the honor, we are not the ones to give it to ourselves, perhaps claiming our own merits. Like he did in the Beatitudes, Jesus turns over the judgement and the behavior of this world. The one who recognizes himself a sinner and humble is raised up by God, but, who instead intends to get recognition and the first places risks to exclude himself from the banquet.
- “Do not take your seat in the place of honor, a more distinguished person than you may have been invited... then to your embarrassment you will have to go and take the lowest place. (Lk 14: 8-9). It seems that Jesus takes as a joke the childish efforts of the guests who struggle in order to get the best positions; but his intention has a more serious purpose. Speaking to the leaders of Israel he shows which is the power which builds up the relations of the Kingdom: “Whoever raises himself up will be humbled and who humbles himself will be raised up” (Lk 14: 11). He describes to them the “good use of power” founded on humility. It is the same power which God releases in humanity in the Incarnation: “At the service of the will of the Father, in order that the whole creation returns to him, the Word did not count “equality with God something to be grasped, but he emptied himself taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death on the cross” (Phil 2: 6-8). This glorious kenosis of the Son of God has the capacity to heal, to reconcile and to liberate all creation. Humility is the force which builds up the Kingdom and the community of the disciples, the Church.

To Pray – Psalm 23

The Psalm seems to turn around a title: the Lord is my shepherd”. The Saints are the image of the flock on the way: they are accompanied by the goodness and the loyalty of God, until they definitively reach the house of the Father (L. Alonso Schökel, The Psalms of trust, Dehoniana Books, Bologna 2006, 54).

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, thanks to your light which descended on me, it flooded my life with the conviction that I am a sinner. I have understood more deeply that your Son Jesus is my Savior.

My will, my spirit, all my being hold Him tightly. May the omnipotence of your love, conquer me, Oh my God. Overthrow the resistance which frequently renders me rebellious, the nostalgia which impels me to be indolent, lazy; may your Love conquer everything so that I can be a happy trophy of your victory.

My hope is anchored in your fidelity. Whether I have to grow in the whirlwinds of civilization, I have converted into a flower and your watchman in this Spring which has blossomed, sprout out from the Blood of your Son. You look at each one of us, you take care of us, you watch over us; you, the Cultivator of this Spring of Eternal Life: you, Father of Jesus, and our Father; you, my Father!" (*Anastasio Ballestrero*)

Monday, August 29, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 6: 17-29

Now it was this same Herod who had sent to have John arrested and had had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife.' As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him, but she was not able to do so, because Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him.

An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you.' And he swore on her oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom.'

She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist.' The girl at once rushed back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, immediately, on a dish.' The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests; he was reluctant to break his word to her.

At once the king sent one of the bodyguards with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in the prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Reflection

Today we commemorate the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist. The Gospel gives a description of how John the Baptist was killed, without a process, during a banquet, victim of the corruption and arrogance of Herod and of his court.

- Mark 6: 17-20: The cause of the imprisonment and murdering of John. Herod was an employee of the Roman Empire, who commanded in Palestine since the year 63 before Christ. Caesar was the Emperor of Rome. He insisted above all, in an efficient administration which would provide revenue for the Empire and for him. The concern of Herod was his own promotion and his security. This is why he repressed any type of corruption. He liked to be called the benefactor of the people, but in reality, he was a tyrant (cf. Lk 22: 25). Flavio Giuseppe, a writer of that time, informs that the reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was the fear that Herod had of a popular uprising or revolt. The denunciation of John the Baptist's against the depraved morality of Herod (Mk 6: 18), was the drop which made the glass overflow, and John was imprisoned.
- Mark 6: 21-29: The plot of the murderer. The anniversary and banquet of the feast, with dancing and orgy were the occasion for the murdering of John. It was an environment in which the powerful of the kingdom met together and in which the alliances were formed. In the feast participated "the great of the court, two officials and two important persons from Galilee". This was the environment in which the murdering of John the Baptist was decided. John, the prophet, was a living denunciation of that corrupt system, and this is why he was eliminated under the pretext of a personal vengeance. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of one man who had no control of self. In the enthusiasm of the feast, of the celebration and of wine, Herod makes a promise by oath to a young girl, a dancer. Superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to keep the promise made by oath. For Herod, the life of the subjects was worthless. This is how Mark gives an account of the fact as it happened and leaves the communities the task of drawing the conclusion.

Between lines, the Gospel today gives much information on the time in which Jesus lived and on the way in which the power was exercised on the part of the powerful of that time. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod, the Great, from the year 4 before Christ until the year 39 after Christ, 43 years! During the whole time of the life of Jesus on earth there was no change of Government in Galilee! Herod was absolute lord of everything, and did not render an account to anyone, he did as he pleased. In him there was arrogance, lack of ethics, absolute power, without any control on the part of the people!

Herod constructed a new capital, called Tiberiades. Seffori the ancient capital, was destroyed by the Romans in retaliation against the popular revolt. This happened when Jesus was about seven years old. Tiberiade, the new capital, was inaugurated thirteen years later, when Jesus was approximately 20 years old. The capital was given that name in order to please Tiberius, the Emperor of Rome. Tiberiade was a strange place in Galilee. That was the place where the king, "the great of the court", the officials, the important people of Galilee lived (Mc 6: 21). The landowners, the soldiers, the policemen lived there and also the judges, who, many times were insensitive, and indifferent (Lk 18: 1-4). The taxes and tributes and the products of the people were channeled there. It was there that Herod held his orgies of death (Mk 6: 21-29). The Gospel does not say the Jesus entered the city.

During the 43 years of the government of Herod, a class of officials, faithful to the project of the king, was created: the Scribes, the merchants, the landowners, the tax collectors on the market, the tax collectors or publicans, the militia, policemen, judges, promoters, local heads. The majority of these persons lived in the capital and

enjoyed the privileges which Herod offered, for example exemption from taxes. Others lived in the villages. In every village or city there was a group of persons who supported the government. Several Scribes and Pharisees were bound to the system and to the politics of the Government. In the Gospels, the Pharisees appear together with the Herodians (Mk 3: 6; 8: 15; 12: 13), and this shows the existing alliance between the religious and the civil powers. The life of the people in the villages of Galilee was very controlled, both by the government and by religion. Much courage was necessary to begin something new, as John and Jesus did! It was the same thing as to attract on oneself the anger of the privileged ones, both those of the religious power as those of the civil power, both at local and state levels.

Personal Questions

- Do you know any persons who died victims of corruption and the dominion of the powerful? And here, among us, in our community and in the Church, are there some victims of authoritarianism or of the excess of power? Give an example.
- Superstition, corruption, cowardice marked the exercise of power of Herod. Compare this with the exercise of religious and civil power today, in the various levels both of society and of the Church.

Concluding Prayer

In you, Yahweh, I take refuge, I shall never be put to shame.
In your saving justice rescue me,
deliver me, listen to me and save me. (Ps 71: 1-2)

Tuesday, August 30, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
every good thing comes from you. Fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith,
and by your constant care
protect the good you have given us.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and
the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 4: 31-37

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because his word carried authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean devil, and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked it, saying, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the devil, throwing the man into the middle, went out of him without hurting him at all.

Astonishment seized them and they were all saying to one another, 'What is it in his words? He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power and they come out.' And the news of him travelled all through the surrounding countryside.

Reflection

In today's Gospel we can see the facts more closely: the admiration of the people because of the way Jesus taught and the cure of a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit. Not all the Evangelists give this account in the same way. For Luke, the first miracle is the peace with which Jesus liberates himself from the threat of death on the part of the people of Nazareth (Lk 4: 29-30) and the cure of the possessed man (Lk 4: 33-35). For Matthew, the first miracle is the cure of the sick and of the possessed (Mt 4: 23) or, more specifically, the cure of a leper (Mt 8: 1-4). For Mark, the miracle was the expulsion of the devil (Mk 1: 23-26). For John, the first miracle was Cana, where Jesus changed the water into wine (Jn 2: 1-11). Thus, in the way of narrating things, each Evangelist, accordingly, indicates which was the greatest concern of Jesus.

- Luke 4: 31: The change of Jesus toward Capernaum: "Jesus descends to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and on Saturday he taught the people". Matthew says that Jesus went to live in Capernaum (Mt 4: 13). He changed his residence. Capernaum was a small city on the crossroad between two important streets: the one coming from Asia Minor and was leading to Petra on the south of Transjordan, and the other one coming from the region of the two rivers: the Tigris and the Euphrates, and descended toward Egypt. The change toward Capernaum facilitated the contact with the people and the diffusion of the Good News.
- Luke 4: 32: Admiration of the people at the teaching of Jesus. The first thing that people perceive is that Jesus teaches in a different way. It is not so much the content that strikes them, but rather his way of teaching: "Jesus speaks with authority". Mark adds that because of his different way of teaching; Jesus created a critical conscience among the people in regard to the religious authority of his time. The people perceived and compared: "He teaches with authority, unlike the Scribes" (Mk 1: 22, 27). The Scribes taught quoting authority. Jesus does not quote any authority; rather he speaks starting from his experience of God and of his life.
- Luke 4: 33-35: Jesus fights against the power of evil. The first miracle is the expulsion of the devil. The power of evil took possession of persons, alienating them. Jesus restores the persons to be themselves again, giving them back the consciousness and liberty. He does this thanks to the force of his word: "Be quiet! Come out of him!" And on another occasion he says: "But if it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out, then the Kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares" (Lk 11: 20). Today, also, many people live alienated from themselves, subjugated by the means of communication, by the propaganda of the government and of business. They live slaves of consumerism, oppressed by debts and threatened by creditors. People think that they do not live well if they do not have everything which the propaganda announces. It is not easy to expel this power which today, alienates many people, and return the persons to be themselves again.
- Luke 4: 36-37: The reaction of the people: he gives orders to the unclean spirits. Jesus not only has a diverse way of teaching the things of God, but another aspect which causes admiration in the people is his power over unclean spirits: "What is it in his words? He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power and they come out." Jesus opens a new path so that the people can place themselves before God to pray and to receive the blessings promised to Abraham. Before, they had to purify themselves. There were many laws and norms which made the life of the people

difficult and marginalized many persons who were considered impure. But now, purified by faith in Jesus, persons could once again place themselves before God and pray to him, without the need to have recourse to the complicated norms of purity which were frequently expensive.

Personal Questions

- Jesus causes admiration and astonishment among the people. Does the way of acting of our community cause admiration among the people of the neighborhood? What type of admiration?
- Jesus drives out the power of evil and restores the persons to be themselves again. Today many persons live alienated from everything and from all. How can we help them to recover and be themselves again?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is tenderness and pity, slow to anger, full of faithful love. Yahweh is generous to all, his tenderness embraces all his creatures. (Ps 145: 8-9)

Wednesday, August 31, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
every good thing comes from you. Fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith,
and by your constant care
protect the good you have given us.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and
the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 4: 38-44

Leaving the synagogue Jesus went to Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in the grip of a high fever and they asked him to do something for her. Standing over her he rebuked the fever and it left her. And she immediately got up and began to serve them.

At sunset all those who had friends suffering from diseases of one kind or another brought them to him, and laying his hands on each he cured them.

Devils too came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God.' But he warned them and would not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ.

When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place. The crowds went to look for him, and when they had caught up with him they wanted to prevent him leaving them, but he answered, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do.' And he continued his proclamation in the synagogues of Judaea.

Reflection

The Gospel today narrates four different events: the cure of Peter's mother-in-law (Lk 4: 38-39), the cure of many sick people at night, after Saturday (Lk 4: 40-41), the prayer of Jesus in a deserted place (Lk 4: 42) and his insistence on the mission (Lk 4: 43-44). With small differences Luke follows and adapts the information taken from the Gospel of Mark.

- Luke 4: 38-39: *Jesus restores life for service.* After having participated in the celebration of Saturday, in the Synagogue, Jesus goes to Peter's house and cures his mother-in-law. The cure causes her to render service immediately, already standing. Having recovered her health and dignity, she places herself at the service of the people. Jesus not only cures, but he cures in such a way that the person places herself at the service of life.
- Luke 4: 40-41: *Jesus accepts and cures the marginalized.* At night, when the first stars appear in the sky, after Saturday is over, Jesus accepts and cures the sick and those possessed who the people bring to him. The sick and the possessed were the most marginalized persons at that time. They had no one to whom to go. They were at the mercy of public charity; besides, religion considered them impure. They could not participate in the community. It was as if God rejected and excluded them. Jesus accepts and cures them, placing his hands on each one of them. Thus, it is clear in what the Good News of God consists of and what he wants to do in the life of persons: to accept the marginalized and the excluded and to integrate them into the community, to live with others.

"Devils came out of many persons shouting: "You are the Son of God!" But he warned them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ". At that time the title Son of God did not have as yet the density and depth that it has for us today. Jesus did not allow the devils to speak. He did not want an easy propaganda dictated by spectacular expulsions.

- Luke 4: 42a: *To remain united to the Father by means of prayer.* "When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place. The crowds went to look for him, and when they had caught up with him they wanted to prevent him from leaving them". Here we see Jesus praying. He has to make an enormous effort to have time available and a place suitable for prayer. He goes to a deserted place to be able to stay alone with God. Many times, the Gospels speak about Jesus' prayer, in silence (Lk 3: 21-22; 4: 1-2, 3-12; 5: 15-16; 6: 12; 9: 18; 10: 21; 5: 16; 9: 18; 11: 1; 9: 28; 23: 34; Mt 14: 22-23; 26: 38; Jn 11: 41-42; 17: 1-26; Mk 1: 35; Lk 3: 21-22). Through prayer, he maintains alive the conscience of his mission.
- Luke 4: 42b-44: *To maintain alive the conscience of one's own mission and not think about the result.* Jesus becomes known. People follow him and they did not want him to leave them. Jesus does not respond to this petition and says: "I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do". Jesus was very clear about his mission. He does not stop at the result that he has already obtained, but he wishes to maintain very alive the awareness of his mission. It is the mission received from the Father which orientates him when he has to take a decision. I have been sent for this! And here in this text this conscience which is so alive springs as fruit of his prayer.

Personal Questions

- Jesus spent much time in prayer and to be alone with the Father, and he looked for this time. Do I dedicate time for prayer and to be alone with God?

- Jesus had a clear conscience of his mission. And I, a Christian, am I conscious that I have a mission, or do I live without a mission?

Concluding Prayer

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