

RULE OF

CARMEL



Lectio Divina

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Thursday, September 1, 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 5:1-11

Now it happened that Jesus was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats at the water's edge. The fishermen had got out of them and were washing their nets.

He got into one of the boats - it was Simon's - and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch.' Simon replied, 'Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled both boats to sinking point.

When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man.' For he and all his companions were completely awestruck at the catch they had made; so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on it is people you will be catching.' Then, bringing their boats back to land they left everything and followed him.

Reflection

In today's Gospel we have the call of Jesus to Peter. The Gospel of Mark places the call of the first disciples after the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus (Mk 1: 16-20). Luke after that the fame of Jesus was already extended across the whole region (Lk 4: 14). Jesus had cured many people (Lk 4: 40) and had preached in the Synagogues of all the country (Lk 4: 44). The people looked for him and the crowds pushed him on all sides in order to hear the Word of God (Lk 5: 1). Luke makes more understandable the call. In the first place, Peter can listen to the words of Jesus to the people. And then he is a witness of the miraculous catch of fish. It is only after this double surprising experience that he understands the call of Jesus. Peter responds, he abandons everything and becomes a "fisherman of men."

- Luke 5: 1-3: Jesus teaches from the boat. People look for Jesus in order to listen to the Word of God. Many persons get together around Jesus, they make a throng around him. And Jesus seeks help from Simon Peter and from some of his companions who had just returned from fishing. He goes into the boat with them and responds to the expectation of the people, communicating to them the Word of God. Sitting down, Jesus takes the attitude of a Teacher and speaks from a fisherman's boat. The novelty

consists in the fact that he teaches, not only in the Synagogue for a choice public but in any place, where there are people who wish to listen, even on the seashore.

- Luke 5: 4-5: “But if you say so, I will pay out the nets.” When he had finished speaking, he addresses himself to Simon and encourages him to fish again. In Simon’s response there is frustration, tiredness and discouragement: “Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing!” But trustful in Jesus’ word, they throw in the nets again and continue the struggle. The word of Jesus has greater force for them than the experience of frustration of that night!
- Luke 5: 6-7: The result is surprising. The catch is so abundant that the nets are about to tear and the boat begins to sink. Simon needs the help of John and of James who are in the other boat. Nobody is complete in himself, alone. One community has to help the other. The conflict among the communities, both at the time of Luke as well as today, should be overcome in order to attain a common objective, which is the mission. The experience of the force of the word of Jesus which transforms is the axis around which the differences are embraced and overcome.
- Luke 5: 8-11: “Be fishermen of men.” The experience of the closeness of God in Jesus makes Peter understand who he is: “Leave me Lord, I am a sinful man!” Before God we are all sinners. Peter and his companions are afraid, and, at the same time, they feel attracted to Jesus. Jesus drives away fear: “Do not be afraid!” He calls Peter and commits him to the mission, ordering him to be a fisherman of men. Peter experiences, quite concretely, that the word of Jesus is like the word of God. It is capable to bring about what it affirms. In Jesus those rough and tough laborers will have an experience of power, of courage, of trust. And so then, “they will abandon everything and follow Jesus!” Up until now it was only Jesus who announced the Good News of the Kingdom. Now other persons will be called and involved in the mission. This way in which Jesus works, in ‘equipe,’ in a team is also Good News for the people.
- The episode of the catch of fish along the lake indicates the attraction and the force of the Word of Jesus. He attracts people (Lk 5: 1). He urges Peter to offer his boat to Jesus to be able to speak (Lk 5: 3). The word of Jesus is so strong that it overcomes the resistance in Peter, it convinces him to throw the nets into the sea again and there is the miraculous catch (Lk 5: 4-6). It overcomes in him the will to leave Jesus and attracts him to become a “fisherman of men” (Lk 5, 10). This is the way the Word of God acts in us, up until now!

Personal Questions

- Where and how does the miraculous catch of fish take place today; the one which takes place paying attention to the word of Jesus?
- And they leaving everything followed Jesus. What do I have to leave in order to follow Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Who shall go up to the mountain of Yahweh? Who shall take a stand in his holy place?
The clean of hands and pure of heart,
who does not swear an oath in order to deceive. (Ps 24: 3-4)

Friday, September 2, 2022

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 5: 33-39

The disciples said to Jesus, 'John's disciples are always fasting and saying prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees, too, but yours go on eating and drinking.'

Jesus replied, 'Surely you cannot make the bridegroom's attendants fast while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them; then, in those days, they will fast.'

He also told them a parable, 'No one tears a piece from a new cloak to put it on an old cloak; otherwise, not only will the new one be torn, but the piece taken from the new will not match the old. 'And nobody puts new wine in old wineskins; otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins and run to waste, and the skins will be ruined. No; new wine must be put in fresh skins. And nobody who has been drinking old wine wants new. "The old is good," he says.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we witness closely a conflict between Jesus and the religious authority of the time, the Scribes and the Pharisees (Lk 5: 3). This time the conflict is concerning the practice of fasting. Luke narrates diverse conflicts concerning the religious practice of the time: forgiveness of sins (Lk 5: 21-25), to eat with sinners (Lk 5: 29-32), fasting (Lk 5: 33-36), and two conflicts on the observance of Saturday, the Sabbath (Lk 6: 1-5 and Lk 6: 6-11).

- Luke 5: 33: Jesus does not insist on the practice of fasting. The conflict here is concerning the practice of fasting. Fasting is a very ancient use, practiced by almost all religions. Jesus Himself followed it during forty days (Mt 4: 2). But he does not insist with the disciples that they do the same. He leaves them free. This is why, the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees, who were obliged to fast, want to know why Jesus does not insist on fasting.
- Luke 5: 34-35: When the bridegroom is with them they are not obliged to fast. Jesus responds with a comparison. When the bridegroom is with the friends of the bridegroom, that is, during the wedding feast, they should not fast. Jesus considers himself the bridegroom. During the time when Jesus is with the disciples, it is the wedding feast. One day will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then if they wish they can fast. Jesus refers to his death. He knows and he is aware that if he wants to continue along this path of liberty, the authority will want to kill him.
- Several times, in the Old Testament, God presents himself as the bridegroom of the people (Is 49: 15; 54: 5, 8; 62: 4-5; Os 2: 16-25). In the New Testament, Jesus is considered the bridegroom of his people (Ep 5: 25). The Apocalypses speaks of the celebration of

the marriage of the Lamb with his spouse, the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rv 19: 7-8; 21: 2, 9).

- Luke 5: 36-39: New Wine in new skins! These words pronounced concerning the new piece of cloth on an old cloak and about new wine in old skins should be understood like a light which gives clarity on diverse conflicts, narrated by Luke, first and after the discussions concerning fasting. They clarify the attitude of Jesus concerning all the conflicts with the religious authority. Today, these would be conflicts such as: marriage between divorced persons, friendship with prostitutes and homosexuals, to receive communion without being married by the Church, not to go to Mass on Sunday, not to fast on Good Friday, etc.

A piece of new cloth is not sewed on an old cloak; because when it is washed the new piece of cloth shrinks and tears the old cloak more. Nobody puts new wine in old skins, because the new wine when it is fermented makes the old skins burst. New wine in new skins! The religion diffused by the religious authority was like an old cloak, like an old skin. It is not necessary to want to combine the novelty brought by Jesus with old customs or uses. Either one or the other! The new wine which Jesus brings bursts the old skins. It is necessary to know how to separate both of these things. Very probably, Luke gives these words of Jesus to orientate the communities of the years 80. There was a group of Christian Jews who wanted to reduce the novelty of Jesus to the Judaism of the beginning. Jesus is not against what is "ancient." But he does not want the ancient to be imposed on the new, preventing it from manifesting itself. It would be as if the Catholic Church reduced the message of Vatican Council II to the Church before the Council, like many persons today seem to want to do it.

Personal Questions

- Which are the conflicts about religious practices which cause suffering to persons today and are the cause of much discussion and polemics? Which is the subjacent image of God in all these preconceptions, norms and prohibitions?
- How can we understand today the phrase of Jesus: "do not put a new piece of cloth on an old cloak? Which is the message which you can draw from this for your life and for the life of the community?

Concluding Prayer

Commit your destiny to Yahweh, be confident in him, and he will act,
making your uprightness clear as daylight,
and the justice of your cause as the noon. (Ps 37: 5-6)

Saturday, September 3, 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 6:1-5

It happened that one Sabbath Jesus was walking through the cornfields, and his disciples were picking ears of corn, rubbing them in their hands and eating them.

Some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath day?'

Jesus answered them, 'So you have not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry- how he went into the house of God and took the loaves of the offering and ate them and gave them to his followers, loaves which the priests alone are allowed to eat?'

And he said to them, 'The Son of man is master of the Sabbath.'

Reflection

The Gospel today speaks about the conflict concerning the observance of the Sabbath – Saturday. The observance of the Sabbath was a central law, one of the Ten Commandments. This was a very ancient Law the value of which was stressed after the Exile. During the Exile, the people had to work seven days a week from morning until evening, without any conditions to meet and meditate on the Word of God, to pray together and to share faith, their problems, and their hopes. Therefore, there was an urgent need to stop at least one day a week to get together and encourage one another during the very difficult situation of the exile. Otherwise, they would have lost their faith. It was then that faith was reborn, and the observance of Saturday was re-established.

- Luke 6: 1-2: The cause of the conflict. On Saturday the disciples were walking across the cornfields and they were picking ears of corn. Matthew 12: 1 says that they were hungry (Mt 12: 1). The Pharisees invoke the Bible to say it was a transgression of the Law of Saturday: Why do you do this which is not permitted to do on Saturday?" (cf. Ex 20: 8-11).
- Luke 6: 3-4: The response of Jesus. Immediately Jesus responds recalling that David himself also did things which were prohibited, because he took the sacred bread from the Temple and gave it to the soldiers to eat because they were hungry (1S 21: 2-7). Jesus knew the Bible and referred to it to show that the arguments of others had no foundation. In Matthew, the response of Jesus is more complete. He not only recalls the story of David, but also quotes the Legislation which permits the priests to work on Saturday and he quotes Prophet Hosea: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice." He quotes a Biblical text or a historical text, a legislative text and a prophetic text (cf. Mt 12: 1-18). At that time there was no printed Bible as we have it today. In each community there was only one Bible, handwritten, which remained in the Synagogue. If Jesus knew the Bible so well, it means that in the 30 years of his life in Nazareth he participated intensely in the life of the community, where every Saturday the Scriptures were read. We still lack very much to have the same familiarity with the Bible and the same participation in the community.
- Luke 6: 5: The conclusion for all of us. And Jesus ends with the following phrase: The Son of Man is Master of the Sabbath! The Lord of Saturday! Jesus, Son of Man, who lives in intimacy with God, discovers the sense of the Bible not from outside, from without, but from inside, that is, discovers the sense starting at the roots, beginning from his intimacy with the author of the Bible who is God himself. Because of this,

he calls himself Master of Saturday. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus revitalizes the law of Saturday saying: "Saturday was instituted for man and not man for Saturday."

Personal Questions

- How do you spend Sunday, which is our "Sabbath"? Do you go to Mass because it is an obligation, in order to avoid sin or to be with God?
- Jesus knew the Bible almost by heart. What does the Bible represent for me?

Concluding Prayer

My mouth shall always praise Yahweh, let every creature bless his holy name for ever and ever. (Ps 145: 21)

Sunday, September 4, 2022

Twenty-third Sunday of 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 Gospel Text – Luke 14: 25-33

25 Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, 26 "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace. 33 So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

A Moment of Silence:

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

MEDITATIO

Some Questions:

- If any man comes to me without hating, he cannot be my disciple: Are we convinced that we must get to the point of separating ourselves from all that ties our hearts: affection received and given, life itself, in order to follow Jesus?
- Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple: Do I possess the logic of the cross, that is, the logic of love freely given?
- The means to fulfil this: does my capability to think inform my life of faith or is it just an interior impulse that dissolves with time and slips by the events of my daily life?
- To avoid having onlookers make fun of something started: does the reward of someone who started to follow the Lord and then did not have the human resources to go on, that is, derision for inability, apply to me?
- None of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions: am I convinced that the key to discipleship is the poverty of non-possession and the beatitude of belonging?

A Key to the Reading:

We are among those who follow Jesus, with all our baggage of the past. One among so many, our name can be lost. But when He turns around and his word strikes the pain of the ties that strongly bind the pieces of our life, questions roll in the most ancient valley of echoes and one single humble reply comes forth from the ruins of unfinished edifices: Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life.

- **v. 25-26:** Great crowds accompanied him on his way and he turned and spoke to them:
«If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple.” The Lord is not interested in counting those who come to him. His words are strong and are free of all illusion. Is there anyone who does not know what it means to hate? If I hate a person, I stay away from that person. This choice between the Lord and affection for parents is the first demand of discipleship. To learn from Christ, it is necessary to find once more the nucleus of every love and interest. The love of a follower of the Lord is not a possessive love, but a love of freedom. To follow someone without any guarantees such as blood relationship can give, namely, family ties and one's own blood, that is, one's life, is discipleship, a place where life is born of divine Wisdom.
- **v. 27:** Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. The only tie that helps us follow Jesus is the cross. This symbol of love that cannot be taken back, capable of being word even when the world silences everything by condemnation and death, is the lesson of the Rabbi born in the smallest village in Judea.
- **v. 28:** Which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? To build a tower requires a large sum for someone who has limited resources. A good intention to build is not

enough, it is necessary to sit down, calculate expenses, seek the means to bring the project to completion. Man's life is incomplete and unsatisfied because the larger the project the larger the debt! A project made to measure: not to know how to calculate what is within our means to accomplish is not the wisdom of those who after having ploughed wait for the rain, but the lack of awareness of those to expect flowers and harvest from seed thrown among stones and brambles, without making the effort to loosen the soil.

- **v. 29-30:** Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, the onlookers would all start making fun of him and saying: "Here is a man who started to build and was unable to finish." The derision of others which grates like sand on one's the feelings of hope of the person who wanted to reach high on his own, is the reward of one's own arrogance clothed in good will. How many humiliations do we not carry with us, but what little fruit do we reap from these painful experiences! Putting down foundations and then not finish the building is useless. Shattered desires sometimes are good tutors to our naïve self-affirmation... but we fail to understand them so long as we try to cover up our failures and the delusion of our waking up from the fairytale world of the dreams of our childhood. Yes, Jesus does tell us to become childlike, but a child will never pretend to build a "real" tower! The child will be happy with a small tower on the beach, because he/she knows well his/her capacity.
- **vv. 31-32:** Or, again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who advanced against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. No one can win a war without first sending envoys of peace. To fight for royal supremacy over every other is in itself a lost battle, because man is not called to be a ruling king, but the lord of peace. Approaching the other while still a long way away is the most beautiful sign of victory where no one wins and no one loses, but all become servants of the one true sovereignty in the world: peace and fullness of the gifts of God.
- **v. 33:** *So, in the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions.* If we examine the capital sins, we shall discover them in the manner of possessing that Jesus speaks of. A person who bases his/her life on possessions is a dissolute person who pretends having power over all things (pride), enjoying a life of pleasure (lust) going beyond the limits as a personal right (anger), being hungry for material goods (gluttony), stealing from others (envy), keeping things for him/herself (avarice), spoiling him/herself apathetically without committing to anything (sloth). The disciple, on the other hand, travels on the rails of the living virtues of the gifts of the Spirit: he/she is a person who has a sense of the things of God (wisdom) and shares it without keeping it to him/herself, and delves deep into the essential meaning of all that is Life (knowledge), who listens to the voice of the Spirit (counsel), and reflects on every discernment (counsel), who allows him/herself to be protected by the limitations of his/her being (fortitude) and does not give in to the allurements of sin, who knows the secrets of history (knowledge) to build horizons of goodness, who does not take unto him/herself the right of making sense, but who welcomes the source of divine intervention (piety) who springs from the abyss of silence and is thankful for the marvels of grace of his Creator (fear of God) without being afraid of his/her smallness. Thus, a disciple is another Jesus.

Reflection:

Our hearts are nets made of chain. We have ties of tenderness and gratitude, ties of love and dependence, endless ties with everything that touches our feelings. Jesus speaks of ties of consanguinity: father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and of ties with life itself which in the Semitic mentality is symbolized by blood. But the heart must be free of these ties in order to go to Him and create a new tie that gives life because it gives the person freedom to be his/her authentic self. Every disciple has but one task: to learn and not to depend. Blood ties create dependence: how often does affective blackmail stop people from building the tower of their existence? How often do the words: If you love me, do this! Or: If you love me, do not do this...? Life itself can imprison you when it ties you to that which does not suit you physically or mentally thus influencing your complicated story, or when it ties you to that which you choose haphazardly by a will made weak by a thousand grids of events and blackmail. The cross does not tie, it urges that all that you have may be shed, blood and water, even to the last drop: your whole life as a gift that does not expect any reward. To belong rather than to possess is the secret of the gratuitous love of the Master and of the disciple. Anyone who follows Jesus is not just any disciple who learns a doctrine, but is one who becomes a beloved disciple, capable of narrating the wonders of God when the fire of the Spirit will turn him/her into a flame on the candlestick of the world.

ORATIO

Psalm 22

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through
the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
thou anoints my head with oil, my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the
house of the Lord for ever.

CONTEMPLATIO

Lord, as you turn around and look at me, your words go through my mind and challenge me with everything that is my life. It is as though a pair of scissors unhesitatingly but sweetly cut the umbilical cords that nourish me to keep me going. And this certain and necessary action restores my full breath and my freedom. Scripture says in its first pages of the human race: Man will leave his father and mother and will go towards a new fullness, all his, towards the unity of one person, capable of bearing fruit and new life. But we have not grasped the key word of this magnificent project, a word that inconveniences because it is like the waves of the sea where you cannot let yourself go with no security, the word: movement. Life does not stop. A love and a life received from a father and a mother. Yes, a full love, but one that does not limit horizons. Man will leave... and will go... A man and a woman, two in one, children who will be the face of their meeting of love, but who tomorrow will leave to go in their turn... if you stop to grasp life, life dies in your grasp. And with life also your unfulfilled dream dies, the dream of a full love that is never exhausted. Lord, grant us to understand that to love is to follow, to listen, to go, to stop, to lose oneself in order to find oneself in a movement of freedom that fulfils every desire for eternal possession. Let me not, for the sake of possessing a part of

life, lose the joy of belonging to life, to that divine Life that comes and goes in me for others and from others to me to make of the days that go by waves of Freedom and of gift from God within the limitations of each life. Grant that I may always be the beloved disciple of your dying Life, capable of welcoming in inheritance the sonship and guardianship, in your Spirit, of every authentic motherhood.

Monday, September 5, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us
and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

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 6: 6-11

On a Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach, and a man was present, and his right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees were watching him to see if he would cure somebody on the Sabbath, hoping to find something to charge him with. But he knew their thoughts; and he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and stand out in the middle!'

And he came forward and stood there.

Then Jesus said to them, 'I put it to you: is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to destroy it?' Then he looked round at them all and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He did so, and his hand was restored.

But they were furious and began to discuss the best way of dealing with Jesus.

Reflection

- Context: This passage presents Jesus who cures a man with a withered hand. Different from the context of chapters 3 and 4 in which Jesus is alone, now here he is surrounded by his disciples and the women who go around with him. Therefore, here we have Jesus always moving. In the first stages of this journey the reader finds different ways of listening to the Word of Jesus on the part of those who follow him and which, definitively, it could be summarized in two experiences, which recall, in turn, two types of approaches: that of Peter (5: 1-11) and that of the centurion (7: 1-10). The first one encounters Jesus who invites him after the miraculous catch to become a fisherman of men; then he falls on his knees before Jesus:
- «Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man» (5: 8). The second one does not have any direct communication with Jesus: he has heard people speak very well about Jesus and he sends his envoys to ask for the cure of one of his servants who is dying; he is asking for something not for himself, but for a person who was a favourite of his. The figure of Peter expresses the attitude of the one who, discovering himself a sinner, places all his acts under the influence of the Word of Jesus. The centurion, showing solicitude for the servant, learns to listen to God. Well, between these itineraries or

attitudes which characterize the itinerant journey of Jesus, is placed the cure of the man who presents the withered hand. This event of the miracle takes place in a context of debate or controversy: the ears of corn picked on the Sabbath and on the act of curing on a Saturday, precisely the withered hand. Between the two discussions there is the crucial role played by the Word of Jesus: "The Son of man is master of the Sabbath" (6: 5). Continuing with this passage we ask ourselves which is the sense of this withered hand? It is a symbol of the salvation of man who is taken back to the original moment, that of creation. The right hand, then, expresses human acting. Jesus then, gives back to this day of the week, Saturday, the deepest significance: it is the day of joy, of the restoration and not of limitation. What Jesus shows is the Messianic Saturday and not the legalistic one: the cures that he does are signs of the Messianic times, of restoration, of the liberation of man.

- The dynamic of the miracle. Luke places before Jesus a man who has a withered hand, dry, paralyzed. Nobody is interested in asking for his cure and much less the one concerned. And just the same, the sickness was not only an individual problem but its effects have repercussion on the whole community. But in our account we do not have so much the problem of the sickness as that of the aspect that it was done on Saturday. Jesus is criticized because he cured on Saturday. The difference with the Pharisees is in the fact that they on Saturday do not act on the basis of the commandment of love which is the essence of the Law.

Jesus, after having ordered man to get in the middle of the assembly, formulates a decisive question: "Is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil?" The space for the answer is restricted: to cure or not to cure, or rather, to cure or to destroy (v.9). Let us imagine the difficulty of the Pharisees: it is excluded that evil can be done on Saturday or lead man to damnation, and even less to cure because help was permitted only in case of extreme need. The Pharisees feel provoked, and this causes aggressiveness in them. But it is evident that the intention of Jesus in curing on Saturday is for the good of man and in the first place, for the one who is sick.

This motivation of love invites us to reflect on our behaviour and to found it on that of Jesus who saves. Jesus is not only attentive to cure the sick person but is interested also in the cure of his enemies: to cure them from their distorted attitude in their observance of the Law; to observe Saturday without freeing their neighbour from their misery and sickness is not in accordance with the will of God. According to the Evangelist, the function of Saturday is to do good, to save, like Jesus has done during his earthly life.

Personal Questions

- Do you feel involved in the words of Jesus: how do you commit yourself in your service to life? Do you know how to create the necessary conditions so that others may live better?
- Do you know how to place at the center of your attention and of your commitment every person and all their requirements?

Concluding Prayer

Joy for all who take refuge in you, endless songs of gladness!
You shelter them, they rejoice in you, those who love your name. (Ps 5: 11)

Tuesday, September 6, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us
and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

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 6: 12-19

Now it happened in those days that Jesus went onto the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came, he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them; he called them 'apostles': Simon whom he called Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

He then came down with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples, with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases.

People tormented by unclean spirits were also cured, and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him because power came out of him that cured them all.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents two facts: the choice of the twelve apostles (Lk 6: 12-16) and the enormous crowds who want to meet Jesus (Lk 6: 17-19). The Gospel today invites us to reflect on the Twelve who were chosen to live with Jesus, being apostles. The first Christians remembered and registered the name of these twelve and of some other men and women, who followed Jesus and who, after His Resurrection, began to create the communities for the world outside. Today, also, all remember some catechists or persons, significant for their own Christian formation.

- Luke 6: 12-13: The choice of the 12 apostles. Before choosing the twelve apostles definitively, Jesus spent a whole night in prayer. He prays in order to know whom to choose and then chooses the Twelve, whose names are in the Gospels and they will receive the name of apostles. Apostle means sent, missionary. They were called to carry out a mission, the same mission that Jesus received from the Father (Jn 20: 21). Mark is more concrete and says that God called them to be with him and he sends them on mission (Mk 3: 14)..
- Luke 6: 14-16: The names of the 12 Apostles. With small differences the names of the Twelve are the same in the Gospels of Matthew (Mt 10: 2-4), Mark (Mk 3: 16-19) and Luke (Lk 6: 14-16). The majority of these names come from the Old Testament. For example, Simeon is the name of one of the sons of the Patriarch Jacob (Gn 29: 33). James (Giacomo) is the same name of Jacob (Gn 25: 26), Judah is the name of the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Matthew also had the name of Levi (Mk 2: 14), the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23) Of the twelve apostles, seven have a name that comes from

the time of the Patriarchs: two times Simon, two times, James, two times Judah, and one time Levi! That reveals the wisdom and the pedagogy of the people. Through the names of the Patriarchs and the matriarchs, which were given to the sons and daughters, people maintained alive the tradition of the ancestors and helped their own children not to lose their identity. Which are the names which we give our children today?

- Luke 6: 17-19: Jesus goes down from the mountain and people are looking for him. Coming down from the mountain with the twelve, Jesus finds an immense crowd of people who were trying to hear his words and to touch him, because people knew that from him came out a force of life. In this crowd there were Jews and foreigners, people from Judaea and also from Tyre and Sidon. These were people who were abandoned, disoriented. Jesus accepts all those who look for him Jews and Pagans! This is one of the themes preferred by Luke!

These twelve persons, called by Jesus to form the first community, were not saints. They were common persons, like all of us. They had their virtues and their defects. The Gospels tell us very little on the temperament and the character of each one of them. But what they say, even if not much is for us a reason for consolation.

- Peter was a generous person and full of enthusiasm (Mk 14: 29.31; Mt 14: 28-29), but at the moment of danger and of taking a decision, his heart becomes small and cannot go ahead (Mt 14: 30; Mc 14: 66-72). He was even Satan for Jesus (Mk 8: 33). Jesus calls him Rock (Peter). Peter of himself was not '*Pietra*' - Rock, he becomes Rock (*Pietra*) because Jesus prays for him (Lc 22: 31-32).
- James and John are ready to suffer with and for Jesus (Mk 10: 39), but they were very violent (Lk 9: 54), Jesus calls them "sons of thunder" (Mk 3: 17). John seemed to have some sort of envy. He wanted Jesus only for his group (Mk 9: 38).
- Philip had a nice welcoming way. He knew how to put others in contact with Jesus (Jn 1: 45- 46), but he was not too practical in solving the problems (Jn 12: 20-22; 6: 7). Sometimes he was very naïve. There was a moment when Jesus lost his patience with him: Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? (Jn 14: 8-9).
- Andrew, the brother of Peter and friend of Philip, he was more practical. Philip goes to him to solve the problems (Jn 12: 21-22). Andrew calls Peter (Jn 1: 40-41), and Andrew found the boy who had five loaves of bread and two fish (Jn 6: 8-9).
- Bartholomew seems to be the same as Nathanael. This one was from there and could not admit that anything good could come from Nazareth (Jn 1: 46).
- Thomas was capable of sustaining his own opinion, for a whole week, against the witness of all the others (Jn 20: 24-25). But when he saw that he was mistaken, he was not afraid to acknowledge his error (Jn 20: 26-28). He was generous, ready to die with Jesus (Jn 11: 16).
- Matthew or Levi was a Publican, a tax collector, like Zaccheus (Mt 9: 9; Lk 19: 2). They were persons who held to the system of oppression of that time.
- Simon, instead, seems that he belonged to the movement which radically opposed the system which the Roman Empire imposed on the Jewish people. This is why he was also called Zealot (Lk 6: 15). The group of the Zealots even succeeded to bring about an armed revolt against the Romans.
- Judah was the one who was in charge of the money in the group (Jn 13: 29). He betrayed Jesus.
- James, son of Alphaeus and Judas Taddeus. The Gospels say nothing of these two, they only mention their name.

Personal Questions

- Jesus spends the whole night in prayer to know whom to choose, and then he chooses those twelve. Which conclusions can you draw?
- Do you recall the persons who began the community to which you belong? What do you remember about them: the content of what they taught or the witness they gave?

Concluding Prayer

They shall dance in praise of his name, play to him on tambourines and harp! For Yahweh loves his people,
he will crown the humble with salvation. (Ps 149: 3-4)

Wednesday, September 7, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us
and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

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 6: 20-26

Then fixing his eyes on his disciples Jesus said: How blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours.

Blessed are you who are hungry now: you shall have your fill. Blessed are you who are weeping now: you shall laugh.

'Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of man.

Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, look!-your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets.

But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now.

Alas for you who have plenty to eat now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who are laughing now: you shall mourn and weep.

'Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents four blessings and four curses in Luke's Gospel. There is a progressive revelation in the way in which Luke presents the teaching of Jesus. Up to 6: 16, he says many times, that Jesus taught the people, but he did not describe the content of the teaching (Lk 4: 15, 31-32, 44; 5: 1, 3, 15, 17; 6: 6). Now, after having said that Jesus sees the crowd desirous to hear the Word of God, Luke presents the first great discourse which

begins with the exclamation: "Blessed are you who are poor!" And "Alas for you, rich!" and then takes up all the rest of the chapter (Lk 6: 12-49). Some call this Discourse the "Discourse of the Plain" because, according to Luke, Jesus came down from the mountain and stopped in a place which was plain and there he pronounced his discourse. In Matthew's Gospel, this same discourse is given on the mountain (Mt 5: 1) and is called "The Sermon on the Mountain." In Matthew, in this discourse there are eight Beatitudes, which trace a program of life for the Christian communities of Jewish origin. In Luke, the sermon is shorter and more radical. It contains only four Beatitudes and four curses, directed to the Hellenistic communities, formed by rich and poor. This discourse of Jesus will be meditated on in the daily Gospel of the next days.

- Luke 6: 20: *Blessed are you, poor!* Looking at the disciples, Jesus declares: "Blessed are you who are poor, the Kingdom of Heaven is yours!" This declaration identifies the social category of the disciples. They are poor! And Jesus promises to them: "The Kingdom is yours!" It is not a promise made for the future. The verb is in the present. The Kingdom belongs to them already. They are blessed now. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes explicit the sense of this and says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit!" (Mt 5: 3). They are the poor who have the Spirit of Jesus; because there are some poor who have the mentality of the rich. The disciples of Jesus are poor and have the mentality of the poor. Like Jesus, they do not want to accumulate, but they assume their poverty and with him, they struggle for a more just life together, where there will be fraternity and sharing of goods, without any discrimination.
- Luke 6: 21-22: *Blessed are you, who now hunger and weep.* In the second and third Beatitude, Jesus says: "Blessed are who are hungry now, because you shall have your fill! Blessed are you, who are weeping now, you shall laugh!" One part of the phrase is in the present and the other in the future. What we live and suffer now is not definitive; what is definitive is the Kingdom of God which we are constructing with the force of the Spirit of Jesus. To construct the Kingdom presupposes pain, suffering and persecution, but something is certain: the Kingdom will be attained, and you will have your fill and you will laugh!"
- Luke 6: 23: *Blessed are you when people hate you...* The fourth Beatitude refers to the future: "Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out on account of the Son of Man!" Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, look, your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way your ancestors treated the prophets!" With these words of Jesus, Luke encourages the communities of his time, because they were persecuted. Suffering is not death rattle, but the pain of birth pangs. It is a source of hope! Persecution was a sign that the future that had been announced by Jesus was arriving, being reached. The communities were following the right path.
- Luke 6: 24-25: *Alas for you who are rich!* Alas for you who now have your fill and who laugh! After the four Beatitudes in favour of the poor and of the excluded, follow four threats or curses against the rich and those for whom everything goes well and are praised by everybody. The four threats have the same identical literary form as the four Beatitudes. The first one is expressed in the present. The second and the third one have a part in the present and another part in the future. And the fourth one refers completely to the future. These threats are found only in Luke's Gospel and not in that of Matthew. Luke is more radical in denouncing injustices.
- Before Jesus, on the plains there are no rich people. There are only sick and poor people, who have come from all parts (Lk 6: 17-19). But Jesus says: "Alas for you the rich!" And this because Luke, in transmitting these words of Jesus, is thinking more of the communities of his time. In those communities there are rich and poor people, and there is discrimination of the poor on the part of the rich, the same discrimination which marked the structure of the Roman Empire (cf. Jm 5: 1-6; Rv 3:

17-19). Jesus criticizes the rich very hard and directly: You rich have already received consolation! You are already filled, but you are still hungry! Now you are laughing, but you will be afflicted and will weep! This is a sign that for Jesus poverty is not something fatal, nor the fruit of prejudices, but it is the fruit of unjust enrichment on the part of others.

- Luke 6: 26: *Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you, because this was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets!* This fourth threat refers to the sons of those who in the past praised the false prophets; because some authority of the Jews used its prestige and authority to criticize Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Do we look at life and at persons with the same look of Jesus? What do you think in your heart: is a poor and hungry person truly happy? The stories which we see on Television and the propaganda of the market, what ideal of happiness do they present?
- In saying: “Blessed are the poor,” did Jesus want to say that the poor have to continue to be poor?

Concluding Prayer

Upright in all that he does, Yahweh acts only in faithful love.
He is close to all who call upon him,
all who call on him from the heart. (Ps 145: 17-18)

Thursday, September 8, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us
and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.
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 1: 1-16, 18-23

Roll of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham: Abraham fathered Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers, Judah fathered Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse; and Jesse fathered King David.

David fathered Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon fathered Rehoboam, Rehoboam fathered Abijah, Abijah fathered Asa, Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat fathered Joram, Joram fathered Uzziah, Uzziah fathered Jotham, Jotham fathered Ahaz, Ahaz fathered Hezekiah, Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, Manasseh

fathered Amon, Amon fathered Josiah; and Josiah fathered Jechoniah and his brothers. Then the deportation to Babylon took place.

After the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah fathered Shealtiel, Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, Abiud fathered Eliakim, Eliakim fathered Azor, Azor fathered Zadok, Zadok fathered Achim, Achim fathered Eliud, Eliud fathered Eleazar, Eleazar fathered Matthan, Matthan fathered Jacob; and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ.

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally.

He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.'

Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'.

Reflection

Today, September 8th, Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, the Gospel gives us the genealogy or Identity Card of Jesus. By means of the list of his ancestors, the Evangelist tells the communities who Jesus is and how God acts in a surprising way in order to fulfil his promise. On our identity card there is our name and the name of our parents. Some persons, to say who they are, also recall the names of the grandparents. Others are embarrassed of their ancestors, of their families, and hide behind appearances which deceive. The Identity Card of Jesus has many names. On the list of names there is a great novelty. At that time, the genealogy indicated only the name of the men. This is why, it surprises that Matthew also mentions five women among the ancestors of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah and Mary. Why does he choose precisely these five women and not others? This is the question which the Gospel of Matthew leaves for us.

- Matthew 1: 1-17: The long list of names – the beginning and the end of the genealogy. At the beginning and at the end of the genealogy, Matthew clearly makes us understand which is the identity of Jesus: He is the Messiah, son of David and son of Abraham. As descendant of David, Jesus is the response of God to the expectations of the Jewish people (2S 7: 12, and 16). As descendant of Abraham, he is source of blessings and of hope for all nations of the earth (Gn 12: 13). Therefore, in this way, both the Jews and the Pagans who formed part of the communities of Syria and of Palestine at the time of Matthew could see that their hope was fulfilled in Jesus. .
- Drawing up the list of the ancestors of Jesus, Matthew adopts a plan of 3 X 14 generations (Mt 1: 17). Number two is the number of the divinity. Number 14 is two times 7, which is the number of perfection. At that time, it was something common to interpret or calculate God's action by using the numbers and the dates. By means of these symbolical calculations, Matthew reveals the presence of God throughout the generations and expresses the conviction of the communities who said that Jesus appeared at the time established by God. With his coming history reaches its fulfilment.
- The message of the five women mentioned in the genealogy. Jesus is the response of God to the expectation both of the Jews and of the Pagans, but it is in a completely

surprising way. In the stories of the four women of the Old Testament, mentioned in the genealogy, there is something abnormal. The four of them were foreigners, and they will conceive their sons outside the normal schema of the behavior of that time and they do not keep the requirements of the laws of purity of the time of Jesus. Tamar, a Canaanite, widow, dresses as a prostitute of Jericho to oblige Judah to be faithful to her and to give her a son (Gn 38: 1-30). Rahab, a prostitute from Jericho, makes an alliance with the Israelites. She helped them to enter into the Promised Land and professed the faith in a God who liberates from the Exodus. (Gs 2: 1-21). Bathsheba, a Hittite, wife of Uriah, was seduced, abused and made pregnant by King David, who in addition to that, ordered her husband to be killed (2S 11: 1-27). Ruth, a Moabite, a poor widow, chose to remain with Naomi and adhere to the people of God (Rt 1: 16-18). Advised by her mother-in-law Naomi, Ruth imitates Tamar and spends the night together with Boaz, obliging him to observe the law and to give her a son. From their relation Obed was born, the grandfather of King David (Rt 3: 1-15; 4: 13-17). These four women question the models of behavior imposed by the Patriarchal society. And thus, their conventional initiative will give continuity to the descendants of Jesus and will bring salvation to all the people. Through them, God realizes his plan and sends the promised Messiah. Truly, God's way of acting surprises and makes one think! At the end the reader will ask: "And Mary? Is there something irregular in her? What is it? We get the response from the story of Saint Joseph which follows in (Mt 1: 18-23).

- Mathew 1: 18-23: Saint Joseph was just. What was irregular in Mary is that she became pregnant before living together with Joseph, her promised spouse, who was a just man. Jesus says: "If your justice is not greater than the justice of the Pharisees and the Scribes, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." If Joseph had been just according to the justice of the Pharisees, he should have denounced Mary and she would have been stoned. Jesus would have died. Thanks to the true justice of Joseph, Jesus was able to be born.

Personal Questions

- When I present myself to others, what do I say about myself and about my family?
- If the Evangelist mentions only these five women together with over forty men, no doubt, he wants to communicate a message, which is this message? What does all this tell us about the identity of Jesus? And what does this say about us?

Concluding Prayer

They shall speak of the glory of your kingship and tell of your might, making known your mighty deeds to the children of Adam, the glory and majesty of your kingship. (Ps 145: 10-11)

Friday, September 9, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us

and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

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 6: 39-42

Jesus also told them a parable, 'Can one blind person guide another? Surely both will fall into a pit? Disciple is not superior to teacher; but fully trained disciple will be like teacher. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the great log in your own? How can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take out that splinter in your eye," when you cannot see the great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter in your brother's eye.

Reflection

Today's Gospel gives us some passages of the discourse which Jesus pronounced on the plains after having spent the night in prayer (Lk 6: 12) and after he had called the twelve to be his apostles (Lk 6: 13-14). Many of the phrases in this discourse had already been pronounced on other occasions, but Luke, imitating Matthew, puts them together in this Discourse of the Plains.

- Luke 6: 39: The parable of the blind man who guides another blind man. Jesus tells a parable to the disciples: "Can a blind man guide another blind man? Will not both of them fall into a hole?" A parable of one line, quite similar to the warnings which, in Matthew's Gospel, are addressed to the Pharisees: "Alas for you, blind guides!" (Mt 23: 16, 17, 19, 24, 26) Here in the context of the Gospel of Luke, this parable is addressed to the animators of the communities who consider themselves the masters of truth, superior to others. Because of this they are blind guides.
- Luke 6: 40: Disciple – Master. "The disciple is not greater than the teacher, but the well-prepared disciple will be like the teacher" Jesus is the Master, not the professor. The professor in class teaches different subjects but does not live with the pupils. The Master or Lord does not teach lessons, he lives with the pupils. His subject matter is himself, his life witness, his way of living the things that he teaches. Living together with the Master, the Lord has three aspects:
 - (1) the Master is the model or example to be imitated (cf. Jn 13: 13-15).
 - (2) The disciple not only contemplates and imitates, he commits himself to the same destiny of the Master, with his temptations (Lk 22: 28). His persecution (Mt 10: 24-25), his death (Jn 11: 16);
 - (3) He not only imitates the model, he not only assumes the commitment, but arrives at identifying himself with him: "I live, but it is not I who live, but Christ lives in me!" (Ga 2: 20). This third aspect is the mystical dimension of the following of Jesus, fruit of the action of the Spirit.
- Luke 6: 41-42: The splinter in the brother's eye. "Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the great log in your own? How can you say to your brother: 'Brother, let me take out that splinter in your eye, when you cannot see the great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter in your brother's eye.'" In the Sermon on the Mountain, Matthew treats the same theme and explains a bit better

the parable of the splinter in the eye. Jesus asks for a creative attitude which will make us capable to go and encounter the others without judging them, without preconceptions and rationalizing, but accepting the brother (Mt 7: 1-5). This total openness toward others considering them as brothers/sisters will arise in us only when we are capable of relating with God with total trust as his children (Mt 7: 7-11).

Personal Questions

- Splinter and log in the eye. How do I relate with others at home and in my family, in work and with my colleagues, in community and with the brothers and sisters?
- Master and disciple. How am I a disciple of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, how blessed are those who live in your house; they shall praise you continually. Blessed those who find their strength in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. (Ps 84: 4-5)

Saturday, September 10, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you redeem us
and make us your children in Christ. Look upon us,
give us true freedom
and bring us to the inheritance you promised.

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 6: 43-49

Jesus said to his disciples: 'There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. Every tree can be told by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns, nor gather grapes from brambles.

Good people draw what is good from the store of goodness in their hearts; bad people draw what is bad from the store of badness. For the words of the mouth flow out of what fills the heart. 'Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord" and not do what I say?

'Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and acts on them—I will show you what such a person is like. Such a person is like the man who, when he built a house, dug, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on rock; when the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well built. But someone who listens and does nothing is like the man who built a house on soil, with no foundations; as soon as the river bore down on it, it collapsed; and what a ruin that house became!'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we have the last part of the Discourse of the Plains that is, the version which Luke presents in the Sermon on the Mountain of the Gospel of Matthew. And Luke puts together what follows:

- Luke 6: 43-45: The parable of the tree that bears good fruit. "There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. Every tree can be known by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns or gather grapes from brambles." The letter of James the Apostle serves as a comment to this parable of Jesus: "Does any water supply give a flow of fresh water and salt water out of the same pipe? Can a fig tree yield olives, my brothers, or a vine yield figs? No more can sea water yield fresh water" (James 3: 11-12). A person who is well formed in the tradition of living together in community develops within self a good nature which leads him/her to do good. "The good of the treasure of his/her heart is brought out," but the person who does not pay attention to his/her formation will have difficulty in producing good deeds. Rather, "from his/her evil treasure evil will come out evil, because the mouth speaks of the fullness of the heart." Concerning the "good treasure of the heart" it is worthwhile to remember what the Book of Ecclesiasticus' says on the heart, the source of good counsel: "Stick to the advice your own heart gives you, no one can be truer to you than that; since a person's soul often gives a clearer warning than seven watchmen perched on a watchtower. And besides all this beg the Most High to guide your steps into the truth" (Si 37: 13-15).
- Luke 6: 46: It is not sufficient to say, Lord, Lord. What is important is not to say beautiful things about God, but rather to do the will of the Father and in this way be a revelation of his face and of his presence in the world.
- Luke 6: 47-49: To construct the house on rock. To listen and to put into practice, this is the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mountain. Many people sought security and religious power in the extraordinary heads (gifts) or in the observance. But true security does not come from power; it does not come from any of those things. It comes from God! And God becomes the source of security, when we seek to do his will. And in this way he will be the rock which will support us, in the difficult hours and in the storms.

God is the rock of our life. In the Book of Psalms, we frequently find the expression: "God is my rock, my fortress... My God, my Rock, my refuge, my shield, the force which saves me..." (Ps 18: 3). He is the defence and the force of those who believe in him and who seek justice (Ps 18: 21-24). The persons, who trust in this God, become, in turn, a rock for others. Thus the prophet Isaiah invites the people who were in exile: "Listen to me, you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh. Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father and Sarah who gave you birth" (Is 51: 1- 2). The prophet asks the people not to forget the past and to remember Abraham and Sarah who because of their faith in God became a rock, the beginning of the People of God. Looking toward this rock, the people should draw courage to fight and get out of the exile. And thus, Matthew exhorts the communities to have as an incentive or encouragement this same rock (Mt 7: 24-25) and in this way be themselves rocks to strengthen their brothers in the faith. This is also the significance which Jesus gives to Peter: "You are Peter and on this Rock I will build my Church" (Mt 16: 18). This is the vocation of the first communities called to unite themselves to Jesus, the living Rock, so as to become themselves living rocks, listening and putting into practice the Word (P 2: 4-10; 2: 5; Ep 2: 19-22).

Personal Questions

- Which is the quality of my heart?

- Is my house built on rock?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, you created my inmost self,
knit me together in my mother's womb.

For so many marvels I thank you; a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders. (Ps 139: 13-14)

Sunday, September 11, 2022

Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Reading

A Key to the Gospel Reading – Luke 15: 1-32

Today's Gospel gives us three parables to help us consider in depth our image of God. The image that a person has of God influences greatly his or her way of thinking and acting. For instance, the image of God as a severe judge frightens the person and renders that person too submissive and passive or rebellious and riotous. The image of God as patriarch or boss, was and still is used to legitimise relationships of power and dominion, in society and in the Church, in the family as well as in the community. In Jesus' days, the idea that people had of God was of someone distant, severe, a judge who threatened with punishment. Jesus reveals a new image of God: God as Father, full of kindness for all and each one individually. This is what these three parables want to communicate to us.

As you read, try to pause on each detail and, above all, let the words penetrate and challenge you. Try to discover what they have in common and try to compare this with your image of God. Only then, try to analyze the details of each parable: attitudes, actions, words, place, atmosphere, etc.

A Division of the Text to Assist With the Reading:

- Luke 15:1-3: The key to the meaning of the three parables
- Luke 15:4-7: In the first parable, **you** are invited to find the lost sheep
- Luke 15:8-10: In the second parable, the **woman** tries to find the lost coin

- Luke 15:11-32: In the third parable, the **father** tries to find his lost son
- Luke 15:11-13: The decision of the younger son
- Luke 15:14-19: The frustration of the younger son and the will to go back to the Father's house
- Luke 15:20-24: The Father's joy in finding his younger son again
- Luke 15:25-28^b: The older son's reaction
- Luke 15:28^a-30: The Father's attitude towards his older son and the son's reply
- Luke 15:31-32: The Father's final reply

Text:

1 The tax collectors and sinners, however, were all crowding round to listen to him, 2 and the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' 3 So he told them this parable:

4 'Which one of you with a hundred sheep, if he lost one, would fail to leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the missing one till he found it? 5 And when he found it, would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders 6 and then, when he got home, call together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, I have found my sheep that was lost." 7 In the same way, I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine upright people who have no need of repentance.

8 'Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one, light a lamp and sweep out the house and search thoroughly till she found it? 9 And then, when she had found it, call together her friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, I have found the drachma I lost." 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.'

11 Then he said, 'There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me." So the father divided the property between them. 13 A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. 14 'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch; 15 so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. 16 And he would willingly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. 17 Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger! 18 I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; 19 I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men." 20 So he left the place and went back to his father. 'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. 21

Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." 22 But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the calf we have been fattening and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate. 25 'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. 26 Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. 27 The servant told him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got him back safe and sound."

28 He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; 29 but he retorted to his father, "All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. 30 But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property -- he and his loose women-- you kill the calf we had been fattening." 31 The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. 32 But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found."

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 pleased or struck you most in the three parables? Why?
- What is the main point of the parable of the lost sheep?
- What is the main point of the parable of the lost coin?
- What is the younger son's attitude and what image does he have of his father?
- What is the older son's attitude and what image does he have of his father?
- What is the father's attitude towards each of his sons?
- Do I identify with the younger or the older son? Why?
- What do these three parables share in common?
- Does our community reveal to others this love of God as Father that is full of kindness?

For Those Who Wish to Go Deeper into the Theme

The Context Then and Now:

The 15th chapter of Luke's Gospel holds a central place in Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem. This journey begins in Luke 9: 51 and ends in Luke 19: 29. The 15th chapter is like the top of the hill from which we can see the journey already travelled and the rest of the journey to come. It is the chapter of God's warm kindness and mercy, themes that are Luke's main concern. The communities must be a revelation of the face of this God for humanity.

We have three parables here. Jesus' parables have a precise purpose. These short stories taken from real life try to lead the listeners to reflect on their own life and discover there a particular aspect of God's presence. In the parables there are two types of stories of life. Some stories are not normal and are not usual occurrences in daily life. For instance, the father's goodness towards his younger son is not usual. Generally, fathers act much more severely towards children who behave like the younger son in the parable. Other stories are normal and are usual events in daily life, for instance the attitude of the woman who sweeps the house to look for the lost coin. As we shall see, these are different ways of urging people to think on life and on the presence of God in life.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Luke 15: 1-2: The key to the meaning of the three parables
 The three parables in chapter 15 are preceded by this information: "The tax collectors and sinners, however, were all crowding round to listen to him, and the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!'" (Lk 15: 1). On the one hand there are the sinners and publicans, on the other the Pharisees and scribes, and between the two groups stands Jesus. This was also happening in the 80's when Luke was writing his Gospel. The pagans approached the communities, wanting to join and take part. Many of the brothers complained saying that to welcome a pagan was against Jesus' teaching. The parables helped them discern. In the three parables we notice the same concern: to show what must be done to regain what was lost: the **lost** sheep (Lk 15: 4-7), the **lost** coin (Lk 15: 8-10), the two **lost** sons (Lk 15: 11-32).
- Luke 15: 3-7: In the first parable you are invited to recover the lost sheep
 Jesus speaks to his listeners: "If **one of you** has a hundred sheep..." He says "one of you." This means that you are challenged! You, he, she, all of us are challenged! We are asked to challenge ourselves with the strange and unlikely story of the parable. Jesus asks: "Which one of you with a hundred sheep, if he lost one, would fail to leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the missing one till he found it?" What is your answer to Jesus' question? The way the question is put, we understand that Jesus thinks the answer must be positive. But will it be so? will it be positive? Would you run the risk of losing ninety-nine sheep in order to find the lost one? I hear a different reply in my heart: "I am very sorry, but I cannot do this. It would be silly to leave the ninety-nine sheep in the desert to find the lost one!" But God's love is above all normal rules of behavior. Only God can do such a crazy thing, so strange, so out of the normal behavior of human beings. The background to this parable is the criticism of the scribes and Pharisees against Jesus (Lk 15: 2). They considered themselves to be perfect and despised others, accusing them of being sinners. Jesus says: "I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine upright people who have no need of repentance." In another place he says: "Tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you!" (Mt 21: 31) According to Jesus, God is happier with the repentance of one sinner than with ninety-nine Pharisees and scribes. God is happier with the repentance of one atheist who never goes to church than with ninety-nine who consider themselves practicing and faithful Catholics and who despise atheists and prostitutes. This different image of God that Jesus presents to the doctors, Pharisees and all of us is quite disturbing!
- Luke 15:8-10: In the second parable, the woman looks for the lost coin
 This parable is different. The short story of the lost coin alludes to the normal behavior of poor women who do not have much money. The woman in the parable has only ten silver coins. In those days, a drachma was worth a day's labor. For poor women, ten drachmas was a lot of money! That is why, if they lost one coin, they would look for it and sweep the whole house till they found it. And when they found it, they would be immensely happy. The woman in the parable talks to her neighbors: "Rejoice with me! I have found the drachma I had lost!" Poor people who were listening to the story would have said: "That's right! That's what we do at home! When we find the lost coin our joy is great!" Well, as comprehensible as the great as the joy of poor women is when they find the lost coin, much greater is God's joy over one sinner who repents!
- Luke 15: 11-32: In the 3rd parable, the father tries to meet again his two lost sons
 This parable is well known. It reminds us of things that happen in life as well as of other things that do not happen. The traditional title is "The Prodigal Son." In fact, the

parable does not speak only of the younger son, but describes the attitude of both sons, emphasizing the father's effort to recover his two lost sons. The fact that Luke places this parable in the central chapter of his Gospel, tells us how important it is for the interpretation of the whole message contained in Luke's Gospel.

- Luke 15: 11-13: The younger son's decision

A man had two sons. The younger son asks for his share of the inheritance. The father shares everything between them. Both the older son and the younger son receive their share. Inheriting something is no personal merit. It is a free gift. God's bequest is shared as gifts with all human beings, Jews and pagans, Christians and non-Christians. All have some share in the Father's bequest. Not all look after their share in the same way. Thus, the younger son goes off a long way and squanders his share by living a dissipated life and forgetting his Father. There is no mention yet of the older son who also received his share. Later, we shall know that he goes on staying at home, carrying on his life as usual and working in the fields. In Luke's time, the older son represented the communities that came from Judaism; the younger son represented communities that came from paganism. Today, who is the younger and who the older son? Or may be both exist in each one of us?

- Luke 15: 14-19: The frustration of the younger son and the decision to go back to the Father's house

The need for food causes the younger son to lose his freedom and become a slave, looking after pigs. He is treated even worse than the pigs. This was this situation of millions of slaves in the Roman Empire in Luke's day. This situation reminds the younger son of his Father's house: "How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger!" He sees his life for what it is and decides to go home. He even prepares his speech to his Father: "I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men!" A hired hand does what he is told, follows the law of servitude. The younger son wanted to follow the law, as the Pharisees and scribes wished to do in Jesus' time (Lk 15: 1). This is what the Pharisee missionaries imposed on the pagans they converted to the God of Abraham (Mt 23: 15). In Luke's time, Christians who came from Judaism wanted Christians who were converted from paganism to submit to the yoke of the law (Acts 15: 1ff).

- Luke 15: 20-24: The Father's joy at seeing the younger son

The parable says that the younger son was still a long way off from the house, but the Father saw him, ran to him and kissed him tenderly. Jesus gives the impression that the Father had been waiting all the time at the window, looking at the road, trying to see whether his son would appear on the road! To our way of feeling and thinking, the Father's joy seems to be overdone. He will not let his son finish his prepared speech. He does not listen! The Father does not want his son to become a slave. He wants him to be a son! This is the great Good News that Jesus brings! A new robe, new sandals, a ring for his finger, a lamb, a feast! In this great joy at the meeting, Jesus gives us a glimpse of the Father's great sorrow at the loss of his son. God was very sad and now people begin to be aware of this when they see the Father's great joy at seeing his son once more! This joy is shared with all at the feast that the Father orders to prepare.

- Luke 15: 25-28^b: The older son's reaction

The older son comes back from work in the fields and sees that there is a feast in the house. He does not go in. He wants to know what is going on. When he is informed of the reason for the feast, he feels very angry and will not go in. Closed in on himself,

he only thinks of his rights. He does not agree with the feast and cannot understand the Father's joy. This implies that he did know his Father well, even though they lived in the same house. Had he known his Father, he would have been aware of the Father's great sorrow at the loss of the younger son and he would have understood his joy at his return. Anyone who is too concerned with observing the law of God runs the risk of forgetting God himself! The younger son, even though he was away from home, seems to know the Father better than the older son who lived with him in the same house! Thus the younger son has the courage to go back to the Father's house, while the older son no longer wants to go into his Father's house! The older son does not want to be a brother, is not aware that, without him, the Father will lose his joy, because he too is son like the younger son!

- Luke 15: 28^a-30: The Father's attitude towards his older son, and the older son's reply
The Father goes out of the house and begs his older son to go in. But the son replies: "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property – he and his women – you kill the calf we had been fattening!" The older son glories in his observance: "I have never once disobeyed your orders!" He too wants a feast and joy, but only with his friends. Not with his brother, not with his father. He does not mention his brother as such, he does not call him brother, but "this you son," as if he were no longer his brother. It is he, the older brother, who speaks of prostitutes. It is his malice that interprets thus the life of his younger brother. How often does the older brother misinterpret his younger brother's life! How often do Catholics misinterpret the life of others! The Father's attitude is different. He goes out of the house for both sons. He welcomes the younger brother but does not want to lose the older brother. Both are part of the family. The one must not exclude the other!
- Luke 15: 31-32: The Father's final reply
Just as the Father pays no attention to the arguments presented by the younger son, so also he pays no attention to the older son's arguments and says to him: "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found!" Could it be that the older son was really aware of being always with the Father and to find in his presence the cause of rejoicing? The Father's expression: "All I have is yours" also includes the younger son who has come back! The older son has no right to make distinctions. If he wishes to be his Father's son, then he will have to accept him as he is not as he would like the Father to be! The parable does not give us the final answer of the older son. This concerns us, because we are all older brothers!

Further Information:

The two economies: the Father's House and the Master's House

This parable is known as that of *the prodigal son*, and this implies the economic side of things. *Prodigal* means someone who spends freely, even though this is a secondary detail in the parable. Really, the main point of the text is found in the fact that the follower of Jesus will one day have to make a choice: the choice between the Father's House or the system of sharing the master's house or the system of accumulation.

The parable begins with a young man who asks the father to give him his share of the inheritance because he wants to leave home (Lk 15: 12). To leave the Father's house requires that the person have the one thing the world readily

accepts: money. Without money the young man could not face the world. But the young man was not mature enough to administer the money and goes on a life of debauchery (Lk 15: 13). To make things worse, when he had spent all his money, he goes through difficult economic times, which, in biblical language, are always described by the word “hunger.” In the biblical world, famine exists only when the economic structure has collapsed. So also the young man begins to be in need (Lk 15: 14).

Difficulties faced generate maturity. The young man sees that he still needs money to survive in this world. So, for the first time in his life, he seeks employment (Lk 15: 15). Thus he goes to the *Master's House* who sends him to look after pigs. He is very hungry, his wages are not sufficient and he tries to satisfy his hunger by eating the food given to the pigs (Lk 15:16).

Meanwhile, in the master's house things are not so simple: the pigs' food is for the pigs. The worker must eat from the wages he gets for his service. Thus, the master's concern is not his worker's hunger but to fatten the pigs. The young man discovers that in the master's house food is denied, not shared, not even the food given to the pigs. Each for himself!

From his experience in the master's house, the young man begins to compare his present situation with that in his father's house. In his *Father's House* the workers are not hungry because the bread is shared with all the workers. In the father's house no one remains without food, not even the workers! The young man then decides to go back to his father's house. Now he is sufficiently mature to know that he cannot be considered as son, so he asks his father for employment. In the father's house the workers are not hungry because the bread is shared.

There are those who think that the son goes back because he is hungry. If so, his return would be opportunism. It is not this, but a choice for a particular kind of house. In the master's house, nothing is shared, not even the pigs' food. In the father's house, no one is hungry because the mission of the Father's House is to “fill the hungry with good things” (Lk 1: 53). Sharing is the thing that keeps hunger away in the father's house. But the young man discovers this only because he is hungry in the master's house. Comparing the two models, the young man makes his choice: he prefers to be a worker in the father's house, a place of sharing, a place where no one goes hungry and all are satisfied. So he goes back to the father's house asking to be one of the workers (Lk 15: 17-20).

By putting this reflection at the heart of his Gospel, Luke is warning the Christian communities that are organizing themselves in the particular economic system of the Roman Empire. This system is symbolized in the parable by the *master's house*, where pigs get more attention than workers, or, where investment is worth more than work. In the Father's House, or in the house of Christians, this system cannot rule. Christians must concentrate their lives on sharing their goods. Sharing goods means breaking with the imperial system of domination. It means breaking with the master's house. In the Acts of the Apostles we see that one of the beautiful characteristics of the Christian community lies in the sharing of goods (Acts 2: 44-45; 3: 6; 4: 32- 37).

Luke wants to remind us that the greatest sign of the Kingdom is the common table in the Father's House, where there is room for all and where the bread is shared with all. Living in the Father's House means sharing everything at the common table of the community. No one may be excluded from this table. We

are all called to share. As we are constantly reminded in our celebrations: no one is so poor that he or she cannot share something. And no one is so rich that he or she may not have something to receive. The common table is built on sharing by all. Thus, the feast in the Father's House will be eternal.

The three parables have something in common: joy and the feast. Anyone who experiences the free and surprising entrance of the love of God in his or her life will rejoice and will want to communicate this joy to others. God's saving action is source of joy: "Rejoice with me!" (Lk 15: 6, 9) It is from this experience of God's gratuity that the sense of feasting and joy is born (Lk 15: 32). At the end of the parable, the Father asks to be joyful and to celebrate. The joy seems to be dampened by the older son who does not want to go in. He wants the right to celebrate only with his friends and does not want to celebrate with the other members of his human family. He represents those who consider themselves just and think that they do not need conversion.

Praying a Psalm

Psalm 63(62): Your Love is More than Life

God, you are my God, I pine for you;
my heart thirsts for you, my body longs for you, as a land parched, dreary and waterless.
Thus I have gazed on you in the sanctuary, seeing your power and your glory.
Better your faithful love than life itself; my lips will praise you.
Thus I will bless you all my life, in your name lift up my hands.
All my longings fulfilled as with fat and rich foods, a song of joy on my lips and praise in my mouth.
On my bed when I think of you,
I muse on you in the watches of the night, for you have always been my help;
in the shadow of your wings I rejoice; my heart clings to you,
your right hand supports me.
May those who are hounding me to death go down to the depths of the earth,
given over to the blade of the sword, and left as food for jackals.
Then the king shall rejoice in God,
all who swear by him shall gain recognition,
for the mouths of liars shall be silenced.

Final Prayer

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

Monday, September 12, 2022

Ordinary Time

Prayer

Holy Father, through Jesus your Son, the Word made flesh for us, send me your Holy Spirit, that my ears may be opened to hear the "letter of love" that you have written to me and enlighten my mind that I may understand it in depth. Make my heart docile that it may receive your will with joy and help me to give witness to it. Amen.

Reading

The Gospel Text - Luke 7: 1-10

When he had finished all his words to the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave who was ill and about to die, and he was valuable to him. When he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and save the life of his slave. They approached Jesus and strongly urged him to come, saying, "He deserves to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation and he built the synagogue for us." And Jesus went with them, but when he was only a short distance from the house, the centurion sent friends to tell him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof. Therefore, I did not consider myself worthy to come to you; but say the word and let my servant be healed. For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him and, turning, said to the crowd following him, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." When the messengers returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Meditation

- Chapter 7 of the gospel of Luke helps us to receive the call addressed to the pagans to adhere to faith in the Lord Jesus. The figure of the centurion becomes the pacesetter for all those who want to abide by the faith of Israel and then encounter and know the face of the Father in Jesus. In the meditation on this Gospel, we are also proposed to open ourselves to faith or to make our confidence in the Word of the Lord more firmly unshaken. Let us try, then, to follow, with our hearts, the paces of this Roman centurion, so that in him we may also be present.
- Perhaps the first aspect that emerges from the reading of the passage is the situation of suffering in which the centurion finds himself. Try to hear more attentively the words that try to give light to this reality. Capernaum, a border city, a city apart, on the margins, a city where the blessings of God seem slow to arrive. The grave illness; the imminent death of a dear person.
- But we soon see that the Lord enters into this situation, coming to share in it, to live in it with his loving presence. The words in italics confirm this truth: "asking him to come"; "and Jesus went with them"; "he was only a short distance." It is wonderful to see this movement of Jesus who moves near to him who calls him, who searches for him and who asks for salvation. This is how Jesus acts with each one of us.
- But it is also very useful to enter into contact with the figure of the centurion, who is here a bit like our master, our guide on the way of faith.
- "When he heard about Jesus." He received the announcement; he heard the good news and held it in his heart. He did not let it escape and did not close his ears to life. He remembered Jesus and now he goes in search for him.
- "He sent." Twice does the centurion carry out his action: first sending the elders of the people to Jesus, authoritative figures, then by sending his friends. Luke uses two different verbs and this helps us to understand better that in this man something

took place, a state of passage: he became more and more open to the encounter with Jesus. Sending his friends is a bit like going to Jesus himself “asking him to come and save.” Two beautiful verbs that explain the whole intensity of his request to Jesus. He wants Jesus to come, to be near, to enter into his poor life, to come and visit his pain. It is a declaration of love, of great faith, because it is as if he was saying: “Without you, I cannot live anymore. Come!” And he does not ask for any mere salvation, a superficial healing, as the particular verb chosen by Luke helps us to understand. In fact, here it is a traverse salvation, one that crosses the entirety of life, of the entire person, and is capable of taking a person beyond, past every obstacle, every difficulty or trial, beyond even death.

- “I am not worthy.” Luke puts these words in the mouth of the centurion twice, and these words help us to understand the great transformation that has taken place within himself. He feels unworthy, incapable, insufficient, as the two different greek terms used here indicate. Perhaps the first conquest on the road of faith with Jesus is exactly this: the discovery of our great need for Him, for his presence and the more certain knowledge that alone we can do nothing because we are poor, we are sinners. However, precisely because of this we are infinitely loved!
- “Say the word.” Here is the great leap, the great transformation in faith. The centurion now believes in a clear, serene and faithful way. While Jesus walked towards him, he was also completing his own interior journey, changing, becoming a new man. First, he welcomed the person of Jesus, then his word. For him it is the Lord as he is, his word is efficacious, true, powerful, able to do what he says. All of his doubts have crumbled; nothing remains but faith, the certain confidence in salvation, in Jesus.

Questions

- Does my prayer feel like that of the centurion, addressed to Jesus to come and save? Am I also ready to explain to the Lord my uneasiness, my need for him? Am I perhaps ashamed to present to him the sickness, the death that lives in my house, in my life? What do I need in order to fulfill this first step in trust?
- And if I open my heart in prayer, to the invocation, if I invite the Lord to come, what is the profound attitude of my heart? Is there also in me, as in the centurion, the knowledge of being unworthy, of not being sufficient solely of myself, of not being pretentious? Do I know how to place myself before the Lord with that humility that comes from love, from serene trust in Him?
- Is his Word good enough for me? Do I ever listen to it in its entirety with attention, with respect, even though, perhaps, I am not able to fully understand it?
- And in this moment, what is the word that I want to hear from the mouth of the Lord for me? What do I want Him to say to me?
- The pagan centurion had such a great faith...and I, who am Christian, what faith do I have? Perhaps it is true that I must pray like this: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9: 24)

Final Prayer

Your words are a lamp for my steps, Lord! How can a youth keep his way pure?

By observing your word.

With all my heart I search for you:

do not let me deviate from your commands.

Put again into my heart your promise that I may not sin against you.

Blessed are you, Lord:
teach me your decrees.
With my mouth I recount
all of the wisdom from your mouth.
On the way of your teachings is my joy, more than all other riches.
I want to meditate on your precepts, to consider your ways.
In your decrees is my delight, I will not forget your word.

Tuesday, September 13, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our creator and guide,
may we serve you with all our hearts and know your forgiveness in our lives.
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 7: 11-17

It happened that soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people.

Now when he was near the gate of the town there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople was with her.

When the Lord saw her he felt sorry for her and said to her, 'Don't cry.' Then he went up and touched the bier and the bearers stood still, and he said, 'Young man, I tell you: get up.' And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying, 'A great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited his people.' And this view of him spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents the episode of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain. The literary context of this episode of the VII chapter of Luke helps one to understand. The Evangelist wants to show that Jesus opens the road, revealing the novelty of God which is presented to us in the announcement of the Good News. And in this way the transformation and openness take place: Jesus accepts the request of a foreigner, a non-Jew (Lk 7: 1-10) and resurrects the son of a widow (Lk 7: 11-17). The way in which Jesus reveals the Kingdom surprises the Jewish brothers who were not accustomed to such great openness. Even John the Baptist is surprised and orders to go and ask: "Are you the one who is to come or are we to expect someone else?" (Lk 7: 18-30). Jesus denounces the incoherence of his patricians: "They are like children shouting to one another without knowing what they want!" (Lk 7: 31-35). And finally, there is the openness of Jesus toward women (7: 36-50).

- Luke 7: 11-12: *The meeting of the two processions.* "Jesus went to a town called Nain. His disciples and a great crowd were going with him. When he was close to the gate of the town, there was a dead man being carried out to the

cemetery, the only son of his mother and she was a widow.” Luke is like a painter. With few words he succeeds to paint a very beautiful picture on the encounter of the two processions: the procession of death which is going out of the city and accompanies the widow who is taking her only son towards the cemetery; the procession of life which enters the city and accompanies Jesus. The two meet in the small square at the side of the gate of the town of Nain.

- Luke 7: 13: *Compassion begins to act here.* “When the Lord saw her, he felt sorry for her and said to her: “Do not cry!” It is compassion which moves Jesus to speak and to act. Compassion signifies literally: “to suffer with,” to assume or make ours the suffering of the other person, identifying oneself with the person, feeling the pain, the suffering. It is compassion which puts into action the power of Jesus, the power of life over death, the creative power.

- Luke 7: 14-15: “Young man, I tell you, get up!” Jesus gets near the bier and says: “Young man, I tell you, get up!” And the dead man sat up and began to talk; and Jesus gave him to his mother.” Sometimes, at the moment of a great sorrow caused by the death of a loved person, people say: “In Jesus’ time, when he walked on this earth there was hope not to lose a loved person because Jesus could resurrect her.” These persons consider the episode of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain as an event of the past which arouses nostalgia and also certain envy. The intention of the Gospel, instead, is not, that of arousing nostalgia or envy, but rather of helping us to experience better the living presence of Jesus in our midst. It is the same Jesus, who continues alive in our midst, capable of overcoming death and the sorrow of death. He is with us today, and in the face of the problems of sorrow which strike us, he tells us: “I tell you, get up!”

- Luke 7: 16-17: *The repercussion.* “Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying: ‘A great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited his people.’ The fame of these events spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside.” It is the prophet who was announced by Moses (Dt 18: 15). It is God who comes to visit us and the “Father of orphans and protector of the widows” (Ps 68: 6: Judith 9: 11).

Personal Questions

- Compassion moves Jesus to resurrect the son of the widow. Does the suffering, the sorrow of others produce in me the same compassion? What do I do to help the others to overcome the sorrow and to create a new life?
- God visited his people. Do I perceive the many visits of God in my life and in the life of the people?

Concluding Prayer

Serve Yahweh with gladness,
come into his presence with songs of joy! Be sure that Yahweh is God, he made us,
we belong to him, his people, the flock of his sheepfold. (Ps 100: 2-3)

Wednesday, September 14, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Oh Father who wanted to save man by the Cross of Christ, your Son, grant to us who have known on earth his mystery of love, to enjoy in Heaven the fruits of his redemption. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

LECTIO

Gospel Reading – John 3: 13-17

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man; as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.

MEDITATIO

Key for the Reading:

The text proposed to us by the Liturgy has been taken from the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. It should not surprise us that the passage chosen for this celebration forms part of the fourth Gospel, because it is precisely this Gospel which presents the mystery of the cross of the Lord, as the exaltation.

This is clear from the beginning of the Gospel: "as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up" (Jn 3: 14; Dn 7: 13). John explains the mystery of the Incarnate Word in the paradoxical movement of the descent-ascent (Jn 1: 14, 18; 3: 13). In fact, it is this mystery which offers the key for the reading in order to understand the evolution of the identity and of the mission of the *passus et gloriosus* of Jesus Christ, and that we may well say that this is not only valid for the text of John. The Letter to the Ephesians, for example, uses this paradoxical movement to explain the mystery of Christ: "Now, when it says, 'he went up', it must mean that he had gone down to the deepest levels of the earth" (Ef 4: 9).

Jesus is the Son of God who becoming Son of man (Jn 3: 13) makes known to us the mysteries of God (Jn 1: 18). He alone can do this, in so far as he alone has seen the Father (Jn 6: 46). We can say that the mystery of the Word who descends from Heaven responds to the yearning of the prophets: who will go up to heaven to reveal this mystery to us? (cf. Dt 30: 12; Pr 30: 4). The fourth Gospel is over full of references to the mystery of he who "is from Heaven" (1 Co 15, 47). The following are some quotations or references: Jn 6: 33, 38, 51, 62; 8: 42; 16: 28-30; 17: 5.

The exaltation of Jesus is precisely in his descent to come to us, up to death, and the death on the Cross, on which he was lifted up like the serpent in the desert, which, "anybody... who looked at it would survive" (Nm 21: 7-9; Zc 12: 10). John reminds us in the scene of the death of Jesus of Christ being lifted up: "They will look to the one whom they have pierced" (Jn 19: 37). In the context of the fourth Gospel, to turn and look means, "to know," "to understand," "to see."

Frequently, in John's Gospel, Jesus speaks about his being lifted up: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He" (Jn 8: 28); "when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all peoples to myself. By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die" (Jn 12: 32-33). In the Synoptics also Jesus announces to his disciples the mystery of his condemnation to death on the cross (see Mt 20: 27-29; Mk 10: 32-34; Lk 18: 31-33). In fact, Christ had "to suffer all that to enter into his glory" (Lk 24: 26).

This mystery reveals the great love which God has for us. He is the Son given to us, "so that anyone who believes in him will not be lost, but will have eternal life," this Son whom we have rejected and crucified. But precisely in this rejection on our part, God has manifested himself to us his fidelity and his love which does not stop before the hardness of our heart. And even in spite of our rejection and our contempt he gives us salvation (cf. Acts 4: 27-28), remaining firm in fulfilling his plan of mercy: God, in fact, has not sent his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world may be saved through him."

A Few Questions:

- What struck you in the Gospel?
- What does the exaltation of Christ and of his cross mean for you?
- What consequences does this paradoxical movement of descent-ascent imply in the living out of faith?

ORATIO

Psalm 77:1-2, 34-38)

My people, listen to my teaching, pay attention to what I say.
I will speak to you in poetry, unfold the mysteries of the past. Whenever he slaughtered them, they began to seek him,
they turned back and looked eagerly for him, recalling that God was their rock,
God the Most High, their redeemer.
They tried to hoodwink him with their mouths, their tongues were deceitful towards him;
their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant.
But in his compassion he forgave their guilt instead of killing them,
time and again repressing his anger instead of rousing his full wrath.

CONTEMPLATIO

"Jesus Christ as Lord,
to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2: 11)

Thursday, September 15, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our creator and guide,
may we serve you with all our hearts
and know your forgiveness in our lives.
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 19: 25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.

Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

Reflection

Today, feast of Our Sorrowful Mother, the Gospel of the day presents the passage in which Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple, meet at Calvary before the Cross. The Mother of Jesus appears two times in the Gospel of John: at the beginning at the wedding feast in Cana (Jn 2: 1-5), and at the end, at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19: 25-27). These two episodes, only present in John's Gospel, have a very profound value. The Gospel of John compared to the other three Gospels, is like an X-Ray of the other three, while the other three are only a photograph of what has taken place. The X rays of faith help to discover in the events dimensions which the human eye does not succeed to perceive. The Gospel of John, besides describing the facts, reveals the symbolical dimension which exists in them. Thus, in both cases, at Cana and at the foot of the Cross, the Mother of Jesus represents symbolically the Old Testament waiting for the New Testament to arrive, and in the two cases, she contributes to the arrival of the New Testament. Mary appears like the step between what existed before and that which will arrive afterwards. At Cana she symbolizes the Old Testament; she perceives the limits of the Old Testament and takes the initiative so that the New one arrives. She tells her Son: "They have no wine!" (Jn 2: 3). And in Calvary? Let us see:

- John 19: 25: The women and the Beloved Disciple, together at the foot of the Cross. This is what the Gospel says: "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala." The "photograph" shows the mother together with the Son, standing up. A strong woman, who does not allow herself to be discouraged. "*Stabat Mater Dolorosa!*" Hers is a silent presence which supports the Son in his gift of self up until death, and the death on the cross (Ph 2: 8). But the "X-Ray" of faith shows how the passage from the Old Testament to the New Testament takes place. Like it happened in Cana, the Mother of Jesus represents the Old Testament, the new humanity which is formed beginning from the lived experience of the Gospel of the Kingdom. At the end of the first century, some Christians thought that the Old Testament was no longer necessary. In fact, at the beginning of the second century, Marcion rejected all the Old Testament and remained with only a part of the New Testament. This is why many wanted to know which was the will of Jesus regarding this.
- John 19: 26-28: The Testament or the Will of Jesus. The words of Jesus are significant. Seeing his Mother, and at her side the beloved Disciple, Jesus says: "Woman, this is your son." Then he says to the disciple: "This is your mother." The Old and the New Testament must walk together. The request of Jesus, the beloved Disciple, the son, the New Testament, receives the mother in his house. In the house of the Beloved Disciple, in the Christian community, the full sense of the Old Testament is discovered. The New Testament cannot be understood without the Old one, neither is the Old one complete without the New one. Saint Agustin said: "Novum in vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet." (The New one is hidden in the Old one. The Old one blooms in the New one). The New one without the Old one would be a building without a foundation. And the Old one without the New one would be like a fruit tree which could not bear fruit.
- Mary in the New Testament. The New Testament speaks very little about Mary and she says even less. Mary is the Mother of silence. The Bible only keeps seven words of

Mary. Each one of those is like a window which allows one to see inside Mary's house and to discover how her relationship with God was. The key to understand all this is given by Luke: "Blessed are those who receive the word of God and put it into practice" (Lk 11: 27-28).

- 1st Word: "How can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?" (Lk 1: 34).
- 2nd Word: "You see before you the Lord's servant; let it happen to me as you have said." (Lk 1: 38).
- 3rd Word: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior (Lk 1: 46-55).
- 4th Word: "My child why have you done this to us? Your father and I were worried looking for you" (Lk 2: 48).
- 5th Word: "They have no wine!" (Jn 2: 3).
- 6th Word: "Do whatever he tells you!" (Jn 2: 5).
- 7th Word: The silence at the foot of the Cross, more eloquent than one thousand words! (Jn 19: 25-27).

Personal Questions

- Mary at the foot of the Cross. A strong and silent woman. How is my devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus?
- In the Pieta of Michelangelo, Mary seems to be very young, younger than the crucified Son, and she must have been about fifty years old. Asked why he had sculptured the face of Mary as a young girl, Michelangelo replied: the persons who are passionate for God never age!" Passionate for God! Is that passion for God in me?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, what quantities of good things you have in store for those who fear you, and bestow on those who make you their refuge, for all humanity to see. Safe in your presence you hide them, far from human plotting. (Ps 31: 19-20)

Friday, September 16, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our creator and guide,
may we serve you with all our hearts and know your forgiveness in our lives.
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 8: 1-3

Now it happened that Jesus made his way through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

With him went the Twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their own resources.

Reflection

In today's Gospel we have the continuation of yesterday's episode which spoke about the surprising attitude of Jesus with regard to women, when he defends the woman, who was known in the town as a sinner, against the criticism of the Pharisee. Now at the beginning of chapter 8, Luke describes Jesus who goes through the villages and towns of Galilee and the novelty is that he was not only accompanied by the disciples, but also by the women disciples.

- Luke 8: 1: The Twelve who follow Jesus. In one phrase alone, Luke describes the situation: Jesus goes through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God and the Twelve are with him. The expression "to follow Jesus" (cf. Mk 1: 18; 15: 41) indicates the condition of the disciple who follows the Master, twenty-four hours a day, trying to imitate his example and to participate in his destiny.
- Luke 8: 2-3: The women follow Jesus. What surprises is that at the side of the men there are also women "together with Jesus." Luke places both the men and the women disciples at the same level because all of them follow Jesus. Luke has also kept some of the names of some of these women disciples: Mary Magdalene, born in the town of Magdala. She had been cured, and delivered from seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, steward of Herod Antipa, who was Governor of Galilee; Suzanne and several others. It is said that they "served Jesus with their own goods" Jesus allows a group of women "to follow" him (Lk 8: 2-3; 23: 49; Mk 15: 41). The Gospel of Mark when speaking about the women at the moment of Jesus' death says: "There were some women who were observing at a distance and among them Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joset, and Salome, who followed him and served him when he was still in Galilee, and many others who had gone up with him to Jerusalem (Mk 15: 40-41). Mark defines their attitude with three words: to follow, to serve, to go up to Jerusalem. The first Christians did not draw up a list of these women disciples who followed Jesus as they had done with the twelve disciples. But in the pages of the Gospel of Luke the name of seven of these women disciples are mentioned: Mary Magdalene, Jeanna, wife of Chuza, Suzanne (Lk 8: 3), Martha and Mary (Lk 10: 38), Mary, the mother of James (Lk 24: 10) and Anna, the prophetess (Lk 2: 36), who was eighty-four years old. Number eighty-four is seven times twelve: the perfect age! The later Ecclesiastical tradition does not value this fact about the discipleship of women with the same importance with which it values the following of Jesus on the part of men. It is a sin!

The Gospel of Luke has always been considered as the Gospel of women. In fact, Luke is the Evangelist who presents the largest number of episodes in which he underlines the relationship of Jesus with the women, and the novelty is not only in the presence of the women around Jesus, but also and, above all, in the attitude of Jesus in relation to them. Jesus touches them and allows them to touch him without fear of being contaminated (Lk 7: 39; 8: 44-45, 54). This was different from the teachers of that time, Jesus accepts women who follow him and who are his disciples (Lk 8: 2-3; 10: 39). The liberating force of God, which acts in Jesus, allows women to raise and to assume their dignity (Lk 13: 13). Jesus is sensitive to the suffering of the widow and is in solidarity with her sorrow (Lk 7: 13). The work of the woman who prepares the meal is considered by Jesus like a sign of the Kingdom (Lk 13: 20-21). The insistent widow who struggles for her rights is considered

the model of prayer (Lk 18:1-8), and the poor widow who shares the little that she has with others is the model of dedication and donation (Lk 21: 1-4). At a time when the witness of women is not accepted as something valid, Jesus accepts women and considers them witnesses of his death (Lk 23: 49), of his burial (Lk 22: 55-56) and of his resurrection (Lk 24: 1-11, 22-24).

Personal Questions

- How is woman considered in your community, in your country, in your Church?
- Compare the attitude of our Church with the attitude of Jesus.

Concluding Prayer

God, examine me and know my heart, test me and know my concerns.
Make sure that I am not on my way to ruin,
and guide me on the road of eternity. (Ps 139: 23-24)

Saturday, September 17, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our creator and guide,
may we serve you with all our hearts and know your forgiveness in our lives.
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 8: 4-15

With a large crowd gathering and people from every town finding their way to Jesus, he told this parable: 'A sower went out to sow his seed. Now as he sowed, some fell on the edge of the path and was trampled on; and the birds of the air ate it up. Some seed fell on rock, and when it came up it withered away, having no moisture. Some seed fell in the middle of thorns and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell into good soil and grew and produced its crop a hundredfold.' Saying this he cried, 'Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!' His disciples asked him what this parable might mean, and he said, 'To you is granted to understand the secrets of the kingdom of God; for the rest it remains in parables, so that they may look but not perceive, listen but not understand.'

'This, then, is what the parable means: the seed is the word of God. Those on the edge of the path are people who have heard it, and then the devil comes and carries away the word from their hearts in case they should believe and be saved.'

Those on the rock are people who, when they first hear it, welcome the word with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of trial they give up.

As for the part that fell into thorns, this is people who have heard, but as they go on their way they are choked by the worries and riches and pleasures of life and never produce any crops. As for the part in the rich soil, this is people with a noble and generous heart

who have heard the word and take it to themselves and yield a harvest through their perseverance.

Reflection

In today's Gospel, we will meditate on the parable of the seed. Jesus had a very popular word to teach by means of parables. A parable is a comparison which uses the visible things of life that are known to explain the invisible and unknown things of the Kingdom of God. Jesus had an enormous capacity to find very simple images to compare the things of God with the things of life which people knew and experienced in their daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: to be within the things of life, and to be within the things of God, of the Kingdom of God. For example, the people of Galilee understood all about seeds, of land, of rain, of the sun, of salt of flowers, of the harvest, of fishing, etc. Now, there are exactly these known things that Jesus uses in the parables to explain the mystery of the Kingdom. The farmer who listens says: "The seed in the ground, I know what this means. Jesus says that this has something to do with the Kingdom of God. What could this ever be?" It is possible to imagine the long conversations with the people! The parable enters into the heart of the people and urges them to listen to nature and to think about life.

When he finishes telling the parable, Jesus does not explain it, but he usually says: "Who has ears to hear, let him hear" This means: "This is: You have heard and so now try to understand!" From time to time he would explain to the disciples: People like this way of teaching, because Jesus believed in the personal capacity to discover the sense of the parables. The experience which people had of life was for him a means to discover the presence of the mystery of God in their life and to have courage not to be discouraged along the way.

- Luke 8: 4: The crowds follow Jesus. Luke says: a large crowd got around him and people from all the towns ran to him from all the towns. So then he tells them this parable. Mark describes how Jesus told the parable. There were so many people that he, in order not to fall, went into a boat and sitting down he taught the people who were on the seashore (Mk 4: 1).
- Luke 8: 5-8°: The parable of the seed is a mirror of the life of the farmers. At that time, it was not easy to live from agriculture. The ground was full of rocks; there was little rain, much sun. Besides, many times, people, to shorten the way, passed through the fields and stepped on the plants (Mk 2: 23). But in spite of that, every year the farmer sowed and planted, trusting in the force of the seed, in the generosity of nature.
- Luke 8: 8b: Anyone who has ears to hear let him hear! At the end, Jesus says: "Anyone who has ears to hear, let him hear!" The way to be able to understand the parable is to search: "Try to understand!" The parable does not say everything immediately but moves the person to think. It does it in such a way that the person discovers the message beginning from the experience which the person has of the seed. It urges the person to be creative and to participate. It is not a doctrine which is presented ready to be taught and decorated. The parable is not water in a bottle, it is the source.
- Luke 8: 9-10: Jesus explains the parable to the disciples. At home, alone with Jesus, the disciples want to know the meaning of the parable. Jesus responds by means of a difficult and mysterious phrase. He says to the Disciples: "To you is granted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God, for the rest it remains in parables so that "they may look but not perceive, listen but not understand." This phrase gives rise to a question in the heart of the people: What is the purpose of a parable? Is it to clarify or to hide things? Did Jesus use the parables in order that people continue in their ignorance and would not convert themselves? Certainly not! In another place it is said that Jesus used the parables "according to what they could understand" (Mk

4: 33). The parable reveals and hides at the same time” It reveals for those who are “inside, within” who accept Jesus Messiah Servant. It hides for those who insist in seeing in him the Messiah the glorious King. These understand the images of the parable, but do not understand its meaning.

- Luke 8: 11-15: The explanation of the parable, in its diverse parts. One by one, Jesus explains the parts of the parable, the seed, and the earth up to the harvest time. Some scholars think that this explanation was added afterwards; that it would not be from Jesus’, but from one of the communities. This is possible! It does not matter! Because in the bud of the parable there is the flower of the explanation. Buds and flowers, both of them have the same origin, that is, Jesus. This is why we also can continue to reflect and to discover other beautiful things in the parable. Once, a person in a community asked: “Jesus says that we have to be salt. For what does salt serve?” The persons gave their opinion starting from the experience which each one had regarding salt! And they applied all this to the life of the community and discovered that to be salt is difficult and demanding. The parable functioned well! The same thing can be applied to the seeds. All have a certain experience.

Personal Questions

- The seed falls in four different places: on the roadside, among the rocks, among the thorns and in the good earth. What does each one of these four places mean? What type of earth am I? Sometimes, people are rock; other times thistles; other roadside, other times good ground. Normally, what are we in our community?
- Which are the fruits which the Word of God is producing in our life and in our community?

Concluding Prayer

Your kingship is a kingship for ever, your reign lasts from age to age.
Yahweh is trustworthy in all his words, and upright in all his deeds. (Ps 145: 12-13)

Sunday, September 18, 2022

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord, my Father, today I bring before you my weakness, my shame, my distance from you; I no longer hide my dishonesty and infidelity, because you know and see everything, in depth, with the eyes of your love and of your compassion. I ask you, good Doctor, pour on my wound the balm of your Word, of your voice which speaks to me, calls me and teaches me. Do not take away your gift, Who is the Holy Spirit: allow him to breathe on me, as a breath of life, from the four winds; that He envelops me as a tongue of fire and inundates me as water of salvation; send Him to me from your holy Heaven, as the dove of truth, to announce, today also, that you are and that you wait for me, that you take me with you, after all, as on the first day, when you shaped me and created and called me.

Reading

To Insert the Passage in its Context:

This evangelical pericope belongs to the great section of the narration of Luke which includes the long journey of Jesus towards Jerusalem; it opens in Lk 9: 51 to end in Lk 19: 27. This section, in turn, is subdivided into three parts, as three stages in the journey of Jesus, each one of which is introduced by an annotation almost like a repetition: "Jesus resolutely turned his face towards Jerusalem" (9: 51); "Through towns and villages he went teaching, making his way to Jerusalem" (13: 22); "...on the way to Jerusalem he was travelling in the borderlands of Samaria and Galilee" (17: 11); to reach the conclusion in 19: 28: "When he had said this he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem," when Jesus enters the City.

We find ourselves in the second part, from Lk 13: 22 to 17, 10 which includes diverse teachings, which Jesus offers to his interlocutors: the crowds, the Pharisees, the Scribes, the disciples. In this unity, Jesus enters into dialogue with his disciples and offers them a parable, to indicate which is the correct use of the goods of this world and how our own life should be concretely administered, inserted in a filial relation with God. Then follow three "sayings" or secondary applications of the same parable in diverse situations, which help the disciples to make space for the new life in the Spirit, which the Father offers them.

To Help in the Reading of the Passage:

- **vv. 1-8:** Jesus tells the parable of the wise and shrewd steward: a man, accused of his excessive greed, which has become unbearable, who finds himself in a decisive and difficult moment in his life, but who succeeds to use all his human resources to turn to good his clamorous failure. Just like this son of the world has known how to discern his own interests, so also the children of light have to learn to discern the will of love and the gift of their Father, to live like Him.
- **v. 9:** Jesus makes us understand that also dishonest and unjust richness, which is that of this world, if used for the good, as a gift, leads to salvation.
- **vv. 10-12:** Jesus explains that the goods of this world are not to be demonized, but rather are to be understood for the value which they have. They are said to be
- "minimum," they are "the little" of our life, but we are called to administer them faithfully and attentively, because they are a means to enter into communion with the brothers and sisters and therefore, with the Father.
- **v. 13:** Jesus offers a fundamental teaching: there is only one and unique end in our life and this is God, the Lord. To seek to serve any other reality means to become slaves, to bind ourselves to deceit and to die even now.

The Gospel Text - Luke 16: 1-13:

1 He also said to his disciples, 'There was a rich man and he had a steward who was denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. 2 He called for the man and said, "What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward any longer." 3 Then the steward said to himself, "Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me, what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed. 4 Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes." 5 'Then he called his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, "How much do you owe my master?" 6 "One hundred measures of oil," he said. The steward said, "Here, take your bond; sit down and quickly write fifty." 7 To another he said, "And you, sir, how much do you owe?" "One hundred measures of wheat," he said. The steward said, "Here, take your

bond and write eighty." 8 'The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.'

9 'And so I tell you this: use money, tainted as it is, to win you friends, and thus make sure that when it fails you, they will welcome you into eternal dwellings.

10 Anyone who is trustworthy in little things is trustworthy in great; anyone who is dishonest in little things is dishonest in great. 11 If then you are not trustworthy with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches? 12 And if you are not trustworthy with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own?

13 'No servant can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

I accept the silence of this moment, of this sacred time of encounter with Him. I who am poor, without money, without possessions, without house and without my own strength, because nothing comes from me, but everything comes from Him, it is His, I allow myself to be taken in by His richness of compassion and of mercy.

Some Questions

- Like any Christian I am also an “administrator” of the Lord, the rich Man of our existence, the Only One Who possesses goods and riches. What is it that regulates my thoughts daily and, consequently, my daily choices, my actions, my relations?
- Life, goods, the gifts which my Father has given me, these infinite riches, which are worth more than any other thing in the world, am I wasting them, am I throwing them away like pearls to the pigs?
- The unfaithful steward, but wise and shrewd, suddenly changes his life, changes relations, calculations, thoughts. Today is a new day, it is the beginning of a new life, regulated according to the logics of remission, of pardon, of distribution: do I know that true wisdom is hidden in mercy?
- “Either you will love one or will love the other....” Whose servant do I want to be? In whose house do I want to live? Together with whom do I want to live my life?

A Key for Reading

“Who is the steward of the Lord?”

Luke in the parable uses the term “**administrator or steward**” or “**administration**” seven times, and thus it becomes the key word of the passage and of the message that the Lord wants to give me. Then, I try to look in Scripture for some traces, or a light which will help me to understand better and to verify my life, the administration that the Lord has entrusted to me.

In the Old Testament several times this reality is repeated, especially referring to the royal richness or to the richness of the city or of the empires: in the Books of the Chronicles, for example, it is spoken about the administrators of King David (1 Ch 27: 31; 28: 1) and also

in the Book of Esther (3: 9), Daniel (2: 49; 6: 4) and Tobias (1: 22) the meeting of administrators of the kings and the princes. It is totally worldly administration, linked to possessions, to money, to wealth, to power; therefore, bound to a negative reality, such as the accumulation, usurpation, violence. It is, in one word, an administration which ends, which is short-lived and deceitful, no matter if it is recognized that this is also, in a certain way, necessary for the good functioning of society.

The New Testament, on the other hand, immediately introduces me into a diverse dimension, higher, because it concerns the things of the spirit, of the soul, those things which do not end, do not change with the change of time and of persons. Saint Paul says: "Each one should consider himself as Christ's servant, steward entrusted with the mysteries of God. In such a matter, what is expected of stewards is that each one should be found trustworthy" (1Cor 4: 1 ff). and Peter: "Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these varied graces of God, put it at the service of others" (1P 4: 10). Therefore, I understand that I am also an administrator of the mysteries and of the grace of God, through the simple and poor instrument, which is my own life; in it I am called to be *faithful and good*. But this adjective "*good*," is the same which John uses referring to the Shepherd, to Jesus: "*kalòs*" that is, beautiful and good. And, why? Simply, because He *offers His life to the Father* for the sheep. This is the unique, true administration which is entrusted to me in this world, for the future world.

What is the shrewdness of the administrator of the Lord?

The passage says that the master praises his dishonest steward, because he acted with "astuteness" and he repeats the word "shrewd," a bit later. Perhaps a more correct translation could be "sage," that is "wise," or "prudent." It is a wisdom that results from an attentive, deep thinking, from reflection, from study and the application of the mind, of affection to something which is of great interest. As an adjective this term is found, for example in Mt 7: 24, where true wisdom is shown of the man who builds his house on the rock and not on the sand, that is the man who founds his existence on the Word of the Lord or also in Mt 25, where he says that the virgins who, together with their lamps, had the oil were wise, so that they will not be taken over by darkness, but who know how to wait always with invincible, incorruptible love, for their Spouse and Lord, when he returns. Therefore, this steward is wise and prudent, not because he takes advantage of others, but because he has known how to regulate and transform his life according to the measure and the form of the life of his Lord: he has committed himself totally, with his whole being, mind, heart, will, desire in imitating the one he serves.

Dishonesty and injustice

Another word which is repeated many times is "dishonest," "dishonesty"; the steward is said to be dishonest and thus also richness. Dishonesty is a characteristic which can corrode the being, in big things, in the great, but also in the minimum, in the small. The Greek text does not precisely use the word "dishonest," but the "administrator or steward of injustice," "richness of injustice," and "unjust in the minimum," "unjust in much." Injustice is a bad distribution, not impartial or just, not balanced; it lacks harmony, it lacks a centre which will attract all energy, all care and intent to itself; it causes fractures, wounds, pain over pain, accumulation on one side and lack of all on the other. All of us, in some way, come into contact, with the reality of injustice, because it belongs to this world. And we feel dragged on one and other side, we lose harmony, balance and beauty; and we cannot deny it because it is like that. The Gospel precisely condemns this strong lack of harmony, which is accumulation, to keep things aside, to increase them always more, possession and it shows us the way to obtain healing, which is a gift or giving, sharing, to give with an open heart, with mercy, like the Father does with us, without getting tired, without becoming less or poor.

And, what is mammon?

The word mammon appears in the whole Bible, in this chapter of Luke in (vv. 9, 11, and 13) and in Mt 6: 24. It is a Semitic term which corresponds to "riches," "possession," "gain," but it becomes almost the personification of the god-money which men serve very foolishly, slaves of that "unquenchable greed, which is idolatry" (Col. 3: 5). Here everything becomes clear, it is full light. Now, I know well which is the question which I still have, after the encounter with this Word of the Lord: "I, whom do I want to serve?" The choice is only one, unique, concrete. I keep in my heart this stupendous, marvelous and sweet verb, the verb "to serve" and I ponder it, and I draw from it all the substance of truth which it contains. The words of Joshua to the people come to my mind: "If serving Yahweh seems a bad thing to you, today you must make up your minds whom you do mean to serve!" (Jos 24: 15). I know that I am unjust, that I am an unfaithful administrator, foolish, I know that I have nothing, but today I choose, with everything that I am, to serve the Lord. (cf. Ac 20: 19; I Th 1: 9; Ga 1: 10; Rm 12: 11).

A Moment of Prayer: Psalm 49

Reflection of Wisdom on the heart which finds its riches in the presence of God

Rit. Blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours.

Hear this, all nations, listen, all who dwell on earth, people high and low, rich and poor alike!

My lips have wisdom to utter,
my heart good sense to whisper. I listen carefully to a proverb,
I set my riddle to the music of the harp.

Rit.

Why should I be afraid in times of trouble? Malice dogs me and hems me in.
They trust in their wealth and boast of the profusion of their riches.
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 for ever
and avoid the sight of the abyss.

Rit.

For he will see the wise also die no less than the fool and the brute,
and leave their wealth behind for others. In prosperity people lose their good sense, they
become no better than dumb animals.

But my soul God will ransom from the clutches of Sheol and will snatch me up.

Rit.

Do not be overawed when someone gets rich, and lives in ever greater splendor;
when he dies he will take nothing with him, his wealth will not go down with him.
Though he pampered himself while he lived
- and people praise you for looking after yourself -
he will go to join the ranks of his ancestors, who will never again see the light.

Rit.

"God wants a gratuitous love, that is a pure love...God fills the hearts, not the strongbox or coffer. What are riches good for if your heart is empty?" (*St. Augustine*).

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you for this time spent with you, listening to your voice which spoke to me with love and infinite mercy; I feel that my life is healed only when I remain with you, in you, when I allow you to take me. You have taken in your hands my greed, which renders me dry and arid, which closes me up, and makes me sad and leaves me alone; you have

taken my insatiable avarice, which fills me with emptiness and pain; you have accepted and taken upon yourself my ambiguity and infidelity, my tired and awkward limping. Lord, I am happy when I open myself to you and show you all my wounds! Thank you for the balm of your Word and of your silence. Thank you for the breath of your Spirit, which takes away the bad breath of evil, of the enemy.

Lord, I have robed, I know it, I have taken away what was not mine, I have buried it, I have wasted it; from now on I want to begin to return, to give back, I want to live my life as a gift always multiplied and shared among many. My life is a small thing, but in your hands it will become barrels of oil, measures of grain, consolation and food for my brothers and sisters.

Lord, I have no other words to say before such great and overflowing love, that is why I do only one thing: I open the doors of the heart and with a smile, I will accept all those whom you will send to me... (Ac 28: 30).

Monday, September 19, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
guide us, as you guide creation according to your law of love.
May we love one another and come to perfection
in the eternal life prepared for 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 8: 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples: 'No one lights a lamp to cover it with a bowl or to put it under a bed. No, it is put on a lampstand so that people may see the light when they come in. For nothing is hidden but it will be made clear, nothing secret but it will be made known and brought to light.

So take care how you listen; anyone who has, will be given more; anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he thinks he has.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents three brief phrases pronounced by Jesus. They are phrases scattered in different places which Luke collected here after the parable of the seed (Lk 8: 4-8) and of his explanation to the disciples (Lk 8: 9-15). This literary context, in which Luke places the three phrases, helps us to understand how he wants people to understand these phrases of Jesus.

- Luke 8: 16: The lamp which gives light. "No one lights a lamp to cover it with a bowl or to put it under a bed; no, it is put on a lampstand so that people may see the light when they come in. This phrase of Jesus is a brief parable. Jesus does not explain, because all know what he is speaking about. This belonged to everyday life. At that time, there was no electric light. Just imagine this! The family meets at home. The sun begins to set. A person gets up, lights the lamp, covers it with a vase or places it under the bed. What will the others say? All will scream out: "But are you crazy... place

the lamp on the table!” In a Biblical meeting somebody made the following comment: The Word of God is a lamp which is necessary to light in the darkness of the night. If it remains closed in the Book of the Bible, it will be like the lamp under a vase. But when it is placed on the table it gives light to the whole house, when it is read in community and is connected to life.

- In the context in which Luke places this phrase, he is referring to the explanation which Jesus gave about the parable of the seeds (Lk 8: 9-15). It is as if he would say: the things which you have just heard you should not keep them only for yourselves, but you should share them with others. A Christian should not be afraid to give witness and spread the Good News. Humility is important, but the humility which hides the gifts of God given to edify the community is false (1Cor 12: 4-26; Rom 12: 3-8).
- Luke 8: 17: That which is hidden will be manifested. “There is nothing hidden which will not be manifested, nothing secret which will not be known and brought to light.” In the context in which Luke places this second phrase of Jesus, it also refers to the teachings given by Jesus particularly to the disciples (Lk 8: 9-10). The disciples cannot keep these only for themselves, but they should diffuse them, because they form part of the Good News which Jesus has brought.
- Luke 8: 18: Attention to preconceptions. “So take care how you listen, anyone who has will be given more, anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he thinks he has.” At that time, there were many preconceptions on the Messiah which prevented people from understanding, in a correct way, the Good News of the Kingdom which Jesus announced. “For this reason, this warning of Jesus concerning preconceptions is quite actual. Jesus asks the disciples to be aware of the preconceptions with which they listen to the teaching that he presents. With this phrase of Jesus, Luke is saying to the communities and to all of us: “Be attentive to the ideas with which you look at Jesus!” Because if the color of the eyes is green, everything will seem to be green. If it were blue, everything would be blue! If the idea that I have when I look at Jesus is mistaken, erroneous, everything which I receive and teach about Jesus will be threatened by error! If I think that the Messiah has to be a glorious King, I will not want to hear anything which Jesus teaches about the Cross, about suffering, persecution and about commitment, and to lose even what I thought I possessed. Joining this third phrase to the first one, I can conclude what follows: anyone who keeps for himself what he receives and does not distribute it to others, loses what he has, because it becomes corrupt.

Personal Questions

- Have you had any experience of preconceptions which have prevented you from perceiving and appreciating in their just value, the good things that persons have?
- Have you perceived the preconceptions which are behind certain stories, accounts and parables which certain persons tell us?

Concluding Prayer

How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the Law of Yahweh!
Blessed are those who observe his instructions, who seek him with all their hearts. (Ps 119: 1-2)

Tuesday, September 20, 2022

Opening Prayer

Father,
guide us, as you guide creation according to your law of love.
May we love one another and come to perfection
in the eternal life prepared for 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 8: 19-21

Jesus' mother and his brothers came looking for him, but they could not get to him because of the crowd.

He was told, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside and want to see you.' But he said in answer, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.'

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the episode in which the relatives of Jesus and also his Mother want to speak with him, but Jesus does not pay attention to them. Jesus had problems with his family. Sometimes the family helps one to live the Gospel and to participate in the community. Other times, the family prevents this. This is what happened to Jesus and this is what happens to us.

- Luke 8: 19-20: The family looks for Jesus. The relatives reach the house where Jesus was staying. Probably, they had come from Nazareth. From there to Capernaum the distance is about 40 kilometers. His Mother was with them. Probably, they did not enter because there were many people, but they sent somebody to tell him: "Your Mother and your brothers are outside and want to see you." According to the Gospel of Mark, the relatives do not want to see Jesus, they want to take him back home (Mk 3: 32). They thought that Jesus had lost his head (Mk 3: 21). Probably, they were afraid, because according to what history says, the Romans watched very closely all that he did, in one way or other, with the people (cf. Ac 5: 36-39). In Nazareth, up on the mountains he would have been safer than in Capernaum.
- Luke 8: 21: The response of Jesus. The reaction of Jesus is clear: "My mother and my brothers are those who listen to the Word of God and put it into practice." In Mark the reaction of Jesus is more concrete. Mark says: Looking around at those who were sitting there he said: "Look, my mother and my brothers! Anyone who does the will of God, he is my brother, sister and mother (Mk 3: 34-35). Jesus extends his family! He does not permit the family to draw him away from the mission: neither the family (Jn 7: 3-6), nor Peter (Mk 8: 33), nor the disciples (Mk 1: 36-38), nor Herod (Lk 13: 32), nor anybody else (Jn 10: 18).
- It is the Word of God which creates a new family around Jesus: "My mother and my brothers are those who listen to the Word of God and put it into practice." A good commentary on this episode is what the Gospel of John says in the Prologue: "He was in the world that had come into being through him and the world did not recognize him. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him." But to

those who did accept him he gave them power to become children of God: to those who believed in his name, who were born not from human stock or human desire, or human will, but from God himself. And the Word became flesh, he lived among us; and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1: 10-14). The family, the relatives, do not understand Jesus (Jn 7: 3-5; Mk 3: 21), they do not form part of the new family. Only those who receive the Word, that is, who believe in Jesus, form part of the new family. These are born of God and form part of God's Family.

- The situation of the family at the time of Jesus. In the time of Jesus, the political social and economic moment or the religious ideology, everything conspired in favor of weakening the central values of the clan, of the community. The concern for the problems of the family prevented persons from being united in the community. Rather, in order that the Kingdom of God could manifest itself anew, in the community life of the people, persons had to go beyond, to pass the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves to the large family, toward the Community. Jesus gives the example. When his own family tried to take hold of him, Jesus reacted and extended the family (Mk 3: 33-35). He created the Community.
- The brothers and the sisters of Jesus. The expression "brothers and sisters of Jesus" causes much polemics among Catholics and Protestants. Basing themselves on this and on other texts, the Protestants say that Jesus had more brothers and sisters, and that Mary had more sons! The Catholics say that Mary did not have other sons. What should we think about this? In the first place, both positions: that of the Catholics as well as that of the Protestants, start from the arguments drawn from the Bible and from the Traditions of their respective Churches. Because of this, it is not convenient to discuss on this question with only intellectual arguments. Because here it is a question of the convictions that they have, and which have to do with faith and sentiments. The intellectual argument alone does not succeed in changing a conviction of the heart! Rather, it irritates and draws away! And even if I do not agree with the opinion of the other person, I must respect it. In the second place, instead of discussing about texts, both we Catholics and the Protestants, we should unite to fight in defense of life, created by God, a life totally disfigured by poverty, injustice, by the lack of faith. We should recall some phrase of Jesus: "I have come so that they may have life and life in abundance" (Jn 10: 10). "So that all may be one so that the world will believe that it was you who sent me" (Jn 17: 21). "Do not prevent them! Anyone who is not against us is for us" (Mk 9: 39, 40).

Personal Questions

- Does your family help or make it difficult for you to participate in the Christian community?
- How do you assume your commitment in the Christian community without prejudice for the family or for the community?

Concluding Prayer

Teach me, Yahweh, the way of your will, and I will observe it.

Give me understanding and I will observe your Law, and keep it wholeheartedly. (Ps 119: 33-34)

Wednesday, September 21, 2022

St. Matthew, the Evangelist

Opening Prayer

Father,
you call your children
to walk in the light of Christ.

Free us from darkness
and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

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 9: 9-13

As Jesus was walking on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

Now while he was at table in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples.

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed I came to call not the upright, but sinners.'

Reflection

The Sermon on the Mountain takes chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew. The purpose of the narrative part of chapters 8 and 9 is to show how Jesus put into practice what he had just taught. In the Sermon on the Mountain, he teaches acceptance (Mt 5: 23-25, 38-42, 43). Now he puts it into practice accepting the lepers (Mt 8: 1-4), the foreigners (Mt 8: 5-13), the women (Mt 8: 14-15), the sick (Mt 8: 16-17), the possessed (Mt 8: 28-34), the paralytics (Mt 9: 1-8), the tax collectors (Mt 9: 9-13), the unclean persons (Mt 9: 20-22), etc. Jesus breaks the norms and the customs which excluded and divided persons, that is with the fear and the lack of faith (Mt 8: 23-27) the laws on purity (9: 14-17), and he clearly says which are the requirements for those who want to follow him. They should have the courage to abandon many things (Mt 8: 18-22). In the same way in the attitudes and in the practice of Jesus we see in what the Kingdom and the perfect observance of the Law of God consists of.

- Matthew 9: 9: The call to follow Jesus. The first persons called to follow Jesus are four fishermen, all Jewish (Mt 4: 18-22). Now Jesus calls a tax collector, considered a sinner and treated as an unclean person by the community of the most observant of the Pharisees. In the other Gospels, this tax collector is called Levi. Here, his name is Matthew, which means gift of God or given by God. The communities, instead of excluding the tax collector and of considering him unclean, should consider him a Gift of God for the community, because his presence makes the community become a sign of salvation for all! Like the first four who were called, in the same way also Matthew, the tax collector, leaves everything that he has and follows Jesus. The following of Jesus requires breaking away from many things. Matthew leaves the tax office, his source of revenue and follows Jesus!

- Matthew 9, 10: Jesus sits at table with sinners and tax collectors. At that time the Jews lived separated from the tax collectors and sinners and they did not eat with them at the same table. The Christian Jews should break away from this isolation and sit at table with the tax collectors and with the unclean, according to the teaching given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mountain, the expression of the universal love of God the Father (Mt 5: 44-48). The mission of the communities was that of offering a place to those who did not have it. But this new law was not accepted by all. In some communities persons coming from paganism, even if they were Christians, were not accepted around the same table (cf. Ac 10: 28; 11: 3; Ga 2: 12). The text of today's Gospel shows us Jesus who sits at table with tax collectors and sinners in the same house, around the same table.

- Matthew 9: 11: The question of the Pharisees. Jews were forbidden to sit at table with the tax collectors and with sinners, but Jesus does not follow this prohibition. Rather he becomes a friend to them. The Pharisees seeing the attitude of Jesus, ask the disciples: "Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?" This question may be interpreted as an expression of their desire to know why Jesus acts in that way. Others interpret the question like a criticism of Jesus' behavior, because for over five hundred years, from the time of the slavery in Babylon until the time of Jesus, the Jews had observed the laws of purity. This secular observance became a strong sign of identity. At the same time, it was a factor of their separation in the midst of other peoples. Thus, because of the laws on purity, they could not nor did they succeed to sit around the same table to eat with tax collectors. To eat with tax collectors meant to get contaminated, to become unclean. The precepts of legal purity were rigorously observed, in Palestine as well as in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora. At the time of Jesus, there were more than five hundred precepts to keep purity. In the years 70's, at the time when Matthew wrote, this conflict was very actual.

- Matthew 9: 12-13: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. Jesus hears the question of the Pharisees to the disciples and he answers with two clarifications: the first one is taken from common sense: "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick." The second one is taken from the Bible: "Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice." Through these clarifications, Jesus makes explicit and clarifies his mission among the people: "I have not come to call the upright but sinners." Jesus denies the criticism of the Pharisees; he does not accept their arguments, because they came from a false idea of the Law of God. He himself invokes the Bible: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice." For Jesus, mercy is more important than legal purity. He refers to the prophetic tradition to say that mercy has greater value for God than all sacrifices (Ho 6: 6; Is 1: 10-17). God has profound mercy, and is moved before the failures of his people (Ho 11: 8-9).

Personal Questions

- Today, in our society, who is marginalized and excluded? Why? In our community, do we have preconceptions or prejudices? Which? Which is the challenge which the words of Jesus present to our community?

- Jesus asks the people to read and to understand the Old Testament which says: "Mercy is what pleases me and not sacrifice." What does Jesus want to tell us with this today?

Concluding Prayer

Blessed are those who observe his instructions, Blessed are those who observe his instructions, who seek him with all their hearts, and, doing no evil, who walk in his ways. (Ps 119: 2-3)

Thursday, September 22, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
guide us, as you guide creation according to your law of love.
May we love one another and come to perfection
in the eternal life prepared for 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 9: 7-9

Herod the tetrarch had heard about all that was going on; and he was puzzled, because some people were saying that John had risen from the dead, others that Elijah had reappeared, still others that one of the ancient prophets had come back to life. But Herod said, 'John? I beheaded him. So who is this I hear such reports about?' And he was anxious to see him.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents a reaction from Herod listening to the preaching of Jesus. Herod does not know how to place himself before Jesus. He had killed John the Baptist and now he wants to see Jesus close to him. It is always threatening.

- Luke 9: 7-8: Who is Jesus? The text begins with the exposition of the opinion of the people and of Herod on Jesus. Some associated Jesus to John the Baptist and to Elijah. Others identified him with a Prophet, that is, with a person who speaks in the name of God, who has the courage to denounce injustices of those in power and who knows how to give hope to the little ones. He is the Prophet announced in the Old Testament like a new Moses (Dt 18: 15). These are the same opinions that Jesus received from the disciples when he asked them: "Who do people say I am?" (Lk 9: 18). Persons tried to understand Jesus starting from things that they knew, thought and expected. They tried to set him against the background of the familiar criteria of the Old Testament with its prophecies and hopes, and of the Tradition of the Ancients with their laws. But these were insufficient criteria; Jesus could not enter into them, he was much bigger!
- Luke 9: 9: Herod wants to see Jesus. But Herod said: "John, I beheaded him; so who is this of whom I hear such things?" "And he was anxious to see him." Herod, a

superstitious man without scruples, recognizes that he was the murderer of John the Baptist. Now, he wants to see Jesus. Luke suggests thus that the threats begin to appear on the horizon of the preaching of Jesus. Herod had no fear to kill John. He will not be afraid to kill Jesus. On the other side, Jesus does not fear Herod. When they tell him that Herod wanted to take him to kill him, he sent someone to tell him: "You may go and give that fox this message: Look, today and tomorrow I drive out devils and heal, and on the third day I attain my end." (Lk 13: 32). Herod has no power over Jesus. When at the hour of the passion, Pilate sends Jesus to be judged by Herod, Jesus does not respond anything (Lk 23: 9). Herod does not deserve a response.

- From father to son. Sometimes the three Herods, who lived during that time are confused, then the three appear in the New Testament with the same name: a) Herod, called the Great, governed over the whole of Palestine from 37 before Christ. He appears at the birth of Jesus (Mt 2: 1). He kills the new-born babies of Bethlehem (Mt 2: 16). b) Herod, called Antipas, governed in Galilee from the year 4 to 39 after Christ. He appears at the death of Jesus (Lk 23: 7). He killed John the Baptist (Mk 6: 14-29). c) Herod, called Agrippa, governed all over Palestine from the year 41 to 44 after Christ. He appears in the Acts of the Apostles (Ac 12: 1, 20). He killed the Apostle James (Ac 12: 2).
- When Jesus was about four years old, King Herod, the one who killed the new-born babies of Bethlehem died (Mt 2: 16). His territory was divided among his sons, Archelaus, would govern Judea. He was less intelligent than his father, but more violent. When he assumed the power, approximately 3000 persons were massacred on the square of the Temple! The Gospel of Matthew says that Mary and Joseph, when they learnt that Archelaus had taken over the government of Galilee, were afraid and returned on the road and went to Nazareth, in Galilee, which was governed by another son of Herod, called Herod Antipas (Lk 3: 1). This Antipas governed over 40 years. During the thirty-three years of Jesus there was no change of government in Galilee.
- Herod, the Great, the father of Herod Antipas, had constructed the city of Caesarea Maritime, inaugurated in the year 15 before Christ. It was the new port to get out the products of the region. They had to compete with the large port of Tyron in the North and, thus, help to develop trade and business in Samaria and in Galilee. Because of this, from the time of Herod the Great, the agricultural production in Galilee began to orientate itself no longer according to the needs of the families, as before, but according to the demands of the market. This process of change in the economy continued during all the time of the government of Herod Antipas, another forty years, and found in him an efficient organizer. All these governors were 'servants of power'. In fact, the one who commanded in Palestine, from the year 63 before Christ, was Rome, the Empire.

Personal Questions

- It is well always to ask ourselves: Who is Jesus for me?
- Herod wants to see Jesus. His was a superstitious and morbid curiosity. Others want to see Jesus because they seek a sense for their life. And I, what motivation do I have which moves me to see and encounter Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Each morning fill us with your faithful love, we shall sing and be happy all our days; let our joy be as long as the time that you afflicted us, the years when we experienced disaster. (Ps 90: 14-15)

Friday, September 23, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
guide us, as you guide creation according to your law of love.
May we love one another and come to perfection
in the eternal life prepared for 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 9: 18-22

Now it happened that Jesus was praying alone, and his disciples came to him and he put this question to them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?'
And they answered, 'Some say John the Baptist; others Elijah; others again one of the ancient prophets come back to life.'
'But you,' he said to them, 'who do you say I am?' It was Peter who spoke up. 'The Christ of God,' he said.
But he gave them strict orders and charged them not to say this to anyone. He said, 'The Son of man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.'

Reflection

The Gospel today follows the same theme as that of Yesterday: the opinion of the people on Jesus. Yesterday, beginning with Herod, today it is Jesus who asks what do people think, the public opinion and the Apostles respond giving the same opinion which was given yesterday. Immediately follows the first announcement of the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

- Luke 9: 18: The question of Jesus after his prayer. "One day, while Jesus was praying alone, his disciples came to him and he put this question to them: "Who do the crowds say I am?" In Luke's Gospel, on several important and decisive occasions, Jesus is presented in prayer: in his Baptism when he assumes his mission (Lk 3: 21); in the 40 days in the desert, when, he overcame the temptations presented by the devil (Lk 4: 1-13); the night before choosing the twelve apostles (Lk 6: 12); in the Transfiguration, when, with Moses and Elijah he spoke about his passion in Jerusalem (Lk 9: 29); in the Garden when he suffers his agony (Lk 22: 39-46); on the Cross, when he asks pardon for the soldier (Lk 23: 34) and when he commits his spirit to God (Lk 23: 46).
- Luke 9: 19: The opinion of the people on Jesus. "They answered: "For some John the Baptist; others Elijah, but others think that you are one of the ancient prophets who has risen from the dead." Like Herod, many thought that John the Baptist had risen in Jesus. It was a common belief that the prophet Elijah had to return (Mt 17: 10-13;

Mk 9: 11-12; Mt 3: 23-24; Eccl 48: 10). And all nourished the hope of the coming of the Prophet promised by Moses (Dt 18: 15). This was an insufficient response.

- Luke 9: 20: The question of Jesus to the disciples. After having heard the opinion of others, Jesus asks: "And you, who do you say I am?" Peter answers: "The Messiah of God!" Peter recognizes that Jesus is the one whom the people are waiting for and that he comes to fulfil the promise. Luke omits the reaction of Peter who tries to dissuade Jesus to follow the way of the cross and omits also the harsh criticism of Jesus to Peter (Mk 8: 32-33; Mt 16: 22-23).
- Luke 9: 21: The prohibition to reveal that Jesus is the Messiah of God. "Then Jesus gave them strict orders and charged them not to say this to anyone." It was forbidden to them to reveal to the people that Jesus is the Messiah of God. Why does Jesus prohibit this? At that time, as we have already seen, everybody was expecting the coming of the Messiah, but each one in his own way: some expected a king, others a priest, others a doctor, a warrior, a judge or a prophet! Nobody seemed to expect the Messiah Servant, announced by Isaiah (Is 42: 1-9). Anyone who insists in maintaining Peter's idea, that is, of a glorious Messiah, without the cross, understands nothing and will never be able to assume the attitude of a true disciple. He will continue to be blind, exchanging people for trees (cf. Mk 8: 24). Because without the cross it is impossible to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Jesus. Because of this, Jesus insists again on the Cross and makes the second announcement of his passion, death and resurrection.
- Luke 9: 22: The second announcement of the Passion. And Jesus adds: "The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and Scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day." The full understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained through theoretical instruction, but through practical commitment, walking together with him along the road of service, from Galilee up to Jerusalem. The road of the following is the road of the gift of self, of abandonment, of service, of availability, of acceptance of conflict, knowing that there will be a resurrection. The cross is not an accident on the way; it forms part of our way. This because in the organized world starting from egoism, love and service can exist only if they are crucified! Anyone who makes of his life a service to others disturbs those who live attached to privileges, and suffers.

Personal Questions

- We all believe in Jesus. But there are some who understand him in one way and others in another way. Today, which is the more common Jesus in the way of thinking of people?
- How does propaganda interfere in my way of seeing Jesus? What do I do so as not to allow myself to be drawn by the propaganda? What prevents us today from recognizing and assuming the project of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Blessed be Yahweh, my rock,
who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle, my faithful love, my bastion, my
citadel, my Savior; I shelter behind him. (Ps 144: 1-2)

Saturday, September 24, 2022

Opening Prayer

Father,
guide us, as you guide creation according to your law of love.
May we love one another and come to perfection
in the eternal life prepared for 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 9: 43b-45

Everyone was awestruck by the greatness of God. But while everyone was full of admiration for all he did, he said to his disciples, 'For your part, you must have these words constantly in mind: The Son of man is going to be delivered into the power of men.'

But they did not understand what he said; it was hidden from them so that they should not see the meaning of it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the second announcement of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. The disciples do not understand the words about the cross, because they are neither capable to understand a Messiah who becomes the servant of his brothers. They continue to dream about a glorious Messiah.

- Luke 9: 43b-44: The contrast. "Everyone was full of admiration for all he did." Jesus said to his disciples "For your part you must have these words constantly in mind: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the power of men." The contrast is very big. On one side, the vibration and admiration of the people for everything that Jesus said and did. Jesus seems to correspond to all that people dream, believe and expect. On the other side, the affirmation of Jesus that he will be put to death and delivered in the hands of men, that is, the opinion of the authority on Jesus is totally contrary to the opinion of the people.
- Luke 9: 45: The announcement of the Cross. "But they did not understand what he said; for them it was so mysterious, that they did not understand the sense and were afraid to ask questions concerning this argument." The disciples listened to him but they did not understand the words about the cross. But even in this way, they do not ask for any clarification. They are afraid to show their ignorance!
- The title Son of Man. This name appears quite frequently in the Gospels: 12 times in John, 13 in Mark, 28 in Luke, 30 in Matthew. In all, it appears 83 times in the four Gospels. This is the name which pleased Jesus the most. This title comes from the Old Testament. In the Book of Ezekiel, is indicated the very human condition of the prophet (Ez 3: 1, 4, 10, 17; 4: 1 etc.). In the Book of Daniel, the same title appears in the apocalyptic vision (Dn 7: 1-28), in which Daniel describes the empires of the Babylonians, of the Medes, of the Persians and of the Greeks. In the vision of the prophet, these four empires have the appearance of "monstrous animals" (cf. Dn 7: 3-8). They are animal empires which are brutal, inhuman, which persecute, dehumanize and kill (Dn 7: 21, 25). In the vision of the prophet, after the anti-human kingdoms, the Kingdom of God appears which has the appearance, not of an animal, but rather of a human person, Son of Man. That is, a Kingdom with the appearance

of people, a human kingdom, which promotes life, it humanizes (Dn 7: 13-14). In the prophecy of Daniel the Son of Man represents, not an individual, but rather, as he himself says, the “people of the Saints of the Most High” (Dn 7: 27; cf. Dn 7: 18). It is the People of God who do not allow themselves to be dehumanized nor deceived or manipulated by the dominating ideology of the animal empires. The Mission of the Son of Man, that is, of the People of God, consists in realizing the Kingdom of God like a human kingdom. That is, a Kingdom which promotes life, which humanizes persons.

- Presenting himself as Son of Man to the disciples, Jesus makes his own this mission which is the mission of all the People of God. It is as if he would say to them and to all of us: “Come with me! This mission is not only mine, but it belongs to all of us! Let us go together to carry out the mission which God has entrusted to us, and thus realize the human and humanizing Kingdom which he dreamt!” And he did this during all his life, especially during the last three years. Pope Leo the Great said: “Jesus was so human, but so human, like only God can be human.” The more human he was, the more divine he was. The more he is “Son of Man” the more he is “Son of God!” Everything which dehumanizes persons draws away from God. That was condemned by God, who has placed the good of the human person above all the laws, above the Sabbath or Saturday (Mk 2: 27). At the moment when he was condemned to death by the religious tribunal of the Synedrium, Jesus assumes this title. When he was asked if he was “the Son of God” (Mk 14: 61), he answered that he is the “Son of Man”: “I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Almighty” (Mk 14: 62). Because of this affirmation he was declared, by the authority, guilty deserving death. He himself knew it because he had said: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10: 45).

Personal Questions

- How do you combine in your life, suffering and faith in God?
- In the time of Jesus there was contrast: people thought and expected or hoped in a certain way; the religious authority thought and expected or hoped in a different way. Today, this same contrast exists.

Concluding Prayer

Forever, Yahweh,
your word is planted firm in heaven. Your constancy endures from age to age;
you established the earth and it stands firm. (Ps 119: 89-90)

Sunday, September 25, 2022

Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that you read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of your

sentence and death. Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection.

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

Gospel Reading - Luke 16: 19-31

A Key to the Reading:

In this 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Liturgy places before us the parable of the poor Lazarus, sitting before the door of the rich man. This parable is a faithful mirror, in which is mirrored not only the situation of the society at the time of Jesus, but also our society of the XXI century. The parable is a strong and radical denunciation of this situation because it clearly indicates that God thinks contrary to that. In the parable there are three persons: the poor man, the rich man and Father Abraham. The poor man has a name but does not speak. He hardly exists. His only friends are the little dogs which lick his wounds. The rich man does not have a name but speaks always and insists. He wants to be right, but he does not succeed. Father Abraham is the father of both of them, and loves both, and he calls the rich man who is in hell, but he does not succeed in obtaining that the rich man changes opinion and converts himself. During the reading try to be very attentive to the conversation of the rich man with Father Abraham, to the arguments of the rich man and to the arguments of Father Abraham.

A Division of the Text to Help in the Reading:

- Luke 16: 19-21: The situation of both in this life
- Luke 16: 22: The situation of both in the other life
- Luke 16: 23-26: The first conversation between the rich man and Abraham
- Luke 16: 27-29: The second conversation between the rich man and Abraham
- Luke 16: 30-31: The third conversation between the rich man and Abraham

Text:

19 'There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. 20 And at his gate there used to lie a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who longed to fill himself with what fell from the rich man's table. Even dogs came and licked his sores. 22 Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels into Abraham's embrace. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 'In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his embrace. 24 So he cried out, "Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames." 25 Abraham said, "My son, remember that during your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus his fill of bad. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. 26 But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to prevent those who want to cross from our side to yours or from your side to ours." 27 'So he said, "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too." 29 Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them." 30 The rich man replied, "Ah no, father Abraham, but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent."

31 Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead."

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which point of the text pleased you most and what struck you most? Why?
- Compare the situation of the poor man and of the rich man before and after death. Which is their situation before death? What changes in the situation of the poor man and of the rich man after death?
- What separates the poor man from the rich man before death? What separates the rich man from the poor man after death?
- In the conversation between the rich man and Father Abraham, what does the rich man ask and what is the response of Abraham?
- In this parable, the situation changes only after death. Would it be that Jesus wants to tell us that during life the poor have to bear everything in order to be able then, to merit Heaven? What do you think?
- There are some persons who, like the rich man of the parable, expect miracles in order to be able to believe in God. But God asks to believe in Moses and in the Prophets. And I, toward which side does my heart tend: toward the miracle or toward the Word of God?
- How do I treat the poor? For me, do they have a name?

To Deepen the Theme

Context:

In the Gospel of Luke, from Chapter 9 (Lk 9: 51), we are accompanying Jesus on his journey toward Jerusalem. Here in chapters 15 and 16, as to say, we reach the summit, the center of the journey, from where it is possible to see the road that has already been covered and that which still has to be covered. Or, that is, that on the summit of the hill, or in the center of the Gospel, we perceive with greater clarity the two principal themes which go through the Gospel of Luke, from one end to the other. In chapter 15, the parable of the father with his two sons reveals to us the tenderness and the mercy of God who accepts all. Now chapter 16 presents to us the parable of the poor Lazarus to reveal the attitude that we should have before the problem of poverty and of social injustice.

Every time that Jesus has something important to communicate, he narrates or tells a parable, he creates a story which mirrors the reality of the people. Thus, during the reflection on visible reality, he leads those who listen to discover the invisible appeals of God, present in life. A parable is made to make people think and reflect. This is why it is important to be attentive even to small details. In the parable on which we are meditating, there are three persons. Lazarus, the poor man, the only one who does not speak. The rich man without a name, who speaks to ask. Father Abraham, who, in the parable, represents the thought of God- The rich man without a name represents the

dominating ideology of the government of the time. Lazarus represents the excruciating cry of the poor at the time of Jesus, of the time of Luke and of all times.

Commentary on the Text:

- Luke 16: 19-21 - The situation of the rich man and of the poor man.
Here we have the two extremes of society. On the one hand, the aggressive richness. On the other the poor without any resources, without any rights, covered with ulcers and wounds, impure, with nobody to accept him to receive him, except the little dogs which lick his wounds. What separates both of them is only a door: the closed door of the house of the rich man. On his part there is no acceptance, no pity for the problem of the poor man who is before his door. But in the parable, the poor man has a name, while the rich man does not. The name of the poor man is Lazarus, which means God helps.
Through the poor God helps the rich and the rich man could have his name written in the Book of Life. But the rich man does not accept to be helped by the poor man, because he continues to keep the door closed. This beginning of the parable which describes the situation, is a faithful mirror of what happens in the time of Jesus and of Luke. and it is also the mirror of what happens today!
- Luke 16: 22 - The change revealed by the truth which was hidden
“Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels into Abraham’s embrace. The rich man also died and was buried.” In the parable, the poor man dies before the rich man. This is a warning for the rich. Up to the time when the poor man was before the door, alive, it is still possible for the rich man to be saved. But after the poor man dies, the only instrument of salvation for the rich man, also dies. Today, millions of poor people die, victims of the geopolitics of the rich countries.
The poor man dies and is carried away by the angels into Abraham’s embrace. The embrace of Abraham is the source of life, from where is born the People of God. Lazarus, the poor man, belongs to the People of God, forms part of the People of Abraham , from which he is excluded because he was at the door of the rich man. The rich man who thinks that he is a son of Abraham, he also dies and is buried. But he does not go toward the embrace of Abraham, because he is not a son of Abraham! The introduction of the parable ends here. Now begins the revelation of its meaning, through three conversations between the rich man and Father Abraham.
- Luke 16: 23-26 - The first conversation between the rich man without a name and Father Abraham
The parable is like a window which Jesus opens for us on the other side of life, the side of God. It is not a question of Heaven. It is a question of the true side of life discovered only by faith and that the rich man, without faith does not perceive. The dominating ideology prevents him from discovering it. And it is only in the light of death that the ideology disintegrates itself in the mind of the rich man, and that the true value of life appears to him. On God’s part, without the ideology and the deceiving propaganda of the government, their fates will be changed: The rich man suffers, the poor man is happy. The rich man, in seeing Lazarus in Abraham’s embrace asks that Lazarus gives some relief to his suffering. In the light of death, the rich man discovers that Lazarus is his only possible benefactor. But now it is too late! The rich man without a name is a Jew (or Christian) “pious,” knows Abraham and calls him Father. Abraham responds and calls him son. That means that, in reality, this word of Abraham is addressed to the rich who are alive. In so far as being alive, they also have the possibility of becoming sons of Abraham, if they open the door to

Lazarus, to the poor man, to the only one who in God's name can help them. For the rich man, closed up in his suffering, salvation consisted in a drop of water which Lazarus could give him. In reality, for the rich man, salvation does not consist in that Lazarus gives him a drop of water to refresh his tongue, but rather, that he himself, the rich man, opens the closed door of his house and enters into contact with the poor man. It is only in this way that it will be possible to overcome the great abyss which separates him.

In Abraham's response, the truth of the four curses appears before the rich man: (Lk 6: 24-26). But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now. Alas for you who have plenty to eat now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who are laughing now: you shall mourn and weep. 'Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.

- Luke 16: 27-29: The second conversation between the rich man and Abraham
The rich man insists: "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers!" The rich man does not want his brothers to suffer the same torment. "Send Lazarus!" Lazarus, the poor man, is the only true intermediary between God and the rich. But the rich man, during his life was not concerned for the poor Lazarus. He is concerned about himself and of his brothers. He was never concerned about the poor! It is like the older son of the "Parable of the Father with two sons" (Lk 15: 25-30). The older one wanted to have a feast with his friends, and not with his brother who had been lost. Abraham's response is clear: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them!" They have the Bible! The rich man had the Bible. He knew it even by heart. But he never became aware that the Bible had something to do with the poor who were at his door. The key to understand the sense of the Bible and of salvation is the poor Lazarus, sitting at the door of the rich man!

Extending the information:

Because of the unjust social context at the time of Jesus:

In the year 64 B.C. the Romans invaded Palestine and imposed upon the people a very heavy tax. The scholars estimate that more or less half of the family income was destined to pay the taxes, the taxes of the Roman Government. Besides, Rome made a geopolitical reorganization in the region. Before the Roman invasion, the whole region, from Tyre to Sidon up to the frontier with Egypt, was governed by the Asmonei, the prolongation of the Maccabees. After the invasion, only three regions remained under the government of the Jews: Judea, Pereira and Galilee. In order to be able to maintain the control on dominated peoples with a minimum of sacrifice and at their own expense, the Romans were the Saducees, the elders, some publicans and part of the priests. Thus, all this change brought about by the Roman invasion caused almost all the Jews who were living in the other territories of that region to migrate toward Judea and Galilee. The consequence of this: the population was doubled in Judea and in Galilee and the family income diminished by half. The result: on the one hand, progressive impoverishment, unemployment, begging, extreme poverty. On the other, exaggerated enrichment of the local population, supported by the Romans. The faithful picture of this situation is expressed in the parable of the poor Lazarus and of the rich man who had no pity.

Final Reflection around the parable

The rich man who has everything and who closes himself up in himself, loses God, loses the richness, loses life, loses himself, loses his name, loses everything. The poor man who has nothing, has God, gains life, has a name, gains everything. The poor man is Lazarus, he is "God helps." God comes to us in the person of the poor man sitting at our door, to help

us overcome the insurmountable abyss created by the rich who have no heart. Lazarus is also Jesus, the poor Messiah and servant, who was not accepted, but whose death radically changed all things. And in the light of the death of the poor man, everything changes.

The place of torment is the situation of the persons without God. Even if the rich man thinks that he has a religion and faith, he does not know how to be with God because he does not open the door to the poor man, as Zacchaeus did (Lk 19: 1-10).

Prayer of a Psalm

Psalm 15 (14): Yahweh, who can find a home in your tent?

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

Final Prayer

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

Monday, September 26, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.
Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.
Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.
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 9: 46-50

An argument started between the disciples about which of them was the greatest. Jesus knew what thoughts were going through their minds, and he took a little child whom he set by his side and then he said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. The least among you all is the one who is the greatest.'

John spoke up. 'Master,' he said, 'we saw someone driving out devils in your name, and because he is not with us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said to him, 'You must not stop him: anyone who is not against you is for you.'

Reflection

- The text enlightens us. If previously Luke had presented the convergence of the men around Jesus to recognize him in faith, to attend to listen to him and to be present to his cures, now, a new stage is opened in his public itinerary. The person of Jesus does not monopolize the attention of the crowds anymore but he is presented as the one who slowly is being drawn away from his own to go toward the Father. Such an itinerary foresees his journey to Jerusalem. And while he is about to undertake that journey, Jesus reveals to them the destiny that is awaiting him (9: 22). Then he is transfigured before them to indicate the starting point of his "Exodus" toward Jerusalem. But immediately after the light that he experiences in the transfiguration, Jesus once again announces his Passion leaving the disciples uncertain and disturbed. The words of Jesus on the event of his Passion, "The Son of man is going to be delivered into the power of men," but they did not understand (9: 45) and they were afraid to ask him (9: 45).
- Jesus takes a child. The enigma of Jesus being delivered broke out a great dispute among the disciples to decide to whom the first place would belong. Without being asked his opinion, Jesus, who being God knew how to read hearts, intervenes with a symbolical gesture. To begin he takes a child and places him at his side. Such a gesture is an indication of election, of privilege that is extended at the moment that one becomes a Christian (10: 21-22). So that this gesture will be understood, not uncertain, Jesus gives a word of explanation: the "greatness" of the child is not stressed but his inclination to "acceptance." The Lord considers "great" anyone who like a child knows how to accept God and his messengers. Salvation presents two aspects: the election on the part of God which is symbolized by the gesture of Jesus who accepts the child: and the acceptance of the one who has sent him, the Father of Jesus (the Son) and of every man. The child embodies Jesus, and both together in their smallness and suffering, realize God's presence (Bovon). But the two aspects of salvation are indicative also of faith: in the gift of election the passive element emerges; in service, the active one; two pillars of the Christian existence. To accept God or Christ in faith has the consequence of total acceptance of the little ones on the part of the believer or of the community. "To be great" about which the disciples were discussing is not a reality of something beyond, but it refers to the present moment and is expressed in the '*diaconia*' of service. Lived love and faith carry out two functions: we are accepted by Christ (takes the child); but also we have the particular gift of receiving him ("anyone who accepts the child, accepts him, the Father," v. 48). A brief dialogue follows between Jesus and John (vv. 49-50). This last disciple is considered among the intimate ones of Jesus. The exorcist who does not belong to those who are intimate with Jesus is entrusted the same role that is given to the disciples. He is an exorcist who, on the one side is external to the group, but on the other, he is inside the group because he has understood the Christological origin of divine force that guides him ("in your name"). The teaching of Jesus is clear: a Christian group should not place obstacles to the missionary activity of other groups. There are no Christians who are "greater" than others, but one is "great" in being and in becoming Christians. And then missionary activity has to be in the service of God and not to increase one's own fame or renown. That clause on the power of the name of Jesus is of crucial importance: it is a reference to the liberty of the Holy Spirit, whose

presence is certainly within the Church, but it can extend beyond the instituted or official ministries.

Personal Questions

- You, as a believer, baptized, how do you live success and suffering?
- What type of “greatness” do you live in your service to life, to persons? Are you capable of transforming competition into cooperation?

Concluding Prayer

I praise your name Lord for your faithful love and your constancy; your promises surpass even your fame.

You heard me on the day when I called,
and you gave new strength to my heart. (Ps 138: 2-3)

Tuesday, September 27, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.
Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.
Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.
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 9: 51-56

It happened that as the time drew near for him to be taken up, he resolutely turned his face towards Jerusalem and sent messengers ahead of him.
These set out, and they went into a Samaritan village to make preparations for him, but the people would not receive him because he was making for Jerusalem.
Seeing this, the disciples James and John said, ‘Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?’ But he turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village.

Reflection

The Gospel today narrates and tells us how Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem. It also describes the first difficulties which he finds along this road. He presents us the beginning of the long and hard way of the periphery toward the capital city. Jesus leaves Galilee and goes toward Jerusalem. Not all can understand him. Many abandon him, because the demands are enormous. Today, the same thing happens. Along the way of our community there are misunderstandings and abandonment.

- “Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem.”

This decision marks the hard and long way of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the periphery to the capital city. This journey occupies more than one third part of the Gospel of Luke (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28). This is a sign that the voyage to Jerusalem was of great importance in the life of Jesus. The long walk is the symbol, at the same time, of the journey that the community is making. They seek to go through a difficult passage from the Jewish world toward the world of the Greek culture. This also symbolized the tension between the New and the Ancient which was closing more and more in itself. It also symbolizes the conversion which each one of us has to carry out, trying to follow Jesus. During the journey, the disciples try to follow Jesus, without returning; but they do not always succeed. Jesus dedicates much time to instruct those who follow him closely. We have a concrete example of this instruction in today's Gospel. At the beginning of the journey, Jesus leaves Galilee and takes with him the disciples to the territory of the Samaritans. He tries to form them in order that they may be ready to understand the openness to the New, toward the other, toward what is different.

- Luke 9: 51: *Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem.*

The Greek text says literally: "Now it happened that as the time drew near for him to be taken up, he resolutely turned his face towards Jerusalem." The expression assumption or being snatched recalls the Prophet Elijah snatched to heaven (2 K 2: 9-11). The expression turned his face recalls the Servant of Yahweh who said: "I have set my face like flint and I know I shall not be put to shame" (Is 50: 7). It also recalls an order which the Prophet Ezekiel received from God: "Turn your face toward Jerusalem!" (Ez 21: 7). In using these expressions Luke suggests that while they were walking toward Jerusalem, the most open opposition of Jesus began against the project of the official ideology of the Temple of Jerusalem. The ideology of the Temple wanted a glorious and nationalistic Messiah. Jesus wants to be a Messiah Servant. During the long journey, this opposition will increase and finally, it will end in the getting hold of Jesus. The snatching of Jesus is his death on the Cross, followed by his Resurrection.

- Luke 9: 52-53: *The mission in Samaria failed.*

During the journey, the horizon of the mission is extended. After the beginning, Jesus goes beyond the frontiers of the territory and of the race. He sends his disciples to go and prepare his arrival in a town of Samaria. But the mission together with the Samaritans fails. Luke says that the Samaritans did not receive Jesus because he was going to Jerusalem. But if the disciples would have said to the Samaritans: "Jesus is going to Jerusalem to criticize the project of the Temple and to demand a greater openness," Jesus would have been accepted, because the Samaritans were of the same opinion. The failure of the mission is, probably, due to the disciples. They did not understand why Jesus "turned the face toward Jerusalem." The official propaganda of the glorious and nationalistic Messiah prevented them from perceiving... The disciples did not understand the openness of Jesus and the mission failed!

- Luke 9: 54-55: *Jesus does not accept the request of vengeance.* James and John do not want to take home the defeat. They do not accept that someone is not in agreement with their ideas. They want to imitate Elijah and use fire to revenge (2 K 1: 10). Jesus rejects the proposal. He does not want the fire. Some Bibles add: "You do not know what spirit is moving you!" This means that the reaction of the disciples was not according to the Spirit of Jesus. When Peter suggests to Jesus not to follow the path of the Messiah Servant, Jesus turns to Peter calling him Satan (Mk 8: 33). Satan is the evil spirit who wants to change the course or route of the mission of Jesus. The Message of Luke for the communities: those who want to hinder the mission among the pagans are moved by the evil spirit!

- In the ten chapters which describe the journey up to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28), Luke constantly reminds us that Jesus is on the way toward Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51, 53, 57; 10: 1, 38; 11: 1; 13: 22, 33; 14: 25; 17: 11; 18: 31; 18: 37; 19: 1, 11, 28). He rarely says through where Jesus passed. Only at the beginning of the journey (Lk 9: 51), in the middle (Lk 17: 11), and at the end (Lk 18: 35; 19: 1), something is known concerning the place where Jesus was going by. This refers to the communities of Luke and also for all of us. The only thing that is sure is that we have to continue to walk. We cannot stop. But it is not always clear and definite the place where we have to pass by. What is sure, certain, is the objective: Jerusalem.

Personal Questions

- Which are the problems which you have to face in your life, because of the decision which you have taken to follow Jesus?
- What can we learn from the pedagogy of Jesus with his disciples who wanted to revenge of the Samaritans?

Concluding Prayer

All the kings of the earth give thanks to you, Yahweh, when they hear the promises you make; they sing of Yahweh's ways,
'Great is the glory of Yahweh!' (Ps 138: 4-5)

Wednesday, September 28, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.
Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.
Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.
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 9: 57-62

As they travelled along they met a man on the road who said to Jesus, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'
Jesus answered, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.'
Another to whom he said, 'Follow me,' replied, 'Let me go and bury my father first.'
But he answered, 'Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.' Another said, 'I will follow you, sir, but first let me go and say good -- bye to my people at home.'
Jesus said to him, 'Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel the long and hard journey of Jesus continues from the periphery of Galilee toward the capital city. Leaving Galilee, Jesus enters in Samaria and continues toward Jerusalem. But not all understand him. Many abandon him, because the demands are enormous. But others get close to him and present themselves to follow Jesus. At the beginning of his pastoral activity in Galilee, Jesus had called three: Peter, James and John (Lk 5: 8-11). Here also, in Samaria there are three persons who present themselves or who are called. In the responses of Jesus there are the requirements or conditions in order to be able to be his disciples.

- Luke 9: 56-58: The first one of the three new disciples. At that time, as they travelled along, they met a man who said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." To this first person who wants to be his disciple, Jesus asks him to divest himself of everything: he has nowhere to lay his head; much less should he seek a false security where to lay the thoughts of his head.
- Luke 9: 59-60: The second one of the three new disciples. To another one he says "Follow me." And he replied, "Let me go and bury my father first." Jesus replied: "Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God." To this second person called by Jesus to follow Him, he asks him to leave the dead bury the dead. It is a question of a popular saying used to say: leave aside the things of the past. Do not lose time with what happened and look ahead. After having discovered the new life in Jesus, the disciple should not lose time with what has happened.
- Luke 9: 61-62: The third one of the three new disciples. "Another said: I will follow you, Sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home." But Jesus replied: once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God." To this third person called to be a disciple, Jesus asks to break the family bonds of union. On another occasion he had said: Anyone who loves his father and his mother more than me cannot be my disciple (Lk 14: 26; Mt 10: 37). Jesus is more demanding than the Prophet Elijah who allowed Elisha to greet and take leave from his parents (1 K 19: 19-21). This also means to break the nationalistic bonds of race and the patriarchal family structure.
- These are three fundamental requirements as necessary conditions for those who want to be the disciples of Jesus:
 - (a) to abandon material goods,
 - (b) not to be attached to personal goods lived and accumulated in the past (
 - c) to break away from the family bonds.

In reality, nobody, even wishing it, can break neither the family bonds, nor break away from things lived in the past. What is asked is to know how to re-integrate everything (material goods, personal life and family life) in a new way around the new axis which is Jesus and the Good News of God which he has brought to us.

- Jesus himself, lived and became aware of what he was asking to his followers. With his decision to go up to Jerusalem Jesus reveals his project. His journey toward Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 27) is represented as the undertaking (Lk 9: 51), the exodus (Lk 9: 31) or the crossing (Lk 17: 11). Arriving in Jerusalem Jesus fulfils the exodus, the undertaking or the definitive crossing from this world toward the Father (Jn 13: 1). Only a truly free person can do this, because such an exodus presupposes to dedicate one's whole life for the brothers (Lk 23: 44- 46; 24: 51). This is the exodus, the crossing,

the undertaking of which the communities should become aware in order to be able to carry on Jesus' project.

Personal Questions

- Compare each one of these three requirements with your life.
- Which are the problems that arise in your life as a consequence of the decision which you have taken to follow Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, you examine me and know me, you know when I sit,
when I rise, you understand my thoughts from afar. (Ps 139: 1-2)

Thursday, September 29, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.
Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.
Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.
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: 47-51

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

Today's Gospel presents the dialogue between Jesus and Nathanael in which the following phrase appears: "In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man." This phrase helps to clarify something concerning the archangels.

- John 1, 47-49: The conversation between Jesus and Nathanael.
Philip took Nathanael to Jesus (Jn 1, 45-46). Nathanael had exclaimed: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael was from Cana, which was close to Nazareth. Seeing Nathanael, Jesus said: "There, truly is an Israelite in whom there is no

deception!" And he affirms that he knew him already when he was under the fig tree. How could Nathanael be an "authentic Israelite," if he did not accept Jesus as Messiah? Nathanael "was under the fig tree." The fig tree was the symbol of Israel (cf. Mq 4, 4; Zc 3, 10; 1K 5,5). "To be under the fig tree" was the same as being faithful to the project of the God of Israel. The authentic Israelite is the one who knows how to detach himself from his own ideas when he perceives that these are not in agreement with God's project. The Israelite who is not ready to converse is neither authentic nor honest. Nathanael is authentic. He expected the Messiah according to the official teaching of that time, according to which the Messiah came from Bethlehem in Judea. The Messiah could not come from Nazareth in Galilee (Jn 7, 41-42.52). This is why Nathanael resists himself to accept Jesus as Messiah. But the encounter with Jesus helps him to become aware that God's project is not always as persons imagine it or desire that it be. Nathanael recognizes his own deception, he changes idea, accepts Jesus as Messiah and confesses: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!"

- The diversity of the call.

The Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke present the call of the first disciples in quite a brief way: Jesus walks along the seashore, and he calls Peter and Andrew. Then he calls John and James (Mk 1: 16-20). The Gospel of John has a different way of describing the beginning of the first community which was formed around Jesus. John does it by narrating very concrete stories. One is struck by the variety of the calls and of the encounters of persons among themselves and with Jesus. Thus, John teaches what is necessary to do to begin a community. It is by means of contacts and personal invitations, and it is like that even today! Jesus calls some directly (Jn 1: 43). Others indirectly (Jn 1: 41-42). One day he called two disciples of John the Baptist (Jn 1: 39). The following day he called Philip who, in turn, called Nathanael (Jn 1: 45). No call is repeated because every person is diverse. People will never forget the important calls which have marked their life. One even remembers the hour and the day (Jn 1: 39).

- John 1: 50-51: The angels of God who descend and ascend on the Son of Man.

The confession of Nathanael is only at the beginning. Anyone who is faithful, will see heaven open and the angels who go up and descend on the Son of Man. They will experience that Jesus is the new bond of union between God and us, human beings. It is the realization of the dream of Jacob (Gn 28: 10-22).

- The angels who go up and descend the ladder.

The three Archangels: Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael. Gabriel explained to Prophet Daniel the meaning of the vision (Dn 8: 16; 9: 21). The angel Gabriel also took God's message to Elizabeth (Lk 1: 19) and to Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Lk 1: 26). His name means "God is strong." Raphael appears in the Book of Tobit. He accompanies Tobias, the son of Tobit and of Anna, throughout the trip and protects him from all danger. He helps Tobias to liberate Sara from the evil spirit and to cure Tobit, his father, from his blindness. His name means "God heals." Michael helped the Prophet Daniel in his struggles and difficulties (Dn 10: 13, 21; 12: 1). The letter of Jude says that Michael disputed with the devil over the body of Moses (Jude 1: 9). It was Michael who obtained victory over Satan, throwing him out of Heaven and throwing him into hell (RV 12: 7). His name means: "Who is like God!" The word 'angel' means messenger. He takes a message from God. In the Bible, the entire nature could be the messenger of God himself, when it turns its face on us and reveals God's love for us (Ps 104: 4). The angel can be God himself, when he turns his face on us and reveals his loving presence to us.

Personal Questions

- Have you already had some encounter which has marked your whole life? How have you discovered there the call of God?
- Have you been interested, sometimes, like Philip, to call another person to participate in the community?

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, September 30, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.
Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.

Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.

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 10: 13-16

Jesus said: 'Alas for you, Corazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. And still, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the Judgement than for you. And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be raised high as heaven? You shall be flung down to hell.

'Anyone who listens to you listens to me; anyone who rejects you rejects me, and those who reject me reject the one who sent me.'

Reflection

The Gospel today continues speaking about the sending out of the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10: 1-12). At the end, after sending them out, Jesus speaks about shaking off the dust from the shoes, if the missionaries are not welcomed or accepted (Lk 10: 10-12). Today's Gospel stressed and extends the threats upon those who refuse to receive the Good News.

- Luke 10: 13-14: *Alas for you, Corazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida!* The place which Jesus travelled or covered in the three years of his missionary life was small. It measured only a few square kilometres along the Sea of Galilee around the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Corazin. Precisely in this very small space Jesus works the majority of his miracles and presents his discourses. He has come to save the whole of humanity,

and he hardly went out of the limited space of his land. But, tragically, Jesus had to see that the people of those cities do not want to accept the message of the Kingdom and are not converted. The cities fixed themselves in the rigidity of their beliefs, traditions and customs and they do not accept the invitation of Jesus to change life. *Alas for you, Corazin; Alas for you Bethsaida! For if the miracle done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.*" Jesus compares the two cities with Tyre and Sidon which in the past were unyielding enemies of Israel, ill-treating the people of God. For this reason they were cursed by the Prophets: (Is 23: 1; Jr 25: 22; 47: 4; Ez 26: 3; 27: 2; 28: 2; Jl 4: 4; Am 1: 10). And now Jesus says that these same cities, symbols of all the evil done to the people in the past, would have already converted if so many miracles would have been worked in them as in Corazin and in Bethsaida.

- Luke 10:15: *And you Capernaum. "Did you want to be raised high as Heaven? You shall be flung down to hell.* Jesus recalls the condemnation which Isaiah, the Prophet launched against Babylonia. Proud and arrogant, Babylonia thought: *"I shall scale the heavens; higher than the stars of God I shall set my throne. I shall sit on the Mount of the Assembly far away to the north. I shall climb high above the clouds; I shall rival the Most High"* (Is 14: 13-14). That is what it thought! But it completely deceived itself! The contrary happened. The Prophet says: *"Now you have been flung down to Sheol, into the depths of the abyss!"* (Is 14: 15). Jesus compares Capernaum with that terrible Babylonia which destroyed the monarchy and the temple and took the people as slaves, from which it never succeeded to recover. Like Babylonia, Capernaum thought it was something important, but it fell into the most profound hell. The Gospel of Matthew compares Capernaum with the city of Sodom, the symbol of the worse perversion, which was destroyed by God's anger (Gen 18: 16 to 19: 29). Sodom would have converted if it had seen the miracles which Jesus worked in Capernaum (Mt 11: 23-24). Today, the same paradox continues to exist. Many of us, Catholics since we were children, have such consolidated convictions that nobody is capable to convert us. And in some places, Christianity, instead of being a source of change and of conversion, has become the refuge of the most reactionary forces of politics of the country.
- Luke 10: 16: *"Anyone who listens to you listens to me; anyone who rejects you rejects me. And those who reject me reject the one who has sent me."* This phrase places the accent on the identification of the disciples with Jesus, in so far as he is despised by the authority. In Matthew the same phrase of Jesus, placed in another context, underlines the identification of the disciples with Jesus accepted by the people (Mt 10: 40). In both cases, the disciples identify themselves with Jesus in the total gift and in this gift is realized their encounter with God, and God allows himself to be found by those who seek him.

Personal Questions

- Does my city and my country deserve the warning of Jesus against Capernaum, Corazin and Bethsaida?
- How do I identify myself with Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

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