



Lectio Divina

English | May 2023 | ocarm.org

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Monday, May 1, 2023

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, Father of all,
you sent your Son Jesus Christ among us to reveal to us that you care about people
and that your love extends to all,
without any distinction of race or culture. Give us a great respect for all people,
whatever way they come,
and let your Church embrace all cultures, that Jesus may truly be
the Lord and Shepherd of all, now and forever.

Gospel Reading - John 10: 11-18

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and runs away, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; he runs away because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and I must lead these too. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, one shepherd.

The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as I have power to lay it down, so I have power to take it up again; and this is the command I have received from my Father.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the parable of the Good Shepherd. It is the continuation of the Gospel which we read yesterday (Sunday). It is difficult to understand the first part without the second. This is why we prefer to comment briefly on both (Jn 10: 1-18). The discourse on the Good Shepherd presents three comparisons linked among themselves:

- 1st comparison: Jesus speaks of the shepherd and of the thieves (Jn 10: 1-5)
- 2nd comparison: Jesus is the door of the sheep (Jn 10: 6-10)
- 3rd comparison: Jesus is the Good Shepherd (Jn 10: 11-18)
- John 10: 1-5: 1st comparison: to enter by the door and not by somewhere else. Jesus begins the discourse with the comparison of the door: "Anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate is a thief and a bandit! He who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock!" At that time, the shepherds took care of the flock the whole day. When night arrived, they lead the sheep to a great community sheepfold, which was well protected against thieves and wolves. All the shepherds of the same region took their flocks there. A gatekeeper took care of them the whole

night. The following day, early in the morning, the shepherd would go there, knocked with his hands on the gate and the gatekeeper would open. The shepherd would go in and call the sheep by name. The sheep recognized the voice of their shepherd would get up and go out following him to go to the pasture. The sheep of the other shepherds heard the voice, but would not move, because for them it was an unknown voice. From time to time, there was the danger of being attacked. The bandits would enter by a side path or jumped over the wall of the sheepfold, made of one rock on top of the other, in order to rob the sheep. They did not enter by the gate because the gatekeeper was there.

- John 10: 6-10: 2nd comparison: Jesus is the door. The audience, the Pharisees (Jn 9: 40-41), did not understand what it meant “to go in through the door”. Jesus then explained: “I am the gate of the sheepfold. All who have come before me are thieves and bandits.” Of whom is Jesus speaking in this phrase which is so hard? Probably, he was referring to the religious leaders who drew the people behind them, but they did not respond to their expectations. They were not interested in the good of the people, but only in their own interest and in filling their pockets. They deceived the people and abandoned them to a worse situation. To enter through the gate is to act as Jesus acted. The fundamental criterion to discern who is shepherd and who is a thief is the defense of the life of the sheep. Jesus asks the people not to follow the persons who present themselves as shepherds, but who have no interest for the life of the people. “I have come in order that they have life and life in abundance!” This is the criterion!
- John 10: 11-15: 3rd comparison: Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Jesus changes the comparison. First, he was the door of the flock. Now he is the Shepherd of the sheep. Everyone knew what a shepherd was and how he lived and worked. But Jesus is not just any shepherd but, he is the Good Shepherd! The image of the Good Shepherd comes from the Old Testament. Saying that he is the Good Shepherd, Jesus presents himself as the one who comes to fulfil the promises of the prophets and the expectations of the people; for example, the beautiful prophecy of Ezekiel (Ex 34: 11-16). There are two points on which Jesus insists:
 - (a) in the defense of the life of the sheep: the Good Shepherd gives his life for the life of the sheep.
 - (b) In the mutual knowledge between the shepherd and the sheep:

The shepherd knows his sheep and the sheep know the shepherd. Jesus says that the people have a particular perception and know who the Good Shepherd is. This was what the Pharisees did not accept. They despised or rejected the sheep and said they were damned and ignorant (Jn 7: 49; 9: 34). They thought they had the right and apt view to discern the things of God. They were blind. The discourse on the Good Shepherd teaches two rules to cure this type of blindness, which is quite frequent:

- (i) to pay special attention to the reaction of the sheep, because they know the voice of the shepherd.
- (ii) To be very attentive to the attitude of the one who calls himself the shepherd to see if his interest is the life of the sheep, or not, and if he is capable to give his life for the life of the sheep.
- John 10: 16-18: The goal which Jesus wants to attain: one only flock and one only Shepherd. Jesus opens the horizon and says that he has other sheep that do not belong to this flock. They have not as yet heard the voice of Jesus, but when they will

hear it, they will become aware that he is the shepherd and will follow him. This is the Ecumenical universal dimension.

Personal Questions

- Shepherd – Pastoral. Does the *Pastoral ministry* in my Parish imitate the mission of Jesus as shepherd? And in my *pastoral* ministry which is my attitude? Am I a shepherd as Jesus?
- Have you had the experience of having been deceived by a false shepherd? How did you succeed in overcoming this?

Concluding Prayer

As a deer yearns for running streams, so I yearn for you, my God.

I thirst for God, the living God;

when shall I go to see the face of God? (Ps 42: 1-2)

Tuesday, May 2, 2023

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord God, our Father,

the Spirit of Jesus calls us, as he called your Son, to abandon our old selves and our old world to be free for new life and growth. Forgive us our fear and hesitations,

lead us out of our worn-out phrases and habits, and our self-made certainties,

steep us in the gospel of your Son, that his good news may become credible in our times and our world.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 10: 22-30

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

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

Reflection

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

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

one, but rather it was prophetic. He obeys in order to be total transparency and, thus, to be the revelation of the Father. Because of this, he could say: "The Father and I are one!" It was a long process of obedience and of incarnation which lasted 33 years. It began with Mary's YES (Lk 1: 38) and ended with: "It is all fulfilled!" (Jn 19: 30).

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

May God show kindness and bless us and make his face shine on us.

Then the earth will acknowledge your ways, and all nations your power to save. (Ps 67: 2-3)

Wednesday, May 3, 2023

Feast of Philip and James, Apostles

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
we praise and thank You on the feast of Your apostles Philip and James.
Through them many have come to know that Jesus is alive and risen.
May we too be good witnesses to the risen Jesus by the way we live His risen life.

Even though we are flawed and weak, may people find through us the way to the Father of Jesus our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 14: 6-14

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

Reflection

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

- John 14: 6: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: Thomas had addressed a question to Jesus: "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?" (Jn 14: 5). Jesus answers, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through Me." Three important words. Without the way, we cannot walk. A "way" is not only a path, but a method of performing or doing. In this case, His way is to be our way. Without the truth one cannot make a good choice. In life, things are not always what they seem to be. We can be easily deceived, especially with fake news, flawed beliefs, and the evil that still inhabits the world. It is important to focus on the Truth and not be deceived. He is the Truth. Without life, there is only death! Jesus explains the meaning. He is the way, because no one "comes to the Father except through Me". And He is the gate through which the sheep go in and out (Jn 10: 9). Jesus is the Truth because looking at Him, we are seeing the image of the Father. "If you know Me, you will know My Father also!" Jesus is Life, because walking like Jesus we will be united to the Father and will have life in us!
- John 14: 7: To know Jesus is to know the Father. Thomas had asked, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus answers, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through Me." And He adds, "If you know Me, you will know My Father also. From this moment you have known Him and have seen Him." This is the first phrase of today's Gospel. Jesus always speaks about the Father, because it was the life of the Father that appeared in everything that Jesus said and did. This continuous reference to the Father causes Philip to ask the question.
- John 14: 8-11: Philip asks, "Show us the Father and then we will be satisfied!" It was the disciples' desire, the desire of many people within the communities of the Beloved Disciple, and it is the desire of many people today. What do people do to see the Father whom Jesus speaks of so much? Jesus' answer is very beautiful, and it is valid even today: "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know Me? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father!" People should not think that God is far away from us, at a distance and unknown. Anyone who wants to know who God the Father is, it suffices for him to look at Jesus. He has revealed Him in the words and gestures of His life! "The Father is in Me and I am in the Father!" Through His obedience, Jesus has fully identified Himself with the Father. At every moment, He did what the Father told Him to do (Jn 5: 30; 8: 28-29, 38). This is why, in Jesus everything is the revelation of the Father! The signs or works are the works of the Father! As people say, "The son is the face of the father!" This is why in Jesus, and for Jesus, God is in our midst.
- John 14: 12-14: The Promise of Jesus. Jesus says that His intimacy with the Father is not a privilege only for Him, but it is possible for all those who believe in Him. We also, through Jesus, are able to do beautiful things for others as Jesus did for the people of His time. He intercedes for us. Everything that people ask from Him, He asks the Father and obtains it always, if it is to serve. Jesus is our defender. He leaves but He does not leave us without defense. He promises that He will ask the Father and the Father will send another defender and consoler, the Holy Spirit. Jesus even said that it is necessary that He leave, because otherwise the Holy Spirit will not come

(Jn 16: 7). The Holy Spirit will fulfill the things of Jesus in us, if we act in the name of Jesus and observe the great commandment of the practice of love. In his recent encyclical *Gaudete et exsultate*, Pope Francis quotes *Lumen Gentium*: The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God's holy and faithful people, for "it has pleased God to make men and women holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather as a people who might acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness."

For Personal Confrontation

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Thursday, May 4, 2023

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - John 13: 16-20

Jesus said to his disciples: 'In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him. 'Now that you know this, blessed are you if you behave accordingly. I am not speaking about all of you: I know the ones I have chosen; but what scripture says must be fulfilled: 'He who shares my table takes

advantage of me. I tell you this now, before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe that I am He. In all truth I tell you, whoever welcomes the one I send, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.'

Reflection

Beginning today, until May 25, every day, except on feast days, the Gospel of each day is taken from the long conversation of Jesus with the disciples during the Last Supper (Jn 13 to 17). In these five chapters which describe the farewell of Jesus, the presence of those three threads of which we had spoken before, is perceived, those threads which knit and compose the Gospel of John: the word of Jesus, the word of the community and the word of the Evangelist who writes the last redaction of the Fourth Gospel. In these chapters, the three threads are intertwined in such a way that the whole is presented as a unique fabric or cloth of a rare beauty and inspiration, where it is difficult to distinguish what is from one and what is from the other, but where everything is the Word of God for us.

These five chapters present the conversation which Jesus had with his friends, the evening when he was arrested and was put to death. It was a friendly conversation, which remained in the memory of the Beloved Disciple. Jesus seems to want to prolong to the maximum this last encounter, this moment of great intimacy. The same thing happens today. There is conversation and conversation. There is the superficial conversation which uses words and words and reveals the emptiness of the person. And there is the conversation which goes to the depth of the heart and remains in the memory. All of us, occasionally, have these moments of friendly living together, which expand the heart and constitute the force in moments of difficulty. They help to trust and to overcome fear.

The five verses of today's Gospel draw two conclusions from the washing of the feet (Jn 13: 1-15). They speak

- (a) of service as the principal characteristic of the followers of Jesus, and
 - (b) of the identity of Jesus, the revelation of the Father.
- John 13: 16-17: The servant is not greater than his master. Jesus has just finished washing the feet of the disciples. Peter becomes afraid and does not want Jesus to wash his feet. "If I do not wash you, you can have no share with me" (Jn 13: 8). And it is enough to wash the feet; there is no need to wash the rest (Jn 13: 10). The symbolical value of the gesture of the washing of the feet consists in accepting Jesus as Messiah, Servant, who gives himself for others, and to reject a Messiah, glorious king. This gift of self, servant of all is the key to understand the gesture of the washing of the feet. To understand this is the root of the happiness of a person: "Knowing these things, you will be blessed if you put them into practice". But there were some persons, even among the disciples, who did not accept Jesus, Messiah, Servant. They did not want to be the servants of others. Probably, they wanted a glorious Messiah, King and Judge, according to the official ideology. Jesus says: "I am not speaking about all of you; I know the ones I have chosen; but what Scripture says must be fulfilled: He who shares my table takes advantage of me!" John refers to Judas, whose betrayal will be announced immediately after (Jn 13: 21-30).
 - John 13: 18-20: I tell you this now, before it happens, so that you may believe that I AM HE. It was on the liberation from Egypt at the foot of Mount Sinai that God revealed his name to Moses: "I am with you!" (Ex 3: 12), "I am who I am" (Ex 3: 14). "I Am" or "I AM" has sent me to you!" (Ex 3: 14). The name Yahweh (Ex 3: 15) expresses the absolute certainty of the liberating presence of God at the side of his people. In many ways

and on many occasions this same expression I Am is used by Jesus (Jn 8: 24; 8: 28; 8: 58; Jn 6: 20; 18: 5, 8; Mk 14: 62; Lk 22: 70). Jesus is the presence of the liberating face of God in our midst.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, May 5, 2023

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

your Son Jesus Christ is to us the way that leads to you and to one another, the truth that is good news of love and hope, the life which he sacrificed to give it.

Help us to show the way to him and to go his way to one another, to speak the truth that is encouraging and credible, to give life by sharing happiness, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 14: 1-6

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

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

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

Reflection

These five chapters (Jn 13-17) are a beautiful example of how the communities of the Beloved Disciple of the end of the first century in Asia Minor, which today is Turkey, carried on the catechesis. For example, in chapter 14, the questions of the three disciples, Thomas (Jn 14: 5), Philip (Jn 14: 8) and Judas Thaddeus (Jn 14: 22) were also the questions and problems of the communities. Thus, the answers of Jesus to the three of

them are like a mirror in which the communities found a response to their doubts and difficulties. To understand better the environment in which the catechesis was carried out, it is possible to do what follows. During and after the reading of the text, it is good to close the eyes and pretend that we are in the room amid the disciples, participating in the encounter with Jesus. While we listen, it is necessary to pay attention to the way in which Jesus prepares his friends to separate themselves and reveals to them his friendship, communicating to them security and support.

- John 14: 1-2: Do not let your hearts be troubled. The text begins with an exhortation: "Do not let your hearts be troubled!" And immediately he adds: "In my Father's house there are many places to live in!" The insistence in continuing to use encouraging words which help to overcome the trouble and the divergence is a sign that there was much polemic and divergence among the communities. One would say to the other: "Our way of living the faith is better than yours. We are saved! You live in error: If you want to go to heaven, you have to convert yourselves and live like we do!" Jesus says: "In my Father's house there are many places!" It is not necessary that everybody thinks in the same way. The important thing is that all accept Jesus, the revelation of the Father and that out of love for him, they have attitudes of understanding, of service and of love. Love and service are the basis which unite the bricks and help the diverse communities to become a Church of brothers and sisters.
- John 14: 3-4: The farewell of Jesus. Jesus says that he is going to prepare a place and that afterwards he will return to take us with him to the Father's house. He wants us to be with him forever. The return which Jesus speaks about is the coming of the Spirit that he sends and who acts in us, in such a way that we can live as he lived (Jn 14: 16- 17, 26; 16: 13-14). Jesus ends by saying: "You know the way to the place where I am going!" Anyone who knows Jesus knows the way, because the way is the life that he lived and which led him through death together to the Father.
- John 14: 5-6: Thomas asks which is the way. Thomas says: "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answers: "I am the Way, I am Truth and Life! No one can come to the Father except through me". Three important words. Without the way we cannot go. Without the truth one cannot make a good choice. Without life, there is only death! Jesus explains the sense. He is the Way, because "No one can come to the Father except through me". And he is the gate through which the sheep enter and go out (Jn 10: 9). Jesus is the truth, because looking at him, we see the image of the Father. "Anyone who knows me knows the Father!" Jesus is the life, because walking like Jesus we will be united to the Father and we will have life in us!

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, May 6, 2023

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

you are distant and unknown, and yet so near that you know and love and save us through your Son Jesus Christ.

May he be present in us and in our actions that we may do the same works of justice, truth and loving service and thus become the sign to the world that your Son is alive and that you are a saving God now and forever.

Gospel Reading - John 14: 7-14

Jesus said to his disciples: "If you know me, you will know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him.

Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied.' Jesus said to him,

'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? What I say to you I do not speak of my own accord: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his works. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe it on the evidence of these works.

In all truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Reflection

- John 14: 7: To know Jesus is to know the Father. The text of today's Gospel is the continuation of that of yesterday. Thomas had asked: "Lord we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?" Jesus answers: "I am the Way, I am Truth and Life! No one can come to the Father except through me." And he adds: "If you know me, you will know the Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him". This is the first phrase of today's Gospel. Jesus always speaks of the Father, because it was the life of the Father which appeared in all that he said and did. This constant reference to the Father provokes Philip's question.
- John 14: 8-11: Philip asks: "Lord, show us the Father and then we will be satisfied!" This was the desire of the disciples, the desire of many persons of the communities of the Beloved Disciple and it is the desire of many people today: What do people do to see the Father of whom Jesus speaks so much? The response of Jesus is very beautiful and is valid even now: "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me! Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!" People should not think that God is far away from us, distant and unknown. Anyone who wants to know how and who God the Father is, it suffices that he looks at Jesus. He has revealed him in

his words and gestures of his life! "I am in the Father and the Father is in me!" Through his obedience, Jesus identified himself totally with the Father. At every moment he did what the Father asked him to do (Jn 5: 30; 8: 28-29, 38). This is why, in Jesus everything is revelation of the Father! And the signs and the works are the works of the Father! As people say: "The son is the face of the father!" This is why in Jesus and for Jesus, God is in our midst.

- John 14: 12-14: The Promise of Jesus. Jesus makes a promise to say that his intimacy with the Father is not his privilege only, but that it is possible for all those who believe in him. We also, through Jesus, can succeed in doing beautiful things for others as Jesus did for the people of his time. He intercedes for us. Everything that people ask him for; he asks the Father and always obtains it. as long as it is to render service. Jesus is our advocate, he defends us. He leaves but he does not leave us defenseless. He promises that he will ask the Father and the Father will send another advocate or consoler, the Holy Spirit. Jesus even says that it is necessary for him to leave, because otherwise the Holy Spirit will not be able to come (Jn 16: 7). And the Holy Spirit will fulfil the things of Jesus in us, if we act in the name of Jesus and we observe the great commandment of the practice of love.

Personal Questions

- To know Jesus is to know the Father. In the Bible the word "to know a person" is not only an intellectual understanding, but it also presupposes a profound experience of the presence of the person in one's life. Do I know Jesus?
- Do I know the Father?

Concluding Prayer

The whole wide world has seen the saving power of our God.

Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth, burst into shouts of joy! (Ps 98: 3-4)

Sunday, May 7, 2023

Fifth Sunday of Easter

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

A Key the Reading:

As you read, try to listen as though you were present at the last meeting of Jesus with his disciples. Listen to his words as though they were addressed to you, today, at this moment.

- A Division of Chapter 14:
 - John 14: 1-4: Let nothing disturb you!
 - John 14: 5-7: Thomas' question and Jesus' reply
 - John 14: 8-21: Philip's question and Jesus' reply
 - John 14: 22-31: Judas Thaddaeus' question and Jesus' reply.
- The Gospel Text - John 14: 1-12
 - 1-4: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many places to live in; otherwise I would have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you to myself, so that you may be with me where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.
 - 5-7: Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus said: I am the Way; I am Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him.
 - 8-12: Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? What I say to you I do not speak of my own accord: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his works. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe it on the evidence of these works. In all truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which word of Jesus most touched my heart? Why?
- What traces of the face of God the Father, revealed by Jesus, appear in these twelve verses?
- What do these verses reveal about the relationship of Jesus with the Father?

- What do these verses tell us about our relationship with the Father?
- What are the "greater works", which, according to Jesus, we shall be able to accomplish?
- Jesus said, "In my Father's house there are many places to live in". What do these words mean for us today?
- Which problems and desires are implied in the questions of Thomas and Philip?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

John's Gospel: A Cloth Woven from Three Threads:

- The word *text* means *cloth*. Hence, John's Gospel is like a beautiful cloth woven from three very different and yet very similar threads. These three threads harmonize so well that we sometimes get confused and are not aware that we are passing from one thread to another.
 - *The first thread*: is the facts of Jesus' life that happened in the year 30 as remembered by eyewitnesses, those who lived with Jesus and saw the things he did and heard the words he taught. This is the historical Jesus, preserved in the witness of the Beloved Disciple (1 Jn 1: 1).
 - *The second thread*: is the facts and problems of the life of the community in the second half of the first century. Beginning with faith in Jesus and convinced of the presence of the Risen One among them, the communities enlightened these facts and problems by means of the words and signs of Jesus. Thus, for instance, the conflicts they had with the Pharisees, greatly influenced the story and the reporting of the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees.
 - *The third thread*: is the Evangelist's comments. In some passages, it is difficult for us to discern when Jesus stops talking and when the Evangelist begins his comments (Jn 2: 22; 3: 16-21; 7: 39; 12: 37-43; 20: 30-31).
- In the five chapters, which describe Jesus' farewell (Jn 13 to 17), we can see these three threads: Jesus speaking, the communities speaking and the Evangelist speaking. In these chapters the three threads are interwoven in such a way that they present a whole of great beauty and inspiration, where it is difficult to distinguish which is which.

Chapters 13 to 17 of John's Gospel:

- The long conversation (Jn 13:1 to 17: 26) between Jesus and his disciples at the last supper, on the eve of his apprehension and death, is the Testament he left us. In it Jesus expresses his last desire concerning life in community for his disciples. It was a friendly conversation, which the Disciple remembered well. The Evangelist wishes to convey that Jesus desired to prolong to the utmost that final meeting of friends, a moment of great intimacy. The same happens today. There are various kinds of conversations. There is the superficial conversation that leaves everything up in the air and reveals emptiness in the persons involved. Then there is the deep conversation that touches the heart. All of us, at some time, experience these

moments of friendly sharing which expand our hearts and strengthen us in times of difficulty. This kind of conversation helps us to grow in trust and to overcome fear.

- These five chapters (Jn 13 to 17) are also an example of the way the communities of the Beloved Disciple catechised. The questions of the three disciples, Thomas (Jn 14: 5), Philip (Jn 14: 8) and Judas Thaddaeus (Jn 14: 22), were also the questions of the communities of the late first century. Jesus' replies to the three were like a mirror where the communities found an answer to their doubts and difficulties. Thus, chapter 14 was (and still is) a catechesis that teaches the communities how to live without the physical presence of Jesus.

Chapter 14: 1-12: An Answer to the Constant Questions of the Human Heart:

- *John 14: 1-4: The communities asked:* "How can we live in community with so many different opinions?" Jesus replies with an exhortation, "Do not let your hearts be troubled! There are many rooms in my Father's house!" The insistence on encouraging words that would help to overcome the troubles and divergences, means that there must have been different tendencies among the communities, each claiming to be truer than the other. Jesus says, "There are many rooms in my Father's house!" It is not necessary for all to think alike. What matters is that all accept Jesus as the revelation of the Father and that, for love of him, all take on an attitude of service and love. Love and service are the concrete, which binds together the many bricks of the wall and makes the diverse communities into one Church of brothers and sisters.
- *John 14: 5-7: Thomas asks,* "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus replies, "I am the way, the life and the truth!" Three important words. Without the way we cannot walk. Without the truth we cannot be certain. Without life, there is only death! Jesus explains that he is the **way** because "No one can come to the Father except through me!" He is the door through which the sheep enter and leave (Jn 10: 9). Jesus is the **truth** because seeing him we see the image of the Father. "If you know me, you know my Father too!" Jesus is the **life** because if we walk in his footsteps we shall be united to the Father and shall have life in us.
- *John 14: 8-11: Philip asks,* "Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'" Philip expressed the desire of many in John's communities and continues to be the desire of all of us: what must I do to see the Father of whom Jesus speaks so much? Jesus' answer is very beautiful, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." We must not think that God is far away, distant and unknown. Anyone who desires to know how and who God the Father is, has only to look at Jesus. He has revealed the Father in the words and signs of his life! "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Through his manner of being, Jesus revealed a new face of God that drew people to him. Through his obedience, he was completely identified with the Father. At all times he did that which the Father told him to do (Jn 5: 30; 8: 28-29, 38). That is why everything in Jesus is the revelation of the Father! The signs and works he did are the work of the Father! In the same way, we, by our manner of living and living together, must be a revelation of Jesus. To have seen us should be to have seen and recognized in us a part of Jesus. What we need to meditate here is "How do I reflect Jesus?" Am I like Peter who would not accept a servant and suffering Jesus and wanted a Jesus according to his wishes? (Mk 8: 32-33). Am I like those who can only say "Lord! Lord!" (Mt 7: 21). Am I like those who only wish for a celestial and glorious Christ and forget that Jesus

of Nazareth walked with the poor, welcomed the marginalized, healed the sick, reinstated those excluded and who, because of his commitment to the people and the Father, was persecuted and crucified.

- *John 14: 12. Jesus' promise.* Jesus says that an intimate relationship with the Father is not his privilege alone but is possible for all of us who believe in him. Through him, we can do the same things he did for the people of his time. He will intercede for us. Whatsoever we ask of him, he will ask of the Father and will obtain for us, provided it is to serve (Jn 14: 13)

Psalm 43 (42)

"Your light and your truth will guide me on my way"

As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. (Picture) My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually, "Where is your God?" These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:

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

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

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

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

Deep calls to deep at the thunder of thy cataracts; all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me. By day the LORD commands his steadfast love; and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock:

"Why hast thou forgotten me?

Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

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

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

Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from deceitful and unjust men deliver me!

For thou art the God in whom I take refuge; why hast thou cast me off?

Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Oh send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me, let them bring me to thy holy hill and to thy dwelling! Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise thee with the lyre, O God, my God.

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

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

Final Prayer

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

Monday, May 8, 2023

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord God, loving Father, we look for your presence in the temple of nature and in churches built by our hands, and you are there with your people.

But above all, you have made your temple right in our hearts.

God, give us eyes of faith and love to recognize that you live in us with your Son and the Holy Spirit if we keep the word of Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord for ever.

Gospel Reading - John 14: 21-26

Jesus said to his disciples: "Whoever holds to my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me; and whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and reveal myself to him." Judas -- not Judas Iscariot -- said to him, 'Lord, what has happened, that you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?' Jesus replied: Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make a home in him. Anyone who does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not my own: it is the word of the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while still with you; but the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.

Reflection

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

- John 14: 21: I shall love him and reveal myself to him. This verse presents the summary of the response of Jesus to Philip. Philip had said: "Show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied!" (Jn 14: 8). Moses had asked God: "Show me your glory!" (Ex 33, 18). God answered: "My face you cannot see, for no human being can see me and survive" (Ex 33: 20). The Father cannot be shown. God lives in inaccessible light (1 Tim 6: 16). "Nobody has ever seen God" (1 Jn 4: 12). But the presence of the Father can be experienced through the experience of love. The First Letter of Saint John says: "He who does not love does not know God because God is Love". Jesus tells Philip:

“Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and reveal myself to him”. By observing the commandment of Jesus, which is the commandment to love our neighbor (Jn 15: 17), the person shows his love for Jesus. And whoever loves Jesus, will be loved by the Father and can be certain that the Father will manifest himself to him. In the response to Judas, Jesus will say how this manifestation of the Father will take place in our life

- John 14: 22: The question of Judas is the question of all. The question of Judas: “Lord, what has happened that you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” This question of Judas mirrors a problem which is real even today. Sometimes, among us, Christians, there arises the idea of being better than the others and of being loved by God more than others. Do we attribute to God the distinction among persons?
- John 14: 23-24: The answer of Jesus. The answer of Jesus is simple and profound. He repeats what he had just said to Philip. The problem is not if we, Christians, are loved more by God than others, or that the others are despised by God. This is not the criterion for the preference of the Father. The criterion for the preference of the Father is always the same: love. “If anyone loves me, he will observe my word, and my Father will love him and we shall come to him and make a home in him. Anyone who does not love me does not keep my words”. Independently of whether the person is Christian or not, the Father manifests himself to all those who observe the commandment of Jesus which is love for neighbor (Jn 15: 17). In what does the manifestation of the Father consist? The response to this question is engraved in the heart of humanity, in the universal human experience. Observe the life of the persons who practice love and make of their life a gift for others. Examine their experience, independently of religion, of social class, of race or color, the practice of love gives us a profound peace and it is a great joy that they succeed to live and bear together pain and suffering. This experience is the reflection of the manifestation of the Father in the life of the person. It is the realization of the promise: “I and the Father will come to him and make our home in him.
- John 14: 25-26: The promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus ends his response to Judas saying: I have said these things to you while still with you. Jesus communicates everything which he has heard from the Father (Jn 15: 15). His words are a source of life and they should be meditated, deepened and updated constantly in the light of the always new reality which surrounds us. For this constant meditation of his words, Jesus promises us the help of the Holy Spirit: “The Consoler, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.

Personal Questions

- Jesus says: We will come to him and make our home in him. How do I experience this promise?
- We have the promise of the gift of the Spirit to help us understand the word of Jesus. Do I invoke the light of the Spirit when I prepare myself to read and meditate the Scripture?

Concluding Prayer

Day after day I shall bless you,

I shall praise your name for ever and ever. Great is Yahweh and worthy of all praise, his greatness beyond all reckoning. (Ps 145: 2-3)

Tuesday, May 9, 2023

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, almighty Father,

you have absolute power over the world, and yet you respect the freedom of people, even of those who persecute your faithful.

Make us realize that our faith does not protect us against the evil which people bring upon one another, but that you want us to build according to your plan a kingdom of justice, love and peace.

Help our faith to stand the test when our meager efforts fail.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 14: 27-31a

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

You heard me say: I am going away and shall return. If you loved me you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you this now, before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe.

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

Reflection

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

- John 14: 27: The gift of Peace. Jesus communicates his peace to the disciples. The same peace will be given after the Resurrection (Jn 20: 29). This peace is an expression of the manifestation of the Father, as Jesus had said before (Jn 14: 21). The peace of Jesus is the source of joy that he communicates to us (Jn 15: 11; 16: 20, 22, 24; 17: 13). It is a peace which is different from the peace which the world gives us, diverse from

Pax Romana. At the end of the first century the Pax Romana was maintained by force and violent repression against the rebellious movements. *Pax Romana* guaranteed the institutionalized inequality between the Roman citizens and the slaves. This is not the peace of the Kingdom of God. The Peace which Jesus communicates is what in the Old Testament is called Shalom. It is the complete organization of the whole life around the values of justice, of fraternity and of equality.

- John 14: 28-29: The reason why Jesus returns to the Father. Jesus returns to the Father in order to be able to return immediately. He will say to Mary Magdalene: "Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father" (Jn 20: 17). Going up to the Father, he will return through the Holy Spirit that he will send (cfr. Jn 20: 22). Without the return toward the Father, he will not be able to stay with us through the Spirit.
- John 14: 30-31a: That the world may know that I love the Father. Jesus had ended the last conversation with the disciples. The prince of this world wanted to impose himself on the destiny of Jesus. Jesus will die. The Prince, the Tempter, the Devil, has no power over Jesus. The world will know that Jesus loves the Father. This is the great witness of Jesus which can impel the world to believe in him. In the announcement of the Good News it is not a question of diffusing a doctrine, or of imposing a Canon Law, or of uniting all in one organization. It is a question; above all, of living and radiating what the human being desires and has deeper in his heart: love. Without this, the doctrine, the Law, the celebration will be only a wig on a bald head.
- John 14: 31b: Come now, let us go. These are the last words of Jesus, the expression of his decision to be obedient to the Father and of revealing his love. In the Eucharist, at the moment of the consecration, in some countries, it is said: "On the day before his passion, voluntarily accepted." In another place Jesus says: "This is why the Father loves me: because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me: I lay it down of my own free will, and as I have power to lay it down so I have power to take it up again, and this is the command that I have received from my Father." (Jn 10: 17-18).

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

All your creatures shall thank you, Yahweh, and your faithful shall bless you.

They shall speak of the glory of your kingship and tell of your might. (Ps 145: 10-11)

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, loving Father,

you have given us your Son Jesus Christ as the true vine of life and our source of strength.

Help us to live his life as living branches attached to the vine, and to bear plenty of fruit of justice, goodness and love.

Let our union with him become visible in our openness to one another and in our unity as brothers and sisters, that he may be visibly present among us now and for ever.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 1-8

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

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

Reflection

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

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

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

- John 15: 1-2: Jesus presents the comparison of the vine. In the Old Testament the image of the vine indicated the People of Israel (Is 5: 1-2). The people were like a vine that God planted with great tenderness on the hills of Palestine (Ps 80: 9-12). But the vine does not correspond to that which God expected. Instead of producing good grapes it produces sour fruit which is good for nothing (Is 5: 3-4). Jesus is the new vine, the true vine. In one phrase alone he gives us the comparison. He says: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even

more.” Pruning is painful, but it is necessary. It purifies the vine, and thus it grows and bears more fruit.

- John 15: 3-6: Jesus explains and applies the parable. The disciples are already purified. They have already been pruned by the word that they heard from Jesus. Up until today, God does the pruning in us through his Word which comes to us from the Bible and from many other means. Jesus extends the parable and says: “I am the vine, you are the branches!” It is not a question of two different things: on one side the vine and on the other the branches. No! The vine does not exist without the branches. We are part of Jesus. Jesus is the whole. In order that a branch can produce fruit, it must be united to the vine. It is only in this way that it can receive the sap. “Without me you can do nothing!” The branch that does not bear fruit will be cut down. It dries up and it is ready to be burnt. It is good for nothing, not even for wood!
- John 15: 7-8: Remain in my love. Our model is that which Jesus himself lives in his relationship with the Father. He says: “As the Father has loved me, I have loved you. Remain in my love!” He insists in saying that we must remain in him and that his words should remain in us. And he even says: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it!” Because what the Father wants the most is that we become disciples of Jesus and, thus, that we bear much fruit.

Personal Questions

- Which has been the different pruning or the difficult moments in my life which have helped me to grow? Which has been the pruning or the difficult moments that we have had in our community, and which have helped us to grow?
- What keeps the life united and alive, capable of bearing fruit, is the sap which goes through it. Which is the sap which goes through our community, and which keeps it alive, capable of bearing fruit?

Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh! Sing to Yahweh, all the earth!

Sing to Yahweh, bless his name!

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

Thursday, May 11, 2023

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

you want your Church to be open to all persons and all nations, for your Son was available to all and you love all people. God, give us open minds and open hearts.

Save us from our narrow prejudices and stop us from trying to create people in our own image and likeness.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 9-11

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

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

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

Reflection

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

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

- John 15: 9-11: Remain in my love, source of perfect joy. Jesus remains in the love of the Father, by observing the commandments which he receives from him. We remain in the love of Jesus by observing the commandments which he has left for us. And we should observe them in the same way in which he observed the commandments of the Father: "If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love". It is in this union of the love of the Father and of Jesus that the source of true joy is found: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy be complete."
- John 15: 12-13: Love one another as I have loved you. The commandment of Jesus is only one: "To love one another, as he has loved us!" (Jn 15: 12). Jesus goes beyond the Old Testament. The ancient criterion was: "You will love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 18: 19). The new criterion is: "That you love one another, as I have loved you." Here he says the phrase which we sing even until now: "Nobody has greater love than this: to give one's life for one's friends!"
- John 15: 14-15: Friends and not servants. "You are my friends if you do what I command you", that is, the practice of love up to the total gift of self! Immediately after, Jesus adds a very high ideal for the life of the disciples. He says: "I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father!" Jesus had no more secrets for his disciples. He has told us everything he heard from the Father! This is the splendid ideal of life in community: to attain a total transparency, to the point of not having any secrets among ourselves and of being able to have total trust in one another, to be able to share the experience of God and of life that we have, and in this way enrich one another reciprocally. The first Christians succeeded in attaining this ideal during several years. They were "one only heart and one soul" (Acts 4: 32; 1: 14, 42, 46).

- John 15: 16-17: Jesus has chosen us. We have not chosen Jesus. He has chosen us, he has called us and has entrusted us the mission to go and bear fruit, fruit which will last. We need him, but he also needs us and our work in order to be able to continue to do today what he did for the people of Galilee. The last recommendation: "My command to you is to love one another!"
- The symbol of the vine in the Bible. The people of the Bible cultivated the vine and produced good wine. The harvest of the grapes was a feast with songs and dances. And this gave origin to the song of the vine, used by the prophet Isaiah. He compares the people of Israel to the vine (Is 5: 1-7; 27: 2-5; Ps 80, 9: 19). Before him, the prophet Hosea had already compared Israel to an exuberant vine, the more fruit that it produced, the more it multiplied its idolatries (Ho 10: 1). This theme was used by Jeremiah, who compares Israel to a bastard vine (Jer 2: 21), from which the branches were uprooted (Jer 5: 10; 6: 9). Jeremiah uses these symbols because he himself had a vine which had been trampled on and devastated by the invaders (Jer 12: 10). During the slavery of Babylonia, Ezekiel used the symbol of the vine to denounce the infidelity of the people of Israel. He told three parables on the vine:
 - 1) the vine which is burnt and is good for nothing (Ez 15: 1-8);
 - 2) the false vine planted and protected by two waters, symbols of the kings of Babylonia and of Egypt, enemies of Israel. (Ez 17: 1-10).
 - 3) The vine destroyed by the oriental wind, image of the slavery of Babylonia (Ez 19: 10-14).

The comparison of the vine was used by Jesus in several parables: the laborers of the vineyard (Mt 21: 1-16); the two sons who have to work in the vineyard (Mt 21: 32-33); the parable of the wicked tenants, who did not pay the landowner, beat the servants and killed the son of the landowner (Mt 21: 33-45); the barren fig tree planted in the vineyard (Lk 13: 6-9); the vine and its branches (Jn 15: 1-17).

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, May 12, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, loving Father,

you have given us your Son Jesus Christ as the true vine of life and our source of strength.

Help us to live his life as living branches attached to the vine, and to bear plenty of fruit of justice, goodness and love.

Let our union with him become visible in our openness to one another and in our unity as brothers and sisters, that he may be visibly present among us now and forever.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 12-17

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

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

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

Reflection

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

- John 15: 12-13: To love one another as he has loved us. The commandment of Jesus is only one: "to love one another as he has loved us!" (Jn 15: 12) Jesus exceeds the Old Testament. The ancient criterion was the following: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lv 18: 19). The new criterion is: "Love one another as I have loved you". It is the phrase that we sing even today and which says: "There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's brother!"
- John 15: 14-15: Friends and not servants. You are my friends if you do what I command you", that is, the practise of love up to the point of the total gift of oneself! Immediately Jesus presents a very high ideal for the life of his disciples. He says: "I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father!" Jesus no longer had any secrets for his disciples. He tells us everything that he has heard from the Father! Behold the wonderful ideal of life in community: to reach a total transparency, to the point of not having any secrets among us and to have full trust with one another, to be able to speak about the experience of God that we have and of life, and thus, be able to mutually enrich one another. The first Christians succeeded to reach this ideal after many years: "they had one only heart and one only soul" (Ac 4: 32; 1: 14; 2: 42-46).
- John 15: 16-17: Jesus has chosen us. We have not chosen Jesus. He met us, called us and entrusted a mission to us to go and bear fruit, and a fruit which lasts. We need him, but he also wants to need us and our work in order to be able to continue to do today, for the people what he did for the people of Galilee. The last recommendation: This is my commandment: to love one another!"

For Personal Confrontation

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

Concluding Prayer

My heart is ready, God, my heart is ready; I will sing, and make music for you.

Awake, my glory, awake, lyre and harp, that I may awake the Dawn. (Ps 57: 7-8)

Saturday, May 13, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord our God;

it is good to live in the friendship of your Son Jesus Christ.

Make us realize that also in this love we are committed to him and share with him for better and for worse, in misunderstanding and contradiction as well as in joy and intimacy.

Help us to rejoice even when treated with indifference or ridicule on account of him, for it means that he is still with us

who is our Lord forever.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 18-21

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

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

Reflection

- John 15: 18-19: The hatred of the world. "If the world hates you, you must realize that it hated me before it hated you." The Christian who follows Jesus is called to live in a way contrary to society. In a world organized according to the egoistic interests of persons and groups which seek to live and radiate the love which will be crucified. This was the destiny of Jesus. This is why when a Christian is very much praised by the power of this world and is exalted as a model for all by mass media; it is good not to trust too much. "If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own;

but because you do not belong to the world, because my choice of you has drawn you out of the world, that is why the world hates you". It was Jesus' choice which separated us. And if we base ourselves on this gratuitous choice or vocation of Jesus we will have the force to suffer persecution and calumny and have joy, in spite of the difficulties.

- John 15: 20: The servant is not greater than his master. "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word they will keep yours as well". Jesus had already insisted on this same point in the washing of the feet (Jn 13: 16) and in the discourse on the Mission (Mt 10: 24-25). And it is this identification with Jesus that, throughout the centuries, has given so much force to persons to continue the journey and has been a source of mystical experience for many saints and martyrs.
- John 15: 21: Persecution on account of Jesus. "But it will be on my account that they will do all this to you, because they do not know the one who sent me." The repeated insistence of the Gospel in recalling those words of Jesus which can help the communities to understand the reason for the crisis and persecutions is an evident sign that our brothers and sisters of the first communities did not have an easy life. From the persecution of Nero after Christ up to the end of the first century, they lived knowing that they could be persecuted, accused, imprisoned and killed any moment. The force which sustained them was a certainty that Jesus communicated that God was with them.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, May 14, 2023

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Opening Prayer

Father, Christ your Son is already pleading for us, but through your Word, which is life for us, you also grant us the grace of opening our hearts to you in deep, intense, true and enlightened prayer. Send us the Consoler, the Spirit of truth, not only that he may dwell beside us, but that he may always dwell within our hearts. He is the fire of love that unites you with Jesus, the kiss that you exchange always. Grant that, through your Word, we too may enter into this love and live

by it. Touch our spirit, our mind and all our being that we may welcome the commandments, hidden in these few verses; that we may keep them, that is, live them fully and in truth in your presence and that of our brothers and sisters. Amen.

Gospel Reading – John 14: 15-21

To Place the Passage in Its Context:

These verses lead us to the holy place where Jesus celebrates the last supper with his disciples: the place of his revelation, of his glory, of his teaching and of his love. Here, we too are invited to sit at table with Jesus, to lean on his chest, receive his commandment and thus prepare ourselves to enter with Him into his Passion and resurrection. After the passage of 13: 1-30, which tells us of the actions, words and feelings of Jesus and of those with him during the paschal meal, in 13: 31 we hear the words of the great last discourse of Jesus, which ends with the priestly prayer of chapter 17. Here, then, we are still at the beginning. In 14: 1-14 Jesus presented and offered himself as the way to the Father, whereas in these few verses he introduces the promise to send the Holy Spirit, as Consoler, as sure presence, but also the promise of the coming of the Father and of himself in the depths of the disciples who, through faith, will have believed in him and kept his commandments.

To Help Us in the Reading of the Passage:

- **vv. 15-17:** First, Jesus clarifies to his disciples that for Him, love, if it is to be true love, must absolutely mean also the observance of his commandments. In brief, He wants to tell us that if we do not keep the commandments then there is no love; this is an essential and indispensable consequence, which reveals whether we really do love or only deceive ourselves that we love. Jesus also says that the gift of the Holy Spirit from the Father is the fruit of this love and observance that give rise to the prayer of Jesus, thanks to which we can receive the Spirit. Jesus explains that the Spirit is the Consoler, the Spirit of truth, the One whom the world does not see, does not know, but whom the disciples will see and know, the One who dwells with them and in them.
- **vv. 18-20:** Jesus promises his coming, his return, which is about to happen in his resurrection. He says that he will no longer appear in his passion, death, and burial, but that he will reappear to his disciples, who will see him, because he is the resurrection and the life. He also reveals his relationship with the Father and invites them and us into that relationship; in fact, he says that we shall know, that is we shall experience this relationship in our depths. Jesus and no one else could ever promise a greater consolation than this.
- **v. 21:** Here Jesus' discourse includes everyone; he moves from the "*you*" of his disciples to the "*anyone*" who begins to love him, enter into a relationship with him and follow him. That which took place for the disciples, the first chosen ones, takes place for anyone who believes in him. Here Jesus opens to us and to all his relationship of love with the Father, because by remaining in Christ, we too are known and loved by the Father. Finally, Jesus promises again his love for anyone who loves him and the revelation of himself, that is, a permanent manifestation of his love for us.

The Gospel Text:

15 If you love me you will keep my commandments. 16 I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever, 17 the Spirit of truth whom the world can never accept since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you. 18 I shall not leave you orphans; I shall come to you. 19 In a short time the world will no longer see me; but you will see that I live and you also will live. 20 On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you. 21 Whoever holds to my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me; and whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and reveal myself to him.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

- This passage begins and ends with the same words: the proclamation and invitation to love the Lord. I know that, through this lectio divina, he wants to prepare me for a powerful meeting with love; perhaps I am frightened a little, I know that I am not used to this, perhaps I am ashamed, perhaps I feel superior towards these sugary words. But he insists and keeps on repeating only this, only Love. So what am I going to do? Am I going to stay and enter into this relationship, so involved, so upsetting? Or shall I go away, run away, because I am afraid, because I don't feel like committing myself? Shall I choose Love, that is, this relationship, this confrontation, this exchange, this reciprocal giving, this giving of myself? Or shall I choose to be closed, remain alone in an absurd isolation of one who does not want to stay with his God and with his equals? Jesus says: "If you want"; He does not force. However, I know that he is waiting for me and has been so for a long time... why wait any longer?
- I read and read again this passage, so that these words, so full of meaning, may be better imprinted on my mind and descend into my heart. I note that Jesus insistently says "you", when referring to his disciples, those then with him but also those of today, that is us, each one of us seen and looked at by Him with a unique, personal, unrepeatable love that cannot be given away or substituted. I know that I too am included in that "you", which seems generic but is not. I try to read again Jesus' words and allow myself to be involved more directly; I place myself face to face, eyes to eyes with Jesus and let him tell me all, using that "you" full of love, using my name that only he really knows.... If you love me, my Father will send you another Consoler; you know him; he dwells near you and will be within you; I shall not leave you an orphan, I shall come back to you; you will see me; you will live; you will know that I am in the Father and you in me and I in you.
- Now we meet an important expression of Jesus, repeated twice: "**keep my commandments**". This is an important and fundamental fact, because the authenticity of my love relationship with the Lord depends on it; if I do not keep his commandments, then I do not love him. But I try to ask myself more carefully what does the verb "keep" mean, which looks so cold, so distant. I find it for instance in Mt 27: 36, where we read that the soldiers *kept watch* over the crucified Jesus; it is then a matter of close and scrupulous watching, an untiring watchfulness. On the other hand, in Jn 2: 10, it appears with the meaning of *keeping in store, reserving*, as Jesus

says of the good wine kept until last. 2 Timothy 4: 7 uses the verb in that wonderful verse on faith: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith". This emphasises the effort, the great care used to *safeguard* and watch over that precious thing, faith. In Jn 17: 15, Jesus prays the Father to keep his own from the evil one, that is *to preserve, protect*, so that nothing and no one would harm or disperse them.

This is not simply a cold and external keeping of the commandments of God or of Jesus, but much more; this is a relationship of love, a being careful, protecting, keeping in life. Fundamentally it is *realizing* that which I am told or asked, in my day-to-day life, every moment and in every situation.

A Key to the Reading

The following are the people I meet in the passage: the Father, Jesus, the Spirit, the disciples, the world.

- **The Father.** The presence of the Father immediately appears as the point of reference of Jesus, the Son. It is to the Father that he addresses his prayer. He says: "I *will ask* the Father." It is this very special and intimate contact that makes of Jesus the Son of his Father, that confirms him all the time as such. The relationship of love with the Father is nourished and maintained by prayer at night, at different times during the day, in times of need, in requests for help, in suffering, in the most distressing trials. If we scan the Gospels several times, we shall find Jesus thus, deeply involved in a relationship with the Father through prayer. Here are some relevant passages: Mt 6: 9; 11, 25; 14: 23; 26: 39; 27: 46; Lk 21: 21ff; 6:12; 10: 21; 22: 42; 23: 34. 46; Jn 11: 41ff; 17: 1. I feel that this is also the way for me; Jesus followed this way in depth, leaving me his enlightened and certain footsteps so that I may have no fear in following him in a similar experience. I too am the child of the Father, I too can pray to him.

Immediately after this, Jesus shows us the Father as the One who *gives*. In fact, giving is the main characteristic of God, who is uninterrupted, measureless and countless gift to all and at all times. The Father is Love and Love gives itself, gives everything. It is not enough that he gave us Jesus, his beloved Son, he still wants to bless us with and offer us life by sending the Holy Spirit. Indeed it is written: "He who has not spared even his own Son but has delivered him for us all, how can he fail to grant us also all things with him?" (Rm 8: 32).

Still more: the Father loves us (Jn 14: 23; 16: 27)! And this love of his allows us to pass from death to life, from the sadness of sin to the joy of communion with Him, from the solitude of hatred to sharing, because the love of God inevitably takes us to the love of our brothers and sisters.

- **Jesus the Son.** In these few verses, the figure and presence of Jesus appear forcefully and with enormous clarity. He is immediately seen as praying, the one who *prays* to the Father for us; he raises his hands in prayer for us, just as he raises them in oblation on the cross.

Jesus is the one who does not go away for ever, who does not leave us orphans, but who *will come back*: "I shall come back". If it seems as though he is absent, I must not despair, but go on believing in him because he will really come back. "It is true, I come quickly!" (Ap 22: 20). He will come back and, as he said, he will take us with him so that we may be where he is (Jn 14: 3).

Jesus is *the living one* forever, the conqueror of death. He is *in the Father* and *in us*, with an all-powerful force that nothing can ever destroy. He is in the Father, but also in us, he dwells in us, he stays with us; there is no possibility of true and full life for us other than that con-penetration of being which Jesus offers us. He says yes,

always, and is never sorry for, nor does he ever withdraw from his commitment of love.

On the contrary! He *loves us*, as the Father loves us and *reveals himself* to us. He gives himself, offers himself, allowing us to know him, to experience him, to touch and taste him. But this is a revelation that is accompanied by love, as Paul says (2 Tim 4: 8).

- **The Holy Spirit.** In this passage the Spirit of the Lord seems to be an emerging figure that embraces everything. He unites the Father to the Son, he brings the Father and the Son into the hearts of the disciples; he creates an indissoluble union of love, of being. He is called the Paraclete, that is the *Consoler*, the one who *stays* with us always, who will not leave us alone, abandoned, forgotten; he comes and gathers us from the four winds, from the dispersion and blows within us the strength for our return to the Father, to Love. Only he can work all this within us; he is the finger of God's hand who, to this day, writes on the sand of our hearts the words of a new covenant, which can never again be forgotten.

He is the Spirit of *truth*, that is, of Jesus; in him there is no deceit, no falsehood, only the certain light of the Word of the Lord. He has built his dwelling place *within us*, he has been invited and goes from being close to us to being within us. He has become one with us, accepting this nuptial union, this fusion; he is all good, the friend of men and women, he is Love itself. That is why he gives himself thus, filling us with joy. Let us beware of making him sad, of sending him away, of substituting his presence with other presences, other covenants of love; we then would be the ones who would die, because no one could ever console us in his place.

- **The Disciples.** The words Jesus addresses to his disciples are words that challenge me more directly, more forcefully; they are addressed to me, they impinge on my day-to-day life, they touch my heart, my thoughts, my most intimate desires. They challenge me to a true love that I must transform into concrete actions, keeping in mind the Word and the wish of the one I claim to love, the Lord. A love that can be verified by my *observance of the commandments*. The disciple, then, here appears as one who knows how to wait for his Lord on his return; at midnight, at cockcrow, or early in the morning? It does not matter; He will come back and so I must wait and be ready. What kind of love is it that will not wait, that will not watch, not protect?

The disciple is also one who *knows*; this is a knowledge given from above and which takes place in the heart, that is in one's most intimate being and personality, where we make decisions to act, where we comprehend reality, formulate our thoughts, see and love. This is knowledge in the biblical sense, born of a strong, long and intimate experience, from a deep union and from reciprocal giving. This happens between the Spirit and the true disciple of Jesus. An unstoppable ever-expanding knowledge that leads us to Christ, to the Father, and places us within their eternal and infinite communion of love: "You will know that I am in the Father and you in me and I in you". The disciple is also someone who lives, who is *in*, that is within, in an unbreakable union with his Lord; it is not a superficial, distant, spasmodic union, but is always within the relationship of love. The disciple goes willingly, goes and comes back, allows him/herself to be held, entertained. And so realises the word of the Gospel: "Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father."

The disciple of Jesus, in fact, is one who is loved, one chosen, from the beginning and forever.

- **The World.** The passage says little about the world, which we know to be very important in the writings of John: the world *cannot receive* the Spirit, because it *cannot see or know him*. The world is immersed in darkness and error; it does not see

or know and cannot experience the love of God. The world stays at a distance, turns its back, closes itself and goes away. The world repays with hatred the love that the Lord has for it: the Father has so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Perhaps we too must also love the world, created by God; love it by uniting ourselves to the offering, the sacrifice of Jesus for it.

Could it not be precisely thus, in Christ's offering, that we come to our full and brilliant truth as children of the Father, as disciples, as lovers? Is not this the end of this *lectio divina*, of this meeting with Christ, with the Father and the Spirit? Maybe it is really thus; we must come to the fullness of love, which is the keeping of the commandments and especially the one commandment of Jesus: love as I have loved you.

A Moment of Prayer: Psalm 22

Ref. You are with me, Lord, there is nothing I want!

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing. In grassy meadows he lets me lie.

By tranquil streams he leads me to restore my spirit.

He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name.

Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death I should fear no danger,
for you are at my side.

Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.

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

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

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

Closing Prayer

Lord, you fill me with your love; I abound with joy and deep peace. Through your Word, You have loved me much during this meeting. You have given yourself to me fully; you have neglected nothing in me, my person, my whole life history. Lord, I am because you are; you are with me, within me. Today you have given me a new birth from above, you have renewed me; I know, I see, I feel your own life in me. This is a real Pasch, a true passing from death to life. Thank you, Lord, for your inexpressible love, which covers me, overpowers me and yet relieves and uplifts me!

Lord, I leave behind here my empty, useless, incapable jar and run into the city to call my friends, those whom you love, to tell them: Come you too that you may know Love!

Lord, one final thing: let me never betray you. If Love is not freely given, shared, then it fades into the distance, disappears, becomes sick and lonely. Please help me that I may be love.

Monday, May 15, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

if we really believe in you and in your Son, we cannot be but witnesses.

Send us your Spirit of strength, that we may give no flimsy excuses for not standing up for you and for the love and rights of our neighbor.

Make us only afraid of betraying you and people and of being afraid to bear witness.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

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

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

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

Reflection

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

- John 16: 26-27: The action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the community. The first thing that the Spirit does is to give witness of Jesus: "He will be my witness". The Spirit is not a spiritual being without a definition. No! He is the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father, will be sent by Jesus himself and introduces us into the complete truth (Jn 16: 13). The complete truth is Jesus himself: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life!" (Jn 14: 6). At the end of the first century, there were some Christians who were so fascinated by the action of the Spirit that they no longer looked at Jesus. They affirmed that now, after the Resurrection, it was no longer necessary to look at Jesus of Nazareth, the one "who comes in the flesh". They withdrew from Jesus and remained only with the Spirit. They said: "Jesus is anathema!" (1 Co 12: 3). The Gospel of John takes a stand and does not permit that the action of the Spirit be separated from the memory of Jesus of Nazareth. The Holy Spirit cannot be isolated with an independent greatness, separated from the mystery of the Incarnation. The Holy Spirit is inseparably united to the Father and to Jesus. He is the Spirit of Jesus that the Father sends to us that same Spirit that Jesus has gained with his death and Resurrection. And we, receiving this Spirit in Baptism, should be the prolongation of Jesus: "And you too will be witnesses!" We can never forget that precisely on the eve of his death Jesus promises the Spirit; in the moment when he gave himself for his brothers. Today, the Charismatic Movement insists on the action of the Spirit and does much good. It should always insist more, but it should also insist in affirming that it is a question of the Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth who, out of love for the poor and

the marginalized, was persecuted, arrested and condemned to death and that, precisely because of this, he has promised us his Spirit in such a way that we, after his death, continue his action and be for humanity the revelation itself of the preferential love of the Father for the poor and the oppressed.

- John 16: 1-2: Do not be afraid. The Gospel tells us that to be faithful to Jesus will lead us to have difficulties. The disciples will be excluded from the Synagogue. They will be condemned to death. The same thing that happened to Jesus will happen to them. This is why at the end of the first century, there were persons who, to avoid persecution, diluted or watered down the message of Jesus transforming it into a Gnostic message, vague, without any definition, which was not in contrast with the ideology of the Empire. To them is applied what Paul said: "They are afraid of the cross of Christ" (Ga 6: 12). And John himself, in his letter, will say concerning them: "There are many deceivers at large in the world, refusing to acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in human nature (he became man). They are the Deceiver; they are the Antichrist!" (2 Jn 1: 7). The same concern appears also in Thomas' demand: "Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe". (Jn 20: 25). The Risen Christ who promises to give us the gift of the Spirit is Jesus of Nazareth who continues to have, even now, the signs of torture and of the cross in his risen Body.
- John 16: 3-4: They do not know what they do. They do all these things "because they have never known either the Father or me". These persons do not have a correct image of God. They have a vague image of God, in the heart and in the head. Their God is not the Father of Jesus Christ who gathers us all together in unity and fraternity. In last instance, it is the same reason which impelled Jesus to say: "Father, forgive them, because they know not what they do (Lk 23: 34). Jesus was condemned by the religious authority because, according to their idea, he had a false image of God. In the words of Jesus there is no hatred or vengeance, but only compassion: they are ignorant brothers who know nothing of our Father.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh:

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

Tuesday, May 16, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

if we really believe in you and in your Son, we cannot be but witnesses.

Send us your Spirit of strength, that we may give no flimsy excuses for not standing up for you and for the love and rights of our neighbour.

Make us only afraid of betraying you and people and of being afraid to bear witness.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 16: 5-11

Jesus told to his disciples: "Now I am going to the one who sent me. Not one of you asks, 'Where are you going?' Yet you are sad at heart because I have told you this. Still, I am telling you the truth: it is for your own good that I am going, because unless I go, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will show the world how wrong it was, about sin, and about who was in the right, and about judgement: about sin: in that they refuse to believe in me; about who was in the right: in that I am going to the Father and you will see me no more; about judgement: in that the prince of this world is already condemned."

Reflection

- John 16: 5-7: The sadness of the Disciples. Jesus begins with a rhetorical question that makes evident the sadness of the disciples, at this time evident in the heart of the disciples because of the detachment from Jesus: «Now I am going to the One who sent me; not one of you asks, where are you going?» It is clear that for the disciples the detachment from the lifestyle lived with Jesus implies suffering. And Jesus urges saying: "Yet you are sad at heart because I have told you this" (v. 6). Thus Saint Augustine explains such a sentiment of abandonment of the disciples: "they were afraid to think of losing the visible presence of Christ... they were grieved, saddened in their human affection, at the thought that their eyes would no longer be consoled in seeing him". (Comment of the Gospel of John, XCIV, 4). Jesus tries to dispel this sadness, due to the fact that they will not have his presence, revealing to them his departure. We can say that if he does not leave them, the Paraclete will not be able to join them; if he dies and therefore, returns to the Father, he will be able to send him to the disciples. His departure and the detachment of the disciples is the previous condition for the coming of the Paraclete: "because unless I go, the Paraclete will not come to you..." (v. 7).
- John 16: 8-11: The Mission of the Paraclete. Jesus continues to describe the mission of the Paraclete. The term "Paraclete" means "advocate", that is, support, assistant. Here the Paraclete is presented as the accuser in a process that is carried out before God and in which the accused is the world which has made itself guilty for condemning Jesus:
«He will show the world how wrong it was, about sin, and about who was in the right and about judgment" (v. 8). The Greek verb *elègken* means that he will make an inquiry, he will question, will test: he will bring out to light a reality, and will furnish the proof of the guilt.
The object of the confutation is sin: he will give the world the proof of the sin that it has committed regarding Jesus and will manifest it. Of which sin is there a question here?; that of unbelief (Jn 5: 44ff; 6: 36; 8: 21, 24, 26; 10: 31ss). Besides, for the world to

have thought that Jesus was a sinner (Jn 9: 24; 18: 30) is an inexcusable sin (Jn 15: 21ff).

In the second place he will “refute” the world “concerning justice”, On the juridical level, the notion of justice which adheres more to the text, is the one which implies a declaration of guilt or of innocence in a judgment. In our context this is the only time that the term “justice” appears in the Gospel of John, elsewhere there is the term “just”. In John 16: 8 justice is linked to all that Jesus has affirmed about himself, that is, the reason why he is going to the Father. Such a discourse concerns his glorification: Jesus goes to the Father, he is about to disappear in him and therefore, the disciples will no longer be able to see him; he is about to entrust and to submerge himself completely in the will of the Father. The glorification of Jesus confirms his divine filiation or son ship and the approbation of the Father regarding the mission which Jesus has accomplished. Therefore, the Spirit will show directly the justice of Christ (Jn 14: 26; 15: 26) protecting the disciples and the ecclesial community.

The world that believed to have judged Jesus condemning him is condemned by the “prince of this world”, because it is responsible for his crucifixion (13: 2, 27). Jesus in dying on the Cross is exalted (12: 31) and he has triumphed over Satan. Now the Spirit will give witness to all about the significance of the death of Jesus which coincides with the fall of Satan (Jn 12: 32; 14: 30; 16: 33).

Personal Questions

- Is the fear, consternation of the disciples in losing Jesus also ours?
- Do you allow yourself to be led by the Spirit, the Paraclete who gives you the certainty of the error of the world and helps you to adhere to Jesus, and, therefore, he introduces you into the truth about yourself?

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, May 17, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord God, our Father,
you are not far away from any of us, for in you we live and move and exist and you live in us
through your Holy Spirit. Be indeed with us, Lord,
send us your Holy Spirit of truth

and through him deepen our understanding of the life and message of your Son, that we may accept the full truth and live by it consistently.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 16: 12-15

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

Reflection

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

- John 16: 12: I still have many things to say to you. The Gospel today begins with this phrase: "I still have many things to say to you, but they would be too much for you to bear now". In these words of Jesus there are two things: the environment of the farewell, which characterized the Last Supper, and the concern of Jesus, the older brother, for his younger brothers, who within a brief time will remain without his presence. The time left was very short. Within a short time, Jesus will be arrested. The work begun was not yet complete. The disciples were just at the beginning of their apprenticeship. Three years are a very short time to change life and to begin to live and to think in a new image of God. Their formation was not yet finished. Much was still lacking, and Jesus had still many things to teach them and to transmit to them, but he knows his disciples. They are not among the most intelligent. They would not be capable to know now all the consequences and implications of discipleship. They would become discouraged. They would not be able to bear this.
- John 16: 13-15: The Holy Spirit will come to their help. "However, when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking of his own accord but will say only what he has been told; and he will reveal to you the things to come. He will glorify me, since all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine". This affirmation of Jesus shows the experience of the first communities. In the measure in which they sought to imitate Jesus, trying to interpret and apply his Word to the various circumstances of their life, they experienced the presence and the light of the Spirit. And this happens even today in the communities which try to incarnate the Word of Jesus in their life. The root of this experience is the words of Jesus: "Everything the Father has is mine that is why I said: all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine".
- The action of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John. John uses many images and symbols to signify the action of the Holy Spirit. Like in creation (Gen 1: 1), the Spirit also descends on Jesus, "in the form of a dove, come from Heaven" (Jn 1: 32). It is the beginning of the new creation! Jesus speaks the words of God and communicates

the Spirit without reserve to us (Jn 3: 34). His words are Spirit and Life (Jn 6: 63). When Jesus bids farewell, he said that he would have sent another Paraclete, Consoler, another defender, who will remain with us. It is the Holy Spirit (Jn 14: 16-17). By his Passion, death and Resurrection, Jesus won for us the gift of the Holy Spirit. By Baptism all of us have received this same Spirit of Jesus (Jn 1: 33). When he appeared to the apostles, he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit!" (Jn 20: 22). The Spirit is like the water which springs from within the persons who believe in Jesus (Jn 7: 37-39; 4: 14). The first effect of the action of the Spirit in us is reconciliation: "If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained". (Jn 20: 23). The Spirit which Jesus communicates to us has multiple actions: consoles and spreads (Jn 14: 16), he communicates truth (Jn 14: 17; 16: 13), makes us remember what Jesus taught (Jn 14: 26); will give witness of Jesus (Jo 15: 26); manifests the glory of Jesus (Jn 16: 14); will convince the world concerning sin, justice (Jn 16: 8). The Spirit is given to us so that we can understand the complete meaning of the words of Jesus (Jn 14: 26; 16: 12-13). Encouraged by the Spirit of Jesus we can adore God in any place (Jn 4: 23-24). Here lies the liberty of the Spirit of which Saint Paul speaks: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Co 3: 17).

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

The name of the Lord is sublime, his splendor transcends earth and heaven. For he heightens the strength of his people, to the praise of all his faithful, the people close to him. (Ps 148: 13-14)

Thursday, May 18, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord God, our Father,

you are not far away from any of us, for in you we live and move and exist and you live in us through your Holy Spirit.

Be indeed with us, Lord, send us your Holy Spirit of truth and through him deepen our understanding of the life and message of your Son, that we may accept the full truth and live by it consistently.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 16: 16-20

Jesus told to his disciples: "In a short time you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again. Then some of his disciples said to one another, 'What

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

Reflection

- John 16: 16: Absence and presence. Jesus says a "little while" (un *mikròn*), that is to say, a very brief period of time, perhaps one "instant". Over and beyond the multiplicity of nuances what we want to stress here is the exiguity of time. Just as the time that Jesus remained as Incarnate Word, with his own, in the same way, the time between his departure and his return, will also be brief. There will be no change in the interior situation of his disciples because the relationship with Jesus does not change: He is permanently close to them. Therefore, the vision of Jesus will not suffer any interruption but will be characterized by the communion of life with Him (Jn 14: 19). The repeated use of the verb "to see" in v. 16: is interesting: «In a short time you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again". The expression "a short time you will no longer see me" recalls the way with which the disciples see in the historical Jesus the Son of God; the other expression "a short time later you will see me again" recalls the experience of the Risen Christ. Jesus seems to want to say to the disciples that for a very short time the conditions to see him still exist, to recognize him in his visible flesh, but later, they will see him in a different vision in so far as he will show himself transformed, transfigured.
- John 16: 17-19: The lack of understanding of the disciples. In the meantime, some disciples do not succeed to understand what this absence signifies, means, that is to say, his going to the Father. They experience a certain disturbance regarding the words of Jesus and they express this asking four questions, joined together in one same expression: "What he is saying, what does it mean?" Other times the reader has listened to the questions of Peter, of Philip, of Thomas. And of Judah, not Iscariot, and now those disciples who ask for an explanation. The disciples do not succeed to understand what he is speaking about. The disciples have not understood how Jesus can be seen again by them if he goes to the Father (vv.16-19). But the question seems to be concentrated on the expression "a short time" that for the reader seems to be a very long time that never ends, especially when one has anguish and sadness. In fact, the time of sadness does not pass away. An answer of Jesus is expected, but the Evangelist places a repetition of the same question as before: "You are asking one another what I meant by saying: "In a short time you will no longer see me; and then a short time later you will see me again?" (v. 19).
- John 16: 20: The response of Jesus. In fact, Jesus does not respond to the question asked: "What does in a short time, mean?", but he invites them to trust. It is true that the disciples will be tried, tested, they will suffer very much, they will be alone in a hostile situation, abandoned in a world which rejoices because of the death of Jesus, but he assures them that their sadness will be changed into joy. To the time of sadness is opposed a time in which everything will be overturned. That opposing clause "but your sadness will be transformed into joy", underlines such a change of perspective. For the reader it is evident that the expressions "a short time" correspond to that instant or moment in which the situation is overturned, but up to that moment everything will be of sadness and trial.

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

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

The whole wide world has seen the saving power of our God.

Acclaim the Lord, all the earth, burst into shouts of joy! (Ps 98: 3-4)

Friday, May 19, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord God, merciful Father,

it is hard for us to accept pain, for we know that you have made us for happiness and joy.

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

Gospel Reading - John 16: 20-23a

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

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

Reflection

During these days between the Ascension and Pentecost, the Gospels of the day are taken from chapters 16 to 21 of the Gospel of Saint John, and form part of the Gospel called: “Book of Consolation or of the Revelation acting in the Community” (Jn 13: 1 to 21: 31). This Book is divided as follows: the farewell to the friends (Jn 13: 1a to 14: 31); witness of Jesus and prayer to the Father (Jn 15: 1 to 17: 28); the accomplished work (Jn 18: 1 to 20: 31). The environment of sadness and of expectation. Sadness, because Jesus leaves

and the nostalgia invades the heart. Expectation, because the hour is arriving of receiving the promised gift, that of the Consoler who will make all sadness disappear and will once again bring the joy of the friendly presence of Jesus in the midst of the community.

- John 16: 20: The sadness will be transformed into joy. Jesus says: "In all truth I tell you: you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy." The frequent reference to sadness and suffering expresses the environment of the communities at the end of the first century in Asia Minor (today, Turkey), for which John wrote his Gospel. They lived in a difficult situation of persecution and oppression which caused sadness. The Apostles had taught that Jesus would have returned afterwards, but the "*parusia*", the glorious return of Jesus had not arrived and persecution increased. Many were impatient: "Until when?" (cfr. 2 Th 2: 1-5; 2 P 3: 8-9). Besides, a person bears a situation of suffering and of persecution when he/she knows that suffering is the way and the condition to attain perfect joy. And thus, even having death before the eyes, the person bears and faces suffering and pain. This is why the Gospel makes this beautiful comparison with the pangs of childbirth.
- John 16: 21: The comparison with pangs of childbirth. All understand this comparison, especially mothers: "The woman in childbirth suffers because her time has come; but when she has given birth to the child she forgets the suffering in her joy that a human being has been born into the world". The suffering and sadness caused by persecution, even without offering any horizon of improvement, are not the stertor of death, but rather the pangs of childbirth. Mothers know all this by experience. The pain is terrible, but they bear it, because they know that the pain, the suffering is a source of new life. Thus, is the suffering of the persecution of Christians, and thus, any suffering should be lived, that is, in the light of the experience of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.
- John 16: 22-23a: Eternal joy. Jesus explains the comparison: "So it is with you: you are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy and that joy no one shall take from you". When that day comes, you will not ask me any questions. This is the certainty that gives courage to the tired and persecuted communities of Asia Minor, and which makes one exult with joy in the midst of suffering and pain. As the poet says: "It hurts, but I sing!" Or as the mystic Saint John of the Cross says: "In a dark night, with an inflamed yearning for love, oh happy venture, I went out without being noticed, in my house all slept!" The expression on that day indicates the definitive coming of the Kingdom which brings with it its clarity. In the light of God, there will no longer be need to ask anything. The light of God is the full and total response to all the questions which could arise within the human heart.

For Personal Confrontation

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

Concluding Prayer

Clap your hands, all peoples, acclaim God with shouts of joy.

For Yahweh, the Most High, is glorious, the great king over all the earth. (Ps 47: 1-2)

Saturday, May 20, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord God, merciful Father,

it is hard for us to accept pain,

for we know that you have made us for happiness and joy.

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

Gospel Reading - John 16: 23b-28

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

Reflection

- John 16: 23b: The disciples have full access to the Father. This is the assurance that Jesus gives to his disciples: they can have access to God's paternity in union with Him. The mediation of Jesus takes the disciples to the Father. It is evident that the role of Jesus is not that of substituting himself to "his own": He does not assume it by means of a function of intercession, but he unites them to himself, and in communion with Him they present their needs.
- The disciples are certain that Jesus can dispose of the riches of the Father: "In all truth I tell you, anything you ask from the Father in my name, he will grant it to you" (v.23b). In such a way, it means, in union with Him, the petition becomes effective. The object of any petition to the Father has to be always joined to Jesus, that is to say, to his love and to his commitment to give his life for man (Jn 10, 10). The prayer addressed to the Father, in the name of Jesus, in union with Him (Jn 14: 13; 16: 23), is listened to. Until now you have not asked anything in the name of Jesus, but they will be able to do it after his glorification (Jn 14: 13s) when they will receive the Spirit who will fully enlighten them on His identity (Jn 4: 22ff) and will create the union with Him. His own will be able to ask and receive the fullness of joy when they will go from the sensitive vision of Him to that of faith.
- Jn 16: 24-25: In Jesus the direct contact with the Father. The believers are taken into the relationship between the Son and the Father. In Jn 16: 26 Jesus once again speaks

about the link produced by the Spirit and that permits his own to present every petition to the Father in union with Him. That will take place “on that day”. What does this mean: “On that day you will ask?” It is the day when He will come to His own and will communicate the Spirit to them (Jn 20: 19.22). And it is then that the disciples knowing the relationship between Jesus and the Father will know that they will be listened to. It will not be necessary for Jesus to intervene between the Father and the disciples to ask in their behalf, and not because his mediation has ended, but they, having believed in the Incarnation of the Word, and being closely united to Christ, will be loved by the Father as He loves his Son (Jn 17: 23, 26). In Jesus the disciples experience the direct contact with the Father.

- John 16: 26-27: The prayer to the Father. To pray consists, then, to go to the Father through Jesus; to address the Father in the name of Jesus. The expression of Jesus in vv. 26-27: “And I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you; because the Father himself loves you”, merits to be given special attention. The love of the Father for the disciples is founded on the adherence of “his own” to Jesus on faith in his provenance, that is to say, the acknowledgment of Jesus as gift of the Father. After having assimilated the disciples to himself Jesus seems to withdraw from his condition of mediator but in reality, he permits that only the Father to take us and to seize us: “Ask and you will receive and so your joy will be complete” (v.24). Inserted into the relationship with the Father through union in Him, our joy is complete, and prayer is perfect. God always offers his love to the whole world, but such a love acquires the sense of reciprocity only if man responds. Love is incomplete if it does not become reciprocal: as long as man does not accept it remains in suspense. However, the disciples accept it at the moment in which they love Jesus and thus they render operational the love of the Father. Prayer is this relationship of love. In last instance the history of each one of us is identified with the history of his prayer, even at the moments which do not seem to be such: Longing, yearning is already prayer and in the same way, research, anguish...

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

God reigns over the nations, seated on his holy throne.

The leaders of the nations rally to the people of the God of Abraham. (Ps 47: 8-9)

Sunday, May 21, 2023

The Ascension of the Lord

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

A Key to Guide the Reading:

The text reports the last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. This is like a testament, his last wish for the community, that which is uppermost in his mind. In our reading, let us try to pay attention to the following: What does Jesus insist on most in his final words?

A Division of Chapter 14 to Help With the Reading:

- Mt 28: 16 – Geographical indication: return to Galilee
- Mt 28: 17 – Jesus' apparition and the reaction of the disciples
- Mt 28: 18-20a – Jesus' final instructions
- Mt 28: 20b – The great promise, source of all hope.

Gospel Text - Matthew 28: 16-20

16: Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them.

17: When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated.

18-20a: Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.

20b: And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What struck you and touched your heart most?

- Identify the chronological and geographical information in this text.
- How do the disciples react? What is the content of Jesus' words to the disciples?
- What is this "all power in heaven and on earth" given to Jesus?
- What does it mean, "to become a disciple" of Jesus?
- In this context, what does the baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" mean?
- What do the words "I am with you always, even to the end of time" remind us of in the OT?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

The Context of Matthew's Gospel

- Matthew's Gospel, written about the year 85, is addressed to a community of converted Jews who lived in Syria-Palestine. They were going through a deep identity crisis concerning their past. When they accepted Jesus as the awaited Messiah, they continued to go to the synagogue and to observe the law and the ancient traditions. Moreover, they had a certain affinity with the Pharisees, and after the revolution of the Jews in Palestine against the Romans (65 to 72), they and the Pharisees were the only two groups to have survived the Roman oppression.
- From the 80s, these Jewish brothers, Pharisees and Christians, only survivors, began to fight among themselves as to who had inherited the promises of the OT. Each claimed to be the inheritors. Gradually, tension grew between them and they began to excommunicate each other. The Christians could no longer attend the synagogue and were cut off from their past. Each group began to regroup: the Pharisees in the synagogue, the Christians in church. This added to the identity problem of the community of Jewish Christians because it raised serious questions in need of urgent solutions. "Who has inherited the promises of the OT, those of the synagogue or those of the church? On whose side is God? Who are really the people of God?"
- Now, Matthew writes his Gospel to help these communities overcome their crisis and to find an answer to their problems. His Gospel is, first of all, a Gospel of revelation showing how Jesus is the true Messiah, the new Moses, the culmination of the whole of the history of the OT and its promises. It is also the Gospel of consolation for those who felt excluded and persecuted by their Jewish brothers. Matthew wants to console and help them to overcome the trauma of the split. It is the Gospel of the new practice because it shows the way to achieve a new justice, greater than that of the Pharisees. It is the Gospel of openness and shows that the Good News of God that Jesus brought cannot be hidden, but must be placed on a candlestick so that it may enlighten the life of all peoples.

Commentary on the Text of Matthew 28: 16-20

- Matthew 28: 16: Returning to Galilee: It was in Galilee that it all began (Mt 4: 12). It was there that the disciples first heard the call (Mt 4: 15) and it was there that Jesus promised to reunite them again after the resurrection (Mt 26: 31). In Luke, Jesus forbids them to leave Jerusalem (Acts 1: 4). In Matthew they are commanded to leave

Jerusalem and go back to Galilee (Mt 28: 7, 10). Each evangelist has his own way of presenting the person of Jesus and his plans. For Luke, after the resurrection of Jesus, the proclamation of the Good News has to begin in Jerusalem in order to reach to the ends of the earth (Acts 1: 8). For Matthew, the proclamation begins in Galilee of the pagans (Mt 4: 15) in order to prefigure the passage from the Jews to the pagans. The disciples had to go to the mountain that Jesus pointed out to them. The mountain reminds us of Mount Sinai, where the first Covenant took place and where Moses received the tablets of the Law of God (Ex 19 to 24; 34: 1-35). It also reminds us of the mountain of God, where the prophet Elijah took refuge to find again the meaning of his mission (1Kings 19: 1-18). It also reminds us of the mountain of the Transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah, that is, the Law and the Prophets, appear with Jesus, thus confirming that he is the promised Messiah (Mt 17: 1-8).

- Matthew 28: 17: Some doubted: The first Christians had great difficulty in believing in the resurrection. The evangelists insist in saying that they doubted a lot and did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus (Mk 16: 11, 13, 14; Lk 24: 11, 21, 25, 36, 41; Jn 20: 25). Faith in the resurrection was a slow and difficult process but ended by being the greatest certainty of Christians (1 Cor 15: 3-34).
- Matthew 28: 18: All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me: The passive form of the verb shows that Jesus received his authority from the Father. What is this authority? In the Apocalypse, the Lamb (the risen Jesus) received from the hand of God the book with seven seals (Ap 5: 7) and became the Lord of history, he who must assume the responsibility for the execution of God's project as described in the sealed book, and as such is adored by all creatures (Ap 12: 11-14). By his authority and power he conquers the Dragon, the power of evil (Ap 12: 1-9). And captures the Beast and the false prophet, symbols of the Roman Empire (Ap 19: 20). In the Creed at Mass we say that Jesus ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, thus becoming the judge of the living and the dead.
- Matthew 28: 19-20a: Jesus' last words: three commands to the disciples: Vested with supreme authority, Jesus passes on three orders to the disciples and to all of us:
 - (i) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations;
 - (ii) baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit;
 - (iii) teach them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations: To be a disciple is not the same as being a student. A disciple is in relation to the master. A student is in relation to the teacher. The disciple lives with the master 24 hours a day; the student receives lessons from the teacher for a few hours then goes back home. The disciple presupposes a community. The student presupposes being present in a classroom for lessons. The state of discipleship in those days was marked by the expression to follow the master. In the Carmelite Rule we read: To live in obedience to Jesus Christ. For the first Christians, to follow Jesus meant three connected things:

- *To imitate the example of the Master:* Jesus was the model to imitate and to be repeated in the life of the disciple (Jn 13: 13-15). Living together every day meant a constant meeting. In this *School of Jesus* only one subject was taught: the Kingdom! This Kingdom could be seen in the life and practice of Jesus.
- *Sharing in the fate of the Master:* Those who followed Jesus, had to commit

themselves to "stay with him in temptations" (Lk 22: 28), and in persecution (Jn 15: 20; Mt 10: 24- 25) and had to be willing to take up the cross and die with him (Mk 8: 34-35; Jn 11: 36).

- *To possess in oneself the life of Jesus:* After Easter, a third dimension was added: "I live now not I but Christ lives in me." The first Christians sought to identify themselves with Jesus. This is the mystical dimension in the following of Jesus, fruit of the Spirit's action.
 - *Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:* The Trinity is the source, the end and the way. Those baptized in the name of the Father, revealed in Jesus, commit themselves to live as brothers and sisters in fraternity. And if God is Father, we are all brothers and sisters. Those baptized in the name of the Son, Jesus, commit themselves to imitate Jesus and to follow him even unto the cross in order to rise with him. And the power that Jesus received from the Father is a creative power that conquers death. Those baptized in the Holy Spirit, given by Jesus on the day of Pentecost, commit themselves to interiorizing fraternity and the following of Jesus, allowing themselves to be led by the Spirit alive in the community.
 - *Teaching them to observe all my commands:* For us Christians, Jesus is the New Law of God, proclaimed from on high in the mountain. Jesus is the chosen of the Father as the new Moses, whose word is law for us. "Hear him" (Mt 17:15). The Spirit sent by him will remind us of all the things he taught us (Jn 14:26; 16:13). The observance of the new Law of love is balanced by the gratuitous presence of Jesus in our midst, till the end of time.
- *Matthew 28: 20b.* I am with you always, even to the end of time: When Moses was sent to free the people from Egypt, he received a guarantee from God, the only guarantee that offers complete certainty: "Go, I shall be with you!" (Ex 3: 12). It is the same certainty promised to the prophets and other persons sent by God to undertake an important mission in God's plan (Jer 1: 8; Jud 6: 16). Mary received the same guarantee when the angel said to her, "The Lord is with you" (Lk 1: 28). The person of Jesus is the living expression of this guarantee, because his name is Emmanuel, God with us (Mt 1: 23). He will be with his disciples, with all of us, even to the end of time. Here we see Jesus' authority. He controls history and time. He is the first and the last (Ap 1: 17).

Before the *first*, nothing existed and after the *last*, nothing is. This guarantee sustains people, nourishes their faith, sustains hope and generates love and the gift of oneself.

Highlighting the Words of Jesus: The Universal Mission of the Community.

Abraham was called to be the source of blessings not only for his descendants, but for all families on earth (Gen 12: 3). The slave people were called not only to restore the tribe of Jacob, but also to be light to the nations (Is 49: 6; 42: 6). The prophet Amos said that God not only freed Israel from Egypt, but also the Philistines from Kaftor and the Aramaians from Quir (Am 9: 7). God, then, looks after and is concerned for the Israelites as well as for the Philistines and the Aramaians who were the greatest enemies of the people of Israel! The prophet Elijah thought he was the only defender of God (Kings 19: 10, 14), but he had to be told that apart from himself there were seven thousand others! (1 Kings 19: 18) The prophet Jonah wanted Yahweh to be only the God of Israel, but had

to admit that he is the God of all nations, even the inhabitants of Niniveh, the bitterest enemies of Israel (Jo 4: 1-11). In the New Testament, John, the disciple, wanted Jesus only for the little group, for the community, but Jesus corrected him and said, *He who is not against me is for me!* (Mk 9: 38-40).

At the end of the first century after Christ, the difficulties and persecutions could have driven the Christian communities into losing the missionary impetus and to close in on themselves, as if they were the only ones defending the values of the Kingdom. But Matthew's Gospel, faithful to this long tradition of openness to all nations, tells the communities that they cannot close in on themselves. They cannot claim for themselves a monopoly on the action of God in the world. God is not the community's property; rather the community is Yahweh's property (Ex 19: 5). In the midst of humanity that struggles against and resists oppression, the communities must be salt and yeast (Mt 5: 13; 13: 33). They must proclaim aloud to the whole world, among all nations, the Good News that Jesus brought us. God is present in our midst, the same God who, in Exodus, commits himself to free those who call on his name! (Ex 3: 7-12). This is our mission. If this salt loses its savor, what will it be good for? "It is of no use for the earth or for the fertilizer" (Lk 14: 35)

Psalm 150

Universal Praise

Hallelujah!

Praise God in his holy sanctuary;

give praise in the mighty dome of heaven. Give praise for his mighty deeds,
praise him for his great majesty.

Give praise with blasts upon the horn, praise him with harp and lyre.

Give praise with tambourines and dance, praise him with flutes and strings.

Give praise with crashing cymbals, praise him with sounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath give praise to the Lord!

Hallelujah!

Final Prayer

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

Monday, May 22, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

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

Gospel Reading - John 16: 29-33

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

Reflection

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

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

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

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

For Personal Confrontation

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

Concluding Prayer

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

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

Tuesday, May 23, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

your Son Jesus Christ carried out the mission you had given him, without fear and in all faithfulness to you.

God, give us a bit of his sense of mission.

Give us the strength of the Spirit to speak your word as it is, bold and demanding, without compromising or giving in to the changing moods and fashions of the day.

And may our lives be like an open book in which people can read your word.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 17: 1-11a

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you; so that, just as you have given him power over all humanity, he may give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him. And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. Now, Father, glorify me with that glory I had with you before ever the world existed. I have revealed your name to those whom you took from the world to give me. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now at last they have recognized that all you have given me comes from you for I have given them the teaching you gave to me, and they have indeed accepted it and know for certain that I came from you, and have believed that it was you who sent me.

It is for them that I pray. I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. All I have is yours and all you have is mine, and in them I am glorified. I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

Reflection

In today's Gospel, in that of tomorrow and of day after tomorrow, we will meditate on the words that Jesus addressed to the Father at the moment of his farewell, when leaving. John keeps these words and puts them in Jesus' mouth during his last encounter with the disciples. It is the Testament of Jesus in the form of a prayer, also called the Priestly Prayer (Jn 17: 1-26).

- Chapter 17 of the Gospel of John is the end of a long reflection of Jesus, begun in chapter 15, on the mission in the world. The communities preserved these reflections in order to be able to understand better the difficult moment that they were going through: tribulations, abandonment, doubts, and persecution. The long reflection ends with the prayer of Jesus for the communities. In it are expressed the sentiments and concerns which, according to the Evangelist, indwelt Jesus at that moment in which he was going out, leaving this world and going toward the Father. With these sentiments and with this concern Jesus now finds himself before his Father, interceding for us. Because of this the Priestly Prayer is also the Testament of Jesus. Many persons, in the moment when they leave forever, leave some message. Everyone keeps the important words of a father and of the mother, especially when they are the last moments of life. To keep these words is like keeping the persons. It is a form of respect and of affection.
- Chapter 17 is a diverse text. It is a friendlier one rather than one of reasoning. In order to grasp well the whole sense, it is not sufficient to reflect with the head, with reason.

This text has to be meditated upon and accepted also in the heart. It is a text not so much to be discussed, but to meditate on and to reflect. Therefore, do not be worried if you do not understand it immediately. This text demands a whole life to meditate it and to deepen it. Such a text should be read, meditated on, thought, read again, repeated, savored, as one does with a good sweet in the mouth. One turns it and turns it in the mouth until it is finished. For this, close the eyes, keep silence within you and listen to Jesus who speaks to you, transmitting in his Testament his greatest concern, his last will. Try to discover which is the point on which Jesus insists the most and, which he considers the most important.

- John 17: 1-3: "Father, the hour has come!" It is the long-awaited hour (Jn 2: 4; 7: 30; 8: 20; 12: 23, 27; 13: 1; 16: 32). It is the moment of the glorification which will take place through the Passion, Death, and Resurrection. In reaching the end of his mission, Jesus looks back and proceeds to a revision. In this prayer, he expresses the most intimate sentiment of his heart and the profound discovery of his soul: the presence of the Father in his life.
- John 17: 4-8: Father, they will recognize that I come from you! In reviewing his own life Jesus sees himself as a manifestation of the Father for the friends whom the Father has given him. Jesus does not live for himself. He lives in order that all may have a flash of goodness and of love which are enclosed in the Name of God which is Abba, Father.
- John 17: 9-11a: All I have is yours and all you have is mine! At the moment of leaving the world, Jesus expresses to the Father his concern and prays for the friends whom he leaves behind; and that they will continue in the world, but they are not of the world. They are of Jesus, they are God's, and they are signs of God and of Jesus in this world. Jesus is concerned about the persons who remain, and he prays for them.

For Personal Confrontation

- Which are the words which orientate your life and which are from persons whom you love? If you were about to die which would be the message that you would like to leave to your family and to your community?
- Which is the word of the Testament of Jesus which struck you the most? Why?

Concluding Prayer

Blessed be the Lord, day after day,
he carries us along, God our Savior. This God of ours is a God who saves;
from Lord Yahweh comes escape from death. (Ps 68: 19-20)

Wednesday, May 24, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

Your Son Jesus gave himself totally to those He loved - that is, to all.

Give us a share of His unselfish love that we too may learn from experience that there is more joy in giving ourselves than in receiving honors or favors.

May the Spirit make us also so much one that we graciously share with one another our God-given riches and gifts as people.

We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 17:11b-19

Lifting up his eyes to heaven, Jesus prayed, saying: "Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one. When I was with them, I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely. I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the Evil One. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth."

Reflection

We are now in the Novena of Pentecost, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says that the gift of the Holy Spirit is given only to those who ask for it in prayer (Lk 11: 13). In the Cenacle, for nine days, from the Ascension to Pentecost, the Apostles persevered in prayer together with Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Acts 1: 14), and they obtained the abundance of the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 4). Today's Gospel continues to place before us the Priestly Prayer of Jesus. It is a very opportune text to prepare ourselves during these days for the coming of the Holy Spirit in our life.

- John 17: 11b-12: Keep them in Your name! Jesus channels His concern into prayer: "Keep those You have given Me true to Your name, so that they may be one like Us!" Everything which Jesus does in His life, He does in the Name of God. Jesus is the manifestation of the Name of God. The Name of God is Yahweh, JHWH. In the time of Jesus, this name was pronounced saying, "*Adonai*," "*Kyrios*," "Lord." In the discourse of Pentecost, Peter says that Jesus, because of His Resurrection, was constituted Lord: "For this reason the whole House of Israel can be certain that the Lord and Christ whom God has made is this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36). And Paul says that this has been done so that "every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God, the Father" (Phil 2:11). It is the Name which is above all other names" (Phil 2:9). JHWH or Yahweh, the Name of God, took on a concrete face in Jesus of Nazareth! Unity has to form around this name: keep those you have given Me true to Your name so that they may be one like We are. Jesus wants the unity of the communities in such a way that they can resist the world which hates them and persecutes them. The people united around the name of Jesus will never be conquered!
- John 17: 13-16: That they may share My joy to the full. Jesus is bidding farewell. In a short time, He will go away. The disciples continue in the world. They will be persecuted and be afflicted. Because of this, they are sad. Jesus prays that their joy may be full. They want to continue to be in the world without being of, or belonging

to, the world. This means to live in the system of the Empire, whether liberal or Roman, without allowing themselves to be contaminated. Like Jesus, and with Jesus, they should live in the opposite direction of the world.

- John 17: 17-19: As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world. Jesus asks that they be consecrated in truth. That is, that they may be capable of dedicating their whole life to giving witness of their convictions concerning Jesus and God the Father. Jesus sanctified Himself in the measure in which, during His life, He revealed the Father. He asks that the disciples enter into the same process of sanctification. Their mission is the same as Jesus' mission. They sanctify themselves in the measure in which, living in love, they reveal Jesus and the Father. To sanctify oneself means to become human like Jesus. Pope Leo the Great said, "Jesus was so human, but so human, as only God can be human." For this reason, we should live in opposition to the world, because the system of the world dehumanizes human life and renders it contrary to the intentions of the Creator.

For Personal Consideration:

- Jesus lived in the world, but was not of the world. He lived contrary to the system, and because of this, He was persecuted and was condemned to death. Do I live contrary to today's system, or do I adapt my faith to the system?
- What words and actions do I show that I belong to the world or don't belong to the world? Am I showing a little of both?
- Preparation for Pentecost. To invoke the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who gave courage to Jesus. In this Novena of preparation for Pentecost, it is good to dedicate some time to asking for the gift of the Spirit of Jesus.

Concluding Prayer

I bless Yahweh who is my counselor, even at night my heart instructs me.

I keep Yahweh before me always, for with Him at my right hand, nothing can shake me. (Ps 16: 7-8)

Thursday, May 25, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and Father of all people,

we believe in you and we know that you loved Jesus with a deep and trusting, lasting love. Let your Holy Spirit pour out this love into the hearts of all those who believe in Jesus, our Savior and shepherd.

Let this love unite us in one common bond of understanding and respect of one another and let that love dispose us to live for one another and to serve one another for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 17: 20-26

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me. May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.

I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity that the world will recognize that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you have loved me.

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see my glory which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Father, Upright One, the world has not known you, but I have known you, and these have known that you have sent me.

I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents to us the third and last part of the Priestly Prayer, in which Jesus looks toward the future and manifests his great desire for unity among us, his disciples, and that all may remain in the love which unifies, because without love and without unity we do not deserve credibility.

- John 17: 20-23: So that the world may believe it was you who sent me. Jesus extends the horizon and prays to the Father: I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me. May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. Behold, here emerges the great concern of Jesus for unity which should exist in the communities. Unity does not mean uniformity, but rather to remain in love, in spite of tensions and conflicts. A love which unifies to the point of creating among all a profound unity, like the unity which exists between Jesus and the Father. The unity in love revealed in the Trinity is the model for the communities. For this, through love among persons, the communities reveal to the world the most profound message of Jesus. People said of the first Christians: "Look how they love one another!" The present-day division among the three religions which came from Abraham is really tragic: the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. And even more tragic is the division among us Christians who say that we believe in Jesus. If we are divided, we do not deserve credibility. Ecumenism is in the centre of the last prayer of Jesus to the Father. It is his testament. To be a Christian and not be ecumenical is a contradiction. It means to contradict the last Will of Jesus.
- John 17: 24-26: So that the love with which you loved me may be in them. Jesus does not want to remain alone. He says: Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am so that they may always see my glory which you have given me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Jesus is happy when we are all together with him. He wants his disciples to have the same experience of the Father which he had. He wants us to know the Father and that he knows us. In the Bible, the word to know is not limited to a rational theoretic knowledge but presupposes the experience of the presence of God living in love with the persons of the community.

- That they may be one as we are one. (Unity and Trinity in the Gospel of John) The Gospel of John helps us to understand the mystery of the Trinity, the communion among the three Divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Of the four Gospels, John is the one who stresses more the profound unity among the Father, the Son and the Spirit. From the text of John (Jn 17: 6-8) we see that the mission of the Son is the supreme manifestation of the love of the Father. And this unity between the Father and the Son makes Jesus exclaim: The Father and I are one (Jn 10: 30). Between the Son and the Father there is such an intense unity that one who sees the face of one also sees the face of the other. And fulfilling this mission of unity received from the Father, Jesus reveals the Spirit. The spirit of Truth comes from the Father (Jn 15: 26). At the petition of the Son (Jn 14: 16), the Father sends the Spirit to each one of us in such a way that he will remain with us, encouraging us and giving us strength. The Spirit also comes to us from the Son (Jn 16: 7-8). Thus, the Spirit of Truth, who journeys with us, is the communication of the profound unity which exists between the Father and the Son (Jn 15: 26-27). The Spirit cannot communicate a truth which is different from the Truth of the Son. Everything which is in relationship with the mystery of the Son, the Spirit makes it known to us (Jn 16: 13-14). This experience of the unity in God was very strong in the communities of the Beloved Disciple. The love which unites the Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit allows us to experience God through union with the persons in a community of love. This was also the proposal of the community, where love should be the sign of God's presence in the midst of the community (Jn 13: 34-35). And this love constructs unity in the community (Jn 17: 21). They looked at the unity in God in order to understand the unity among them.

For Personal Confrontation

- Bishop Don Pedro Casaldáliga said: "The Trinity is truly the best community". In the community of which you form part, can one perceive some human sign of the Divine Trinity?
- Ecumenism: Am I ecumenical?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, you will teach me the path of life, unbounded joy in your presence,
at your right-hand delight forever. (Ps 16: 11)

Friday, May 26, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

you have appointed shepherds in your Church to speak your word to us and to build community in your name. We pray you today:

May they be shepherds like your Son who look for those who have lost the way, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded and make the weak strong.

May they all be ministers of your tender love and service, as Jesus was, your Son and our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 21: 15-19

When they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'

A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He replied, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Look after my sheep.'

Then he said to him a third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt that he asked him a third time, 'Do you love me?' and said, 'Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. In all truth I tell you, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go.'

In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said, 'Follow me.'

Reflection

We are in the last days before Pentecost. During the time of Lent the selection of the Gospels of the day continues the ancient tradition of the Church. Between Easter and Pentecost, the Gospel of John is preferred. And thus, during these last days, before Pentecost, the Gospels of the day narrate the last verses of the Gospel of John. When again we go to Ordinary time, we will go back to the Gospel of Mark. In the weeks of Ordinary Time, the Liturgy proceeds to a continuous reading of the Gospel of Mark (from the 1st to the 9th week of the Ordinary Time), of Matthew (from the 10th to 21st week of Ordinary Time) and of Luke from the 22nd to the 34th week of Ordinary Time).

The Gospel readings for today and for tomorrow speak about the last encounter of Jesus with his disciples. It was an encounter of celebration, marked by tenderness and affection. At the end Jesus calls Peter and asks him three times: "Do you love me?" Only after having received three times the same affirmative response, Jesus entrusts to Peter the mission of taking care of the lambs. To be able to work in the community Jesus does not ask us many things. What he asks of us is to have much love!

- John 21: 15-17: Love in the center of the mission. After a whole night of fishing in the lake catching not even one fish, they go to the shore, the disciples discover that Jesus had prepared bread and roasted fish for them. When they finished eating, Jesus calls Peter and asks him three times: "Do you love me?" Three times, because Peter denied Jesus three times (Jn 18: 17, 25-27). After the three affirmative responses, Peter also becomes a "Beloved Disciple" and receives the order to take care of the lambs. Jesus does not ask Peter if he had studied exegesis, theology, Morals, or Canon Law. He only asks: "Do you love me?" Love in the first place. For the communities of the Beloved Disciple the force which supports and maintains united is not the doctrine, but love.
- John 21: 18-19: The foresight of death. Jesus tells Peter: Truly I tell you: when you were young, you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go! Throughout life, Peter and we also, attain maturity. The practice of love will take roots in life and the persons will no longer be

the patrons of their own life. Service to the brothers and sisters out of love will prevail and will lead us. Somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go. This is the meaning of the following. And the Evangelist comments: "He tells him this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God". And Jesus adds: "Follow me."

- Love in John – Peter, do you love me? – The Beloved Disciple. The word love is one of the words which today are more used by us. Precisely, because of this, it is a word that has been greatly worn out. But the communities of the Beloved Disciple manifested their identity and their own project by this word. To love is, above all, a profound experience of relationship among persons in which there are similar sentiments and values: joy, sadness, suffering, growth, renunciation, dedication, fulfilment, gift, commitment, life, death, etc. All these together is summarized in the Bible in one only word in the Hebrew language. This word is hesed. Its translation in our language is difficult. Generally, in our Bibles it is translated by charity, mercy, fidelity, or love. The communities of the Beloved Disciple sought to live this practice of love in a very radical way. Jesus revealed this in his encounters with persons with sentiments of friendship and tenderness, as for example, in his relationship with the family of Martha and Mary of Bethany: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." He weeps before the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11: 5, 33-36). Jesus always embodies his mission in a manifestation of love: "having loved his own, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13: 1). In this love, Jesus manifests his profound identity with the Father (Jn 15: 9). For his communities, there was no other commandment, except this one "to act as Jesus acted" (1 Jn 2: 6). This presupposes to love the brethren" (1 Jn 2: 7-11; 3: 11-24; 2 Jn 4-6). Being such a central commandment in the life of the community, the writings of John define love as follows: "This is the proof of love that he laid down his life for us and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers". Our love should not be just words or mere talk but something active and genuine". (1 Jn 3: 16-17). Anyone who lives this love and manifests it in words and attitudes becomes a Beloved Disciple.

For Personal Confrontation

- Look within you and say: which is the most profound reason which impels you to work in the community? Love or the concern for ideas?
- Considering the relationships among us, with God and with nature, what type of community are we constructing?

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, May 27, 2023

Easter Weekday

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

like Mary, the women and the apostles on the day before the first Pentecost we are gathered in prayer.

Let the Holy Spirit come down also on us, that we may become enthusiastic believers and faithful witnesses to the person and the good news of Jesus.

May our way of living bear witness that Jesus is our light and life, now and forever.

Gospel Reading - John 21: 20-25

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them -- the one who had leant back close to his chest at the supper and had said to him, 'Lord, who is it that will betray you?' Seeing him, Peter said to Jesus, 'What about him, Lord?' Jesus answered, 'If I want him to stay behind till I come, what does it matter to you? You are to follow me.' The rumor then went out among the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus had not said to Peter, 'He will not die,' but, 'If I want him to stay behind till I come.' This disciple is the one who vouches for these things and has written them down, and we know that his testimony is true. There was much else that Jesus did; if it were written down in detail, I do not suppose the world itself would hold all the books that would be written.

Reflection

Today's Gospel begins with the question of Peter: Lord, what about him? Jesus begins to speak with Peter, announcing the destiny or type of death by which Peter will glorify God. And at the end Jesus adds: Follow me. (Jn 21: 19).

- John 21: 20-21: Peter's question concerning John's destiny. At this moment, Peter turned back and saw the Disciple whom Jesus loved and asks: "Lord, what about him?" Jesus had just indicated the destiny of Peter and now Peter wants to know from Jesus which is the destiny of this other disciple. It is a curiosity which does not deserve an adequate response from Jesus.
- John 21: 22: The mysterious response of Jesus. Jesus says: If I want him to stay behind till I come, what does it matter to you? You are to follow me." A mysterious phrase which ends again with the same affirmation as before: Follow me! Jesus seems to want to stop Peter's curiosity. Just as each one of us has his/her own history, in the same way each one of us has his/her own way of following Jesus. Nobody is the exact copy of another person. Each one of us should be creative in following Jesus.
- John 21: 23: The Evangelist clarifies the sense of the response of Jesus. Ancient tradition identifies the Beloved Disciple with the Apostle John and says that he died very old, when he was almost one hundred years old. Putting together the old age of John with the mysterious response of Jesus, the Evangelist clarifies things saying: "The rumor then went out among the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet, Jesus had not said to Peter: He will not die, but: If I want him to stay behind till I come; what does that matter to you?" Perhaps, it is a warning to be very attentive to the interpretation of the words of Jesus and not base oneself in any rumour.

- John 21: 24: Witness of the value of the Gospel. Chapter 21 is an added appendix when the final redaction of the Gospel was made. Chapter 20 ends with this phrase: “There were many other signs that Jesus worked in the sight of his disciples, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.” (Jn 20: 30-31). The Book was ready but there were many other facts about Jesus. This is why, on the occasion of the definitive edition of the Gospel, some of these “many facts” about Jesus were chosen and added, very probably to clarify better the new problems of the end of the first century. We do not know who wrote the definitive redaction with the appendix, but we know it was someone of the community who could be trusted, because he writes: “This is the disciple who vouches for these things and has written them down and we know that his testimony is true”.
- John 21: 25: The mystery of Jesus is inexhaustible. A beautiful phrase to conclude the Gospel of John: “There was much else that Jesus did; if it were written down in detail, I do not suppose the world itself would hold all the books that would be written”. It seems an exaggeration, but it is the truth. Never will anyone be capable of writing all the things that Jesus has done and continues to do in the life of persons who up until now follow Jesus!

For Personal Confrontation

- Is there something in your life which Jesus has done and which could be added to this book which will never be written?
- Peter is very concerned about the other disciple and forgets to carry on and live his own “Follow me”. Does this also happen to you?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh in his holy temple! Yahweh, his throne is in heaven; his eyes watch over the world, his gaze scrutinizes the children of Adam. (Ps 11: 4)

Sunday, May 28, 2023

Pentecost

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 Reading:

The disciples were gathered together, and the doors were well closed. They were afraid of the Jews.

All of a sudden, Jesus stood in their midst and said: "Peace be with you!" After showing them the hands and his side, once again he said: "Peace be with you"! As the Father has sent me, I also send you!" And immediately he gave them the gift of the Spirit so that they could forgive sins and reconcile persons among themselves and with God. To reconcile and to construct peace! Behold this is the mission which they received and which endures up until today!

Humanity is lacking peace more and more: to put together the pieces of a disintegrated life, to reconstruct human relationships, broken because of the injustices committed and because of so many other reasons. Jesus insists on peace, and he repeats it several times! During the reading of the brief text of the Gospel of this Pentecost Sunday, we try to be attentive to the attitudes of Jesus as well as to those of the disciples, and to the words of Jesus which he pronounces with such solemnity.

A division of the text to help the reading:

- John 20: 19-20: The description of the experience of the Resurrection
- John 20: 21: the sending out: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you"
- John 20: 22: The gift of the Spirit
- John 20: 23: The power to forgive sins

Gospel Text - John 20: 19-23

19 In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you,' 20 and, after saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord, 21 and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you. 'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.' 22 After saying this he breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained.

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 struck you most in the description of the experience of the Resurrection?
- Which are the characteristics of the Mission which the disciples receive?
- Which are the characteristics of the action of the Holy Spirit which Jesus communicates to us?

- How important is all this for the life of our community today?
- Jesus insists: "Peace be with you!" Which steps should I take to reconstruct the peace and the broken relationships among persons?

To Deepen This Theme

The Context in Which the Gospel of John was Written:

The text of the Gospel of John is like a very beautiful fabric, made with three threads of different colors. The three threads are so well combined with one another that it is not always possible to see when one passes from one thread to the other.

- (i) The first thread are the facts of the life of Jesus, which took place in the year thirty in Palestine, preserved in the memory of the Beloved Disciple and of many other witnesses (I Jn 1: 1-4). (
- (ii) ii) The second thread are the facts of the life of the communities. Because of their faith in Jesus and convinced of his presence, in their midst, the communities enlightened their life with the Word and the gestures of Jesus. That influenced the description of the facts. For example, the conflicts of the communities with the Pharisees towards the end of the first century indicate the way in which are described the conflicts of Jesus with the Pharisees.
- (iii) (iii) The third thread are the comments made by the Evangelist. In certain passages, it can hardly be perceived when Jesus finishes speaking and the redactor begins to knit in his own comments. (Jn 2: 22; 3: 16-21; 7: 39; 12: 37-43; 20: 30-31).

Comment on the Text:

- John 20: 19-20: A description of the experience of the Resurrection
Jesus becomes present in the community. Not even the closed doors prevent him from being amid those who do not recognize him. Even today, it is the same thing! When we are gathered, even if all the doors are closed, Jesus is in our midst! And today, the first word of Jesus, will always be: "Peace be with you!"
He shows the signs of the Passion on his hands and his side. The Risen Lord is the Crucified Lord! The Jesus who is with us in the community is not a glorious Jesus who had nothing in common with the life of the people. But it is the same Jesus who came on this earth and who bears the signs of his Passion. And today these same signs are found in the suffering of the people. They are the signs of hunger, of torture, of wars, of sickness, of violence, of injustice. So many signs! And in the persons who react and struggle for life, Jesus resurrects and makes himself present in our midst.
- John 20: 21: The sending out: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you!"
From this Crucified and Risen Jesus we receive the mission, the same one that He received from the Father. And for us also he repeats: "Peace be with you!" The repetition confirms the importance of peace. To construct peace forms part of the mission. The Peace which Jesus gives us means much more than the absence of war. It signifies to construct a human, harmonious environment, in which persons can be themselves, with all that is necessary to live, and where they can live happy and in peace. In one word, it means to construct a community according to the community of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

- John 20: 22: Jesus gives the gift of the Spirit
Jesus breathed and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit". And therefore, it is with the help of the Holy Spirit that we can carry out the mission which He entrusts to us. In the Gospel of John, the Resurrection (Passover) and the effusion of the Spirit (Pentecost) are one same thing. All takes place in the same moment.
- John 20: 23: Jesus gives the power to forgive sins
The central point of the mission of peace is found in reconciliation, in the effort to overcome the barriers which separate us: "to those to whom you forgive sins, they will be forgiven and to those to whom you do not forgive them, will not be forgiven". Then this power of reconciliation and of forgiving is given to the disciples. In the Gospel of Matthew, this same power is also given to Peter (Mt 16: 19) and to the communities (Mt 18: 18). A community without pardon and without reconciliation is not a Christian community.

To Deepen More:

- The action of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John
In Hebrew the same word is used to say wind and spirit. The wind has in itself a goal, a direction: North wind, South wind. The same for the Spirit of God (the wind of God) has in itself a goal, a project, which manifests itself in many ways in the works which the Spirit of God fulfils in creation, in history, and above all, in Jesus. The great promise of the Spirit becomes present in the prophets: the sight of the dry bones which become alive, thanks to the force of the Spirit of God (Ez 37: 1-14); the effusion of the Spirit of God on all people (Gl 3: 1-5); the vision of the Messiah the Servant who will be anointed by the Spirit to re-establish the right on earth and to proclaim the Good News to the poor (Is 11: 1-9; 42: 1; 44: 1-3; 61: 1-3). The prophets foresee a future in which the People of God is reborn thanks to the effusion of the Spirit (Ez 36: 26-27; Ps 51: 12: cf. Is 32: 15-20).
In the Gospel of John these prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus. As it happened in creation (Gen 1: 1), in the same way the Spirit appears and descends on Jesus "under the form of a dove from heaven" (Jn 1: 32), It is the beginning of the new creation! Jesus pronounces the words of God and communicates to us the Spirit in abundance (Jn 3: 34). His words are Spirit and life (Jn 6: 63). When Jesus leaves, he says that he will send another consoler, another defender whom he will leave with us. It is the Holy Spirit (Jn 14: 16-17). By his passion, death and resurrection, Jesus wins for us the gift of the Spirit. When he appears to the Apostles, he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit!" (Jn 20: 22). The first effect of the action of the Holy Spirit in us is reconciliation: "to those to whom you remit sins, they will be remitted and to those to whom you do not remit them, they will not be remitted!" (Jn 20: 23). Through Baptism we all receive this same Spirit of Jesus (Jn 1, 33). The Spirit is like the water which springs from within the person who believes in Jesus (Jn 7: 37-39; 4: 14). The Spirit is given to us to be able to remember and understand the full significance of the Words of Jesus (Jn 14: 26; 16: 12-13). Animated by the Spirit of Jesus we can adore God every where (Jn 4: 23-24). Here the liberty of the Spirit is lived. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom", Saint Paul confirms it (2 Cor 3: 17).
- Shalom: the construction of peace
In the Gospel of John, the first encounter between the Risen Jesus and his disciples is marked by a greeting: "Peace be with you!" The peace which Jesus gives us is different from the Pax Romana, constructed by the Roman Empire (Jn 14: 27). Peace

in the Bible (*shalom*), is a word rich with a deep significance. It means integrity of the persons before God and others. It means also a full life, happy, abundant (Jn 10: 10). Peace is the sign of the presence of God, because our God is a God of Peace “Yahweh

is Peace” (Jer 6: 24). “May the Peace of God be with you!” (Rom 15: 33). This is the reason why the peace of God produces violent reactions. As the Psalm says: “Too long have I lived among people who hate peace. When I speak of peace they are all for war!” (Ps 120: 6-7). The peace which Jesus gives us is the sign of a “sword” (Mt 10: 34). It is necessary to have trust, to struggle, to work, to persevere in the Spirit in order that the peace of God may triumph one day. And that day “love and truth will meet, justice and peace will embrace” (Ps 85, 11). And then, “The Kingdom of God will be justice, peace and joy, and these will be the fruits of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14: 17) and “God will be all in all” (I Co 15: 28).

Psalm 145

Description of the Kingdom of God

I shall praise you to the heights,

God my King, I shall bless your name for ever and ever. Day after day I shall bless you,

I shall praise your name for ever and ever. Great is Yahweh and worthy of all praise, his greatness beyond all reckoning.

Each age will praise your deeds to the next, proclaiming your mighty works.

Your renown is the splendour of your glory, I will ponder the story of your wonders.

They will speak of your awesome power, and I shall recount your greatness.

They will bring out the memory of your great generosity, and joyfully acclaim your saving justice.

Yahweh is tenderness and pity, slow to anger, full of faithful love. Yahweh is generous to all, his tenderness embraces all his creatures. All your creatures shall thank you, Yahweh, and your faithful shall bless you.

They shall speak of the glory of your kingship and tell of your might, making known your mighty deeds to the children of Adam, the glory and majesty of your kingship.

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.

Yahweh supports all who stumble, lifts up those who are bowed down.

All look to you in hope and you feed them with the food of the season. And, with generous hand, you satisfy the desires of every living creature. 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.

He fulfils the desires of all who fear him, he hears their cry and he saves them.

Yahweh guards all who love him, but all the wicked he destroys.

My mouth shall always praise Yahweh, let every creature bless his holy name for ever and ever.

Final Prayer

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

Monday, May 29, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening prayer

Father,

keep before us the wisdom and love you have revealed in your Son.

Help us to be like Him in word and deed, for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading – John 19:25-34

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit. Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the sabbath, for the sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and they be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately Blood and water flowed out.

Reflection

• Jn 19:25-29: Mary, the strong woman who understood the full meaning of this event, will help us cast a contemplative glance at the crucified. The fourth Gospel specifies that these disciples "stood by the cross" (Jn 19:25-26). This detail has a deep meaning. Only the fourth Gospel tells us that these five people stood by the cross. The other Evangelists do not say so. Luke, for instance, says that all those who knew him followed the events from a distance (Lk 23:49). Matthew also says that many women followed these events from afar. These women had followed Jesus from Galilee and served Him. But now they followed Him from afar (Mt 27:55-56). Like Matthew, Mark gives us the names of those who followed the death of Jesus from afar (Mk 15:40-41). Thus only the fourth Gospel says that the mother of Jesus and the other women and the beloved disciple "stood by the cross". They stood there like servants before their king.

• Jn 19:30-34: They are present courageously at a time when Jesus has already declared that "it is fulfilled" (Jn 19:30). The mother of Jesus is present at the hour that finally "has come". That hour was foretold at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:1ff). The fourth Gospel had remarked then that "the mother of Jesus was there" (Jn 2:1). Thus, the person that remains faithful to the Lord in His destiny, he/she is a beloved disciple. The Evangelist keeps this disciple anonymous so that each one of us may see him/herself mirrored in the one who knew the mysteries of the Lord, who laid his head on Jesus' chest at the last supper (Jn 13:25). The mother standing beneath the cross (cf. Jn 19:25), accepted her Son's testament of love and welcomed all people in the person of the beloved disciple as sons and daughters to be reborn unto life eternal.

• Jesus takes an active part in His death, He does not allow Himself to be killed like the thieves whose legs were broken (Jn 19:31-33), but commits His spirit (Jn 19:30). The details recalled by the Evangelist are very important: 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." (Jn 19:26-27). These simple words of Jesus bear the weight of revelation, words that reveal to us His will: "this is your son" (v. 26); "this is your mother" (v. 27). These words also recall those pronounced by Pilate on the Lithostrotos: "This is the man" (Jn 19:5). With these words, Jesus on the cross, his throne, reveals His will and His love for us. He is the lamb of God, the shepherd who gives His life for His sheep. At that moment, by the cross, He gives birth to the Church, represented by Mary, Mary of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene, together with the beloved disciple (Jn 19:25).

Personal Questions

- How has Mary given you a model for parenthood, discipleship, and love? What of these have I applied in my own life?
- Mary exemplified humility and obedience, yet she also led (as at Cana). How do I lead others, in what ways, while also being truly humble and obedient myself?

Concluding Prayer

The precepts of Yahweh are honest, joy for the heart;
the commandment of Yahweh is pure, light for the eyes. (Ps 19: 8)

Tuesday, May 30, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,
guide the course of world events and give your Church the joy and peace of serving you in freedom.

You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 10: 28-31

Peter took this up. 'Look,' he said to Jesus, 'we have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'In truth I tell you, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times as much, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land -- and persecutions too -- now in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life. Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'

Reflection

In yesterday's Gospel, Jesus spoke about the conversation among the disciples about material goods: to get away from things, to sell everything, to give it to the poor and to follow Jesus. Or rather, like Jesus, they should live in total gratuity, placing their own life in the hands of God, serving the brothers and sisters (Mk 10, 17-27). In today's Gospel Jesus explains better how this life of gratuity and service of those who abandon everything for him, for Jesus and for the Gospel, should be (Mk 10, 28-31).

- Mark 10: 28-31: *A hundred times as much, and persecutions too, now.* Peter observes: *"We have left everything and followed you"*. It is like saying: "We have done what the Lord asked of the young rich man. We have abandoned everything and we have followed you. Explain to us how our life should be?" Peter wants Jesus to explain more the new way of living in the *service and in gratuity*. The response of Jesus is beautiful, profound and symbolical: *"In truth there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel who will not receive a hundred times as much, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land and, persecutions too, now in the present time and in the world to come, eternal life. Many who are first will be last and the last first"*. The type of life which springs from the gift of everything is the example of the Kingdom which Jesus wants to establish in order to:
 - to extend the family and to create community; it increases a hundred times the number of brothers and sisters.
 - It produces the sharing of goods, because all will have a hundred times more houses and land. Divine Providence incarnates itself and passes through the fraternal organization, where everything belongs to everyone and there are no longer persons who are in need. They put into practice the Law of God which asks "that there be no poor among you" (Dt 15: 4-11). This was what the first Christians did (Ac 2: 42-45). It is the perfect living out of service and gratuity.
 - They should not expect any privilege in return, no security, no type of promotion. Rather, in this life they will have all this, but with *persecutions*. Because, in this world, organized on egoism and the interests of groups and persons, those who want to live a gratuitous love and the gift of self, they will be crucified as Jesus was.
 - They will be persecuted in this world, but in the future world they will have eternal life of which the rich young man spoke about.
- *Jesus is the choice of the poor.* A two-fold slavery characterized the situation of the people of the time of Jesus: the slavery of the politics of Herod supported by the Roman Empire and maintained by a whole well-organized system of exploitation

and repression, and the slavery of the official religion, maintained by the religious authority of the time. This is why the clan, the family, the community, were being disintegrated and a great number of the people were excluded, marginalized, homeless, having no place neither in religion nor in society. This is why several movements arose which were seeking for a new way of living in community: the Essenes, the Pharisees and, later on, the Zealots. In the community of Jesus there was something new which made it different from other groups. It was the attitude toward the poor and the excluded. The communities of the Pharisees lived separated. The word "Pharisee" means "separated." They lived separated from impure people. Many Pharisees considered people ignorant and cursed (Jn 7: 49), in sin (Jo 9: 34). Jesus and his community, on the contrary, lived together with excluded persons, considered impure: publicans, sinners, prostitutes, lepers (Mk 2: 16; 1: 41; Lk 7: 37). Jesus recognizes the richness and the values which the poor possess (Mt 11: 25-26; Lk 21: 1-4). He proclaims them blessed, because the Kingdom is theirs, it belongs to the poor (Lk 6: 20; Mt 5: 3). He defines his mission: "to proclaim the Good News to the poor" (Lk 4: 18). He himself lives as a poor person. He possesses nothing for himself, not even a rock where to lay his head (Lk 9: 58). And to those who want to follow him to share his life, he tells them to choose: God or money! (Mt 6: 24). He orders that they choose in favor of the poor! (Mk 10: 21). The poverty which characterized the life of Jesus and of the disciples, also characterized the mission. On the contrary of other missionaries (Mt 23: 15), the disciples of Jesus could take nothing with them, neither gold, nor money, nor two tunics, nor purse, nor sandals (Mt 10: 9-10). They had to trust in the hospitality offered to them (Lk 9: 4; 10: 5-6). And if they would be accepted by the people, they should work like everybody else and live from what they would receive as wages for their work (Lk 10: 7-8). Besides they should take care of the sick and of those in need (Lk 10: 9; Mt 10: 8). Now they could tell the people: "The Kingdom of God is very near to you!" (Lk 10: 9).

Personal Questions

- In your life, how do you practice Peter's proposal: "We have left everything and have followed you"?
- Gratuitous sharing, service, acceptance to the excluded are signs of the Kingdom. How do I live this today?

Concluding Prayer

The whole wide world has seen the saving power of our God.

Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth, burst into shouts of joy! (Ps 98: 3-4)

Wednesday, May 31, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

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

May we too rejoice in the Lord when we can hurry to see people to bring them the Lord as we to share in their needs and their joys.

With Mary, may we become a blessing to them.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Luke 1: 39-56

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

And Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him. He has used the power of his arm, he has routed the arrogant of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly. He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love according to the promise he made to our ancestors -- of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

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

Reflection

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

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

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

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

The second Book of Samuel tells the story of the Ark of the Covenant. David wants to put in his own house, but he is frightened and says: "How can the Ark of Yahweh come to be with me?" (2 Sam 6: 9). Then David ordered that the Ark be placed in the house of Obed-Edom. And the Ark of Yahweh remained three months in the house of Obed-Edom, and the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and his whole family" (2 Sam 6: 11). Mary, waiting for Jesus, is like the Ark of the Covenant which, in the Old Testament, visited the houses of the persons granting benefits. She goes to Elizabeth's house and remains there three months. And while she is in Elizabeth's house, the whole family is blessed by God. The community should be like the New Ark of the Covenant. Visiting the house of the persons, it should take benefits and the grace of God to the people.

Personal Questions

- What prevents us from discovering and living the joy of God's presence in our life?
- Where and how does the joy of the presence of God take place today in my life and in that of the community?

Concluding Prayer

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