



Lectio Divina
English | May 2024 | ocarm.org

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Wednesday, May 1, 2024

Opening Prayer

Lord, You are! And this is sufficient for us, to live by, to go on hoping every day, to walk in this world, not to choose the wrong road of being closed and lonely. Yes, You are forever and from all time; You are constant, O Jesus! Your being is our constant gift; it is an ever ripe fruit that feeds and strengthens us in You, in Your presence. Lord, open our heart, open our being to Your being; open us to life with the mysterious power of Your Word. Help us to listen, to eat and savor this food for our souls, which is indispensable for us! Send us the good fruit of Your Spirit so that He may bring about in us that which we read and meditate about You.

Reading

To Place the Passage in Its Context:

These few verses are part of the great discourse of Jesus to His disciples during that intimate moment of the last supper and they begin with chapter 13, verse 31, and proceed up to the end of chapter 17. This passage has a very tight, deep and inseparable unity, unequaled in the Gospels, and sums up the whole of Jesus' revelation in His divine life and in the mystery of the Trinity. It is the text that says what no other text in the Scriptures can say concerning Christian life, its power, its tasks, its joys and pains, its hopes, and its struggle in this world in the Church. Just a few verses, but full of love. That love to the very end that Jesus chose to live for His disciples, and for us, even to this day and forever. In the strength of this love, the supreme gesture of infinite tenderness, which includes all other gestures of love, the Lord bequeaths to His disciples a new presence. A new way of being. By means of the parable of the vine and its branches and the proclamation of the wonderful verb remain, repeated several times, Jesus initiates His new story with each one of us called indwelling. He is no longer with us, because He is going back to the Father, yet He remains within us.

To Assist Us in the Reading of the Passage:

- vv. 1-3: Jesus reveals Himself as the true vine, which brings forth good fruit and excellent wine for His Father who is the vinedresser. He reveals to us, His disciples, the branches, that we must remain united to the vine so as not to die and to bear fruit. The pruning, which the Father accomplishes on the branches by means of the Word, is a purification, a joy, and a chant.
- vv. 4-6: Jesus passes on to His disciples the secret of being able to continue to live in an intimate relationship with Him by remaining. As He lives in them and remains in them, and is no longer external to them or with them, so they must also remain in Him, inside Him. This is the only way to be completely consoled, to be able to hold on to this life and bear good fruit which is love.

- v. 7: Once more, Jesus bequeaths the gift of prayer in the heart of His disciples, that most precious and unique pearl, and He tells us that by remaining in Him, we can learn true prayer, the prayer that seeks insistently the gift of the Holy Spirit and knows that it will be granted.
- v. 8: Jesus calls us to Himself, asks us to follow Him, and to be always His disciples. The remainder brings forth mission, the gift of life for the Father and for the neighbor. If we really remain in Jesus, then we shall really remain in the midst of our brothers and sisters, as gift and as service. This is the glory of the Father.

Gospel Text – John 15: 1-8

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

A Moment of Silent Prayer

As a branch, I now remain united to the vine, my Lord, and I abandon myself to Him. I allow myself to be overtaken by the sap of His silent and deep voice, which is like living water. Therefore, I remain in silence and stay close.

A Few Questions

These help me remain and to discover the beauty of the vine, Jesus. They lead me to the Father, and allow Him to take over and labor in me, certain of His good labor as loving vine-dresser. They urge me to enter into the life blood of the Spirit to meet Him as the only necessary thing that I must seek untiringly.

- "I am": it is beautiful that the passage begins with these words, which are like a song of joy of the victory of the Lord that He loves to sing all the time in the life of each one of us. "I am": He repeats this infinitely, every morning, every evening, at night, while we sleep, even though we are not aware of this. In fact, He really is at our disposal. He is turned towards the Father, and towards us for us. I meditate on these words and not only listen to them, but allow them to penetrate me, my mind, my innermost memory, my heart, and all my feelings as I ruminate on and absorb His being into my being. I try to enter into the depths of my being, overcoming fear, crossing the darkness that I find there and I gather those parts of my being that are most lifeless. I take them delicately and bring them to Jesus and I hand them over to His "I am".

- The vine recalls to mind wine, that precious and good fruit, and also recalls to mind the covenant that nothing will ever break. Am I willing to remain in that embrace, in that continuous yes of my life thus woven into His? Together with the Psalmist, I shall also raise the chalice of the covenant, calling on the name of the Lord and saying to Him, "yes, I also love you".
- Jesus calls His Father the vinedresser, a very beautiful term that carries all the force of the love dedicated to working the land. It expresses a bending over the earth, a drawing close of body and being, a prolonged contact, a vital exchange. This is precisely the Father's attitude towards us! However, St. Paul says: "The farmer who has done the hard work should have the first share of the harvest" (2 Tim 2:6) and St. James reminds us "See how patient a farmer is as he waits for his land to produce precious crops" (Jas 5:7). Will I disappoint the patience of the Father who cultivates me every day, turns me over, gets rid of the stones, nourishes me with good fertilizer and builds a hedge all round me to protect me? To whom do I give the fruits of my existence, my heart, my mind, and my soul? For whom do I exist? For whom do I decide and choose to live every day, every morning, when I wake up?
- I follow the text carefully and underline two verbs, which occur frequently: "to bear fruit" and "to remain". I understand that these two realities are a symbol of life itself and are woven together, each depending on the other. Only by remaining is it possible to bear fruit, and the only true fruit that we as disciples can bear in this world is to remain. Where do I remain every day, all day? With whom do I remain? Jesus always makes the connection of this verb with that wonderful and enormous particle: "in Me". Do I console myself with these two words "in Me"? Do I dig in search of the Lord as one digs for a well (cfr. Gn 26:18) or for treasure (Pr 2:4)? Or am I outside, always lost among the ways of this world, as far as possible from intimacy and from a relationship from contact with the Lord?
- Twice Jesus reminds us of the reality of His Word and reveals to us that it is His Word that makes us pure and it is His Word that leads us to true prayer. The Word is proclaimed and given as a permanent presence within us. It also has the ability to remain, to make its dwelling place in our heart. However, I must ask myself, what ears do I have to listen to this proclamation of salvation and goodness, which the Lord addresses to me through His Words? Do I allow room to listen in depth to that which the Scripture speaks to me all the time, in the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms and the apostolic writings? Do I allow the Word of the Lord to find me and overtake me in prayer, or do I prefer to trust in other words, lighter, more human and more like my words? Am I afraid of the voice of the Lord who speaks to me urgently and all the time?

A Key to the Reading

As a branch, I seek to be ever more one with my Vine, that is, the Lord Jesus. Here and now, I drink of His Word, the good sap, seeking to penetrate ever deeper so as to absorb the hidden nourishment that transmits real life to me. I

pay attention to the words, the verbs, the expressions Jesus uses and which recall other passages of divine Scripture and, thus, I let myself be purified.

The meeting with Jesus, the "I am"

This passage is one of the texts where this strong expression appears, an expression that the Lord addresses to us in order to reveal Himself. It is wonderful to walk through the Scriptures in search of other texts similar to this one, where the Lord speaks of Himself directly. When the Lord says and repeats, in a thousand ways, with a thousand nuances, "I am". He does not do so in order to annihilate or humiliate us, but only to stress forcefully His overflowing love for us which desires to make us live that same life that belongs to Him. When He says "I am", He is also saying "You are" to each one of us, to each son and daughter who is born into this world. It is a fruitful and uninterrupted transmission of being, of essence, and I do not wish to let this be in vain. I wish to welcome it and welcome it inside me. So, I follow the luminous trace of the "I am" and I try to stop at each step. "I am your shield" (Gen 15:1), "I am the God of Abraham your father" (Gen 24:26), "I am the Lord who led you and still leads you out of the land of Egypt" (cfr. Es 6:6) and from the hands of every Pharaoh who will threaten your life. "I am He who heals you" (Es 15:26). I allow myself to be enlightened by the force of these words, which fulfill the miracle they speak of; they fulfill this miracle to this day, and for me, in this lectio. Then I go on reading in the book of Leviticus where at least 50 times this affirmation of salvation is found: "I am the Lord", and I believe these words and hold on to them with my whole being, my whole heart and say: "Yes, indeed the Lord is my Lord, He and no other!" I note that the Scriptures probe ever deeper. As the journey continues, gradually, the Scriptures penetrate me and lead me to an ever more intense relationship with the Lord. In fact, the book of Numbers says: "I am the Lord and I live among the people of Israel" (Num 35:34). "I am" is in the present, He who does not draw apart, does not turn His back to leave. It is He who cares for us from close by, from the inside, as only He can do. I read Isaiah and I receive life: 41:10; 43:3; 45:6 etc.

The holy Gospel is an explosion of being, presence, and salvation. I run through it letting John lead me: 6:48; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:15; 14:6; 18:37. Jesus is the bread, the light, the gate, the shepherd, the resurrection, the way, the truth, the life, the king. All for me and for us, and so I want to welcome Him, know Him and love Him, and I want to learn, through these words, to say to Him: "Lord you are!" It is this "You" that gives meaning to my "I" that makes life a relationship and a communion. I know for certain that only here can I find full joy and live forever.

The Vineyard, the True Vine and Its Good Fruit

God's vineyard is Israel, a beloved vineyard, a chosen vineyard, a vineyard planted on a fertile hill in a place where the earth has been cleared afresh, hoed, and freed of stones. A protected vineyard, worked, loved, large and one that God Himself has planted (cfr. Is 5:1ff; Ger 2:21). So loved is this vineyard that the beloved has never ceased to sing the canticle of love for her. Strong notes, yet sweet at the same time. Notes that bear true life, that go across the ancient covenant and come to the new covenant in even clearer notes. At first it was the Father who sang, now it is Jesus, but in both it is the Spirit who is heard, as the Song of Songs says: "The voice of the dove is still heard... and the vineyards

spread fragrance" (Sgs 2:12ff). It is the Lord Jesus who draws us, who takes us from the old to the new, from love to love, towards an ever stronger communion, even to identification: "I am the vine, but you too are in me". Hence it is clear: the vineyard is Israel, is Jesus, is us. Always the same, always new, always chosen and beloved, loved, cared for, protected, visited: visited by rain and visited by the Word. Sent by the prophets day by day, visited by the sending of the Son, who is love, and who expects love, that is, the fruit. "He waited for the grapes to ripen, but every grape was sour" (Is 5:2). In love, disappointment is always around the corner. I stop here at this reality. I look inside me. I try to discover the places where I am closed, dry, and dead. Why has the rain not come? I repeat this word that echoes often through the pages of the Bible: "The Lord waits..." (see Is 30:18; Lk 13:6-9). He wants the fruits of conversion (cfr. Mt 3:8), as He tells us through John, the fruits of the word that hides the listening, the welcoming and the self-control, as the synoptics say (cfr. Mt 13:23; Mk 4:20 e Lk 8:15), the fruits of the Spirit, as Paul explains (cfr. Gal 5:22). He wants us "to bear fruit in every good work" (Col 1:10), but above all, it seems to me, the Lord waits and desires "the fruit of the womb" (cfr. Lk 1:42), that is Jesus, in whom we are truly blessed. In fact, Jesus is the seed that, dying, bears much fruit within us in our life (Jn 12:24) and defeats every solitude, every closure, opening us wide to our brothers and sisters. This is the real fruit of conversion, planted in the earth of our bosom. This is to become His disciples and, finally, this is the true glory of the Father.

Pruning, a Joyful Purification

In this passage of the Gospel, the Lord shows me another way of following Him, together with Him. It is the way of purification, of renewal, of resurrection, and new life. It is hidden in the term "pruning", but I can better discover it thanks to the Word itself, which is the only sure guide. The Greek text uses the term "purify" to point to this action of the vinedresser in His vineyard. Certainly, it is true that He prunes and cuts with a knife sharpened by His Word (Heb 4:12) and sometimes, wounds us, but it is even truer that it is His love that penetrates ever deeper in us and thus purifies, washes, and refines. Yes, the Lord sits as washer to purify, to make splendid and luminous the gold in His hand (cfr. Mal 3:3). Jesus brings a new purification, the one promised for so long by the Scriptures and in waiting for the Messianic times. It is no longer the purification that took place by means of cult, by means of the observance of the law or sacrifices, a temporary purification, incomplete and figurative. Jesus brings about an intimate, total purification. One of the heart and conscience, the one sung by Ezekiel: "I shall purify you of all your idols, I shall give you a new heart...When I shall have purified you from all you iniquities, I shall bring you back to your cities and your ruins will be rebuilt..." (Ez 36:25ff. 33). I also read Eph 5:26 e Tt 2:14, beautiful and rich texts, which help me better enter into the light of grace of this work of salvation, of this spiritual pruning that the Father works in me. There is a verse in the Song of Songs that can help my understanding more. It says, "This is the time for singing" (Sgs 2:12), however, it uses a verb that means also "pruning, cutting" as well as "singing". Thus pruning is the time for singing and for joy. It is my heart that sings before and in the Word. It is my soul that rejoices for my faith, because I know that through this long but magnificent pilgrimage in the Scriptures, I too will take part in Jesus' life. I too will be united

with Him, the pure, the holy, the immaculate Word and that thus, united to Him, I shall be washed and purified with the infinite purity of His life. Not for me alone, not in order to be alone, but to bear much fruit. To grow leaves and branches that do not wither. To be a branch together with many other branches in the vine of Jesus Christ.

A Moment of Silent Prayer: Psalm 1

A meditation on the joy of one who lives by the Word and, thanks to the Word, bears fruit.

Res. Your Word is my joy, Lord!

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on His law he meditates day and night. *Res.*

He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff which the wind drives away. *Res.*

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish. *Res.*

Closing Prayer

Lord, I still see the light of Your Word. The healing force of Your voice still rings in the depth of my being! Thank you, O my Vine, my sap. Thank You, O my dwelling where I can and wish to remain. Thank You, O my strength to do, to carry out every task; thank You my Master! You have called me to be a fruitful branch, to be fruit of your love for humankind, to be the wine that makes the heart rejoice. Lord, help me to realize this blessed and true Word of Yours. Only thus can I live truly and live truly as You are and remain. Lord, let me not err so that I wish to remain a branch in Your vine without the other branches, my brothers and sisters. It would be indeed the sourest and most displeasing fruit. Lord, I do not know how to pray. Teach me Yourself and let my most beautiful prayer be my life, transformed into a bunch of grapes for the hunger and the thirst, for the joy and company of those who come to the vine, that is, You. Thank you for being the wine of Love!

Thursday, May 2, 2024

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - John 15: 9-11

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.
If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.
I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete.

Reflection

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

- Today's Gospel is formed only of three verses which continue 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 to be able to bear more fruit.
- John 15: 9-11: Remain in my love, source of perfect joy. Jesus remains in the love of the Father, by observing the commandments which he receives from him. We remain in the love of Jesus by observing the commandments which he has left for us. And we should observe them in the same way in which he observed the commandments of the Father: "If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love". It is in this union of the love of the Father and of Jesus that the source of true joy is found: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy be complete".
- John 15: 12-13: Love one another as I have loved you. The commandment of Jesus is only one: "To love one another, as he has loved us!" (Jn 15: 12). Jesus goes beyond the Old Testament. The ancient criterion was: "You will love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 18: 19). The new criterion is: "That you love one another, as I have loved you." Here he says the phrase which we sing even until now: "Nobody has greater love than this: to give one's life for one's friends!"

- John 15: 14-15: Friends and not servants. “You are my friends if you do what I command you”, that is, the practice of love up to the total gift of self! Immediately after, Jesus adds a very high ideal for the life of the disciples. He says: “I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father!” Jesus had no more secrets for his disciples. He has told us everything he heard from the Father! This is the splendid ideal of life in community: to attain a total transparency, to the point of not having any secrets among ourselves and of being able to have total trust in one another, to be able to share the experience of God and of life that we have, and in this way enrich one another reciprocally. The first Christians succeeded in attaining this ideal during several years. They were “one only heart and one soul” (Acts 4: 32; 1: 14; 2: 42, 46).
- John 15: 16-17: Jesus has chosen us. We have not chosen Jesus. He has chosen us, he has called us and has entrusted us the mission to go and bear fruit, fruit which will last. We need him, but he also needs us and our work 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 3, 2024

Feast of James and Philip, 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)

Saturday, May 4, 2024

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 5, 2024

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Opening Prayer

Father, you are the source of life and you always surprise us with your gifts. Grant us the grace of responding to the call of your Son Jesus who has called us friends, so that in following him, our master and shepherd, we may learn to observe his commandments, the new and definitive Law that is himself, the way leading to you and of remaining in you. Through Christ your Son, our Lord.

Gospel Reading: John 15: 9-17

9 I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10 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. 11 I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete.

12 This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. 13 No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends, if you do what I command you. 15 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. 16 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. 17 My command to you is to love one another.

Reading

The context of our passage already determines the tone: this is Jesus' long discourse to his disciples during the last supper and after the washing of the feet of the disciples, which according to John characterizes Jesus' ministry of love even to the end, (Jn 13: 1-15). If we look at these compact chapters, we can see a dynamism which goes from a gesture as such, the washing of the feet, a gesture in keeping with Jesus' works as signs of his identity and which appeal to the faith of those looking on and listening, to the long discourse addressed to his disciples as an expression of leave-taking but also as an indication of the required attitude and the reality to look for, even to the so-called "priestly" prayer of Jesus to the Father (Jn 17), a prayer that goes beyond the circle of his disciples for the benefit of all those who believe in him in all times. There is an ascending movement of the narrative that coincides with the raising of Jesus on the cross, an upward movement perceived by John as the glorification of Jesus and one that ultimately describes Easter as the passing of the Word from humanity back to the Father.

In Jesus' discourse, expressions follow one another closely forming a vortex of communication, which is neither oppressive in its rhythm nor tiring. Each

expression is complete, simple and incisive and places the Jesus of John in a continuity of favorite themes and terms. In the context just before this passage, Jesus spoke of himself as the true vine (Jn 15:1); an image suggesting two relationships: the Father who is the vinedresser and the disciples who are the branches. This image is revealing: besides being an exhortation to the disciples, it is a given fact: the Father looks after his precious plants, looks after the relationship established between Jesus and his disciples and so the disciples from now on live in a communion that defines them. The exhortation is expressed in the very image itself and is made explicit and is centered in the word "remain". The disciples are called to remain in Jesus just like the branches remain in the vine so as to have life and bear fruit. The theme of bearing fruit as also that of asking and receiving, which recurs in our passage, is here anticipated, putting before us an example of John's special style of hinting and echoing. The tone of verse 9 changes because there is no longer an image but a direct reference to a relationship: "I have loved you just as the Father has loved me." Jesus places himself in a descending movement that goes from God to humanity. The verb "to love" already occurred in chapter 14 in connection with the observance of the commandments; now in our passage it occurs again in a new synthesis where the "commandments" give way to "the commandment" of Jesus: "My command to you is to love one another" (Jn 15: 17). This reciprocal relationship is repeated immediately after in an incisive command: "remain in my love." Jesus goes from the verb "to love" to the substantive "love" to show that the action flowing from the Father through the Son to humanity has created a new order of things, a possibility which until then was unthinkable. In verse 10 the reciprocity is accomplished in the inverse sense: the observance of Jesus' commandments is for the disciples the way of responding to his love in an analogical and real continuity of the attitude of the Son who has observed the commandments of the Father and thus remains in his love. This perspective is quite different from that of the legalism that had been monopolized by the terms "law" and "commandments." Everything is referred to Jesus in his truer perspective: a response of love to the love received, the proclamation of the possibility of remaining in the presence of God. Also the words in verse 11 become a further way out of the legalistic mentality: the aim is joy, a joy of relationship, the joy of Christ in his disciples, their joy present in its fullness. In verse 12, as we have already said, the discourse becomes more urgent. Jesus says that his commandments are a single one: "that you love one another as I have loved you." Notice how the line of relationships remains the same, always as a response: the disciples will love one another in the way that Jesus has loved them. What follows, however, re-establishes in absolute terms the primacy of Jesus' gift: "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (v. 13). This is the work beyond compare of his love, an action that lifts the quality of involvement to its highest point, the gift of life. Here we have a conspicuous digression in the new name given to the disciples, namely that of "friends" as opposed to that of "servants." The difference lies in the fact that the servant does not know what his master is planning. The servant is called to do and that is all. Jesus' discourse follows a thread: it is because he has loved his disciples and is about to give his life for them that he has revealed to them his Father's plan. He did this by means of his signs and works. He will do this in the greatest of his works, his death on the cross. Again, Jesus shows his close relationship

with the Father: "I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father" (v. 15). Yet at the center of this affirmation to his disciples as friends Jesus expresses an order of things: "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (v. 14).

The final verses of our passage recall the image of the vine with the added statements above: It is Jesus who has chosen his disciples not the other way round. The initiative is his. However, the process of the image of the vine planted in the soil is presented differently. The disciples are called so that they may go and it is in this going that they will bear fruit, then the fruit is meant to remain (the same word used as in remaining in Jesus' love).

The identity of the disciples is based on the choice made by Jesus and points to a journey to be undertaken, a fruit to be borne. The picture is complete: the call in the past, the present listening and the future bearing of fruit. Yet there is still Someone who must be considered, there is still an attitude to acquire. "To bear fruit" may lead the disciples towards unilateral action. However, the words "so that," connect the bearing of fruit to what follows: to ask and to receive, to experience need and the gift abundantly and freely given ("anything you ask"). That Someone whom Jesus reveals is the Father, source of love and of the mission of the Son, the Father to whom we may turn in the name of the Son in so far as we have remained in his love. The conclusion is given in a solemn and concise form: "My command to you is to love one another."

Meditation

Jesus' words just before his glorification tell the Church the meaning of following him and of his demands. They are strong words, mirroring the glory of Him who will freely give his life for the salvation of the world (cfr. Jn 10: 17-18); but they are also precise words and thus simple, essential, close, connected and typical of a farewell discourse where repetition becomes a pressing and gentle appeal. To be a disciple of Christ is first of all a gift: it is He who has chosen his own, it is He who has revealed to them his mission and in doing so has revealed the "background" of the project of salvation: the will of the Father, the love between Father and Son, which is now communicated to humanity. The disciples now know, not as were the first steps of the past history of salvation and the present of those who chose to close themselves and not want to understand the value of the works accomplished by the Son by the will of the Father. This knowledge will demand of them consequent options so as not to remain in an empty and sterile pretense (cfr. 1 Jn 4: 8, 20). "Remain" in the love of Jesus and observe his "commandments" is above all a revelation, the gift of a supreme possibility that frees people from a servile state even in respect of God and places them in a new, full and reciprocal relationship with Him, typical of friendship. "To remain in his love" is what the Synoptics would call the "kingdom of God," a new stage in history, at first wounded and now freed. In the Hebrew culture, the observance of the commandments was connected with pedantic teaching that often went into the smallest details. This had its value because it witnessed to an effort by pious Jews to remain faithful to God. However, they ran the risk, common to all human endeavors, that they would lose sight of God's initiative and emphasize the human response. In John's Gospel, Jesus restores and thus renews the semantics of the "law" and of the

“commandments” with the concept of “love” and the invitation to “remain.” When Jesus proclaims and shows the love of the Father in the act of giving his life for the salvation of the world, he renews and personalizes this observance. It is love that reveals its quality, not in the abstract, but in the concrete and visible face of Christ who loves “to the end” and lives in person the greatest love. Several times Jesus describes his relationship with the Father. The fact that here he places himself under the sign of obedience to the Father gives new meaning to obedience. It is not the obedience of a servant but of a Son. The work to be accomplished, that is, “the commandments of my Father,” is not something separate from the person of Jesus, but that which he knows and desires wholeheartedly. The Word that was with the Father is always with him to accomplish the things that please the Father in a concrete communion that is life giving. This is precisely what Jesus asks of his disciples: to keep in mind that “as the Father has loved... as I have loved you” must not remain on the level of an example, but on the level of a generative source. The love of the Father is the source of the love expressed by the Son, and the love of the Son is the source of the love that the disciples will give to the world. Knowledge and practice are thus closely connected in the “spiritual Gospel,” as John’s Gospel has been called by the Fathers of the Church. When faith is authentic, it will not put up with a dichotomy concerning life. In this passage, the disciples appear as the object of the caring cure of their master. He will not forget them, not even in the imminent trial to come, when he prays for them to the Father and “for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me” (Jn 17: 20). At the end of their listening, their welcoming and their commitment there is their joy, which is the same as that of their master. He has chosen them using criteria that only God knows, a choice that recalls the choice of Israel, the smallest of all nations. It is Jesus who has formed, taught and strengthened them. All this acquires a new and more intense meaning in the light of Easter and Pentecost. It is like a paradox, and this is what they are called to: to be steadfast and remain and yet to go. Steadfastness and dynamism whose source is the mystery of God, whereby the Word was with the Father and yet built his tent in our midst (cfr. Jn 1: 2, 14). Formed in steadfastness and going to bear lasting fruit, this is what defines the task of the disciples after the Pasch of the Lord, but in our passage all this is connected with the invitation to ask the Father in Jesus’ name. It is, then, from the Father, in Christ and with the power of the Consoler that will come the grace to love and, in loving, to bear witness.

Prayer

There are some points in this passage that may help us renew our style of prayer:

- A prayer that is truly “Trinitarian”, not just theoretically or in its expression, but also as an inherent dynamic of the prayer itself.
- The need for prayer and life to be one. Prayer is the mirror, the expression and the measure of our life of faith.
- The joy that must accompany our attitude of prayer.

- Appreciating all that is human (awareness of relationships, love of prayer, experience of joy, perception of union with God) and being aware that all is gift.

Psalm 119: 129-136

Wonderful are your instructions, so I observe them.

As your word unfolds it gives light, and even the simple understand. I open wide my mouth, panting eagerly for your commandments. Turn to me, pity me; those who love your name deserve it. Keep my steps firm in your promise; that no evil may triumph over me.

Rescue me from human oppression, and I will observe your precepts.

Let your face shine on your servant, teach me your will.

My eyes stream with tears because your Law is disregarded.

Contemplation

The Word of God calls us to confirm in our heart and in our actions the newness of being disciples of the Son. The four aspects: relationship with God, reading reality, commitment and attention to the life of the Church are like seeds of contemplation, attitudes and possible choices.

Relationship with God: growing in an awareness of being in relationship with the Trinity; we are thought of, wanted, gifted, saved between the Father and the Son in the Spirit; presenting our actions in response to the love of God who first called us.

Reading reality: recognizing personal reactions to persons and institutions, such as the trivializing of the concept of "love" in a materialist interpretation as well as in spiritual escapism. On the other hand, to be aware of the expectations of free and freeing relationships as experiences of an authentic gift often not recognized.

Commitment to reality: to give one's life (in all its forms) as a concrete expression and appreciation of love; the importance of new communications of experiences of wisdom in following the fruits of the witness given to the Gospel in the world that God wishes to save.

The life of the Church as a life of relationship in relationship: to see the Church not only as an image of the Trinity, but "within" the Trinity; to regain the feeling of freedom and joy in the community of believers.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the loving care with which you have taught and still teach your disciples. We praise you, Lord, conqueror of sin and of death, because you have gambled all that was yours, even your infinite relationship with the Father in the Spirit. You have presented this relationship to us who risk not understanding it, trivializing it, forgetting it. You spoke of it to us so that we may understand how great a love has given us life. Grant, Lord, that we may remain in you as the branches remain united to the vine that nourishes them and allows them to bear fruit. Turn your gaze of faith and hope on us that we may learn to go from words and desires to the concreteness of actions in

imitation of you who have loved us to the end when you gave your life to us so that we may have life in you. You who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Monday, May 6, 2024

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, in order to avoid persecution, diluted or watered down the message of Jesus transforming it into a Gnostic message, vague, without any definition, which was not in contrast with the ideology of the Empire. To them is applied what Paul said: “They are afraid of the cross of Christ” (Ga 6: 12). And John himself, in his letter, will say concerning them: “There are many deceivers at large in the world, refusing to acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in human nature (he became man). They are the Deceiver; they are the Antichrist!” (2 Jn 1: 7). The same concern appears also in Thomas’ demand: “Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe”. (Jn 20: 25). The Risen Christ who promises to give us the gift of the Spirit is Jesus of Nazareth who continues to have, even now, the signs of torture and of the cross in his risen Body.
- John 16: 3-4: They do not know what they do. They do all these things “because they have never known either the Father or me”. These persons do not have a correct image of God. They have a vague image of God, in the heart and in the head. Their God is not the Father of Jesus Christ who gathers us all together in unity and fraternity. In last instance, it is the same reason which impelled Jesus to say: “Father, forgive them, because they know not what they do (Lk 23: 34). Jesus was condemned by the religious authority because, according to their idea, he had a false image of God. In the words of Jesus

there is no hatred or vengeance, but only compassion: they are ignorant brothers who know nothing of our Father.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Tuesday, May 7, 2024

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - John 16: 5-11

Jesus 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 life- style 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 8, 2024

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 9, 2024

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 with us indeed, 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 said to his disciples: "A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me." So some of his disciples said to one another, "What does this mean that he is saying to us, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" So they said, "What is this 'little while' of which he speaks? We do not know what he means." Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Are you discussing with one another what I said, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'? Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become 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 in 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 and 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 in understanding 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 expression: “What is He saying; what does it mean?” Other times the reader has listened to the questions of Peter, of Philip, of Thomas, and now of those disciples who ask for an explanation. The disciples do not 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 is expected of Jesus, 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: Jesus’ response. In fact Jesus does not respond to the question asked: “What does ‘in a short time mean?’” He invites them to trust. It is true that the disciples will be tried and tested. They will suffer very much, being alone in a hostile situation, abandoned in a world which rejoices because of the death of Jesus. However, He assures them that their sadness will be changed into joy. The time of sadness is opposed by 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” and “in a short time” correspond to that instant or moment in which the situation is overturned, but until that moment everything will be of sadness and trial.

In the end, the disciples receive from Jesus a promise of happiness and joy. In the 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. In our own lives, through

contemplation and the acceptance of Jesus, we can also go from weeping and mourning while the world rejoices, to experiencing joy.

Personal Questions

- Am I convinced that the moment of trial or 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 lives? How do you live your moments of sadness and anguish?
- What are various ways we may "not see Him" and "a little while later, we see Him"?
- Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, John of the Cross, and Bernard are all saints who spoke of the "dark night". There is a saying: "absence make the heart grow fonder." What is your attitude when there is a reunion, when "a little while later, we see Him"? Do we use it as a time to renew and strengthen our relationship with Him, to move beyond being "lukewarm", or do we get upset and demand "where have you been?"

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 10, 2024

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 to his disciples: "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy. When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. On that day you will not question me about anything. Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give 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: "The 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); and the accomplished work (Jn 18:1 to 20:31). The environment of sadness and expectation: sadness, because Jesus leaves and nostalgia invades the heart; expectation, because the hour is coming for receiving the promised gift, that of the Consoler who will make all sadness disappear and will once again bring the joy of the 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 references to sadness and suffering express the environment of the communities at the end of the first century in Asia Minor (present day Turkey), for whom John wrote his Gospel. They lived in a difficult situation of persecution and oppression, which caused sadness. The Apostles had taught that Jesus would return soon, but the "parousia," the glorious return of Jesus, had not happened and persecution increased. Many were impatient: "Until when?" (cf. 2 Thess 2:1-5; 2 Pet 3:8-9). A person bears suffering and persecution when he/she knows that suffering is the way and the condition to attain perfect joy. Thus, even having death before his/her 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 chance of improvement on the horizon, are not the death rattle, 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. So is the suffering of the persecution of Christians, and thus, any suffering should be lived 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 Consideration

- “On that day you will not question Me about anything.” The joy and love of the reality is greater than all of the questions of “how can this be”, rendering them mute. Do I question “how can this be?”, or am I satisfied with the presence of Jesus in my 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 and how it recurs in faith, as in the dark night of Saint John of the Cross.
- Am I weeping and mourning right now, or am I rejoicing, or am I in between, lukewarm, being not one way or the other? What does this say about my relationship with Jesus? How would people around me answer this about me?

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 11, 2024

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 nation's rally
to the people of the God of Abraham. (Ps 47: 8-9)

Sunday, May 12, 2024

Ascension Sunday

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: Mark 16: 15-20

A Key to the Reading:

The liturgy of the feast of the Ascension presents us with a scene where Jesus appears to the disciples and confers on them the mission of going to the whole world to proclaim the Good News. The text of Mark's Gospel (Mk 16: 9-20) is the final section of the appendix of that Gospel (Mk 16: 15-20). We expand the brief commentary to include the whole of the appendix. During the reading we need to pay attention to the following point: "To whom does Jesus appear, what are the various aspects of the mission and what are the signs of his presence in the community?"

A Division of the Text as an Aid to the Reading:

- Mark 16: 14-18: Jesus appears to the eleven and gives them a mission.
- Mark 16: 19-20: Jesus ascends into heaven in the presence of the disciples.

The Text:

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." ¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. ²⁰ And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What pleased you most in this text or what caught your attention most? Why?
- To whom does Jesus manifest himself alive and how do they react?
- In this text, who has the greatest difficulty in believing in the resurrections?
- As Paul says: "God brought us to life with Christ...and gave us a place with him in heaven" (Eph 2: 6). How does this affirmation help us better understand the meaning of the Ascension?
- What are the signs of Jesus' presence within the community? What is the meaning of each sign?

- What signs best convince people today of the presence of Jesus in our midst?

A Key to the Reading

to enter deeper into the theme.

- **The Context:**

The appendix of Mark's Gospel offers a list of Jesus' appearances (Mk 16: 9-20). There are other lists, but they do not always coincide. The list given by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians is quite different (1 Cor 15: 3-8). These differences show that, in the beginning, Christians were not concerned about describing or proving the resurrection. For them, faith in the resurrection was so vivid and evident, that there was no need to prove it. The communities themselves, living and persevering among so many challenges and persecutions from the Roman Empire, were living proof of the truth of the resurrection.

- **Commentary on the Text:**

- Mark 16: 9-11: Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, but the other disciples do not believe her.

Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene and she announces this to the others. To come into the world, God wished to depend on the "yes" of Mary of Nazareth (Lk 1:38). To be recognized as Living in our midst, he wished to depend on the word of Mary Magdalene who had been freed from seven devils.

- Mark says that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. In this he agrees with the other three Evangelists (cfr Mt 28: 9-10; Jn 20:16; Lk 24: 9-11). But on the list of appearances given in the Letter to the Corinthians (1Cor 15, 3-8), there is no mention of any appearances to the women. The first Christians found it difficult to believe the witness of the women.
- Mark 16: 12-13: Jesus appears to two disciples

The story of Jesus' appearance to the two disciples who were walking in the fields is probably a reference to Jesus' appearance to the disciples from Emmaus who, on returning, shared their experience of the resurrection with "the eleven and their companions (Lk 24: 33-34). Only here, Mark differs from Luke because the others did not believe in the witness of the two disciples.

- Mark 16: 14: Jesus scolds the eleven for their incredulity

Finally Jesus appears to the eleven disciples gathered at table and scolds them because they have not believed those who had seen him risen. For the third time, Mark makes reference to the resistance of the disciples to believe the witness of those who had experienced the resurrection of Jesus. Why does Mark insist so much on the incredulity of the disciples? Probably to teach two things. First, that faith in the risen Jesus is transmitted through the faith of those who give witness to it. Secondly,

that no one must give up hope when doubt or confusion arises in one's heart. Even the eleven had doubts!

- Mark 16: 15-18: The signs that go with the proclamation of the Good News Jesus immediately confers the mission of announcing the Good News to all creation. The requirement for anyone who wishes to be saved is: to believe and be baptized. To those who have the courage to believe in the Good News and are baptized, he promises the following signs: (1) they will drive out devils, (2) they will speak in new tongues, (3) they will hold snakes in their hands, (4) if they drink poison it will not harm them, (5) they will lay hands on the sick and these will be healed. These signs take place even now:
 - ***driving out devils:*** is to fight the power of evil that chokes life. The life of many people has improved since they entered in community and have started to live the good news of the presence of God. By participating in the life of the community, they drive out evil from their lives.
 - ***speaking in new tongues:*** is to begin to communicate with others in a new way. Sometimes we meet someone whom we have never met before, but it is as if we have known each other for a long time. This is because we speak the same language of love.
 - ***To hold snakes in one's hand and to overcome poison:*** there are so many things that poison living together. Much gossip that breaks down relationships. Those who live in the presence of God can overcome this and are not affected by this deadly poison.
 - ***Healing the sick:*** wherever we have a clearer awareness of the presence of God, we find also special care for those excluded and marginalized, especially the sick. What best restores health is welcoming and loving care.
- Mark 16: 19-20: Through the community, Jesus continues his mission. The Jesus who, in Palestine, welcomed the poor and revealed to them the love of the Father, is the same Jesus who now continues to be present in our midst, in our communities. Through us, he continues his mission of revealing the Good News of the love of God for the poor. To this day, the resurrection still takes place. No earthly power can neutralize the force that comes from faith in the resurrection (Rom 8: 35-39). A community that wants to witness to the resurrection must be a sign of life, must fight against the power of death. So that the world may become a place of life, that community must believe that another world is possible. Above all, where the life of the people is in danger because of a system of death that is imposed, the community must be a living proof of the hope that conquers the world, without fear of unhappiness!

Further Information on the Gospel of Mark - God's Surprises:

From the start, Mark's Gospel insists on: "The time has come...and the kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent, and believe the Good News*" (Mk 1:15). This initial request for conversion and faith indicates the door through which we have access to Jesus and the Good News of God that he brings. There is no other access. Faith demands belief in Jesus, in his Word, accepting him

unconditionally. We are invited not to close ourselves in any name or title, doctrine or custom, and to keep ourselves always open to the surprises of God, that demand a constant conversion. Names and titles, doctrines and customs, devotions and pleadings are like a tag that we wear on our chest for identification. The tag is important because it helps us and directs us when necessary to meet a person we are looking for. But when we meet, we do not look at the tag anymore, but at the face! Very often, when we meet the person we are looking for he or she is quite different from what we imagined before. The meeting always carries some surprises! More so our meeting with God in Jesus. Throughout Mark's Gospel there are many surprises for the disciples and these come from where they least expect them:

- from a pagan who gives Peter a lesson because he recognizes the presence of God in the crucified one (Mk 15: 39);
- from a poor widow who gives her all to share with others (Mk 12: 43-44);
- from a blind man who annoys the disciples by calling out and who does not even have a definite belief (Mk 10: 46-52);
- from marginalized little ones, but who believe in Jesus (Mk 9: 42);
- from those who use the name of Jesus to fight evil but who do not belong to the "Church" (Mk 9: 38-40);
- from an anonymous woman who scandalizes the disciples by her manner of acting (Mk 14: 3-9);
- from a father of a family who is obliged to carry the cross and becomes a model disciple (Mk 15: 21)
- from Joseph of Arimathea who risks everything by asking for the body of Jesus to give it burial (Mk 15: 43).
- from women who, then, could not be official witnesses but were chosen by Jesus as expert witnesses of his resurrection (Mk 15: 40, 47; 16: 6, 9-10).

In a word: The twelve disciples who were specially called by Jesus (Mk 3: 13-19) and who were sent by him on a mission (Mk 6: 7-13), failed. Peter denied him (Mk 14: 66-72), Judas betrayed him (Mk 14: 44-45) and all fled (Mk 14: 50). But it is precisely through their failure that is shown the strength of faith of the others who were not part of the group of the chosen twelve. The community, the Church, must clearly be aware that it does not own Jesus nor does it own all the criteria of the action of God in our midst. Jesus does not belong to us, but we, the community, the Church, belong to Jesus, and Jesus is of God (1 Cor 3: 23). The greatest surprise of all is the resurrection!

Psalm 27 (26)

Courage Born of Faith

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
When evildoers assail me, uttering slanders against me,
my adversaries and foes, they shall stumble and fall.

Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.
One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after;
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.
For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under
the cover of his tent,
he will set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my
enemies round about me;
and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make
melody to the Lord.
Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! Thou hast
said, "Seek ye my face." My heart says to thee,
"Thy face, Lord, do I seek." Hide not thy face from me.
Turn not thy servant away in anger, thou who hast been my help.
Cast me not off, forsake me not, O God of my salvation!
For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up.
Teach me thy way, O Lord;
and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Give me not up to the will
of my adversaries;
for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.
I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!
Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the
Lord!

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 13, 2024

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. Schoke*)

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 14, 2024

St. Matthias, Apostle

Opening Prayer

Lord God,

your apostle Matthias was a witness to the life and death of Jesus Christ and to his glorious resurrection.

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

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 9-17

Jesus said to his disciples. 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.

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 is the Feast of the Apostle Mathias. The Gospel of John 15: 9-17 has already been meditated in April. Let us take some of the points which were considered that day.

- John 15: 9-11: Remain in my love, the source of perfect joy. Jesus remains in the love of the Father observing the commandments that he received from him. We remain in the love of Jesus observing the commandments that he has left for us. And we should observe them in the same measure in which he observed the commandments of the Father: "If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. And in this union of love of the Father and of Jesus is found the source of true joy: "I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete".
- John 15: 12-13: To love one another as he has loved us. The commandment of Jesus is only one: "to love one another as he has loved us!" (Jn 15: 12) Jesus exceeds the Old Testament. The ancient criterion was the following: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 18: 19). The new criterion is: "Love one another as I have loved you." It is the phrase that we sing even today and which says: "There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's brother!"
- John 15: 14-15: Friends and not servants. You are my friends if you do what I command you", that is, the practice of love up to the point of the total gift of oneself! Immediately Jesus presents a very high ideal for the life of his disciples. He says: "I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does

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

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

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
your Son Jesus gave himself totally to those he loved - that is, to all.
Give us a bit 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 persons. We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 17: 11b-19

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us.

While I was with them, I kept those you had given me true to your name. I have watched over them and not one is lost except one who was destined to be lost, and this was to fulfil the scriptures. But now I am coming to you and I say these things in the world to share my joy with them to the full. I passed your word on to them, and the world hated them, because they belong to the world no more than I belong to the world.

I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect 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, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too 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, during nine days, from the Ascension to Pentecost, the Apostles persevered in prayer together with Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Acts 1; 14). This is why 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, very opportune text to prepare ourselves during these days to the coming of the Holy Spirit in our life.

- John 17: 11b-12: Keep them in your name! Jesus transforms 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 it 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" (Ph 2: 11). It is the Name which is above all other names" (Ph 2: 9). JHWH or Yahweh, the Name of God, received a concrete face in Jesus of Nazareth! Unity has to be constituted around this name: Keep those you have given me true to your name so that they may be one like us. Jesus wants the unity of the communities, in such a way that they can resist before 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, they will be afflicted. Because of this, they are sad. Jesus wants 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, concretely, 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 contrary 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 to dedicate their whole life- 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 mission of Jesus. 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 contrary to the world, because the system of the world dehumanizes human life and renders it contrary to the intentions of the Creator.

For Personal Confrontation

- 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. And I? Do I live contrary to today's system, or do I adapt my faith to the system?
- Preparation for Pentecost. To invoke the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who gave courage to Jesus. In this Novena of preparation to Pentecost, it is good to dedicate some time to ask for the gift of the Spirit of Jesus.

Concluding Prayer

I bless Yahweh who is my counsellor, 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 16, 2024

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 center 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 17, 2024

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. In order 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 18, 2024

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 leaned 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 until 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 until 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 until 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 rumor.
- 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 19, 2024

Pentecost

Opening Prayer

Oh, My Father, when will the Consoler come? When will your Spirit of Truth reach me? The Lord Jesus has promised Him, He has said that He would have sent Him from your womb down to us. Father, then, open wide your heart and send Him from your holy Heavens, from your high dwelling! Do not delay any more, but fulfil the ancient promise; save us today, forever! Open and free your Love for us, in order that I too can be open and freed by You, in You. May this Word of yours today be the holy place of our encounter, be the nuptial room to be immersed in You, Oh Trinity who are Love! Come in me and I in You; dwell in me and I in You. Remain, Father! Remain Oh Son Jesus Christ! Remain forever, Consoler Spirit, do not leave me ever! Amen.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 26-27; 16: 12-15

- **In order to insert this passage in its context:**

The few verses which the Liturgy offers us today for meditation belong to the great farewell discourse which Jesus addressed to his disciples before the Passion, and which John extends from 13: 31 to the end of chapter 17. Here Jesus begins to speak of the unavoidable consequence of the following of the choice of faith and love for Him; the disciple has to be ready to suffer persecution from the world. But in this struggle, in this pain, there is a Consolation, there is a Defender, an Advocate Who witnesses for us and saves us: the gift of the Spirit illuminates the human adventure of the disciple and fills us with a living hope. He is sent to make us understand the mystery of Christ and to make us participate in it.

- **To help in the reading of the passage:**

- **15: 26-27:** Jesus announces the coming of the Holy Spirit, as Consoler, as the defending Advocate: He will be the one to act in the process of accusation which the world has against the disciples of Christ. He will be the one to make them strong in persecution. The Spirit renders witness to the world regarding the Lord Jesus; He defends Christ, who is contested, accused, rejected. But the witness of the disciples is also necessary; the Spirit has to

use them to proclaim with strength, in this world, the Lord Jesus. It is the beauty of our life transformed into a witness of love and fidelity to Christ.

- **16: 12:** Jesus places his disciples – and therefore, us too – before their condition of poverty, of incapacity, by which it is not given to them to understand well neither the words of Jesus, nor the words of Scripture. His truth is still a burden, which they cannot receive, to lift up and carry.
- **16: 13 –15:** In these last verses, the Word of Jesus reveals to the disciples which will be the action of His Spirit in them. He will be the one to guide them in the whole truth, that is, He will make them understand the mystery of Jesus in all its importance or significance, in the totality of His truth. He will guide, reveal, proclaim, illuminate, bringing to us, his disciples, the words themselves of the Father, and in this way we will be led to the encounter with God; by His grace we will be rendered capable to understand the depth of the Father and of the Son.

- **The Text:**

15 ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ And you too will be witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.

16 ¹² I still have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you to bear now. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, since all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine. ¹⁵ Everything the Father has is mine; that is why I said: all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

I keep silence. From time to time I repeat in a low voice: "Come Holy Spirit".

Some Questions

- **"When the Paraclete will come"**. Jesus immediately places me in front of a very concrete reality; He opens before me a new time, a diverse time and tells me that this is a time of waiting in my life. The Paraclete is about to come, the Holy Spirit. Why Lord, have I always waited for you for such a short time, why has my attention toward you been so weak, so hypocrite? You send someone to look for me and I am not even aware, I do not even show any interest.
- **"And you too will be witnesses"**. Jesus affirms this, addressing himself to his disciples of that time and of today. He speaks precisely to me and tells me: "You too will be a witness". I am afraid, you know it. Why lose importance before others: my companions in school, in the university, in my team, my friends, who invite me to go out with them? Why this great difficulty? Cannot I be a Christian just the same? You are my beginning and my end: you are my whole existence! How could I not be your witness, Lord? How can I continue to keep silence in this way?

- **“He will lead you to the complete truth”.** I have always programmed very minutely when I move, my decisions to change; I have always been able to do everything alone. And now, Lord, you tell me that Another One will guide me. This is not an easy choice, I confess it. But I want to try, I want to accept you, Oh, you who are Love. I allow myself to be taken hold of by your Spirit. Will He lead me to the desert, as he did with you (cf. Lk 4: 1)? Will he open my life, as he opened the womb of the Virgin Mary (Lk 1: 35)? Will he invest me as he did with Peter, with the others, with all who believed in the preaching, as it is narrated in the Acts of the Apostles? I do not know what will happen to me, but I want to say yes to you.

A Key for the Reading

- **The Holy Spirit Paraclete**

At first sight this term may seem a bit strange; it confuses me, it disorients me. I know that it is a Greek word which is quite diffused, already from ancient times, a bit in the whole Mediterranean world. Saint John used it above when he said: “I shall ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete, to be with you forever” (Jn 14: 16) and revealing that the Spirit comes to console, to remain with them, to defend and to protect. Here, though, in this verse, there seems to emerge a diverse nuance: the Spirit presents himself to us as the Advocate, that is, the One who is at our side in the judgment, in the accusation, in the tribunal of persecution. We know it, the whole story, also that of our days, bears in its heart the accusation, the contempt, the condemnation for the Lord Jesus and for all those who love Him. This is the daily story of all. At the bench of the accused, at the side of Jesus, we also sit. But not alone. We have an Advocate. The Spirit of the Lord comes and acts in the judgment in our behalf: He has discourses, renders witness, tries to convince and to prove. His work is immense in our midst, for us. Before the Father, our Advocate is Jesus, as John writes in his first Letter (1 Jn 2: 1); but before the world, our Advocate is the Spirit, whom he sends to us from the Father. We should not prepare our defense beforehand (Lk 21: 14), thinking that we can excuse ourselves alone, but we have to make space, within us, for the breath of the Holy Spirit, allow him to be the one who speaks, says, proves. Paul also had to have this hard experience; he writes this in his second Letter to Timothy: “The first time I had to present my defense, no one came into court to support me; Every one of them deserted me” (2 Tim 4: 16). and it is truly like that: there is no defense for us, no innocence, liberation, true freedom from jail, except in the intimate relationship with the Spirit of the Lord. He comes sent to us, in order that we may allow ourselves to be taken up by his presence, as in an embrace, as in an intimate and intense relationship of friendship, of trust, abandonment and love.

- **The Witness**

I begin to understand, continuing to accept, in my heart, the words of this Gospel, that the relationship of us, disciples with the Holy Spirit has as its purpose to render us capable of giving our witness on Jesus. We are united

unconditionally with the Holy Spirit, we are grasped by Him, taken up in His fire, which is the reciprocal Love of the Father and of the Son, so that we too may become luminous, that we also may be sources of love in this world.

To render witness means to affirm clearly, giving the proofs. The first one to do this, continually, is the Spirit, every place, at all times; he acts with power, in us and around us. He is the one who moves the hearts, who changes our distorted and hardened thoughts, who brings us closer, reconciles, impels to pardon, to union; He is also the One who heals the soul, the psychic, the sick body and heart. He is the One who teaches, trains and makes one docile, renders wise and simple, the poor, the pure. He gives witness of the Lord Jesus, the Savior, through all his actions, soft touches of love and of communion on our desolate and dry earth. He certifies of the Crucifix, of the Suffering one out of love; He calls out concerning the Risen One, who has conquered and stepped on death for ever; He gives witness of the Living One, of the Glorified One of the One who is with us until the end of time. Behold, this is the witness. The Spirit introduces this in our world, brings it to us; we cannot remain indifferent, continue to doze, to choose a bit here and there. He is the truth. And there is only one truth: that of God, His Son Jesus Christ. We are called to give witness of all this, that is to place, to commit our life, out of love, for this truth. To give witness is to become martyrs, out of love. Not alone; not by our own strength, by our own wisdom. "You will also be my witnesses," says Jesus. But our wisdom can only exist within the witness of the Holy Spirit; they are not parallel witnesses, but lives fused together: that of the Spirit and ours. This takes place before the infinite tribunals of the world, every day of our life, then, it becomes a sacred place, almost a sanctuary, of the witness to the Lord Jesus. It is not important to carry out great enterprises, to show wisdom and intelligence, to attract crowds of people; no, one thing alone suffices: to tell the world that the Lord is alive, that he is here, in our midst and to proclaim his mercy, his infinite love.

- **The Father**

The contact with the Holy Spirit, to allow ourselves to be embraced and invaded by Him, leads us to the Lord Jesus; it leads us to his Heart, to the source of His love. And from there we go to the Father. We had nothing, we were not able to bring anything with us, coming into this world and now, behold, we are loaded with gifts! Impossible to contain them all. It is necessary to allow them to overflow, to flow outside, toward the brothers and sisters whom we meet, or even if only to have a brief experience of life.

The Spirit speaks of Jesus and uses the words of the Father; He repeats to us what He hears from the womb of the Father. His dwelling is the Father, his house; and coming to us, the Spirit brings with Him the print, the seal of that dwelling, of that place of infinite communion, which is the womb of the Father. And we understand well that this is our house; we recognize the place of our origin and of our end. Receiving the Spirit of Jesus we rediscover that we also come from the Father, that we are born in Him and we live in Him. If we seek ourselves, if we want to find the way, the sense of our life here, all this is written in the words which the Spirit pronounces for us, within us,

concerning us. It is truly necessary to have a great silence in order to be able to listen to understand him. It is necessary to go back to the house, to rethink finally in our Father and to say, within ourselves: "Yes, it is now enough! I have wandered far away from you for a long time, I have been lost... I will go back to my Father". I see how many wonders the Spirit of truth can act, that my Lord Jesus Christ sends me from the Father. It will not be Pentecost, if I do not allow myself to be taken up by Him, to be led by Him to the womb of the Father, where Christ is already waiting for me, where the fire of the Holy Spirit is already burning for me.

A Moment of Prayer

Psalm 68

The tenderness of the Father is the dwelling of the poor

Response: Abbà Father, I am your son!

I pray to you, Yahweh,
at the time of your favor;
in your faithful love answer me,
in the constancy of your saving power.

Answer me, Yahweh, for your faithful love is generous; in your tenderness turn towards me;

do not turn away from your servant,

be quick to answer me, for I am in trouble. Come to my side, redeem me,
ransom me because of my enemies. The humble have seen and are glad. Let

your courage revive,
you who seek God.

For God listens to the poor,

he has never scorned his captive people. Let heaven and earth and seas,

and all that stirs in them, acclaim him! For God will save Zion,

and rebuild the cities of Judah,

and people will live there on their own land; the descendants of his servants will inherit it, and those who love his name will dwell there.

Final Prayer

Thank you, Father, for the coming of the Consoler, the Advocate; thank you for his witness of Jesus in the world and in me, in my life. Thank you because it is He who makes me capable to receive and to bear the glorious weight of your Son and my Lord. Thank you, because He guides me in truth, He hands me over to the whole truth and reveals to me the Word which you yourself pronounce.

Thank you, my Father, because in your goodness and tenderness you have joined me, today and you have attracted me to you, you have made me enter in the house of your heart; you have immersed me in the fire of the Trinitarian love, where you and your Son Jesus are only one in the infinite kiss of the Holy Spirit. I am also here and because of this my joy is overflowing. I pray you, Father, make me give this joy to all, in the loving witness of Jesus, the Savior,

every day of my life. Amen.

Monday, May 20, 2024

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church

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

- In 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 21, 2024

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 - Mk 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it. He was teaching his disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him. They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they remained silent. For they had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest. Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." Taking a child, he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."

Reflection

Today's Gospel narrates the second announcement of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus. Like the first announcement (Mk 8:27-38), the disciples were terrified and afraid. They do not understand the words about the cross because they are not capable of understanding or accepting a Messiah who becomes the servant of the brothers. They continue to dream of a *glorious* Messiah, and besides that, they show a great incoherence. When Jesus announces His Passion and Death, they discuss who among them will be the greatest. Jesus wants to serve, yet they only think of commanding! Ambition leads them to promote themselves at the cost of Jesus. Even to the present time, this same desire of self-promotion exists in our communities.

- In the time of Jesus as well as in that of Mark, there was the "yeast" of a dominating ideology. Today, the ideology of business, consumerism, and television shows, all profoundly influence the thoughts and actions of people. At the time of Mark, the communities were not always capable of maintaining a critical attitude regarding the assimilation of the ideology of the Roman Empire. Do we have the same problem today?
- Mark 9:30-32: *The announcement of the Cross*. Jesus goes across Galilee, but He does not want people to know it. He is busy with the formation of the disciples and He speaks with them about the Cross. He says that according to the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 53:1-10), the Son of Man has to be handed over and condemned to death. This indicates the orientation of Jesus toward the Bible, whether in the carrying out of His own mission or in the formation given to His disciples. He drew His teaching from the prophecies. As in the first announcement (Mk 8:32), the disciples listen to Him, but they do not understand what He says about the Cross. But they do not ask for any clarification. They are afraid to show their ignorance! So many are like this

today. They read or listen and do not ask questions. The result can be either ignorance, shallow understanding, or imaginative interpretations that are incorrect.

- Mark 9:33-34: *The competitive mentality.* When they got home, Jesus asked: “*What were you arguing about on the road?*” They did not answer. It is the silence of the one who feels guilty, “*on the road, in fact, they had been arguing which of them was the greatest*”. Jesus is a good pedagogue. He does not intervene immediately. He knows how to wait for the opportune moment to fight against the influence of the ideology in those whom He is forming. The competitive mentality *and* prestige, which characterized the society of the Roman Empire, was already penetrating into the small community which was just being formed! Behold the contrast: incoherence: Jesus is concerned with being the Messiah Servant and they think only in who is the greatest. Jesus tries to descend, they think of going up!
- Mark 9:35-37: *To serve instead of commanding.* The response of Jesus is a summary of the witness of life which He Himself was giving from the beginning: *If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all!* The last one does not win a prize nor obtain a reward. He is a useless servant (cfr. Lk 17:10). Power must be used not to ascend and dominate, but to descend and serve. This is the point on which Jesus insists the most and which He gives a greater witness (cf. Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28; Jn 13:1-16). Then Jesus took a little child whom He set among them. A person who only thinks to go up and to dominate would not lend much attention to little ones and to children. But Jesus overturns everything! He says: “*Anyone who welcomes a little child such as this in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes not me but the one who sent me*”. He identifies Himself with little ones. Anyone who welcomes the little ones in the name of Jesus welcomes God Himself!
- A person is not a saint and is not renewed by the simple notion of “*following Jesus*”. In the midst of the disciples, as always, the “*yeast of Herod and of the Pharisees*” (Mk 8:15) could be observed. In today’s Gospel, Jesus appears as a teacher forming His followers. “*To follow*” was a term that formed part of the educational system of that time. It was used to indicate the relationship between the disciple and the teacher. The relationship teacher-disciple is different from that of professor-pupil. The pupils go to the class of a professor in a defined subject. The disciples “*follow*” the teacher and live with him, twenty-four hours a day. In this “*living together*” with Jesus during three years, the disciples will receive their formation. Tomorrow’s Gospel will give us another quite concrete example of how Jesus formed His disciples.

Personal Questions

- Jesus wants to lower Himself and serve. The disciples want to ascend and to dominate. What is my motivation in life? Does it match with all of my actions? Is it consistent with the instructions from Jesus?

- Do I follow Jesus and be with Him twenty-four hours a day, and allow His way of living to become my way of living and of living together with others?
- Do I follow Jesus by shuffling along the way, not really paying attention, “going along for the ride”? Or am I eager, looking and listening, trying not to miss a moment with Him?
- Many have leadership roles today in society: as a manager, or parent, or teacher, or official. How does one serve and be effective and responsible in that role and still “be last” and serve?
- How does a child learn? By watching every little action the parent does and imitating it! This how to learn as a disciple. Are we learning from Jesus by imitating His every action like children do, or are we too “adult” for that?

Concluding Prayer

May the words of my mouth always find favor, and the whispering of my heart, in Your presence, Yahweh, my rock, my redeemer. (Ps 19:14)

Wednesday, May 22, 2024

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 - Mark 9:38-40

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us." Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us."

Reflection

Today's Gospel narrates quite a beautiful and actual example of the pedagogy of Jesus. It shows us how He helped His disciples to perceive and to overcome the “yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod”.

- Mk 9:38-40: *A closed mentality: He was not one of ours* “Someone who did not belong to the community used the name of Jesus to drive out devils. John, the disciple, sees this and forbids it: *We have stopped him because he was not one of us.* In the name of the community he forbids that the other one can do

a good deed! He thinks that being a disciple, he can have a monopoly on Jesus, and because of this, he wants to forbid that others use the name of Jesus to do good. This was the closed mentality of the “chosen People, a separated People!” Jesus responds: “*You must not stop him; no one who works a miracle in my name could soon afterwards speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us.*” (Mk 9:40). It would be very difficult to find a more ecumenical affirmation than this affirmation of Jesus. For Jesus, what is important is not if the person forms part of the community or not, but rather if the person does the good which the community should do.

- *A picture of Jesus, formator of His disciples.* Jesus, the Master, is the axis, the center, and the model of formation given to the disciples. By His attitudes He is an example of the Kingdom. He embodies the love of God and reveals it (Mk 6:31; Mt 10:30; Lk 15:11-32). Many small gestures show this witness of life with which Jesus marked His presence in the life of the disciples, preparing them for life and for their mission. This was His way of giving a human form to the experience which He had of God, the Father. The following is a picture of Jesus, the formator of His disciples:
 - He involves them in the mission (Mk 6:7; Lk 9:1-2; 10:1),
 - when they return He reviews with them all that they have lived (Lk 10:17-20)
 - He corrects them when they fail and want to be the first ones (Mk 9:33-35; 10:14-15)
 - He waits for the opportune moment to correct them (Lk 9:46-48; Mk 10:14-15)
 - He helps them to discern (Mk 9:18-19)
 - He challenges them when they are slow (Mk 4:13; 8:14-21)
 - He prepares them to face the conflict (Jn 16:33; Mt 10:17-25)
 - He orders them to observe reality (Mk 8:27-29; Jn 4:35; Mt 16:1-3)
 - He reflects with them on questions of the moment (Lk 13:1-5)
 - He confronts them with the needs of the people (Jn 6:5)
 - He teaches them that the needs of the people are above the ritual prescriptions (Mt 12:7-12)
 - He meets alone with them so as to be able to instruct them (Mk 4:34; 7:17; 9:30-31; 10:10; 13:3)
 - He knows how to listen even if the dialogue is difficult (Jn 4:7-42)
 - He helps them to accept themselves (Lk 22:32)
 - He is demanding and asks them to leave everything out of love for Him (Mk 10:17-31)
 - He is severe concerning hypocrisy (Lk 11:37-53)
 - He asks more questions than gives responses (Mk 8:17-21)
 - He is firm and does not allow himself to deviate from the right path (Mk 8:33; Lk 9:54)

- He prepares them for conflict and persecution (Mt 10:16-25).
- Formation was not, in the first place, the transmission of truths to be remembered, but the communication of the new experience of God and the life which radiates from Jesus for the disciples. The community which was forming around Jesus was the expression of this new experience. Formation led people to have a different way of looking, to have different attitudes. It gave them a new conscience concerning the mission and concerning themselves. It helped them to place themselves at the side of the excluded. And soon afterwards, it produced “conversion” as a consequence of the acceptance of the Good News (Mk 1:15).

Personal Questions

- *“Anyone who is not against us is for us.”* How do we define “for us” and “against us” today with so many variations in Christian beliefs?
- If someone selectively and creatively creates their own “doctrine” and interpretations of Jesus’ teachings, are they “for us” or “against us”?
- How does my formation in Jesus take place in my life? Is it a serious, ongoing process, or whatever comes along?
- Go back to the list of how Jesus does formation. Read each, adding the question “how does He do this for me personally?” at the end of each line. Then answer each for your own formation.

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)

Thursday, May 23, 2024

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 - Mark 9:41-50

Jesus said to his disciples: "Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. "Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another."

Reflection

Today's Gospel narrates some advice from Jesus on the relationship of adults with the little ones and the excluded. At that time, many persons were excluded and marginalized. They could not participate. Many of them would lose their faith. The text on which we are going to meditate now contains strange affirmations which, if taken literally, cause perplexity in the reader.

- Mark 9:41: *A glass of water will be rewarded.* A phrase from Jesus is inserted here: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not lose his reward. Two thoughts: 1) "Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink". Jesus is going to Jerusalem to give His life. A gesture of great donation! But He does not forget the small gestures in life each day: a cup of water, an act of acceptance or kindness, to give alms, so many gestures. Anyone who rejects and despises the brick will never be able to construct a house! 2) "...because you belong to Christ": Jesus identifies Himself with us who want to belong to Him. This means that for Him we have great value. The word here is *because*, not *if*. To give a cup of water *because* the receiver belongs to Christ also acknowledges Christ! In this act of kindness the giver is also acknowledging Christ by his action.
- Mark 9:42: *Who is a cause of scandal for these little ones.* *Scandal*, literally, it is a stone along the road, a stone in the shoe. It is what leads a person away from the right path. *To scandalize the little ones* is to be the cause of why the little ones go away from the right path and lose their faith in God. Anyone who does this receives the following sentence: "*It would have been better to be thrown into the sea with a great millstone hung round his neck!*" Jesus identifies Himself with the little ones (Mt 23:40-45). Today, in the whole world, many little ones, many poor people, are leaving the traditional churches. Every year, in Latin America, approximately three million people leave to other churches. They cannot believe what we profess! Why does this happen? Is this an action taken in full knowledge and as a definitive statement? Is it based on a lack of understanding or teaching? Up to what point are we to be blamed for this? Do we also merit having a millstone round our neck?
- Mark 9:43-48: *To cut off your hand and your foot and to tear out your eye.* Jesus orders the person to cut off the hand, the foot, to tear out the eye, in the case

in which they are cause of scandal. And He says: “*It is better to enter into life or into the Kingdom with one foot (hand, eye) than to be thrown into hell with two feet, (hands, eyes)*”. These phrases are not to be taken literally, but rather, that there is nothing so important that it should be retained if it were to keep a person from entering the Kingdom. They mean that the person has to be rooted in his/her choice of God and of the Gospel. It might seem obvious that a person can’t be more attached to something than their own hand or foot, but many are – to their money, their car or house, their social position, or even more trivial things. It is better to cut off the things that are not in alignment with the priorities of the Kingdom.

- The expression “*hell*”, where their worm will never die nor their fire be put out”, is an image to indicate the situation of a person who remains without God. “*Gehenna*” was the name of a valley near Jerusalem. Jeremiah condemns it (II Kings 23:10; Jer 7:31; 32:35 et al.; see *Moloch) as a place where children were cult sacrificed, which is the predominant rabbinical thought. Rabbi David Kimhi’s commentary (ca. 1200 AD) stated it was where the trash of the city was thrown and where a fire was always burning to burn the trash. This place, terrible either way, full of stench, was used by the people to symbolize the situation of the person who did not participate in the Kingdom of God.
- Mark 9:49-50: *Salt and Peace*. These two verses help us to understand the severe words on scandal. Jesus says: “Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another!” The community, in which the members live in *peace with one another*, is like a bit of salt which gives flavor to all the meal. To live in peace and fraternally in the community is the salt that gives flavor to the life of the people of the community. It is a sign of the *Kingdom*, a revelation of the Good News of God. Are we salt? The salt which does not give flavor is good for nothing! Has our salt become insipid?
- *Jesus accepts and defends the life of the little ones*. Several times, Jesus insists that little ones should be accepted. “Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me” (Mk 9:37). Anyone who gives a cup of water to one of these little ones will not lose his reward (Mt 10:42). He asks not to despise little ones (Mt 18:10). And at the final judgment the just will be received because they would have given something to eat “to one of these little ones” (Mt 25:40). If Jesus insists so much on acceptance of the little ones, it is because there are many simple people considered less, who are not accepted! In fact, women and children were not taken into account (Mt 14 21; 15:38), they were despised (Mt 18:10) and reduced to silence (Mt 21:15-16). Even the Apostles prevented the children from getting close to Jesus (Mt 19:13-14). In the name of the Law of God, misinterpreted by the religious authority of the time, many good people were excluded. Instead of welcoming the excluded, the law was used to legitimize the exclusion. In the Gospels, the expression “little ones” (in Greek it is said *elachisto, mikroi or nepioi*), sometimes indicates “the children”, and other times it indicates the sections excluded by society. It is not easy to discern. Sometimes the “little ones” in the Gospel means “the children”. This because *the children* belonged to the category of the “little ones”, of the excluded. Besides, it is not always easy to

discern between what comes from the time of Jesus and that which comes from the time of the communities for which the Gospels were written. Even if things were like this, what is clear is the context of exclusion which reigned at the time and which the first communities kept from Jesus: He places Himself on the side of the little ones and the excluded, and takes up their defense.

Personal Questions

- Today in our society and in our community, who are the little ones and the excluded? How are they accepted on our part?
- "Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me" (Mk 9:37). How does this apply to welcoming a child versus abortion in our society?
- We spoke of "Anyone who is not against us is for us" yesterday, and it's relation to other Christian doctrinal interpretations. We talk about ecumenism. Today we talked about so many people leaving to other churches. These are various views on the same thing. How do they fit together?
- "A millstone round the neck". Does my behavior deserve a millstone or a cord round the neck? What does the behavior of our community deserve?

Concluding Prayer

The Lord forgives all your offenses, cures all your diseases,
He redeems your life from the abyss,
crowns you with faithful love and tenderness. (Ps 103:3-4)

Friday, May 24, 2024

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 - Mark 10:1-12

Jesus came into the district of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds gathered around him and, as was his custom, he again taught them. The Pharisees approached him and asked, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" They were testing him. He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?" They replied, "Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her." But Jesus told them, "Because of the hardness of your

hearts he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate." In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

Reflection

Yesterday's Gospel indicated the advice given by Jesus on the relationship between adults and children, between the great and the little ones in society. Today's Gospel advises us how the relationship between man and woman should be, between wife and husband.

- Mark 10:1-2: the question of the Pharisees: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" The question is a malicious one. It wants to put Jesus to the test. This is a sign that Jesus had a different opinion, because if this was not so the Pharisees would not have questioned Him on this matter. They do not ask if it is lawful for the wife to divorce the husband. That was not allowed. This is a clear sign of the strong dominion of men and the marginalization of women in the society of that time.
- Mark 10:3-9: The answer of Jesus: man cannot divorce his wife. Instead of responding, Jesus asks: "What did Moses command you?" The Law permitted a man to draw up a writ of dismissal in cases of divorce. This permission reveals the reigning machismo of the time. Man could divorce his wife, but the woman did not have the same right. Jesus explains that Moses acted that way because they were so hardhearted, but that the intention of God was different when He created the human being. Jesus goes back to the plan of the Creator and denies to man the right to divorce his wife. He takes away the privilege of man regarding his wife and asks for the maximum equality between the two.
- Mark 10:10,12: Equality of man and woman. At home the disciples asked Jesus something on this point. Jesus draws the conclusions and reaffirms the equality of rights and duties between man and woman. The Gospel of Matthew adds a comment of the disciples on this point. They say: "If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry" (Mt 19:10). Jesus goes to the very depth of the question and says that there are only three cases in which a person is permitted not to get married: "Not everyone can understand it but only those to whom it is granted. In fact there are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb; there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can. (Mt 19:11-12). The three cases are: "(a) impotence, (b) castration, and (c) for the Kingdom. Not to get married only because man does not want to lose dominion over woman, this is not permitted by the New Law of Love! Matrimony as well as celibacy should be at the service of the Kingdom and not at the service of egoistic or selfish interests. Neither one of these can be a reason to maintain

man's dominion on woman. Jesus changed the relationship man-woman, wife- husband.

Personal Questions

- Equality in society is always framed in terms of power. Yet, this last week we have read almost every day about service, humility, and welcoming children. Jesus taught us to serve, to be humble, to welcome and care for the children in order to reach the Kingdom of God. It is not for the powerful. Who is closer to the Kingdom?
- In the life of my family and of my community, do we focus on power, or on service and humility as a basis for equality?
- Within community, how important to equality is listening, obedience, and prayer (*obsculta, oboedientia, oratio*) and what roles and purpose do each of these contribute to equality?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is tenderness and pity,
slow to anger and rich in faithful love; His indignation does not last for ever,
nor His resentment remain for all time. (Ps 103:8-9)

Saturday May 25, 2024

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 - Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing children to Jesus that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced the children and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

Reflection

The Gospel of two days ago indicated the advice of Jesus concerning the relationship of the adults with little ones and with the excluded (Mk 9:41-50). Yesterday's Gospel indicated the advice on the relationship between man and woman, husband and wife (Mk 10:1-12). Today's Gospel indicates the advice on the relationship between parents and sons. Jesus asked for the greatest acceptance for the little ones and the excluded. In the relationship man-woman, He asked for the greatest equality. Now, with the sons and their mother, He asks for the greatest tenderness.

- Mark 10:13-16: Receive the Kingdom like a child. People brought little children to Him, for Him to touch them. The disciples wanted to prevent this. Why? The text does not say it. Perhaps because according to the ritual norms of the time, the small children with their mothers lived almost constantly the legal impurity. To touch them meant to become impure! If they touched Jesus, He would become impure! But Jesus does not feel uncomfortable with this ritual norm of legal purity. He corrects the disciples and welcomes the mothers with the children. He touches them, embraces them saying: "Let the little children come to me, do not stop them: for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs". And He comments: "In truth I tell you, anyone who does not accept the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it". And then Jesus embraces the children and blesses them, and laid His hands on them. What does this phrase mean? (a) The children receive everything from their parents. They cannot merit what they receive, but live from gratuitous love. (b) The parents receive the children as a gift from God and take care of them with the greatest possible love. The concern of the parents is not to dominate the children, but to love them, educate them in a way in which they can grow and be fulfilled! This is the relationship we have with our Father in Heaven! We must be just like these children.
- A sign of the Kingdom: To welcome the little ones and the excluded. There are many signs of the acting presence of the Kingdom in the life and the activity of Jesus. One of these is the way of welcoming, of accepting the little ones and the children:
 - To welcome them and not scandalize them. One of the hardest words of Jesus was against those who cause scandal to the little ones, that is, who are the reason so that the little ones no longer believe in God. For them it is better to have a millstone hung round their neck and be thrown into the sea (Mk 9:42; Lk 17:2; Mt 18:6).
 - To identify oneself with the little ones. Jesus embraces the little ones and identifies Himself with them. Anyone who receives a child, "receives Me" (Mk 9:37). "And as long as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to Me". (Mt 25:40).
 - To become like children. Jesus asks the disciples to become like children and to accept the Kingdom as they do. Otherwise it is not possible to enter into the Kingdom (Mk 10:15; Mt 18:3; Lk 9:46-48). He makes the children teachers of adults! And that is not normal. Generally, we do the contrary.
 - To defend the right that children have to shout and yell. When Jesus, entering into the Temple, turned over the tables of the money changers,

the children were those who shouted the most: “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Mt 21:15). Criticized by the high priests and by the Scribes, Jesus defends them and in defending them He recalls the Scriptures (Mt 21:16).

- To be pleasing for the Kingdom present in little children. Jesus’ joy is great, when He perceives that the children, the little ones, understand the things of the Kingdom which He announced to the people“. “I bless you, Father!” (Mt 11:25-26). Jesus recognizes that the little ones understand the things of the Kingdom better than the doctors!
- To welcome, accept and take care. Many are the little children and the young whom Jesus accepts, takes care of and raises from the death: the daughter of Jairus who was 12 years old (Mk 5:41-42), the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mk 7:29-30), the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:14-15), the epileptic boy (Mk 9:25-26), the son of the Centurion (Lk 7:9-10), the son of the public officer (Jn 4:50), the boy with the five loaves of bread and two fish (Jn 6:9).

Personal Questions

- In our society and in our community, who are the little ones and the excluded? How do we welcome and accept them?
- What have I learned in my life from children concerning the Kingdom of God?
- There are so many ways modern adults are not like children. What can I do to become more child-like for the Father and in relation to my peers; imitative, obedient, humble, grateful, innocent? Do I even want to?
- I place myself as innocent, obedient, humble, and grateful into my world of friends, my business, recreation and my responsibilities. What happens? How am I perceived by the world around me? If I continue to be this way, how would this make a better world?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, I am calling, hurry to Me, listen to my voice when I call to You.
May my prayer be like incense in Your presence,
my uplifted hands like the evening sacrifice. (Ps 141:1-2)

Sunday, May 26, 2024

Solemnity of the MOST HOLY TRINITY

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 liturgy of Trinity Sunday uses the closing verses of Matthew's Gospel (Mt 28; 16- 20). In the beginning of the Gospel, Matthew introduced Jesus as Immanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). Here, in the last verse of his Gospel, Jesus communicates the same truth: "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20). This was the central point of the faith of the communities in the eighties (AD), and continues to be the central point of our faith. Jesus is the Immanuel, God with us. This is also the perspective for our adoration of the Most Blessed Trinity.

Gospel Text – Matthew. 28: 16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they all saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

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 drew your attention most in this text? Why?
- What kind of image of Jesus does this text convey to us?
- Is this the first point where Jesus says "make disciples of all nations" rather than just having been sent to the House of Israel? Why now?
- Some translations use the phrase "they doubted" and others use "some doubted". Does this make a difference in meaning or what we take away from it?
- How is the mystery of the Trinity presented in this text?

- In Acts 1:5, Jesus proclaims a baptism in the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:38, Peter speaks of a baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus. Here the text speaks of a baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. What is the difference among these three affirmations, or are they speaking of the same baptism?
- h) What, exactly, is the mission that Jesus gives the Eleven? What is the mission of our communities today as disciples of Jesus? According to the text, where do we find strength and courage to fulfill our mission?

A Key to the Reading

to enter deeper into the theme.

The Context:

Matthew writes for the Judeo-Christian communities of Syria and Palestine. They were criticized by the Jewish brethren who said that Jesus could not be the promised Messiah and therefore, their manner of living was wrong. Matthew tries to uphold their faith and helps them understand that Jesus is indeed the Messiah who came to fulfill the promises God made in the past through the prophets. A summary of Matthew's message to the communities is found in Jesus' final promise to the disciples, the subject of our meditation on this Trinity Sunday.

Commentary on the Text:

- **Matthew 28:16: the first and last appearances of the risen Jesus to the Eleven disciples.**

First, Jesus appears to the women (Mt 28:9) and, through the women, tells the men that they had to go to Galilee to see Him once more. It was in Galilee that they received their first call (Mt 4:12.18) and their first official mission (Mt 10:1-16). And it is there, in Galilee, that everything will begin again: a new call and a new mission! As in the Old Testament, important events always take place on the mountain, the Mountain of God.

- **Matthew 28:17: Some doubted.**

When the disciples see Jesus, they prostrate themselves before Him. This is a response of those who believe and welcome God's presence, even though it might surprise and be beyond human ability to comprehend. So, some doubt. The four Gospels emphasize the doubt and incredulity of the disciples when confronted with the resurrection of Jesus (Mt 28:17; Mk 16:11:13,14; Lk 24:11,24:37-38; Jn 20:25). This serves to show that the apostles were not naïve and encourages the communities of the eighties (AD) which still had doubts.

- **Matthew 28:18: Jesus' authority.**

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me". This is a solemn declaration very much like the other affirmation: "Everything has been entrusted to Me by My Father" (Mt 11:27). There are other similar affirmations

by Jesus in John's Gospel: "Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into His hands" (Jn 13:3) and "All I have is yours, and all you have is Mine" (Jn 17:10). This same conviction of faith in Jesus appears in the canticles preserved in Paul's letters (Eph 1:3-14; Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20). The fullness of divinity is manifested in Jesus (Col 1:19). This authority of Jesus, born of His oneness with the Father, is the basis for the mission that the disciples are about to receive as well as our faith in the Most Blessed Trinity.

- **Matthew 28:19-20^a: The triple mission.**

Jesus conveys a triple mission: (1) to make disciples of all nations, (2) to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and (3) to teach them to observe all the commands He gave them.

- To become a disciple: The disciple lives with the master and thus learns from this daily living together. The disciple forms a community with the master and follows him, seeking to imitate his way of living and of living together in obedience. The disciple is someone who does not place absolute value on his/her manner of thinking, but is always open to learning. A disciple is also active. It is not a passive role, like watching television. Like the "servant of Yahweh", the disciple strains his/her ear to listen to what God has to say (Is 50:4).
- To baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: The Good News of God that Jesus brought to us is the revelation that God is Father and that thus, we are all brothers and sisters. Jesus lived and obtained this new experience of God for us through His death and resurrection. This is the new Spirit that He spread over His followers on the day of Pentecost. In those days, to be baptized in someone's name meant to publicly assume the commitment to observe the proclaimed message. Thus, to be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit meant the same as being baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38) and the same as being baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). It meant, and still means, publicly assuming the commitment to live the Good News that Jesus brought, to reveal through prophetic brotherhood that God is Father, to struggle to overcome divisions and separations among people, and to affirm that all are children of God.
- To teach to observe all the commandments that Jesus gave us: We do not teach new doctrines nor do we teach our own doctrines, but we reveal the face of the God whom Jesus revealed to us. It is from this revelation that comes all the doctrine passed on to us by the apostles.
- **Matthew 28:20b: God is with us always.**

This is the great promise, the synthesis of all that was revealed from the beginning. It is the summary of the name of God, the summary of the whole of the Old Testament, of all the promises, of all the desires of the human heart. It is the final summary of the Good News of God passed on to us in Matthew's Gospel.

The History of the Revelation of the Name of God, One and Three:

When one hears a name for the first time, it is just a name. The more we live with the person the more the name becomes a synthesis of that person. The longer we live with the person, the greater the significance and value of the name. In the Bible, God has many names and titles that express what He means or what He can mean for us. God's personal name is YHWH. We have already come across this name in the second narration of creation in Genesis (Gen 2:4). The deep meaning of this name (the result of long living together through the centuries, which also went through the "dark night" of the crisis of the exile in Babylon) is described in the book of Exodus on the occasion of the calling of Moses (Ex 3:7-15). Living with God through the centuries endowed this name of God with meaning and depth.

God said to Moses: "Go and free my people" (cf. Ex 3:10). Moses is afraid and justifies himself by feigning humility: "Who am I?" (Ex 3:11). God answers: "I shall be with you" (Ex 3:12). Even though he knows that God will be with him in his mission of liberating the people oppressed by Pharaoh, Moses tries to excuse himself again: he asks God's name. God replies by simply reaffirming what He had already said, "I AM WHO AM". In other words, God is saying I am certainly with you and you cannot doubt this. The text then goes on: "You are to say to the people of Israel 'I AM has sent me to you!'" The text concludes, "This is My name for all time: by this name I shall be invoked for all generations to come" (Ex 3:14-15).

This brief text, which is deeply theological, expresses the deepest conviction of faith of the people of God: God is with us. He is Immanuel, an intimate, friendly, liberating presence. All this is contained in the four letters of the name YHWH, which we pronounce as Yahweh: the One who is in our midst. This is the same certainty that Jesus communicates to His disciples in His last promise on the mountain: "I am with you always, yes, to the end of time" (Mt 28:20). The Bible is insistent on this one thing: the Name of God, that is, the presence of God in our midst expressed in the name Yahweh: "He is in our midst". In the Old Testament alone, the name Yahweh appears more than 7000 times! It is the wick of the candle around which gathers the wax of the stories.

Something tragic happened (and is still happening) when, in later centuries during the exile in Babylonia, fundamentalism, moralism, and ritualism gradually presented that living, friendly, present and loved face as a rigid and severe figure, unfittingly hung on the walls of sacred scripture, a figure that aroused fear and placed a distance between God and His people. Thus during the last centuries before Christ, the name YHWH could not be pronounced. Instead, the word Adonai was used, a translation of Kyrios, which means Lord. A cult centered on the observance of the laws, a cult centered on the temple in Jerusalem and a racially closed system, created a new kind of slavery that stifled the mystical experience and withheld contact with the living God. The Name that should have been like transparent glass which revealed the Good News of the friendly and attractive face of God, became a mirror that reflected only the face of the one who looked into it. A tragic deceit of self-contemplation! They no longer drank at the source, but drank water bottled by the doctors of the law. To this day we go on drinking water kept in storage, rather than water from the source.

By His death and resurrection, Jesus did away with small-mindedness (Col 2:14), broke the mirror of idolatrous self-contemplation, and opened a new window

where God shows His face and draws us to Himself. Citing a canticle of the community, St. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, "God raised Him high and gave Him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11). On the day of Pentecost, Peter ended his first speech by revealing what the great discovery of the experience of the resurrection meant for him, "Let all the people know: God has constituted Jesus Christ Lord". Jesus who died and rose again, is the revelation that God, the same as always, is and continues to be YHWH (Adonai, Kyrios, Lord), an intimate presence, friendly and liberating in the midst of his people, conqueror of every barrier, even death. With the coming of Jesus, and in Jesus, the God of the forebears, who seemed so distant and severe, gained the features of a good Father, full of kindness. Abba! Our Father! For us Christians, the most important thing is not to confess that Jesus is God, but to witness that God is Jesus! God reveals Himself in Jesus. Jesus is the key to a new reading of the Old Testament. He is the new name of God.

This new revelation of the name of God in Jesus is the fruit of the completely free gift of the love of God, of His faithfulness to His Name. This faithfulness can be ours too, thanks to the complete and radical obedience of Jesus: "Obedient unto death, death on the cross" (Phil 2:8). Jesus identified Himself completely with the will of God. He says, "What the Father has told Me is what I speak" (Jn 12:50). "My food is to do the will of the one who sent Me" (Jn 4:34). That is why Jesus is the completely transparent revelation of the Father, "To have seen Me is to have seen the Father!" (Jn 14:9). In Him dwelt "the fullness of the divinity" (Col 1:19). "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30). Such obedience is not easy. Jesus went through difficult moments when He exclaimed: "Let this chalice pass me by!" (Mk 14:36). As the letter to the Hebrews says, "He offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears to the One who had the power to save Him out of death" (Heb 5:7). He overcame by means of prayer. That is why He became full revelation and manifestation of the Name, of what the Name means for us. Jesus' obedience is not a disciplinary one, but a prophetic one. It is an action that reveals the Father. Through obedience, chains were broken and the veil that hid the face of God was torn. A new way to God opened to us. He earned for us the gift of the Spirit when we ask the Father for the Spirit in His name in prayer (Lk 11:13). The Spirit is living water earned for us by His resurrection (Jn 7:39). It is through the Spirit that He teaches us, revealing the face of God the Father (Jn 14:26; 16:12-13).

Psalm 145 (144)

Jesus Establishes the Kingdom

I will extol Thee, my God and King, and bless Thy name for ever and ever. Every day I will bless Thee,
and praise Thy name for ever and ever.
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable.
One generation shall laud Thy works to another, and shall declare Thy mighty acts.

On the glorious splendor of Thy majesty, and on Thy wondrous works, I will meditate.

Men shall proclaim the might of Thy terrible acts, and I will declare Thy greatness.

They shall pour forth the fame of Thy abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.

The Lord is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and His compassion is over all that He has made. All Thy works shall give thanks to Thee, O Lord, and all Thy saints shall bless Thee! They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom, and tell of Thy power,

to make known to the sons of men Thy mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of Thy kingdom.

Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,

and Thy dominion endures throughout all generations.

The Lord is faithful in all His words, and gracious in all His deeds. The Lord upholds all who are falling,

and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to Thee,

and Thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest Thy hand,

Thou satisfy the desire of every living thing.

The Lord is just in all His ways, and kind in all His doings.

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.

He fulfills the desire of all who fear Him, He also hears their cry, and saves them.

The Lord preserves all who love Him; but all the wicked He will destroy.

My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,

and let all flesh 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 27, 2024

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 10:17-27

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother." He replied and said to him, "Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement, his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, "Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God." They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For men it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God."

Reflection

The Gospel today narrates two events: (a) it tells the story of a rich man who asks how to obtain eternal life (Mk 10:17-22), and (b) Jesus warns on the danger of riches (Mk 10:23-27). The rich man does not accept the proposal of Jesus because he was very rich. A rich person believes he is protected by the security which is given to him by his riches. He has difficulty opening his hand and detaching himself from this security. He seizes the advantage of his goods, lives being concerned about defending his own interests. A poor person is not accustomed with this concern. But there may also be some poor people who have the mentality of the rich. Then, the desire for riches creates in them dependence and also makes them become slaves of consumerism. They have no time to dedicate themselves to the service of neighbor. Keeping these problems in mind, problems of persons and of countries, let us read and meditate on the text of the rich man.

- Mark 10:17-19: The observance of the commandments and eternal life. A person came up to Jesus and asked: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" The Gospel of Matthew tells us that it was the case of a young man (Mt 19:20-22). Jesus responds abruptly: "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone!" Jesus takes away the attention from Himself to direct it toward God, because what is important is to do God's will, to reveal the Father's plan. Then Jesus affirms: "You know the commandments: You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother". It is important to always observe the response of Jesus. The young man had asked something concerning eternal life. He wanted to live together with God. But Jesus does not mention the first three commandments which define our relationship with God! He mentioned only those which indicate respect for the life lived together with others. According to Jesus, we can only be well

with God if we know how to be well with our neighbor. It serves nothing to deceive ourselves. The door to reach God is our neighbor.

- Mark 10:20: What good is it to observe the commandments? The young man answered that he observed the commandments since his earliest days. What is strange is what follows. He wanted to know which was the way to eternal life. Now, the way of life was, and continues to be, to do God's will expressed in the commandments. It means that he observed the commandments without knowing for what purpose. Otherwise, he would not have asked any questions. This is what can happen today to many Catholics: they do not know what it means to be Catholic. "I was born in a Catholic country; this is why I am Catholic!" It is mindless!
- Mark 10:21-22: To share the goods with the poor and to follow Jesus. Hearing the response of the young man, "Jesus looked at him and was full of love for him and said: You need to do one more thing: go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you will have a treasure in heaven, then come, follow Me!" The observance of the commandments is only the first step of a stairway that goes higher. Jesus asks more! The observance of the commandments prepares the person for the total gift of self on behalf of neighbor. Jesus asks for much, but he asks it with much love. The rich young man does not accept the proposal of Jesus and goes away not just because he was a man of great wealth, but because he valued that wealth above all others.
- Mark 10:23-27: The camel and the eye of the needle. After the young man left, Jesus commented on His decision: "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were astounded. Jesus repeats the same phrase and adds: "It is easier that a camel passes through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

The expression "enter the kingdom" not only indicates in the first place entrance into heaven after death, but also and above all, the entrance into the community around Jesus. The community is and should be a model of the Kingdom. The reference to the impossibility for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle comes from a popular proverb of the time used by the people to say that a thing was, humanly speaking, impossible and unfeasible. The disciples were astounded by hearing this and they ask themselves: "Then who can be saved?" This is a sign that they had not understood the response of Jesus to the young rich man: "Go, sell all you all you own and give the money to the poor and then come follow me". The young man had observed the commandments since his earliest days, but without understanding the reason for this observance. Something similar was happening to the disciples. They had already abandoned all their goods as Jesus had asked the young rich man, but without understanding the reason, the why of this abandonment. If they had understood, they would not have been astounded at the demands of Jesus. When riches, or the desire for riches, occupies the heart and the gaze, the person cannot perceive the sense of the Gospel. Only God can help! Jesus looks at the disciples and says: "Impossible for man but not for God. For God everything is possible."

Personal Questions

- Can someone who lives constantly concerned about her wealth, or who lives always wanting to buy all the things the television advertises, free herself from everything to follow Jesus and live in peace in a Christian community? Is it possible? How do you do it and what are the steps?
- Do you know somebody who has succeeded in abandoning everything for the sake of the Kingdom? What does it mean for us today: "Go, sell all you own, and give the money to the poor"? How can we understand and practice this?
- Does this instruct communities as well, or just individuals? How would a community "abandon everything" and still carry on its mission?

Concluding Prayer

I give thanks to Yahweh with all my heart,
in the meeting-place of honest people, in the assembly. Great are the deeds of Yahweh, to be pondered by all who delight in them. (Ps 111:1-2)

Tuesday, May 28, 2024

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 should our life 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 (a) to extend the family and to create community; it increases a hundred times the number of brothers and sisters. (b) 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 (Acts 2: 42-45). It is the perfect living out of service and gratuity. (c) 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. (d) 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 (Job 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 29, 2024

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: 32-45

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem; Jesus was walking on ahead of them; they were in a daze, and those who followed were apprehensive. Once more taking the Twelve aside he began to tell them what was going to happen to him, 'Now we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man is about to be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the gentiles, who will mock him and spit at him

and scourge him and put him to death; and after three days he will rise again.' James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached him. 'Master,' they said to him, 'We want you to do us a favor.' He said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' They said to him, 'Allow us to sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory.' But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I shall drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I shall be baptized?' They replied, 'We can.' Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I shall drink you shall drink, and with the baptism with which I shall be baptized you shall be baptized, but as for seats at my right hand or my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted.'

When the other ten heard this they began to feel indignant with James and John, so Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that among the gentiles those they call their rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of man himself came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel narrates the third announcement of the Passion and, once again, like in the previous times, it shows us the incoherence of the disciples (cfr. Mk 8: 31-33 and Mk 9: 30- 37). Jesus insists on the service and on the gift of one's own life, and they continue to discuss about the first places in the Kingdom, one at the right and the other on the left of the throne. Therefore, everything indicates, that the disciples continue to be blind. This is a sign that the dominating ideology of the time had profoundly penetrated their mentality. In spite of the fact of having lived several years with Jesus, they had not changed their way of seeing things. They saw Jesus now, as they had seen him at the beginning. They wanted to be rewarded for following Jesus.

- Mark 10: 32-34: *The third announcement of the Passion.* They were on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus walked in front of them. He was in a hurry. He knew that they would kill him. The Prophet Isaiah had announced it (Is 50: 4-6; 53: 1-10). His death was not the result of a blind destiny or of a pre-established plan, but the consequence of the commitment assumed of the mission which he received from the Father together with those excluded of his time. This is why Jesus warns his disciples concerning the torture and the death which he will suffer in Jerusalem. The disciple has to follow the Master, even if it is a question of suffering with him. *The disciples were terrified, and those who were behind were afraid.* They did not understand what was happening. Suffering was not in agreement with the idea that they had of the Messiah.
- Mark 10: 35-37: *The petition for the first place.* The disciples not only do not understand, but they continue with their own personal ambitions. James and John ask for a place in the glory of the Kingdom, one at the right and the other on the left of Jesus. They want to be even before Peter! They do not understand the proposal of Jesus. They are only concerned about their own personal interests. This shows clearly the tensions and the little

understanding existing in the communities, at the time of Mark, and these exist even today in our communities. In the Gospel of Matthew, it is the mother of James and John who addressed this request for her sons (Mt 20: 20). Probably, before the difficult situation of poverty and growing lack of work at that time, the mother intercedes for her sons and tries to guarantee an employment for them in the coming of the Kingdom of which Jesus spoke about so much.

- Mark 10: 38-40: *The response of Jesus.* Jesus reacts firmly: “*You do not know what you are asking!*” And he asks if they are able to drink the cup that he, Jesus, will drink and if they are ready to receive the baptism which he will receive. It is the cup of suffering, the baptism of blood! Jesus wants to know if they, instead of a place of honor, accept to give their life up to the point of death. Both answer: “*We can!*” It seems to be a spontaneous answer, not having thought about it, because a few days later, they abandoned Jesus and left him alone at the hour of suffering (Mk 14: 50). They do not have a critical conscience; they do not perceive their personal reality. As regards the place of honor in the Kingdom at the side of Jesus, this is granted by the Father. What he, Jesus, can offer, is the chalice and the baptism, suffering and the cross.
- Mark 10: 41-44: “*Among you this is not to happen*”. At the end of his instruction about the Cross, Jesus once again speaks about the exercise of power (Mk 9: 33-35). At that time, those who held power in the Roman Empire did not bother about the people. They acted only according to their own interests (Mk 6: 17-29). The Roman Empire controlled the world and maintained it submitted by the force of arms and, thus, through the tributes, the taxes, duties, succeeded in concentrating the wealth of the people in the hands of a few in Rome. The society was characterized by the repressive and abusive exercise of power. Jesus had another proposal. He said: “*Among you this is not to happen! With you it is not like that; but anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all*”. He teaches against privileges and against rivalry. He overturns the system and insists on service, as a remedy against personal ambition. The community has to present an alternative for human living together.
- Mark 10: 45: *The summary of the life of Jesus:* Jesus defines his mission and his life: “*For the Son of man himself came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” Jesus is the Messiah Servant, announced by the Prophet Isaiah (cfr. Is 42: 1-9; 49: 1- 6; 50: 4-9; 52: 13-53: 12). He learnt from his mother who said to the Angel: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord!” (Lk 1: 38). A totally new proposal for the society of that time. In this phrase in which he defines his life, three more ancient titles appear, used by the first Christians to express and to communicate to others what the following meant for them: Son of Man, Servant of Yahweh, He who redeems the excluded (the one who liberates, who saves). To humanize life, to serve the brothers and sisters, to welcome the excluded.

Personal Questions

- James and John ask for the first places in the Kingdom. Today, many persons pray to ask for some money, promotion, healing, and success. What do I seek in my relationship with God and what do I ask God for in my prayer?
- To humanize life, to serve the brothers and sisters. To welcome and accept the excluded. This is the program of Jesus, it is our program. How do I put it into practice?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh has made known his saving power, revealed his saving justice for the nations to see, mindful of his faithful love and his constancy to the House of Israel. (Ps 98: 2-3)

Thursday, May 30, 2024

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, 46-52

As Jesus left Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus -- that is, the son of Timaeus -- a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and cry out, 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.' And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me.' Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man over. 'Courage,' they said, 'get up; he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'Rabbuni, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has saved you.' And at once his sight returned and he followed him along the road.

Reflection

The Gospel today describes the cure of the blind man Bartimaeus (Mk 10, 46-52) which closes the long teaching of Jesus about the Cross. At the beginning of this teaching, there was the cure of an anonymous blind man (Mk 8, 22-26). Both cures of blind persons are the symbol of what happened between Jesus and the disciples.

- Mark 10, 46-47: *The shouting of the blind man Bartimaeus*. Finally, after travelling a long distance, Jesus and the disciples reached Jericho, the last stop before going up toward Jerusalem. Bartimaeus, the blind man was sitting at the side of the road. He could not take part in the procession which accompanies Jesus. But he calls out, asking for the help of Jesus: “*Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!*” Throughout the centuries, through the practice of the monks of the desert, this invocation of the poor Bartimaeus became what is usually called: “*The prayer of Jesus*”. The monks repeated it orally, all the time, and from the mouth it went to the heart. The person, after a short time, no longer prays, in the sense that the person becomes prayer.
- Mark 10, 48-51: *Jesus listens to the cry of the blind man*. The cry of the poor man bothers people. Those who are in the procession try to stop the poor man from shouting, but “*he shouted even louder!*” And what does Jesus do? He listens to the call of the poor man, he stops and said: Call him here! Those who wanted to keep him from shouting, to stop *the* disturbing shout of the poor man, now, at the request of Jesus, are obliged to bring the poor man to Jesus. “*Courage, get up because Jesus is calling you*”. Bartimaeus leaves everything and directs himself to Jesus. He does not have too much. Only a mantle; what he had to cover his body (cfr. Ex 22, 25-26). This was his security, the only thing he possessed. Jesus asks: “*What do you want me to do for you?*” It is not enough to shout. It is necessary to know why we shout! “*Rabbuni, My Lord, let me see again!*” Bartimaeus had called Jesus not with thoughts completely just, because the title “Son of David” was not particularly appropriate. Jesus himself had criticized this (Mk 12, 35-37). But Bartimaeus had greater faith in Jesus than what he could express with his ideas about Jesus. He does not express any demands as Peter did. He knows how to give his life without imposing any conditions, and the miracle takes place.
- Mark 10, 52: “*Your faith has saved you*”. Jesus tells him: “*Go, your faith has saved you.*” In that same instant Bartimaeus began to see again and he followed Jesus along the road. His cure is the result of his faith in Jesus. Once cured, he abandons everything, follows Jesus along the road and goes up with him toward Calvary to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus becomes a model disciple for all of us who want to “follow Jesus along the road” in the direction of Jerusalem. In this decision of walking with Jesus is found the source of courage and the seed of the victory on the Cross. Because the cross is not fatal, nor an exigency from God. It is the consequence of the commitment assumed with God, to *serve* the brothers and sisters and to reject privileges.
- *Faith is a force which transforms persons*. The cure of the blind man Bartimaeus clarifies a very important aspect of how faith in Jesus should be. Peter had said to Jesus: “You are the Christ!” (Mk 8, 29). His doctrine was right, exact, because Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. But when Jesus says that the Messiah has to suffer, Peter reacts and does not accept. Peter had a right doctrine, but his faith in Jesus was not so just. Bartimaeus, on the contrary, had called Jesus with the title of “Son of David!” (Mk 10, 47. Jesus was not too pleased with this title (Mk 12, 35-37). And this is why, even invoking Jesus with a doctrine which is not correct, Bartimaeus had faith and was cured! It was

different from that of Peter (Mk 8, 32-33), he believed more in Jesus than in the ideas that he had of Jesus. He was converted and followed Jesus along the road toward Calvary (Mk 10, 52). The total understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained through a theoretical teaching, but with practical commitment, *walking* with him along the road of service and of gratuity, from Galilee to Jerusalem. Anyone who insists in maintaining the idea of Peter, that is, a glorious Messiah without the Cross, will understand nothing of Jesus and will never be able to attain the attitude of a true disciple. Anyone who believes in Jesus and “gives” himself (Mk 8, 35), accepts “to be the last one” (Mk 9, 35), to “drink the cup and to carry the cross” (Mk 10, 38), this person, like Bartimaeus, even having a not too correct idea, will succeed to perceive and “to follow Jesus along the road” (Mk 10, 52). In this certainty of walking with Jesus is found the source of courage and the seed of the victory on the cross.

Personal questions

- An indiscreet question: “In my way of living faith, am I like Peter or like Bartimaeus?”
- Today, in the Church, is the majority of the people like Peter or like Bartimaeus?

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, May 31, 2024

The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, loving Father,
Mary went with haste to visit
her cousin Elizabeth in her hour of need.
May we too rejoice in the Lord
when we can hurry to see people
to bring them the Lord
as we 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 in order 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 on behalf of the poor and the hungry. The expression "arm of God" recalls the liberation of the Exodus. It is this saving force of God which gives life to the change: he has routed the arrogant of heart (1: 51), he has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly (1: 52), he has sent the rich away empty, and has filled the starving with good things (1: 53). Luke 1: 54-55: at the end, she recalls that all that is the expression of God's mercy toward his people and an expression of his fidelity to the promises made to Abraham. The Good News is not a response to the observance of the Law, but the expression of the goodness and the fidelity of God to the promises made. That is what Paul taught in the letters to the Galatians and to the Romans.
- The second Book of Samuel tells the story of the Ark of the Covenant. David wants to put in his own house, but he is frightened and says: "How can the Ark of Yahweh come to be with me?" (2 Sam 6: 9). Then David ordered that the Ark be placed in the house of Obed-Edom. And the Ark of Yahweh remained three months in the house of Obed-Edom, and the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and his whole family" (2 Sam 6: 11). Mary, waiting for Jesus, is like the Ark of the Covenant which, in the Old Testament, visited the houses of the persons granting benefits. She goes to Elizabeth's house and remained there three months. And while she is in Elizabeth's house, the whole family is blessed by God. The community should be like the New Ark of the Covenant.

Visiting the house of the persons, it should take benefits and the grace of God to the people.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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