



# Lectio Divina

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<sup>1</sup> *Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel* (<https://ocarm.org/en/item/711-blessed-virgin-mary-of-mount-carmel>).

# Monday, July 1, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
guide and protector of Your people,  
grant us an unfailing respect for Your name,  
and keep us always in Your love.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,  
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 8: 18-22

When Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other shore. A scribe approached and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But Jesus answered him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead."

## Reflection

From the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> week of ordinary time, we have meditated on chapters 5 to 8 of the Gospel of Matthew. Following the meditation of chapter 8, today's Gospel presents the conditions for following Jesus. Jesus decides to go to the other side of the lake, and a person asks to follow Him (Mt 8: 18-22).

- Matthew 8: 18 – Jesus gives orders to go to the other side of the lake. He had accepted and cured all the sick whom people had brought to Him (Mt 8: 16). Many people were around Him. Seeing that crowd, Jesus decides to go to the other side of the lake. In Mark's Gospel, from which Matthew takes a great part of his information, the context is varied. Jesus had just finished the discourse of the parables (Mk 4: 3-34) and said, "Let us go to the other side!" (Mk 4: 35), and, once on the boat from where He had pronounced the discourse (cf. Mk 4: 1-2), the disciples took Him to the other side. Jesus was so tired that He went to sleep on a cushion (Mk 4: 38).
- Matthew 8: 19 – A doctor of the Law wants to follow Jesus. The moment at which Jesus decides to cross the lake, a doctor of the law comes to Him and says, "Master, I will follow You wherever You go." A parallel text in Luke (Lk 9: 57-62) treats the same theme but in a slightly different way. According to Luke, Jesus had decided to go to Jerusalem, where He would have been condemned and killed. In going toward Jerusalem, He entered the territory of Samaria (Lk 9: 51-52), where three people ask to follow Him (Lk 9: 57, 59, 61). In Matthew's Gospel, written for the converted Jews, the person who wants to follow Jesus is a doctor of the law. Matthew insists on the fact that an authority of the Jews

recognizes the value of Jesus and asks to follow Him, to be one of His disciples. In Luke, who writes for the converted pagans, the people who want to follow Jesus are Samaritans. Luke stresses the ecumenical openness of Jesus who also accepts non-Jews to be His disciples.

- Matthew 8: 20 – Jesus' response to the doctor of the law. The response of Jesus is identical both in Matthew and in Luke, and it is a very demanding response which leaves no doubts: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Anyone who wants to be a disciple of Jesus has to know what he is doing. He should examine the requirements and estimate well, before making a decision (Lk 14: 28-32). "So in the same way none of you can be My disciple without giving up all that he owns." (Lk 14: 33).
- Matthew 8: 21 – A disciple asks to go and bury his father. Immediately, one who was already a disciple asks Him for permission to go and bury his deceased father: "Lord, let me go and bury my father first." In other words, he asks Jesus to delay crossing the lake until after the burial of his father. To bury one's parents was a sacred duty for the sons (cf. Tob 4: 3-4).
- Matthew 8: 22 – Jesus' answer. Once again the response from Jesus is very demanding. Jesus does not delay His trip to the other side of the lake and says to the disciple, "Follow Me, and leave the dead to bury their dead." When Elijah called Elisha, he allowed him to greet his relatives (1Kings 19: 20). Jesus is much more demanding. In order to understand the significance and importance of Jesus' response it is well to remember that the expression "Leave the dead to bury their dead" was a popular proverb used by the people to indicate that it is not necessary to spend energies in things which have no future, and which have nothing to do with life. Such a proverb should not be taken literally. It is necessary to consider the objective with which it is being used. Thus, in our case, by means of the proverb, Jesus stresses the radical demands of the new life to which He calls and which demands abandoning everything to follow Jesus. It describes the requirements of following Jesus. Like the rabbi of that time Jesus gathers His disciples. All of them "follow Jesus." To follow was the term which was used to indicate the relationship between the disciple and the master. For the first Christians, to follow Jesus, meant three very important things bound together:
  - a) To imitate the example of the Master: Jesus was the model to be imitated and to recreate in the life of the disciple (Jn 13: 13-15). Living together daily allowed for a constant confrontation. In "Jesus' School" only one subject was taught: The Kingdom—and this Kingdom is recognized in the life and practice of Jesus.
  - b) To participate in the destiny of the Master: Anyone who followed Jesus should commit himself to be with Him in His privations (Lk 22: 28), including persecutions (Mt 10: 24-25) and on the Cross (Lk 14: 27). He should be ready to die with Him (Jn 11: 16).
  - c) To bear within us the life of Jesus: After Easter, the light of the Resurrection, following took on a third dimension: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2: 20). It is a matter of the mystical dimension of following and the fruit of the action of the Spirit. The

Christians tried to follow in their life the path of Jesus who had died in defense of life and rose from the dead by the power of God. (Phil 3: 10-11).

## Personal Questions

- In what way am I living the “following of Jesus”?
- The foxes have their dens and the birds of the sky have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. How can we live this aspect of discipleship today?
- In what ways and how often do I tell Jesus to “hold off” and wait while I do my own thing at the moment, rather following always and everywhere?
- In what way is living a conventional life like telling Jesus to wait? If He calls us radically like He called the disciples, and we say “yes”, how is it that we continue to live “like everyone else” still?

## For Further Study

The Church of the first few centuries saw the beginnings of asceticism and monasticism in the Egyptian hermits. These early monastics took these words of Jesus literally and left everything to follow Him. This was the foundation for Eastern Monasticism, and through Saint Benedict, Western Monasticism. Some of the more visible modern monastic communities are the Benedictines and the Cistercians, or Trappists. Take time this week to read about the early Desert Fathers as they are called, as well as the the monastic orders that have resulted. Their lives are modeled after the early Christian communities and this advice from Jesus. The writings of the Desert Fathers, Saint Benedict, Saint Bernard, and others give insight on spiritual growth in this way.

## Concluding Prayer

Fix your gaze on Yahweh and your face will grow bright,  
you will never hang your head in shame.  
A pauper calls out and Yahweh hears,  
saves him from all his troubles. (Ps 34: 5-6)

## Tuesday, July 2, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
you call your children to walk in the light of Christ.  
Free us from darkness and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

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

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 8: 23-27

Then Jesus got into the boat followed by his disciples. Suddenly a storm broke over the lake, so violent that the boat was being swamped by the waves. But he was asleep.

So they went to him and woke him saying, "Save us, Lord, we are lost!" And he said to them, "Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith?" And then he stood up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

They were astounded and said, "Whatever kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

## Reflection

Matthew writes for the converted Jews of the years 70's who felt lost like a boat in the middle of a stormy sea, without the hope of being able to get to the desired port. Jesus seems to be asleep in the boat, and it seems to them that no divine power will come to save them from the persecution. In the face of this desperate and anguished situation, Matthew puts together several episodes of the life of Jesus to help the community discover, in the midst of an apparent absence, the welcoming and powerful presence of Jesus the conqueror who dominates the sea (Mt 8: 23-27), who conquers and casts away the power of evil (Mt 9: 28- 34) and who has the power to forgive sins (Mt 9, 1-8). In other words, Matthew wants to communicate hope and to suggest that the communities have no reason to fear. This is the reason for the narration of the storm calmed by Jesus in today's Gospel.

- Matthew 8: 23: *The starting point: to enter into the boat.* Matthew follows the Gospel of Mark, but makes it shorter and inserts it in the new outline which he has adopted. In Mark, the day had been very heavy because of the work that they had done. Having finished the discourse of the parables (Mk 4: 3-34), the disciples take Jesus into the boat and he was so tired that he fell asleep on a cushion (Mk 4: 38). Matthew's text is very brief. It only says that Jesus went into the boat and that the disciples accompanied him. Jesus is the Master, the disciples *follow* the Master.
- Matthew 8: 24-25: *The desperate situation: "We are lost!"* The Lake of Galilee is close to high mountains. Sometimes, between the cracks of the rocks, the wind blows strongly on the lake causing a sudden storm. Strong wind, agitated sea, the boat full of water! The disciples were experienced fishermen. If they thought that they were about to sink, it meant that the situation was truly dangerous! But Jesus is not aware, and continues to sleep. They cried out: "Save us, Lord, we are lost!" In Matthew the profound sleep of Jesus is not only a sign of tiredness. It is also the expression of the calm trust of Jesus in God. The contrast between the attitude of Jesus and that of the disciples is enormous!

- Matthew 8: 26: *The reaction of Jesus: Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith!* Jesus wakes up, not because of the waves, but because of the desperate cry of the disciples. And he turns to them saying: *“Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith!”* Then he stood up and rebuked the winds and the sea, because there was no danger. It is like when one arrives to a friend’s house, and the dog, at the side of his master, barks very much. But one should not be afraid, because the master is present and controls the situation. The episode of the storm calmed by Jesus evokes the episode, when people, without fear, passed across the water of the sea (Ex 14: 22). Jesus recreates this episode. He recalls the Prophet Isaiah who said to the people: *“If you have to go across the water, I will be with you!”* (Is 43: 2). The episode of the calmed storm recalls and fulfils the prophecy announced in the Psalm 107:
  - Those who ploughed the waves in the sea on the ships, plying their trade on the great ocean. they have seen the works of the Lord, his wonders in the deep.
  - By his word he raised a storm-wind lashing up towering waves.
  - Up to the sky then down to the depths; their stomachs were turned to water. They staggered and reeled like drunkards, and all their skill went under.
  - They cried out to Yahweh in their distress, he rescued them from their plight. He reduced the storm to a calm, and all the waters subsided.
  - He brought them overjoyed at the stillness, to the port where they were bound (Ps 107: 23-30)
- Matthew 8: 27: *The fear of the disciples: “Who is this man?”* Jesus asks: *“Why are you so frightened?”* The disciples do not know what to answer. Astounded, they ask themselves: *“Whatever kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”* In spite of the long time that they had lived with Jesus, they still do not know who he is. Jesus seems to be a foreigner for them! Who is this man?

*Who is this man? Who is Jesus for us, for me?* This should be the question which urges us to continue to read the Gospel, every day, with the desire always to know better the significance and the importance of the person of Jesus for our life. From this question comes Christology. It does not come from elevated theological considerations, but from the desire of the first Christians always to find new names and titles to express what Jesus meant for them. There are tens of names, titles and attributes, from that of *carpenter to Son of God*, which Jesus expresses: Messiah, Christ, Lord, Beloved Son, Holy One of God, Nazarene, Son of Man, Spouse, Son of God, Son of the Most High God, Carpenter, Son of Mary, Prophet, Master, Son of David, Rabboni, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Son, Shepherd, Bread of Life, Resurrection, Light of the world, Way, Truth, Life, King of the Jews, King of Israel, etc. Every name, every image, is an effort to express what Jesus means for them. But a name, no matter how beautiful it is, never succeeds to reveal the mystery of a person, and much less of the person of Jesus. Jesus does not enter into any of these names, in no outline, in no title. He exceeds everything, he is the greatest! He cannot be put

into a frame. Love takes up all this, not the mind! Starting from this experience of a love which is alive, the names, the titles and the images receive their full significance. Definitively, who is Jesus for me, for us?

## Personal Questions

- Which was the agitated sea at the time of Jesus? Which was the agitated sea at the time when Matthew wrote his Gospel? Today, which is the agitated sea for us? Have you ever been on the point of drowning in the agitated waters of the sea of your life? What saved you?
- Who is Jesus for me? Which is the name of Jesus which expresses my faith and my love better?

## Concluding Prayer

Each age will praise your deeds to the next, proclaiming your mighty works. Your renown is the splendor of your glory, I will ponder the story of your wonders. (Ps 145: 4-5)

## Wednesday, July 3, 2024

*Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
you call your children  
to walk in the light of Christ.  
Free us from darkness  
and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

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

## Gospel Reading - John 20: 24-29

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord," but he answered, "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."

Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, "Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving any more but believe."

Thomas replied, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him: "You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."



## Reflection

Today is the Feast of Saint Thomas and the Gospel speaks to us about the encounter of Jesus with Thomas, the apostle who wanted to see in order to believe. For this reason, many call him Thomas the incredulous. In reality the message of this Gospel is very diverse. It is much more profound and actual.

- John 20: 24-25: The doubt of Thomas. Thomas, one of the twelve was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples the week before. He did not believe in the witness of the others who said: "We have seen the Lord". He gives some conditions: "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". Thomas is very demanding. In order to believe he wants to see! He does not want a miracle in order to believe. No! He wants to see the signs on the hands, on the feet and on the side! He does not believe in the glorious Jesus, separated from the human Jesus who suffered on the Cross. When John writes, at the end of the first century, there were some persons who did not accept the coming of the Son of God in the flesh (2 Jn 7; 1 Jn 4: 2-3). They were the Gnostics who despised matter and the body. John presents this concern of Thomas to criticize the Gnostics: "To see in order to believe". The doubt of Thomas also makes us see the difficulty of believing in the Resurrection!
- John 20: 26-27: Do not be unbelieving but believe. The text says "six days later". That means that Thomas could maintain his opinion during a whole week against the witness of the other Apostles. Stubborn! Thank God, for us! Thus, six days later, during the community meeting, they once again had the profound experience of the presence of the risen Lord in their midst. The closed doors could not prevent the presence of Jesus in the midst of those who believe in him. Today, it is also like this. When we are meeting, even when we are meeting with the doors closed, Jesus is in our midst. And up until today, the first word of Jesus is and will always be: "Peace be with you!" What impresses is the kindness of Jesus. He does not criticize, nor does he judge the unbelief of Thomas, but he accepts the challenge and says: "Thomas, put your finger in the hole of my hands!" Jesus confirms the conviction of Thomas and of the communities, that is, the glorious Risen One is the tortured crucified One! The Jesus who is in the community is not a glorious Jesus who has nothing in common with our life. He is the same Jesus who lived on this earth and on his body he has the signs of his Passion. The signs of the Passion are found today in the sufferings of people, in hunger, in the signs of torture, of injustice. And Jesus becomes present in our midst in the persons who react, who struggle for life and who do not allow themselves to be disheartened. Thomas believes in this Christ and so do we!
- John 20: 28-29: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Together with him we say: "My Lord and my God!" This gift of Thomas is the ideal attitude of faith. And Jesus completes with a final message: "You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!" With this phrase, Jesus declares blessed all of us who find ourselves

in the same condition: without having seen, we believe that Jesus, who is in our midst, is the same One who died crucified!

- The mandate: “As the Father sent me so I am sending you!” From this Jesus, who was crucified and rose from the dead, we receive the mission, the same one which he has received from the Father (Jn 20: 21). Here, in the second apparition, Jesus repeats: “Peace be with you!” This repetition stresses the importance of Peace. To construct peace forms part of the mission. Peace means much more than the absence of war. It means to construct a harmonious human living together in which persons can be themselves, having everything necessary to live, living happily together in peace. This was the mission of Jesus and also our own mission. Jesus breathed and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20: 22). And with the help of the Holy Spirit we will be capable to fulfil the mission which he has entrusted to us. Then Jesus communicates the power to forgive sins: “If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone’s sins, they are retained!” The central point of the mission of peace is reconciliation, in the effort of trying to overcome barriers which separate us. This power of reconciling and of forgiving is given to the community (Jn 20: 23); Mt 18: 18). In the Gospel of Matthew, this power is also given to Peter (Mt 16: 19). Here we can perceive that a community without pardon and without reconciliation is not a Christian community. In one word, our mission is that of “forming community” according to the example of the community of the Father, of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

## Personal Questions

- In society today the divergence and the tensions of race, social class, religion, gender and culture are enormous and they continue to grow every day. How can the mission of reconciliation be carried out today?
- In your community and in your family is there some mustard seed, the sign of a reconciled society?

## Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, all nations, extol him, all peoples,  
for his faithful love is strong  
and his constancy never-ending. (Ps 117)

## Thursday, July 4, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

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

Free us from darkness

and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

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

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 1-8

Jesus got back in the boat, crossed the water and came to his hometown. And suddenly some people brought him a paralytic stretched out on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take comfort, my child, your sins are forgiven."

And now some scribes said to themselves, "This man is being blasphemous." Knowing what was in their minds Jesus said, "Why do you have such wicked thoughts in your hearts? Now, which of these is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?' But to prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins," -- then he said to the paralytic--"get up, pick up your bed and go off home."

And the man got up and went home. A feeling of awe came over the crowd when they saw this, and they praised God for having given such authority to human beings.

## Reflection

- The extraordinary authority of Jesus. To the reader, Jesus appears as a person invested with extraordinary authority, by means of the words and actions (Mt 9: 6, 8). The authoritative word of Jesus strikes evil at its root: in the case of the paralytic man on sin that affects the man in his liberty and blocks him in his living forces: "Your sins are forgiven" (v. 5); "Get up pick up your bed and go off home" (v.6). Truly all the forms of paralysis of the heart and the mind to which we are subject are cancelled by the authority of Jesus (9: 6), because during his life on earth he met all these forms. The authoritative and effective word of Jesus awakens the paralyzed humanity (9: 5-7) and gives it the gift of walking (9: 6) in a renewed faith
- The encounter with the paralytic. After the storm and a visit in the country of the Gadarenes, Jesus returns to Capernaum, his city. And as he was on his way, he met the paralytic. The healing did not take place in a house, but along the road. Therefore, along the road that leads to Capernaum they brought him a paralytic man. Jesus addresses him calling him "my son", a gesture of attention that soon becomes a gesture of salvation: "your sins are forgiven you" (v. 2) The forgiveness of sins which Jesus pronounces on the part of God on the paralytic refers to the bond between sickness, failure and sin. This is the first time that the evangelist attributes this particular divine power to Jesus, in an explicit way. For the Jews the sickness of a man was considered a punishment because of sins committed; The physical illness was considered always because of one's own moral evil or due to parents (Jn 9: 2). Jesus restores to man the condition of salvation freeing him from illness as well as from sin.



- For some of those who were present, for the Scribes, the words of Jesus which announce forgiveness of sins is a true and proper blasphemy. According to them Jesus is arrogant because God alone can forgive sins. They do not manifest openly such a judgment of Jesus but express it by murmuring among themselves. Jesus who penetrates their hearts sees their considerations and reproves them because of their unbelief. The expression of Jesus “To prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” (v. 6) he is going to indicate that not only God can forgive sins, but with Jesus, also man (*Gnilka*).
- The crowd, differently from the Scribes, is seized by fear before the cure of the paralytic and glorifies God. The crowd is struck by the power to forgive sins manifested in the healing. People exult because God has granted such a power to the Son of man. Is it possible to attribute this to the ecclesial community where forgiveness of sins was granted on the order of Jesus? Matthew has presented this episode on forgiveness of sins with the intention of applying it to fraternal relationships within the ecclesial community. In it the practice to forgive sins, by delegation of Jesus, was already in force; a practice which was not shared in the Synagogue. The theme of forgiveness of sins is repeated also in Mt 18 and at the end of the Gospel it is affirmed that this is rooted in the death of Jesus on the Cross (26: 28). But in our context the forgiveness of sins is linked with the demand of mercy present in the episode which follows, the vocation of Matthew: «...mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed, I came to call not the upright but sinners” (Mt 9: 13). Such words of Jesus intend to say that He has made visible the forgiveness of God; above all, in his relationships with the Publicans or tax collectors and sinners, in sitting at table with them.
- This account that takes up again the problem of sin and reminds of the bond with the misery of man is something to be practiced in the forgiveness which should be given, but it is a story that should occupy a privileged place in the preaching of our ecclesial communities.

## Personal Questions

- Are you convinced that Jesus, called the friend of sinners, does not despise your weaknesses and your resistance, but he understands and offers you the necessary help to live a life in harmony with God and with the brothers and sisters?
- When you make the experience of betraying or refusing friendship with God do you have recourse to the Sacrament of reconciliation that reconciles you with the Father and with the Church and makes you a new creature by the force of the Holy Spirit?

## 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)

# Friday, July 5, 2024

Ordinary Time

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
you call your children  
to walk in the light of Christ.  
Free us from darkness  
and keep us in the radiance of your truth.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with  
you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 9-13

As Jesus was walking on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him. Now while he was at table in the house it happened that several tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this, he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed, I came to call not the upright, but sinners.'

## Reflection

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

- Matthew 9: 9: *The call to follow Jesus*. The first persons called to follow Jesus are four fishermen, all Jewish (Mt 4: 18-22). Now Jesus calls a tax collector, considered a sinner and treated as an unclean person by the community of the most observant of the Pharisees. In the other Gospels, this tax collector is called Levi. Here, his name is Matthew, which means *gift of God or given by God*. The communities, instead of excluding the tax collector and of considering him unclean, should consider him a *Gift of God* for the

community, because his presence makes the community become a sign of salvation for all! Like the first four who were called, in the same way also Matthew, the tax collector, leaves everything that he has and follows Jesus. The following of Jesus requires breaking away from many things. Matthew leaves the tax office, his source of revenue and follows Jesus!

- Matthew 9: 10: *Jesus sits at table with sinners and tax collectors.* At that time the Jews lived separated from the tax collectors and sinners and they did not eat with them at the same table. The Christian Jews should break away from this isolation and sit at table with the tax collectors and with the unclean, according to the teaching given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mountain, the expression of the universal love of God the Father (Mt 5: 44-48). The mission of the communities was that of offering a place to those who did not have it. But this new law was not accepted by all. In some communities persons coming from paganism, even if they were Christians, were not accepted around the same table (cf. Ac 10: 28; 11: 3; Ga 2: 12). The text of today's Gospel shows us Jesus who sits at table with tax collectors and sinners in the same house, around the same table.
- Matthew 9: 11: *The question of the Pharisees. Jews were forbidden to sit at table with the tax collectors and with sinners, but Jesus does not follow this prohibition. Rather he becomes a friend to them. The Pharisees seeing the attitude of Jesus, ask the disciples: "Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?"* This question may be interpreted as an expression of their desire to know why Jesus acts in that way. Others interpret the question like a criticism of Jesus' behavior, because for over five hundred years, from the time of the slavery in Babylon until the time of Jesus, the Jews had observed the laws of purity. This secular observance became a strong sign of identity. At the same time, it was a factor of their separation in the midst of other peoples. Thus, because of the laws on purity, they could not nor did they succeed to sit around the same table to eat with tax collectors. To eat with tax collectors meant to get contaminated, to become unclean. The precepts of legal purity were rigorously observed, in Palestine as well as in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora. At the time of Jesus, there were more than five hundred precepts to keep purity. In the years '70's, at the time when Matthew wrote, this conflict was very actual.
- Matthew 9: 12-13: *"Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice.* Jesus hears the question of the Pharisees to the disciples, and he answers with two clarifications: the first one is taken from common sense: "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick." The second one is taken from the Bible: "Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice." Through these clarifications, Jesus makes explicit and clarifies his mission among the people: "I have not come to call the upright but sinners." Jesus denies the criticism of the Pharisees; he does not accept their arguments, because they came from a false idea of the Law of God. He himself invokes the Bible: "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice." For Jesus, mercy is more important than legal purity. He refers to the prophetic tradition to say that mercy has greater value for God than all sacrifices. (Ho 6: 6; Is 1: 10-17) God



has profound mercy and is moved before the failures of his people. (Ho 11: 8-9)

## Personal Questions

- Today, in our society, who is marginalized and excluded? Why? In our community, do we have preconceptions or prejudices? Which? Which is the challenge which the words of Jesus present to our community?
- Jesus asks the people to read and to understand the Old Testament which says: *"Mercy is what pleases me and not sacrifice."* What does Jesus want to tell us with this today?

## Concluding Prayer

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

## Saturday, July 6, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father, you call your children to walk in the light of Christ. Free us from darkness and keep us in the radiance of your truth. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 14-17

Then John's disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?' Jesus replied, 'Surely the bridegroom's attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth onto an old cloak, because the patch pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, the wine runs out, and the skins are lost. No; they put new wine in fresh skins and both are preserved.'

## Reflection

- Matthew 9: 14: The question of the disciples of John concerning the practice of fasting. Fasting is quite an ancient use, practiced by almost all religions. Jesus himself practiced it during forty days (Mt 4, 2). But he does not insist with the disciples so that they do the same thing. He leaves them free. Because of this, the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees, who

were obliged to fast, want to know why Jesus does not insist on fasting “Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?”

- Matthew 9: 15: The answer of Jesus. Jesus answers with a comparison in the form of a question: “Surely the bridegroom’s attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them?” Jesus associates fasting to mourning, and he considers himself the bridegroom. When the bridegroom is with his friends, that is, during the wedding feast, they have no need to fast. When Jesus is with them, with his disciples, it is a feast, the wedding feast. Therefore, they should not fast. But one day the bridegroom will go away. It will be a day of mourning. Then, if they want they can fast. Jesus refers to his death. He knows and feels that if he continues on this way of liberty, the authority will want to kill him.
- Matthew 9: 16-17: New wine in new skins! In these two verses, the Gospel of Matthew gives two separate phrases of Jesus on the patch of new cloth on an old cloak and of the new wine in new skins. These words throw light on the discussions and the conflicts of Jesus with religious authority of the time. A patch of new cloth is not put on an old cloak; because when washing it, the new piece of cloth shrinks and pulls on the old cloak and tears it and the tear becomes bigger. Nobody puts new wine in old skins, because when the new wine ferments, it tears the old skins. New wine in new skins! The religion defended by the religious authority was like a piece of old cloth, like an old skin. Both the disciples of John and the Pharisees, tried to renew the religion. In reality, they hardly put some patches and because of this, they ran the risk of compromising and harming both the novelty as well as the old uses. It is not necessary to want to change the novelty which Jesus brings to us for the old uses. Either one or the other! The new wine which Jesus brings to us tears the old skins. It is necessary to know how to separate things. Most probably, Matthew presents these words of Jesus to orientate the communities of the years 80’s. There was a group of Jew-Christians who wanted to reduce the novelty of Jesus to the Judaism of the time before the coming of Jesus. Jesus is not against what is “old”. He does not want that what is old be imposed on that which is new and, that it prevents it from manifesting itself. Vatican II cannot be reread with the mentality before the Council, like some try to do today.

## Personal Questions

- Which are the conflicts around the religious practices which today make many persons suffer and are a reason for heated discussions and polemics? Which is the image of God which is behind all these preconceptions, these norms and these prohibitions?
- How is this phrase of Jesus to be understood: “Nobody puts a piece of new cloth on an old cloak? Which is the message which we can draw from all this for your community today?

## Concluding Prayer

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

## Sunday, July 7, 2024

*14th Sunday of Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

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

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

### Reading

#### A Key to the Reading:

In this 14th Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Church places us before the rejection of Jesus on the part of the people of Nazareth. Passing through Nazareth was painful for Jesus. That which was his first community, now it is no longer such. Something has changed. Those who first accepted him, now reject him. As we will see later, this experience of rejection led Jesus to go ahead and to change his way of acting.

Has something changed in your relationship with your family or with your friends, since you began to participate in the community? Has participation in the community helped you to accept and to have greater trust in persons, especially in the simplest and poorest persons?

#### A Division of the Text to Help in the Reading:

- Mark 6: 1: Jesus arrives to Nazareth, his community of origin.
- Mark 6: 2-3: The reaction of the people of Nazareth before Jesus.
- Mark 6: 4: The way in which Jesus accepts the criticism.
- Mark 6: 5-6: The lack of faith prevents him from working the miracle.

#### The Text:

<sup>1</sup> Leaving that district, he went to his hometown, and his disciples accompanied him. <sup>2</sup> With the coming of the Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, 'Where did



the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him? <sup>3</sup> This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?' And they would not accept him. <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is despised only in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house'; <sup>5</sup> and he could work no miracle there, except that he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. <sup>6</sup> He was amazed at their lack of faith. He made a tour round the villages, teaching.

## A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

## Some Questions

*to help us in our personal reflection.*

- Which is the part of this text which you have liked the most and what impressed you most? Why?
- Which is the attitude of Nazareth before Jesus? Why do they not believe in him?
- Because of the lack of faith of the people, Jesus cannot work many miracles in Nazareth. Why is faith so important? Would it be that Jesus cannot work miracles without the faith of persons?
- Which are the elements which have to characterize the mission of the disciples?
- Which is the point of the mission of the apostles which today has greatest importance for us? Why?

## Deepening the Theme

### Context of Yesterday and of Today:

- Throughout the pages of his Gospel, Mark indicates that the presence and actions of Jesus constitute a growing source of joy for some and a reason of rejection for others. The conflict grows, the mystery of God appears which envelopes the person of Jesus. With chapter 6 of the narrative, we find ourselves before a curve. The people of Nazareth close themselves up before Jesus (Mk 6: 1-6). And Jesus, before this closing up of the people of his community, opens himself to the people of another community. He directs himself toward the people of Galilee and sends his disciples on mission, teaching them how the relationship should be with the persons, so that it will be a true community relationship, which does not exclude as it happens among the people of Nazareth (Mk 6: 7-13).
- When Mark writes his Gospel, the Christian communities lived in a difficult situation, without horizons. Humanly speaking there was no future for them. The description of the conflict which Jesus lives in Nazareth and in the sending

out of the disciples, which extends the mission, makes it creative. For those who believe in Jesus there can be no situation without a horizon.

### Commentary on the text

- Mark 6: 1-3. Reactions of the people of Nazareth before Jesus

It is always good to go back to our own land. After a long absence, Jesus also goes back and, as usual, on Saturday he goes to a meeting of the community. Jesus was not the coordinator, but just the same he speaks. This is a sign that the persons could participate and express their opinion. But the people did not like the words pronounced by Jesus, they were scandalized. Jesus, who was known to them since he was a child, how is it that now he is so different? The people of Capernaum had accepted the teaching of Jesus (Mark 1: 22), but the people of Nazareth remained scandalized and had not accepted it. Which was the reason for this rejection? "Is this not the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary?" They did not accept God's mystery present in such a common person, one like themselves! In order to be able to speak of God, he would have to be different from them!

The expression "brothers of Jesus" causes much polemics between Catholics and Protestants. Basing themselves on this and in other texts, the Protestants say that Jesus had more brothers and sisters, and that Mary had more children! We Catholics say that Mary did not have other children. What can we think about this? In the first place, the two positions, that of Catholics and that of the Protestants, take arguments from the Bible and from the ancient Tradition from their respective Churches. For this reason, it is not convenient to discuss these questions using rational arguments, which are the fruit of our own ideas. It is a question of deep convictions which have something to do with faith and the sentiment of the people.

The argument supported by ideas alone fails to bring about a conviction of faith the roots of which are found in the heart! It only irritates and disturbs! But even if I do not agree with the opinion of the other one, I must always respect it. In the second place, instead of discussing around the texts, all of us, Catholics, and Protestants, should unite much more to fight in the defense of life, created by God, a life which is so transfigured by poverty, injustice, the lack of faith. We should remember other words of Jesus: "I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance" (Jn 10: 10). "So that all may be one, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (Jn 17: 21). "You must not stop him. Anyone who is not against us is for us" (Mk 9: 39-40).

- Mark 6: 4-6b. Reactions of Jesus before the attitude of the people of Nazareth  
Jesus knows very well that "the saint of the house does not work miracles". And he says: "A prophet is despised only in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house!" In fact, there where faith is not accepted, people can do nothing. The prejudice prevents it. Jesus, even if he wanted, can do nothing and remains surprised before their lack of faith.

### Information on the Gospel of Mark:

This year the Liturgy presents us in a particular way the Gospel of Mark. Because of this it is worthwhile to give some information which will help us to discover better the message which Mark wants to communicate to us.

- The design of the face of God on the wall of the Gospel of Mark

Jesus dies approximately in the year 33. When Mark writes his Gospel about the year 70, the Christian communities lived already dispersed in the Roman Empire. Some say that Mark writes for the community of Italy. Others say that he does it for those of Syria. It is difficult to know it with certainty. Nevertheless, one thing is certain. The problems were not lacking: the Roman Empire persecuted the Christians, the propaganda of the Empire infiltrated itself in the communities, the Jews from Palestine rebelled against the Roman invasion, there were internal tensions due to a diverse tendency, doctrine and heads...

- Mark writes his Gospel to help the communities to find a response to the problems and concerns they have. He collects various episodes and parables of Jesus and joins them together as bricks on a wall. The bricks were already ancient and known. They came from the community, where they were transmitted orally in the meetings and celebrations. The design formed by the bricks was new. It came from Mark, from his experience of Jesus. He wanted that the community, reading what Jesus did and said, would find a response to these questions: "Who is Jesus for us and who are we for Jesus? How can we be his disciples? How can we proclaim the Good News of God, that he has revealed? How can we travel on the path that he traced?"

### Three keys to understand the division of the Gospel of Mark

- **1<sup>st</sup> Key:** The Gospel of Mark was written to be read and listened to in *community*. When a book is read alone, one can always turn back, to join one thing to another, but when one is in community and a person is reading the Gospel before us, it is not possible to say: "Stop! Read again once more! I did not understand well!" As we shall see, a book written to be listened to in the community celebrations has a different way of dividing the theme from a book written to be read by one alone.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Key:** The Gospel of Mark is a *narrative*. A narrative is like a river. Going through the river in a boat, one is not aware of the divisions in the water. The river has no divisions! It is constituted by one flow alone, from the beginning to the end. In the river, the divisions, are made beginning from the bank of the river. For example it is said: "What a beautiful part which goes from that house up to the curve where there is a palm, three curves after that". But in the water no divisions can be seen. The narrative of Mark runs like a river. Its divisions, those who listen, find them on the margin, in the places through which Jesus passed by, in the geography, in the persons whom he meets, along the roads through which he goes by. These indications on the margin help those who listen not to get lost amid so many words and actions of Jesus and on Jesus. The geographic framework helps the reader to walk with Jesus, step after step, from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the lake to Calvary.



- **3<sup>rd</sup> Key:** the Gospel of Mark was written to be read in one only time. This is what the Jews did with the brief books of the Old Testament. For example, in the night of Easter, they read all the book of the Song of Songs. Some scholars affirm that the Gospel of Mark was written to be read, completely, in the night in the long Paschal vigil. Or, in order not to get the people who listened tired, the reading had to be divided and to have some pauses. Besides, when a narrative is long, as that of the Gospel of Mark, its reading has to be interrupted quite often. In certain moments there is need for a pause, otherwise the listeners would be lost. These pauses were foreseen by the author of the narrative himself. And these pauses were marked by short summaries, between two long readings. Practically, the same thing that happens in television. Every day, at the beginning of the news are repeated some scenes of the preceding transmission. When they end, some scenes of the next day are presented. These summaries are like the hinges which collect what has been read and open to what will follow. They allow one to stop and to begin anew, without interrupting or disturbing the sequence of the narrative. They help those who listen to place themselves in the river of the narrative which flows. In the Gospel of Mark there are diverse summaries of this type or pauses, which allow us to discover and follow the thread of the Good News of God which Jesus has revealed to us and that Mark tells us. In the whole there is a question of seven blocks or longer readings, intermingled with short summaries or hinges, where it is possible to make a pause.

### A Division of the Gospel of Mark

Below we give a possible division of the Gospel of Mark. Others divide it in a different way. The importance of a division is that it opens one of the many windows inside the text, and that it helps us to discover the direction of the road which Jesus opened for us toward the Father and the brothers and sisters.

- Mark 1: 1-13 - Beginning of the Good News
- Prepare the announcement
- 1<sup>st</sup> Reading
  - Mark 1: 14-15 - pause, summary, hinge
  - Mark 1: 16-3: 16 - The Good News grows. The conflict becomes present
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading
  - Mark 3: 7-12 - pause, summary, hinge
  - Mark 3: 13-6: 6 - The conflict grows. The Mystery appears
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Reading
  - Mark 6: 7-13 - pause, summary, hinge
  - Mark 6: 14-8: 21 - The Mystery grows. It is not understood
- 4<sup>th</sup> Reading
  - Mark 8: 22-26 - pause, summary, hinge
  - Mark 8: 27-10: 45 - They continue not to understand. The dark light of

the Cross appears

- 5<sup>th</sup> Reading
  - Mark 10: 46-52 - pause, summary, hinge
  - Mark 11: 1-13: 32 - The dark light of the Cross grows. Rupture and death appear
- 6<sup>th</sup> Reading
  - Mark 13: 33-37 - pause, summary, hinge
  - Mark 14: 1-15: 39 - Rupture and death grow. Victory over death appears
- 7<sup>th</sup> Reading
  - Mark 15: 40, 41 - pause, summary, hinge
  - Mark 15: 42-16: 20 - The victory over death increases. The Good News reappear
- 8<sup>th</sup> Reading
  - Mark 16: 9-20

In this division the titles are important. They indicate the path of the Spirit, of *inspiration*, which the Gospel follows from the beginning until the end. When an artist has an inspiration, he tries to express it in a work of art. A poem or an image which is produced encloses in itself this inspiration. Inspiration is like an electric force which runs invisibly through the wires and lights the lamp in our houses. In the same way also the inspiration runs invisibly through the letters of the poem or the form of the image to reveal or light in us a light similar or almost similar to that which shone in the soul of the artist. This is the reason why artistic works attract and shake persons so much. The same thing happens when we read and meditate on the Gospel of Mark. The same Spirit or *Inspiration* which impelled Mark to write the text, continues to be present in the words of his Gospel. Through an attentive and prayerful reading, this Spirit acts and begins to act in us. And thus, little by little, we discover the face of God who has revealed Himself in Jesus and which Mark communicates to us in his book.

## Prayer of Psalm 145

### Always Give Thanks for Everything!

I shall praise you to the heights, God my King,  
I shall bless your name for ever and ever. Day after day I shall bless you,  
I shall praise your name for ever and ever. Great is Yahweh and worthy of all  
praise, his greatness beyond all reckoning.  
Each age will praise your deeds to the next, proclaiming your mighty works.  
Your renown is the splendour of your glory, I will ponder the story of your  
wonders.  
They will speak of your awesome power, and I shall recount your greatness.  
They will bring out the memory of your great generosity, and joyfully acclaim  
your saving justice.  
Yahweh is tenderness and pity, slow to anger, full of faithful love. Yahweh is

generous to all,  
his tenderness embraces all his creatures. All your creatures shall thank you,  
Yahweh, and your faithful shall bless you.  
They shall speak of the glory of your kingship and tell of your might,  
making known your mighty deeds to the children of Adam, the glory and  
majesty of your kingship.  
Your kingship is a kingship for ever, your reign lasts from age to age.  
Yahweh is trustworthy in all his words, and upright in all his deeds.  
Yahweh supports all who stumble, lifts up those who are bowed down.  
All look to you in hope  
and you feed them with the food of the season. And, with generous hand,  
you satisfy the desires of every living creature. Upright in all that he does,  
Yahweh acts only in faithful love. He is close to all who call upon him, all who call  
on him from the heart.  
He fulfils the desires of all who fear him, he hears their cry and he saves them.  
Yahweh guards all who love him, but all the wicked he destroys.  
My mouth shall always praise Yahweh,  
let every creature bless his holy name for ever and ever.

## Final Prayer

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

## Monday, July 8, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,  
you raised a fallen world.  
Free us from sin  
and bring us the joy that lasts forever.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with  
you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 18-26

While Jesus was speaking to them, suddenly one of the officials came up, who bowed low in front of him and said, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and her life will be saved.' Jesus rose and, with his disciples, followed him.

Then suddenly from behind him came a woman, who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, and she touched the fringe of his cloak, for she was thinking, 'If only I can touch his cloak, I shall be saved.' Jesus turned round and saw her; and he said to her, 'Courage, my daughter, your faith has saved you.' And from that moment the woman was saved.

When Jesus reached the official's house and saw the flute-players, with the crowd making a commotion, he said, 'Get out of here; the little girl is not dead; she is asleep.' And they ridiculed him. But when the people had been turned out he went inside and took her by the hand; and she stood up. And the news of this spread all round the countryside.

## Reflection

Today's Gospel takes us to meditate on two miracles of Jesus. The first one was in favor of a woman considered unclean because of an irregular hemorrhage which had been lasting for more than twelve years. The second one in favor of a girl who had just died. According to the mentality of that time, the person who touched blood or a corpse or dead body was considered unclean and whoever touched that person became unclean. Blood and death were factors of exclusion! Therefore, those two women were marginalized persons, excluded from the participation in the community. Whoever touched them became unclean, and therefore, would not be able to participate in the community, and therefore, could not relate with God. To be admitted participating fully in the community, it was necessary to go through the rite of purification, prescribed by the norms of the law. Now, when curing the impurity of the woman, through faith, Jesus opens a new path toward God which does not depend anymore on the rites of purification, controlled by the priests. In resurrecting the girl, Jesus conquers the power of death and opens a new horizon to life.

- Matthew 9: 18-19: The death of the little girl. When Jesus was still speaking, behold an official of the place came to intercede for his daughter who has just died. He asks Jesus to go to impose his hands on her and, "she will live." The official thinks that Jesus has the power to make his daughter rise from the dead. This is a sign of much faith in Jesus on the part of the father of the little girl. Jesus rises and goes with him, taking only his disciples. This is the starting point of both episodes which follow: the cure of the woman who had been suffering for the past twelve years from a hemorrhage, and the resurrection of the little girl. The Gospel of Mark presents both of these episodes, but with many details: the official was called Jarius and he was the president of the Synagogue. The little girl was not dead yet, and she was twelve years old, etc. (Mk 5: 21-43). Matthew gives a briefer narration of the very lively one of Mark.
- Matthew 9: 20-21: The situation of the woman. While they were on the way to the official's house, a woman who had been suffering for twelve years because of an irregular hemorrhage got close to Jesus seeking to be cured. Twelve years with a hemorrhage! Therefore, she was marginalized, excluded, because as we have said, at that time blood rendered the person impure. Mark says that the woman had spent all she had with doctors, but instead of improving her situation had become worse (Mk 5: 25-26) But she had heard some speak about Jesus (Mk 5: 27). Therefore, a new hope sprang in her. She



told herself: "If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved". The catechism of that time said: "If I touch his clothes, I will remain impure". The woman thinks exactly the contrary! This was a sign of great courage! A sign also that women were not in agreement with everything that the religious authority taught. The teaching of the Pharisees and of the Scribes failed to control the thinking of the people. Thank God! The woman got close to Jesus from behind, she touched the end of his cloak and she was cured.

- Matthew 9: 22. The word of Jesus which enlightens. Jesus turns and seeing the woman declares: "Courage, my daughter your faith has saved you". A brief phrase, but which makes us see three very important points:
  - (1) In saying "my daughter," Jesus accepts the woman in the new community which has formed around him. She was no longer excluded.
  - (2) What she expected and believed takes place in fact. She was cured. This proves that the catechism of the religious authority was not correct and that in Jesus was opened a new path which gave people the possibility of obtaining the purity which the law demanded and to come into contact with God.
  - (3) Jesus recognizes that without the faith of this woman, He would not have been able to work the miracle. The cure was not a magic rite, but an act of faith.
- Matthew 9: 23-24: In the house of the official. After that Jesus goes to the house of the official. Seeing the agitation of those who were mourning because of the death of the little girl, he asks everybody to get out from the room. And he says: "The little girl is not dead, she is sleeping!" People laugh, because they know how to distinguish when a person sleeps or when she is dead. Death was for them a barrier that nobody could go beyond. It is the laughter of Abraham and of Sarah, that is, of those who fail to believe that nothing is impossible for God (Gn 17: 17; 18: 12-14; Lk 1: 27). The words of Jesus still have a very deep significance. The situation of the communities at the time of Matthew seemed to be in a situation of death. Even though they heard said, "It is not death, you are asleep! Wake up!"
- Matthew 9: 25-26: The resurrection of the little girl. Jesus does not give any importance to the laughter of the people. He waits for everyone to get out of the house. Then he enters, takes the little girl by the hand and she gets up. Mark keeps the words of Jesus: "*Talita kum!*" which mean: "Little girl, I tell you to get up!" (Mk 5: 41). The news spread throughout that region. The people believed that Jesus is the Lord of life who overcomes death.

## Personal Questions

- Today, which are the categories of persons who feel excluded from participating in the Christian community? Which are the factors which cause the exclusion of so many persons and render life difficult for them in the family and in society?

- “The little girl is not dead. She sleeps!” “She is not dead! You are sleeping! Wake up! This is the message of today’s Gospel. What does it tell me? Am I one of those who laugh?”

## Concluding Prayer

I shall praise you to the heights, God my King, I shall bless your name for ever and ever.

Day after day I shall bless you,

I shall praise your name for ever and ever. (Ps 145: 1-2)

## Tuesday, July 9, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,

through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,  
you raised a fallen world.

Free us from sin

and bring us the joy that lasts forever.

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

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 32-38

A man was brought to Jesus, a dumb demoniac. And when the devil was driven out, the dumbman spoke and the people were amazed and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.” But the Pharisees said, “It is through the prince of devils that he drives out devils.” Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. And when he saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to his harvest.”

## Reflection

Today’s Gospel presents two facts: (1) the cure of a possessed dumb person (Mt 9: 32-34) and (2) a summary of the activity of Jesus (Mt 9: 35-38). These two episodes end the narrative part of chapters 8 and 9 of the Gospel of Matthew in which the Evangelist seeks to indicate how Jesus put into practice the teachings given in the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5 and 7). In chapter 10, the meditation which begins in the Gospel of tomorrow, we see the second great discourse of Jesus: The Discourse of the Mission (Mt 10: 1-42).

- Matthew 9: 32-33a: The cure of a dumb. In one only verse Matthew describes the arrival of the possessed person before Jesus, the expulsion of the demon and the attitude of Jesus, which in the fourth Gospel there is the attention and affection of Jesus with sick persons. The illnesses were many. Social security was nonexistent. The illnesses were not only deficiencies of the body: deafness, blindness, paralysis, leprosy and so many other sicknesses. In fact, these illnesses were nothing else than a manifestation of a much deeper and vast evil which undermined the health of persons, and that is the total abandonment and the depressing and inhuman state in which they were obliged to live. The activity and the cures of Jesus were directed not only against physical sickness, but also and above all against this greater evil of material and spiritual abandonment, in which people were obliged to live the few years of life. Then, in addition to the economic exploitation which stole half of the family stipend, the official religion of that time, instead of helping people to find strength in God, to resist and have hope, taught that sickness was a punishment from God for sin. This increased in them the sentiment of exclusion and condemnation. Jesus did all the contrary. The acceptance full of tenderness of Jesus and the cure of the sick form part of the effort to knit together again the human relationship among persons and to re-establish community and fraternal living in the villages of Galilee, his land. Matthew 9: 33b-34: The twofold interpretation of the cure of the dumb man. Before the cure of the possessed dumb man, the reaction of the people is one of admiration and of gratitude: "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!" The reaction of the Pharisee is one of mistrust and malice: "It is through the prince of devils that he drives out devils!" They were not able to deny the facts which cause admiration in the people, the only way which the Pharisees find to neutralize the influence of Jesus before the people is to attribute the expulsion to the power of the evil one. Mark presents an extensive argument of Jesus to demonstrate the lack of coherence and the malice of the interpretation given by the Pharisees (Mk 3: 22-27). Matthew does not present any response of Jesus to the interpretation of the Pharisees, because when malice is evident, truth shines by itself.
- Matthew 9: 35: Tireless, Jesus goes through the villages. The description of the tireless activity of Jesus is beautiful, in which emerges the double concern to which we referred: the acceptance full of tenderness and the cure of the sick: "Jesus went through all the towns, teaching in their Synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and all kinds of illness". In the previous chapters, Matthew had already referred several times to this itinerant activity of Jesus in the villages and towns of Galilee (Mt 4: 23-24; 8: 16).
- Matthew 9: 36: The compassion of Jesus. "Seeing the crowds, he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd". Those who should be shepherds were not shepherds; they did not take care of the flock. Jesus tries to be the shepherd (Jn 10: 11-14). In this, Matthew sees the realization of the Prophecy of the Servant of Yahweh, who took upon himself our sickness, and bore our infirmities" (Mt 8: 17 and Is 53: 4). As it was for Jesus, the great concern of the Servant was "to find a word of

comfort for those who were discouraged". (Is 50: 4). Jesus shows the same compassion toward the abandoned crowd, on the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves: they are like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 15: 32). The Gospel of Matthew has a constant concern in revealing to the converted Jews of the communities of Galilee and of Syria that Jesus is the Messiah announced by the Prophets. For this reason, frequently, he shows that in Jesus' activity the prophecies are fulfilled (cf. Mt 1: 23; 2: 5, 15, 17, 23; 3: 3; 4: 14-16; etc.).

- Matthew 9: 37-38: The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few. Jesus transmits to the disciples the concern and the compassion which are within him: "The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few! Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to his harvest!"

## Personal Questions

- Compassion for the tired and hungry crowds. In the history of humanity, there have never been so many tired and hungry people as today. Television diffuses the facts, but does not offer any responses. Do we, Christians, succeed to have the same compassion of Jesus and to communicate it to others?
- The goodness of Jesus toward the poor disturbed the Pharisees. They have recourse to malice to neutralize the discomfort caused by Jesus. Are there many good attitudes in the persons who disturb me? How do I interpret them: with pleasant admiration as the crowds or with malice as the Pharisees?

## Concluding Prayer

Sing to him, make music for him, recount all his wonders!  
Glory in his holy name,  
let the hearts that seek Yahweh rejoice! (Ps 105: 2-3)

## Wednesday, July 10, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,  
you raised a fallen world.

Free us from sin  
and bring us the joy that lasts forever.

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

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 1-7



Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who was also his betrayer.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.'

## Reflection

The second great Discourse: The Discourse of the Mission begins in chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew organizes his Gospel as a new edition of the Law of God or like a new "Pentateuch" with its five books. For this reason, his Gospel presents five great discourses or teachings of Jesus followed by a narrative part, in which he describes the way in which Jesus puts into practice what he had taught in the discourses. The following is the outline:

- Introduction: the birth and preparation of the Messiah (Mt 1 to 4)
- Sermon on the Mountain: the entrance door into the Kingdom (Mt 5 to 7)
- Narrative Mt 8 and 9  
Discourse of the Mission: how to announce and diffuse the Kingdom (Mt 10)
- Narrative Mt 11 and 12  
Discourse of the Parables: The mystery of the Kingdom present in life (Mt 13)
- Narrative Mt 14 to 17  
Discourse of the Community: the new way of living together in the Kingdom (Mt 18)
- Narrative 19 to 23  
Discourse of the future coming of the Kingdom: the utopia which sustains hope (Mt 24 and 25)
- Conclusion: Passion, death and Resurrection (Mt 26 to 28)

Today's Gospel presents to us the beginning of the Discourse of the Mission, in which the accent is placed on three aspects:

- (a) the call of the disciples (Mt 10: 1);
- (b) the list of the names of the twelve Apostles who will be the recipients of the Discourse on the Mission (Mt 10: 2-4);
- (c) the sending out of the twelve (Mt 10: 5-7).

- Matthew 10: 1: The call of the twelve disciples. Matthew had already spoken about the call of the disciples (Mt 4: 18-22; 9: 9). Here, at the beginning of the Discourse of the Mission, he presents a summary: "He summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and all kinds of illness." The task or the mission of the disciple is to follow Jesus, the Master, forming community with him and carrying out the same mission of Jesus: to drive out the unclean spirits, to cure all sorts of diseases and all sorts of illness. In Mark's Gospel they receive the same two-fold mission, formulated with other words: Jesus constituted the group of Twelve, to remain with him and to send them out to preach and cast out devils" (Mc 3: 14-15).

1) To be with him, that is to form a community, in which Jesus is the center.

2) To preach and to be able to cast out the devils, that is, to announce the Good News and to conquer the force of evil which destroys the life of the people and alienates persons.

Luke says that Jesus prayed the whole night, and the following day he called the disciples. He prayed to God to know whom to choose (Lk 6: 12-13).

- Matthew 10: 2-4: The list of the names of the Twelve Apostles. A good number of these names come from the Old Testament. For example, Simon is the name of one of the sons of the Patriarch Jacob (Gen 29: 33). James is the same as Giacomo (Gn 25: 26). Judas is the name of the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Matthew also had the name of Levi (Mk 2: 14), who was the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Of the Twelve Apostles seven have a name which comes from the time of the Patriarchs. Two are called Simon; two are called James; two are called Judas, one Levi! Only one has a Greek name: Philip. This reveals the desire of people to start again the history from the beginning! Perhaps it is good to think in the names which are given today to the children when they are born. Because each one of us is called by God by his/her name.
- Matthew 10: 5-7: The sending out or the mission of the twelve apostles toward the lost sheep of Israel. After having given the list of the names of the twelve, Jesus sends them out with the following recommendation: "Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town, go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand". In this one phrase there is a three-fold insistence in showing that the preference of the mission is for the House of Israel: (1) Do not go among the gentiles, (2) do not enter into the towns of the Samaritans, (3) rather go to the lost sheep of Israel. Here appears a response to the doubt of the first Christians concerning opening up to pagans. Paul, who strongly affirmed the openness to the gentiles, agrees in saying that the Good News of Jesus should first be announced to the Jews and, then to the gentiles (Rm 9: 1-11, 36; cf. Acts 1: 8; 11: 3; 13: 46; 15: 1. 5: 23-29). But then, in the same Gospel of Matthew, in the conversation of Jesus with the Canaanite woman, the openness to the gentiles will take place (Mt 15: 21-29).

- The sending out of the Apostles toward all peoples. After the Resurrection of Jesus, there are several episodes on the sending out of the Apostles not only toward the Jews, but toward all peoples. In Matthew: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe everything which I have commanded. And I will be with you until the end of time" (Mt 28: 19-20). In Mark: "Go to the entire world, proclaim the Good News to all creatures. Those who will believe and will be baptized will be saved; those who will not believe will be condemned" (Mk 15-16). In Luke: "So it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this (Lk 24: 46-48; Acts 1: 8) John summarizes all in one phrase: "As the Father has sent me, so I also send you!" (Jn 20: 21).

## Personal Questions

- Have you ever thought sometime about the meaning of your name? Have you asked your parents why they gave you the name that you have? Do you like your name?
- Jesus calls the disciples. His call has a two-fold purpose: to form a community and to go on mission. How do I live in my life this two-fold purpose?

## Concluding Prayer

Seek Yahweh and his strength, tirelessly seek his presence!  
Remember the marvels he has done, his wonders, the judgements he has spoken. (Ps 105: 4-5)

## Thursday, July 11, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,  
you raised a fallen world.

Free us from sin  
and bring us the joy that lasts forever.

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

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 7-15

Jesus said to his disciples: "As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils.

You received without charge, give without charge. Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the laborer deserves his keep. 'Whatever town or village you go into, seek out someone worthy and stay with him until you leave.

As you enter his house, salute it, and if the house deserves it, may your peace come upon it; if it does not, may your peace come back to you. And if anyone does not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from your feet. In truth I tell you, on the Day of Judgement it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town."

## Reflection

The Gospel today presents the second part of the sending out of the disciples. Yesterday we have seen that Jesus insists on directing them first toward the lost sheep of Israel. Today, we see the concrete instructions to carry out the mission.

- Matthew 10: 7: The objective of the mission: to reveal the presence of the Kingdom. "Go and announce the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand". The principal objective is that of announcing that the Kingdom is close at hand. This is the novelty which Christ brings to us. For the other Jews there was still a long time before the coming of the Kingdom. It would have come only after they would have done their own part. The coming of the Kingdom depended, according to them, on their effort. For the Pharisees, for example, the Kingdom would be attained only after the perfect observance of the Law. For the Essenes, when the country would have purified itself. But Jesus thinks in a different way. He has a different way of reading the facts of life. He says that the hour has already arrived (Mk 1: 15). When he says that the Kingdom is close at hand or that the Kingdom is already among us, in our midst, he does not mean to say that the Kingdom was just arriving at that moment, but that it was already there, independently of the effort made by the people. What they all expected was already present among the people, gratuitously, but the people did not know it, nor perceived it (cf. Lk 17: 21). Jesus is aware of this because he sees reality with different eyes. He reveals and announces to the poor of his land this hidden presence of the Kingdom in our midst (Lk 4: 18). It is the mustard seed which will receive the rain of his word and the warmth of his love.
- Matthew 10: 8: The signs of the presence of the Kingdom: accept the excluded. How should the presence of the Kingdom be announced? Only through words and discourses? No! The signs of the presence of the Kingdom are above all concrete gestures or acts, done gratuitously: "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out the devils. You received without charge, give without charge". This means that the disciples should accept within the community those who have been excluded. This practice of solidarity

criticizes both the religion and society which exclude and indicates concrete solutions.

- Matthew 10: 9-10: Do not take anything for the journey. Contrary to other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus should not take anything: “Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or a spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the laborer deserves his keep”. This means that they must trust in the hospitality of the people. Because the disciples who go without anything, taking only peace (Mk 10: 13), show that they trust the people. It is certain that they will be welcomed, that they will be able to participate in the life and the work of the people of the place and that they will be able to survive with what they will receive in exchange, because the laborer deserves his keep. This means that the disciples should trust in sharing. By means of this practice they criticize the laws of exclusion and recover the ancient values of community living together.
- Matthew 10: 11-13: To share peace in the community. The disciples should not go from house to house but should seek persons of peace and remain in that house. That is, they should stay in a stable manner. Thus, through that new practice, they criticize the culture of accumulation which characterized the politics of the Roman Empire, and they announced a new model of living together. Once all these requirements were respected, the disciples could cry out: The Kingdom of God has arrived! To announce the Kingdom does not mean, in the first place, to teach truths and doctrine, but lead toward a new fraternal manner of living and of sharing starting from the Good News which Jesus has brought to us: God and Father and Mother of all men and women.
- Matthew 10: 14-15: *The severity of the menace*. How is such a severe menace to be understood? Jesus has brought us something completely new. He has come to rescue the community values of the past: hospitality, sharing, communion around the table, acceptance of the excluded. That explains the severity against those who reject the message. Because they do not reject something new, but their own past, their own culture and wisdom! The objective of the pedagogy of Jesus is to dig out from the memory, to recover the wisdom of the people, to reconstruct the community, to renew the Covenant, to reconstruct life.

## Personal Questions

- Today, how can we put into practice the recommendation not to take anything for the journey when going to a mission?
- Jesus orders to seek for persons of peace, so as to be able to remain in their house. Today, who would be a person of peace to whom to address oneself in the announcement of the Good News?

## Concluding Prayer



God Sabaoth, come back, we pray, look down from heaven and see, visit this vine;  
protect what your own hand has planted. (Ps 80: 14-15)

## Friday, July 12, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

Father,  
through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,  
you raised a fallen world.  
Free us from sin  
and bring us the joy that lasts forever.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with  
you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 16-23

Jesus said to his disciples: "Look, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be cunning as snakes and yet innocent as doves. 'Be prepared for people to hand you over to Sanhedrin and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as evidence to them and to the gentiles. But when you are handed over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes, because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you.

'Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will come forward against their parents and have them put to death. You will be universally hated on account of my name; but anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved.

If they persecute you in one town, take refuge in the next; and if they persecute you in that, take refuge in another. In truth I tell you, you will not have gone the round of the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes.

### Reflection

To the community of his disciples, called and gathered around him and invested with his same authority as collaborators, Jesus entrusts them directives in view of their future mission.

- Matthew 10: 16-19: Danger and trust in God. Jesus introduces this part of his discourse with two metaphors: sheep amid wolves; prudent as serpents, simple as the doves. The first one shows the difficult and dangerous context to which the disciples are sent. On the one hand, the dangerous situation is made evident in which the disciples sent on mission will find themselves; on the other the expression "I send you" expresses protection. Also regarding the

astuteness of the serpent and the simplicity of the dove Jesus seems to put together two attitudes: trust in God and prolonged and attentive reflection on the way in which we should relate with others.

- Jesus, then, following this gives an order that seems, at first sight, filled with mistrust: «beware of men...», but it means to be attentive to possible persecutions, hostility, and denouncement. The expression “will deliver you” does not only refer to the accusation in the tribunal but, above all, it has a theological value: the disciples who is following Jesus can experience the same experience of the Master of “being delivered in the hands of man” (17: 22). The disciples must be strong and resist in order “to give witness,” The fact of being delivered to the tribunal should become a witness for the Jews and for the Pagans, it is the possibility to be able to draw them to the person and the cause of Jesus and, therefore, to the knowledge of the Gospel. This positive implication is important as a result of witnessing: characterized by the credible and fascinating faith.
- Matthew 10: 20: the divine help. So that all this may take place in the mission-witness of the disciples it is essential to have the help that comes from God. That is to say that we should not trust our own security and resources, but the disciples in critical, dangerous, and aggressive situations, for their lives found help and solidarity in God. For their mission as disciples is also promised the Spirit of the Father (v.20), he is the one who acts in them when they are committed in their mission of evangelization and of witnessing, the Spirit will speak through them.
- Matthew 10: 21-22: Threat-consolation. Once again, the announcement of threat is repeated in the expression “will be delivered”: Brother will betray brother, a father against his son, the sons against the parents. It is a question of a true and great disorder in the social relationships, the breaking up of the family. Persons who are bound by the most intimate family relationships – such as parents, children, brothers, and sisters – will fall in the misfortune of mutually hating and eliminating one another. In what sense does such a division of the family have to do with the witness on behalf of Jesus? Such breaking up of the family relationships could be caused by the diverse attitudes that are taken within the family, regarding Jesus. The expression “you will be hated” seems to indicate the theme of the hostile acceptance on the part of the contemporaries and of those he sent. The strong sense of the words of Jesus find a comparison in another part of the New Testament: «Blessed are you if you are insulted for the sake of Christ’s name, because the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God, rests upon you. No one of you should suffer as a murderer or thief or evil doer or as a spy. But if one suffers as a Christian, do not blush, because of this name, rather give glory to God”. After the threat, follows the promise of consolation (v.3). The greatest consolation for the disciples will be that of “being saved”, of being able to live the experience of the Savior, that is to say, to participate in his victories.

## Personal Questions

- What do these dispositions of Jesus teach us today for understanding the mission of the Christian?
- Do you know how to trust on divine help when you experience conflicts, persecutions, and trials?

## Concluding Prayer

Give me back the joy of your salvation, sustain in me a generous spirit.  
 Lord, open my lips,  
 and my mouth will speak out your praise. (Ps 51: 12, 15)

## Saturday, July 13, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
 through the obedience of Jesus, your servant and your Son,  
 you raised a fallen world.  
 Free us from sin  
 and bring us the joy that lasts forever.  
 We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with  
 you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 24-33

Jesus said to his disciples: "The disciple is not superior to teacher, nor slave to master. It is enough for disciple to grow to be like teacher, and slave like master. If they have called the master of the house "Beelzebul," how much more the members of his household?

'So do not be afraid of them. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted.

So, there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. 'So, if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of human beings, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.

## Reflection

Today's Gospel presents to us diverse instructions of Jesus on the behavior that the disciples have to adopt in the exercise of their mission. What strikes most in these instructions are two warnings:

(a) the frequency with which Jesus refers to the persecutions and suffering which they will have to bear;

(b) the insistence repeated three times to the disciples not to be afraid.

- Matthew 10: 24-25: Persecutions and sufferings which mark the life of the disciples. These two verses constitute the final part of a warning of Jesus to the disciples concerning persecutions. The disciples should know that, because of the fact of being disciples of Jesus, they will be persecuted (Mt 10: 17-23). But this should not be a reason for worrying, because a disciple should imitate the life of the Master and share the trials with him. This is part of discipleship. "A disciple is not greater than the Teacher or a servant than his master; it is sufficient for the disciple to grow to be like his teacher and the servant like his master." If they called Jesus Beelzebul, how much more will they insult his disciples. In other words, the disciple of Jesus should be worried if in his life there are no persecutions.
- Matthew 10: 26-27: Do not be afraid to say the truth. The disciples should not be afraid to be persecuted. Those who persecute them, succeed to pervert the sense of the facts and to spread calumnies which change truth into lie, and the lie into truth. But no matter how great the lie is, truth will triumph at the end and will make the lie crumble down. Therefore, we should not be afraid to proclaim truth, the things which Jesus has taught. Every day, the means of communication succeed to pervert the meaning of things and the persons who proclaim the truth are considered as criminals; they make the neo-liberal system to appear as just and it perverts the sense of human life.
- Matthew 10: 28: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body. The disciples should not be afraid of those who kill the body, who torture, who strike and cause suffering. Those who torture can kill the body, but they cannot succeed to kill liberty and the spirit in the body. They should be afraid, yes, that the fear of suffering may lead them to hide or to deny the truth, and that this will lead them to offend God, because anyone who draws away from God will be lost forever.
- Matthew 10: 29-31: Do not be afraid, but trust in Divine Providence. The disciples should not fear anything, because they are in God's hands. Jesus orders to look at the birds in the air. Two sparrows are sold for a penny, but not one of them will fall to the ground without the Father wanting. Every hair on our head has been counted. Luke says that not one hair falls without our Father wanting it (Lk 21: 18). And so many hairs fall from our head! Because of this "Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows." This is the lesson which Jesus draws from the contemplation of nature.
- Matthew 10: 32-33: Do not be afraid to be the witnesses of Jesus. At the end Jesus summarizes everything in this sentence: "If anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven; 33: the one who instead will disown me in the presence of human beings, I will disown him in the presence of my Father

in heaven". Knowing that we are in God's hands and that God is with us, at every moment, we have the necessary courage and the peace to render witness and to be disciples of Jesus.

## Personal Questions

- Are you afraid? Afraid of what? Why?
- Have you been persecuted sometimes because of your commitment to announce the Good News of God which Jesus announced to us?

## Concluding Prayer

Your decrees stand firm, unshakeable, holiness is the beauty of your house, Yahweh, for all time to come. (Ps 93: 5)

## Sunday, July 14, 2024

*15<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time: The Mission of the Twelve*

## Opening Prayer

Father, grant that we may see in your Son the face of your love, the Word of salvation and mercy, so that we may follow him with generous heart and proclaim him in word and deed to our brothers and sisters who look for the Kingdom and his justice. Pour out your Spirit upon us that we may listen attentively and that our witness may be authentic and free, even in difficult times and in times when we do not understand. Who lives and reigns forever and ever.

## Gospel Reading – Mark 6: 7-13

### The Context:

After the calling (in the text "institution") of the twelve (Mk 3: 13-19), Jesus teaches and heals as part of their schooling. Now the time has come for their first public practice: as a first experience, they must go and proclaim. Two by two, they go among the people with tasks, which in Mark seem to be rather simple: a generic proclamation to conversion and various types of prodigies against evil. Jesus does not let the violent refusal of himself in Nazareth frighten him, a fact first recalled by Mark: Mk 6: 1-6. He does not suspend his mission because our closed minds cannot block him.

The other two Synoptic Gospels (Mt 10: 1-42; Lk 9: 1-10) recount with greater precision the tasks and challenges the twelve will meet. However, in all the Gospels it is important to note that the mission comes from Jesus and only after they have learnt from him the manner and the content. The number "twelve" - so often repeated in connection with the foundation of the new community, even to the glories of the Apocalypse - signify continuity, but also the surpassing



of the preceding saving economy. The sending "two by two" must be understood according to the Jewish mentality that accepts any witness only if it is brought by a "community" (at least minimal) and not by one person.

### The Text:

And he went about among the villages teaching. 7 And he called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8 He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9 but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. 10 And he said to them, "Where you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11 And if any place will not receive you and they refuse to hear you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them." 12 So they went out and preached that men should repent. 13 And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.

## A Moment of Silent Prayer

*to re-read the text with our heart and to recognize in the words and structure, the presence of the mystery of the living God.*

## Some Questions

*to see the important points in the text and begin to assimilate them.*

- In Mark, why is the driving out of the unclean spirits so important?
- What is the sense of this insistence on poverty of means?
- What is the content of this first proclamation?
- Why does Jesus place together poverty and courage and freedom?
- Why does the proclamation have to be itinerant and not stable?
- What do the other Synoptic Gospels explain better?

## A Deepening of the Reading

- **He began to send them out two by two"**

The mission of the disciples does not come from personal enthusiasm or from a desire for greatness. It begins when Jesus thinks that they are ready to speak, based on what they have heard and assimilated. According to Mark, until then they had seen many miracles, heard some teachings, important among the teachings being the theme of the seed that grows in several ways; they have also assisted at some arguments between Jesus and the leaders.

They were to refer themselves to Jesus' practice as healer, his call to conversion, his availability to move among the people, his itinerant preaching. They are certainly not mature yet. Under Jesus' supervision they will learn and better themselves: they will come up with the right words and the proper

gestures. They will experience the enthusiasm that comes from great success, but in the end, they will have to go beyond even their focus on miracles in order to announce the death and resurrection of the Savior.

- **"He gave them authority over the unclean spirits"**

This concerns "*exousia*" which Jesus practiced too: they are therefore empowered and authorised to use the same *power*. For Mark, it almost seems that this is the main exercise currently; in fact, he concentrates on this aspect of Jesus as "*thaumaturge*" and one who drives out evil spirits.

We need to understand that "unclean spirits" meant many things: psychic diseases, forms of epilepsy, destructive spiritual forces, the enslaving power of the law, every form of psychic disability, physical malfunctions, etc.

Power is exercised in walking among these sufferings, accepting the challenge to faith in God provided by these challenges, accepting to live in solidarity, accepting the dignity of each human being. We must not identify "unclean" with sexual or legal impurity. It is a matter of "purity" as God sees it, that is, love, solidarity, justice, mercy, collaboration, welcoming, etc. That is why the twelve will have to call "to conversion" from these prejudices, perverse and "unclean" forms to live as children of God.

- **"Nothing for their journey, except a staff..."**

Their mission must be an itinerant one, not sedentary; that is, the mission must constantly stimulate the going, new encounters, detachment from results, interior and exterior freedom. Hence the recommendation, found in all the Synoptic Gospels, to practice material poverty in dress and food, in security and guarantees. It was probably also a matter of the shortness of the experience: as a first exercise, it was not supposed to last long, and so, they had to travel light, free, focused more on the importance of the proclamation than on the consolidation of results.

But when this text was written, the situation of the community of disciples was a lot more developed and consolidated. Thus, the memory of these recommendations not only served to recall this first joyful and adventurous experience, but also to confront the present style of life and customs with those of the time of Jesus, now so long ago. Thus, the text aims at remembering and at a new missionary impetus, less fearful of the demands of comfort and security.

- **"When you leave, shake off the dust..."**

The Lord's recommendations bring together two aspects, which only appear to be in contradiction. On the one hand, the disciples must be completely available to meet the people, without thinking of gain or survival. They must seek out sick people - that is, those sick for personal or social reasons, from the oppression of the law or from human evil - and free them, pour the oil of consolation on them, heal their wounds and interior hurts. But, on the other hand, they must also avoid accepting any form of hypocrisy and irresponsible do-gooders.

Besides charity and care for the suffering, they must also have the courage to unmask hypocrisy, react to closed minds and accept personal failure. Where they are not received, they must leave without regrets or weakness. Rejection or hypocrisy render proclamation and witness sterile. He asks for a clear and unequivocal break, a thing that Jesus himself, perhaps, had not experienced much. He always tried to go back and dialogue, suffered from the closed minds of the Pharisees and the Scribes. He challenged their tenacious and insidious teachings. Yet now he imposes on his disciples the direction not to waste time on those who will not receive them. Probably, in this recommendation there is also an adaptation to the situation of the community: they must not regret the break with the Israelite community. There had been a closed attitude and a ferocious and aggressive refusal: well, Jesus had foreseen this too. There was no need to grieve. They must go to other people, and they must not waste time trying to win back that which could not be won back.

## Psalm 85

### Prayer for justice and peace

Show us thy steadfast love,  
O Lord and grant us thy salvation.

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. Yea, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and make his footsteps a way.

## Closing Prayer

Lord our God, keep your Son's disciples from the easy ways of popularity, of cheap glory, and lead them to the ways of the poor and scourged of the earth, so that they may recognize in their faces the face of the Master and Redeemer.

Give them eyes to see possible ways of peace and solidarity; ears to hear the requests of sense and salvation of so many people who seek as by feeling; enrich their hearts with generous fidelity and a sensitiveness and understanding so that they may walk along the way and be true and sincere witnesses to the glory that shines in the crucified resurrected and victorious one.

Who lives and reigns gloriously with you, Father, for ever and ever. Amen

## Monday, July 15, 2024

## Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth  
guides us to the way of Christ.

May all who follow him  
reject what is contrary to the gospel.

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

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 34-11: 1

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword. For I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; a person's enemies will be the members of his own household. 'No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. No one who prefers son or daughter to me is worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 'Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person. 'If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward.'

When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

## Reflection

In May of 2014, the Fifth Conference of Latin American Bishops, which was held in Aparecida in the north of Brazil, wrote a very important document on the theme: *Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our peoples may have life.*" The discourse of the Mission of chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew, offers much light to be able to carry out the mission as disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ. The Gospel today presents to us the last part of this Discourse of the Mission.

- Matthew 10: 34-36: I have not come to bring peace to the earth but the sword. Jesus always speaks of peace (Mt 5: 9; Mk 9: 50; Lk 1: 79; 10: 5; 19: 38; 24: 36; Jn 14: 27; 16: 33; 20: 21, 26). And then, how can we understand the phrase in today's Gospel which seems to say the contrary: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; no, I have not come to bring peace but the sword". This affirmation does not mean that Jesus was in favor of division and the sword. No! Jesus does not want neither the sword (Jn 18: 11), nor division. He wants the union of all in truth (cf. Jn 17: 17-23). At that time, the announcement of the truth that He, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Messiah became a reason of

great division among the Jews. In the same family or community, some were in favor and others were radically contrary. In this sense the Good News of Jesus was truly a source of division, a “sign of contradiction” (Lk 2: 34) or, as Jesus said, he was bringing the sword. In this way the other warning is understood: “I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; a person’s enemies will be the members of his own household”. In fact, that was what was happening in the families and in the communities: much division, much discussion, the consequence of the announcement of the Good News among the Jews of that time, because some accepted, others denied. Today the same thing happens. Many times, there where the Church renews itself, the appeal to the Good News becomes a ‘sign of contradiction’ and of division. Persons, who during years have lived comfortably in their routine of Christian life, do not want to allow themselves to be bothered by the ‘innovations’ of Vatican Council II. Disturbed by the changes, they used all their intelligence to find arguments in defense of their opinions and to condemn the changes considering them contrary to what they thought was the true faith.

- Matthew 10: 37: No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. Luke gives this same phrase, but much more demanding. Literally he says: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his sons and brothers, his sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14: 26). How can this affirmation of Jesus be combined with the other one in which he orders to observe the fourth commandment: love and honor father and mother? (Mk 7: 10-12; Mt 19: 19). Two observations:
  - (1) The fundamental criterion on which Jesus insists always is this one: the Good News of God should be the supreme value of our life. In our life there can be no greater value.
  - (2) The economic and social situation at the time of Jesus was such that the families were obliged to close themselves up in themselves.

They no longer had the conditions to respect the obligations of human community living together as for example: sharing, hospitality, invitation to a meal and the acceptance of the excluded. This individualistic closing up in self, caused by the national and international situation produced distortion:

- (1) It made life in community impossible
  - (2) It limited the commandment “honor father and mother” exclusively to the small family nucleus and no longer to the larger family of the community
  - (3) It prevented the full manifestation of the Good News of God, because if God is Father/Mother we are brothers and sisters of one another.
- And this truth should be expressed in the life of the community. A living and fraternal community is the mirror of the face of God. Human living together without community is a mirror which disfigures the face of God. In this



context, the request of Jesus: “to hate father and mother means that the disciples should overcome the individualistic closing up of the small family on itself and extend it to the community dimension. Jesus himself put into practice what he taught others. His family wanted to call him to close himself up in self. When they told him: “Look, your mother and your brothers are outside and they are looking for you,” he answered: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And looking at the persons around him he said: “Behold, my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God is my brother, my sister and my mother” (Mk 3, 32-35). He extends the family! This was and continues to be even today for the small family the only way to be able to keep and transmit the values in which he believes.

- Matthew 10: 38-39: The demands of the mission of the disciples. In these two verses, Jesus gives important and demanding advice: (a) To take up the cross and follow Jesus: Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. To perceive all the significance and important of this first advice it is well to keep in mind the witness of Saint Paul: “But as for me, it is not of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (Ga 6, 14). To carry the cross presupposes, even now, a radical drawing away from the iniquitous system which reigns in the world. (b) To have the courage to give one’s life: “Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it.” Only the one, who in life has been capable of giving himself totally to others, will feel fulfilled. This second advice confirms the deepest human experience; the source of life is in the gift of life. Giving one receives. If the wheat grain does not die ... (Jn 12: 24).
- Matthew 10: 40: The identification of the disciple with Jesus and with God himself. This human experience of donation and of the gift receives here a clarification, a deepening: “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me: and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” In the total gift of self, the disciple identifies himself with Jesus; there the encounter with God takes place, and God allows himself to be found by the one who seeks him.
- Matthew 10: 41-42: the reward of the prophet, of the just and of the disciple. The discourse of the Mission ends with one phrase on reward: “Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet’s reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without reward”. In this phrase the sequence is very meaningful: the prophet is recognized because of his mission as one sent by God. The upright person is recognized by his behavior, by his perfect way of observing the law of God. The disciple is recognized by no quality or mission, but simply by his social condition of being least among the people. The Kingdom is not made of great things. It is like a very big house which is constructed with small bricks. Anyone who despises the brick will have great difficulty in constructing the house. Even a glass of water serves as a brick for the construction of the Kingdom.

- Matthew 11: 1: The end of the Discourse of the Mission. The end of the Discourse of the Mission. When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples he moved from there to teach and preach in their towns. Now Jesus leaves to put into practice what he has taught. We will see this in the next chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel of Matthew.

## Personal Questions

- To lose life to gain life. Have you had some experience of having felt rewarded for an act of donation or gratuity for others?
- He who welcomes you welcomes me, and who welcomes me, welcomes the One who sent me. Stop and think what Jesus says here: He and God himself identify themselves with you.

## Concluding Prayer

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

## Tuesday, July 16, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth guides us to the way of Christ.

May all who follow him

reject what is contrary to the gospel.

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

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 20-24

Jesus began to reproach the towns in which most of his miracles had been worked, because they refused to repent. 'Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Still, I tell you that it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on Judgement Day than for you. And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be raised as high as heaven? You shall be flung down to hell. For if the miracles done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have been standing yet. Still, I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on Judgement Day than for you.'

## Reflection

The Discourse of the Mission occupies chapter 10. Chapters 11 and 12 describe the Mission which Jesus carried out and how he did it. The two chapters mention how the people adhered to him, doubted the evangelizing action of Jesus, or rejected it. John the Baptist, who looked at Jesus with the eyes of the past, fails in understanding him (Mt 11: 1-15). The people, who looked at Jesus out of interest, were not capable to understand him (Mt 11: 16- 19). The great cities around the lake, which listened to the preaching of Jesus and saw his miracles, did not want to open themselves up to his message (this is the text of today's Gospel) (Mt 11: 20-24). The wise and the doctors, who appreciated everything according to their own science, were not capable to understand the preaching of Jesus (Mt 11: 25). The Pharisees, who trusted only in the observance of the law, criticized Jesus (Mt 12: 1-8) and decided to kill him (Mt 12: 9-14). They said that Jesus acted in the name of Beelzebul (Mt 12: 22-37). They wanted a proof in order to be able to believe in him (Mt 12: 38-45). Not even his relatives supported him (Mt 12: 46-50). Only the little ones and the simple people understood and accepted the Good News of the Kingdom (Mt 11: 25-30). They followed him (Mt 12: 15-16) and saw in him the Servant announced by Isaiah (Mt 12: 17-21). This way of describing the missionary activity of Jesus was a clear warning for the disciples who together with Jesus walked through Galilee. They could not expect a reward or praise for the fact of being missionaries of Jesus. This warning is also valid for us who today read and meditate on this discourse of the Mission, because the Gospels were written for all times. They invite us to confront the attitude that we have with Jesus with the attitude of the persons who appear in the Gospel and to ask ourselves if we are like John the Baptist (Mt 11: 1-15), like the people who were interested (Mt 11: 16-19), like the unbelieving cities (Mt 11: 20-24), like the doctors who thought they knew everything and understood nothing (Mt 11: 25), like the Pharisees who only knew how to criticize (Mt 12: 1-45) or like the simple people who went seeking for Jesus (Mt 12: 15) and that, with their wisdom, knew how to understand and accept the message of the Kingdom (Mt 11: 25-30).

- Matthew 11: 20: The word against the cities which did not receive him. The space in which Jesus moves during those three years of his missionary life was small; only a few square kilometers along the Sea of Galilee around the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin. Only that! So, it was in this very reduced space where Jesus made the majority of his discourses and worked his miracles. He came to save the whole of humanity, and almost did not get out of the limited space of his land. Tragically, Jesus must become aware that the people of those cities did not want to accept the message of the Kingdom and were not converted. The cities become more rigid in their beliefs, traditions and customs and do not accept the invitation of Jesus to change life.
- Matthew 11: 21-24: Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are worse than Tyre and Sidon. In the past, Tyre and Sidon, inflexible enemies of Israel, ill-treated the People of God. Because of this they were cursed by the prophets. (Is 23: 1; Jer 25: 22; 47: 4; Ex 26: 3; 27: 2; 28: 2; Jl 4: 4; Am 1: 10). And now Jesus says that these cities, symbols of all evil, would have already been converted if in them had been worked all the miracles which were worked in Chorazin and Bethsaida. The city of Sodom, the symbol of the worse perversion, was

destroyed by the anger of God (Gn 18: 16 to 19: 29). And now Jesus says that Sodom would exist up until now, because it would have been converted if it had seen the miracles that Jesus worked in Capernaum. Today we still live this same paradox. Many of us, who are Catholics since we were children, have many solid and firm convictions, so much so that nobody is capable of converting us. And in some places, Christianity, instead of being a source of change and of conversion, becomes the refuge of the most reactionary forces of the politics of the country.

## Personal Questions

- How do I place myself before the Good News of Jesus: like John the Baptist, like the interested people, like the doctors, like the Pharisees or like the simple and poor people?
- Do my city, my country deserve the warning of Jesus against Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida?

## Concluding Prayer

Great is Yahweh and most worthy of praise in the city of our God, the holy mountain, towering in beauty,  
the joy of the whole world. (Ps 48: 1-2)

## Wednesday, July 17, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth guides us to the way of Christ.  
May all who follow him reject what is contrary to the gospel.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 25-27

At that time Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do.  
Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

## Reflection

- **Context:** The liturgical passage of Mt 11: 25-27 represents a turning point in the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus is asked the first questions regarding the coming of

the Kingdom of Heaven. The first one to ask the first questions on the identity of Jesus is John the Baptist, who through his disciples asks him a concrete question: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?" (11: 3). Instead, the Pharisees, together with the Scribes, address words of reproach and judgment to Jesus: "Look, your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath" (12: 2). Up until now in chapter 1 to 10, the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven in the person of Jesus did not seem to find any obstacles, but beginning with chapter 11, we find some concrete difficulties. Or rather many begin to take a stand before Jesus: sometimes he is "the object of scandal", of fall (11: 6); "this generation", in the sense of this human descent, does not have an attitude of acceptance regarding the Kingdom that is to arrive; the cities along the lake are not converted (11: 20); concerning the behavior of Jesus a true and proper controversy springs up (chapter 12), and thus they begin to think how to lead him to death (12: 14). This is the climate of mistrust and of protest in which Matthew inserts this passage.

Now the moment has arrived in which to question oneself about the activity of Jesus: how to interpret the "works of Christ" (11: 2, 19)? How can these thaumaturgic actions be explained (11: 20, 21, 23)? Such questions concern the crucial question of Messiah ship of Jesus, and judge not only "this generation" but also the cities around the lake which have not converted as the Kingdom of Heaven gets closer in the person of Jesus.

- **To become small.** The most efficacious itinerary to carry out this conversion is to become "small". Jesus communicates this strategy of "smallness" in a prayer of thanksgiving (11: 27) which has a wonderful parallel in the witness rendered to the Father on the occasion of the Baptism (11: 27). Experts love to call this prayer a "hymn of rejoicing, exultation". The rhythm of the prayer of Jesus begins with a confession: "I praise you," "I confess to you". Such expressions of introduction render Jesus' words quite solemn. The prayer of praise that Jesus says presents the characteristics of an answer addressed to the reader. Jesus addresses himself to the God with the expression "Lord, of Heaven and earth", that is, to God as Creator and guardian of the world. In Judaism, instead, it was the custom to address God with the invocation "Lord of the world", but did not add the term "Father," a distinctive characteristic of the prayer of Jesus. The reason for the praise and the disclosing of God: because you have hidden..., revealed. The hiding referred to the "wise and intelligent" concerns the Scribes and the Pharisees completely closed up and hostile to the coming of the Kingdom (3: 7 ff; 7: 29; 9: 3, 11, 34). The revelation to the little ones, the Greek term says "infants", those who cannot speak yet. Thus, Jesus indicates the privileged audience of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven as those who are not experts of the Law, and are not instructed.
- **Which are "these things" that are hidden or revealed?** The content of this revelation or hiding is Jesus, the Son of God, the one who reveals the Father. It is evident for the reader that the revelation of God is linked indissolubly to the person of Jesus, to his Word, to his Messianic actions. He is the one who



allows the revelation of God and not the Law or the premonitory events of the end of time.

The revelation of God from the Father to the Son. In the last part of the discourse Jesus makes a presentation of self as the one to whom everything has been communicated by the Father. In the context of the coming of the Kingdom, Jesus has the role and the mission to reveal the Heavenly Father in everything. In such a task and role, he receives the totality of power, of knowledge and of the authority to judge. In order to confirm this role, which is so committed, Jesus appeals to the witness of the Father, the only one who possesses a real knowledge of Jesus: "Nobody knows the Son but the Father", and vice-versa "and nobody knows the Father but the Son". The witness of the Father is irreplaceable so that the unique dignity of Jesus as Son may be understood by his disciples. Besides, the unicity or uniqueness of Jesus is affirmed in the revelation of the Father; the Gospel of John had already affirmed this: "No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart who has made him known" (1:18). To summarize, the Evangelist makes his readers understand that the revelation of the Father takes place through the Son. Even more: the Son reveals the Father to whom he wants.

## Personal Questions

- In your prayer do you feel the need to express all your gratitude to the Father for the gifts that he has given you in life? Does it happen to you to confess publicly, to exult in the Lord because of the wonderful works that he accomplishes in the world; in the Church, and in your life?
- In your search for God do you rely on your wisdom and intelligence, or do you allow yourself to be guided by the wisdom of God? How attentive are you to your relationship with Jesus? Do you listen to his word? Do you assume his sentiments to discover his physiognomy of Son of the Heavenly Father?

## Concluding Prayer

My lips shall proclaim your saving justice, your saving power all day long.  
God, you have taught me from boyhood,  
and I am still proclaiming your marvels. (Ps 71: 15, 17)

## Thursday, July 18, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth  
guides us to the way of Christ.  
May all who follow him  
reject what is contrary to the gospel.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with

you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 28-30

Jesus said: 'Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

## Reflection

The Gospel today is composed only by three verses (Mt 11: 28-30) which form part of a brief literary unity, one of the most beautiful ones, in which Jesus thanks the Father for having revealed the wisdom of the Kingdom to the little children and because he has hidden it to the doctors and the wise (Mt 11: 25-30). In the brief commentary which follows we will include all the literary unity.

- Matthew 11: 25-26: Only the little children accept and understand the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus recites a prayer: "I thank you Father, Lord of Heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children". The wise, the doctors of that time, have created a system of laws which they imposed on the people in the name of God. (Mt 23: 3-4) They thought that God demanded this observance from the people. But the law of love, which Jesus has revealed to us, said the contrary. What is important to be saved, is not what we do for God, but what God, in his great love, does for us! God wants mercy and not sacrifice (Mt 9: 13). The simple and poor people understood this way of speaking of Jesus and rejoiced. The wise said that Jesus was in error. They could not succeed to understand his teaching. "Yes, Father for that is what it pleased you to do! It pleased the Father that the little children understand the message of the Kingdom and that the wise and the learned do not understand it! If they want to understand it they have to become the pupils of the little children! This way of thinking and of teaching makes people feel uncomfortable and change their community life together.
- Matthew 11: 27: The origin of the new Law: the Son knows the Father. What the Father must tell us he has given to Jesus, and Jesus reveals it to the little children, so that they may be open to his message. Jesus, the Son, knows the Father. He knows what the Father wanted to communicate to us, when many centuries ago he gave his Law to Moses. Today also, Jesus is teaching many things to the poor and to the little children and, through them, to all his Church.
- Matthew 11: 28-30: The invitation of Jesus which is still valid today. Jesus invites all those who are tired to go to him, and he promises them rest. In our communities today, we should be the continuation of this invitation which Jesus addresses to people who were tired and oppressed by the weight of the observance asked by the laws of purity. He says: "Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart". Many times, this phrase has been manipulated, to ask people for submission, meekness, and passivity. Jesus wants to say the

contrary. He asks people not to listen to “the wise and learned,” the professors of religion of that time and to begin to learn from him, from Jesus, a man who came from Galilee, without higher instruction, who says he is “meek and humble of heart.” Jesus does not do like the Scribes who exalt themselves because of their science, but he placed himself at the side of the people who are exploited and humiliated. Jesus, the new Master, knows by experience what takes place in the heart of the people who suffer. He has lived this well and has known it during the thirty years of his life in Nazareth.

- How Jesus puts into practice what he taught in the Discourse of the Mission. Jesus has a passion: to announce the Good News of the Kingdom. He had a Passion for the Father and for the people of his country who are poor and abandoned. There where Jesus found people who listened to him, Jesus transmitted the Good News, in any place: In the Synagogues during the celebration of the Word (Mt 4: 23), in the houses of the friends (Mt 13: 36); walking along the way with the disciples (Mt 12: 1-8); along the shore of the sea, sitting in the boat (Mt 13: 3); on the Mountain from where he proclaims the Beatitudes (Mt 5: 1); in the squares and in the cities, where people would bring the sick to him (Mt 14: 34-36). Also in the Temple of Jerusalem, during the pilgrimage (Mt 26: 55)! In Jesus everything is revelation of everything which he bore inside himself! He not only announced the Good News of the Kingdom, He himself was and continues to be a living sign of the Kingdom. In him we see clearly what happens when a human being allows God to reign in his life. Today’s Gospel reveals the tenderness with which Jesus welcomes the little children. He wanted them to find rest and peace. And because of this choice of his for the little children and the excluded, he was criticized and persecuted. He suffered very much! The same thing happens today. When a community tries to open itself to be a place of welcome and consolation for the little children and the excluded of today who are the foreigners and the migrants, many persons do not agree and criticize.

## Personal Questions

- Have you experienced some time the rest promised by Jesus?
- How can the words of Jesus help our community to be a place of rest for our life?

## Concluding Prayer

In you is the source of life, by your light we see the light.  
Maintain your faithful love to those who acknowledge you,  
and your saving justice to the honest of heart. (Ps 36: 9-10)

## Friday, July 19, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth  
guides us to the way of Christ.

May all who follow him  
reject what is contrary to the gospel.

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

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 12: 1-8

At that time Jesus went through the cornfields one Sabbath day. His disciples were hungry and began to pick ears of corn and eat them.

The Pharisees noticed it and said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath.'

But he said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry - how he went into the house of God and they ate the loaves of the offering although neither he nor his followers were permitted to eat them, but only the priests? Or again, have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath day the Temple priests break the Sabbath without committing any fault? Now here, I tell you, is something greater than the Temple. And if you had understood the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless. For the Son of man is master of the Sabbath.'

## Reflection

In today's Gospel we see that there are many conflicts between Jesus and the religious authority of that time. They are conflicts regarding the religious practices of that time: fasting, purity, observance of the Sabbath, etc. In normal terms, they would be conflicts regarding for example, matrimony between divorced persons, friendship with prostitutes, the acceptance of homosexuals, communion without being married by the Church, not to go to Mass on Sunday, not to fast on Good Friday. The conflicts were many: at home, in the school, in work, in the community, in the Church, in personal life, in society. Conflicts regarding growth, relationship, age, mentality. So many of them! To live life without conflicts is impossible! Conflict is part of life and springs up since the time of birth. We are born with birth pangs. Conflicts are not accidents along the way, but form part of the journey, of the process of conversion. What strikes us is the way in which Jesus faces the conflicts. In the discussion with his enemies, he was not trying to show them that he was right, but wished to make the experience which he, Jesus, had of God, Father and Mother, prevail. The image of God which others had was that of a severe Judge who only threatened and condemned. Jesus tries to have mercy on the blind observance of the norms and of the law, prevail, since it had nothing to do with the objective of the Law which is the practice of Love.

- Matthew 12: 1-2 – To pick ears of corn on the Sabbath day and the criticism of the Pharisees. On a Sabbath day, the disciples went through the corn fields, and they opened their way picking ears of corn to eat them. They were hungry. The Pharisees arrived and invoke the Bible to say that the disciples were transgressing the law of the Sabbath (cf. Ex 20: 8-11). Jesus also uses the Bible and responds invoking three examples taken from Scripture: (1) that of David, (2) that of the legislation on work of the priests in the temple and (3) from the action of the Prophet Hosea, that is, he quotes a historical book, a legislative book and a prophetic book.
- Matthew 12: 3-4 – The example of David. Jesus recalls that David himself did something which was forbidden by the Law, because he took the sacred bread of the temple and gave it to the soldiers to eat, because they were hungry (1 S 21: 2-7). No Pharisee had the courage to criticize King David!
- Matthew 12: 5-6 – The example of the priests. Accused by the religious authority, Jesus argues beginning from what they themselves, the religious authority, do on the Sabbath day. On the Sabbath day, in the Temple of Jerusalem, the priests worked very much, more than the other days of the week, because they had to sacrifice the animals for the sacrifices, they had to clean, sweep, carry burdens, kill the animals, etc. and nobody said that this was against the Law, they thought it as normal! The Law itself obliged them to do all this (Nb 28: 9-10).
- Matthew 12: 7 – The example of the prophets. Jesus quotes the phrase of the Prophet Hosea: I want mercy and not sacrifice. The word mercy means to have the heart (cor) in the misery (miseri) of others, that is, the merciful person has to be very close to the suffering of the persons, has to identify himself/herself with them. The word sacrifice means to have (ficio) a thing consecrated (sacri), that is, that the one who offers a sacrifice separates the sacrificed object from the profane use and placed it at a distance from the daily life of the people. If the Pharisees had had this way of looking at the life of the Prophet Hosea, they would have known that the most pleasing sacrifice for God is not that the consecrated persons lives far away from reality, but that he/she placed totally his/her consecrated heart in the service of the brothers and sisters in order to relieve them from their misery. They would not have considered guilty those who in reality were innocent.
- Matthew 12: 8 – The Son of Man is the master of the Sabbath. Jesus ends with this phrase: The Son of Man is the Master of the Sabbath! Jesus himself is the criterion of interpretation of the Law of God. Jesus knows the Bible by heart and invokes it to indicate that the arguments of the others had no foundation. At that time, there were no printed Bibles like we have them today. In every community there was only one Bible written by hand, which remained in the Synagogue. If Jesus knew the Bible so well, it means that during the thirty years of his life in Nazareth, he had participated intensely in the life of the community, where Scripture was read every Saturday. The new experience of God the Father made Jesus discovered much better the intention of God in decreeing the Laws of the Old Testament. Having lived thirty years in Nazareth and feeling as his own the oppression and exclusion of so many



brothers and sisters, in the name of the Law, Jesus must have perceived that this could not be the sense of the Law. If God is Father, then he accepts all as sons and daughters. If God is Father, then we should be brothers and sisters among ourselves. Jesus lived this and prayed for this, from the beginning until the end. The Law should be at the service of life and of fraternity. "The human being is not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for the human being" (Mk 2: 27). Because of his great fidelity to this message, Jesus was condemned to death. He disturbed the system, and the system defended itself, using its force against Jesus, because he wished that the Law be placed at the service of life, and not vice-versa. We lack very much in order to know the Bible at depth and to participate deeply in the community, like Jesus did.

## Personal Questions

- What type of conflicts do you live in the family, in society, in the Church? Which are the conflicts which concern religious practices which today, cause suffering to persons and which are a cause of discussion and polemics? Which is the image of God which is behind all these preconceptions, behind all these norms and prohibitions?
- What has conflict taught you during all these years? Which is the message which you draw from all this for our communities today?

## Concluding Prayer

Lord, I muse on you in the watches of the night, for you have always been my help;  
in the shadow of your wings I rejoice; my heart clings to you,  
your right hand supports me. (Ps 63: 6-8)

## Saturday, July 20, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

God our Father, your light of truth  
guides us to the way of Christ.  
May all who follow him  
reject what is contrary to the gospel.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with  
you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 12: 14-21

At this the Pharisees went out and began to plot against Jesus, discussing how to destroy him. Jesus knew this and withdrew from the district. Many followed him and he cured them all but warned them not to make him known. This was

to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: Look! My servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul delights, I will send my Spirit upon him, and he will present judgement to the nations; he will not brawl or cry out, his voice is not heard in the streets, he will not break the crushed reed, or snuff the faltering wick, until he has made judgement victorious; in him the nations will put their hope.

## Reflection

The Gospel today has two parts bound between them:

- (a) It describes the diverse reactions of the Pharisees and of the people who listen to the preaching of Jesus;
  - (b) it describes what Matthew sees in these diverse reactions: the fulfilment of the prophecy of the Servant of Yahweh, announced by Isaiah.
- Matthew 12: 14 – The reaction of the Pharisees: they decide to kill Jesus. This verse is the conclusion of the previous episode, in which Jesus challenges the malice of the Pharisees, by curing the man who had a withered hand (Mt 12: 9-14). The reaction of the Pharisees was to hold a Council meeting against Jesus. Thus, they arrive to the breaking of the relationship between the religious authority and Jesus. In Mark this episode is much more explicit and provoking (Mk 3: 1-6). He says that the decision to kill Jesus was not only that of the Pharisees, but also of the Herodians (Mk 3: 6). Altar and Throne joined together against Jesus.
  - Matthew 12: 15-16 – The reaction of the people: to follow Jesus. When Jesus learnt the decision of the Pharisees, he went away from the place where he was. People follow him. Even knowing that the religious authority has decided to kill Jesus, the people do not go away from Jesus, rather they follow him. Many followed him and he cured them all, but warned them not to make him known. People know how to discern. Jesus asks not to diffuse the news, not to say what he is doing. A great contrast! On the one side, the conflict of life and death, between Jesus and the religious authority, and on the other the movement of the people who were desirous to encounter Jesus! They were above all, the marginalized and the excluded who presented themselves to Jesus with their illness and their infirmities. They, who were not accepted in society, and in the religious field, were accepted by Jesus.
  - Matthew 12: 17 – The concern of Matthew: Jesus is our Messiah. This reaction, different from that of the Pharisees and of the people, moved Matthew to see here the realization of the prophecy of the Servant. On the one hand, the Servant was persecuted by the authority which insulted him and spat on his face, but he does not turn back. He presents his face hard as a rock, knowing that he will not be disappointed (Is 50: 5-7). On the other hand, the Servant is sought and expected by the people. The crowd coming from far is waiting for his teaching (Is 42: 4). This is exactly what is happening to Jesus.
  - Matthew 12: 18-21 – Jesus fulfils the prophecy of the Servant. Matthew presents the entire first Canticle of the Servant. Read the text slowly, thinking of Jesus and the poor who today are excluded:

“Look! My Servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul delights,  
I will send my Spirit upon him, and he will present judgment to the nations;  
He will not brawl or cry out; his voice is not heard in the streets,  
He will not break the crushed reed or snuff the faltering wick.  
Until he has made judgment victorious; in him the nations will put their hope”.

## Personal Questions

- Do you know some case in which the religious authority, in the name of religion, decided to persecute and kill persons who, like Jesus, did good to people?
- In our community are we servants of God for the people? What do we lack?

## Concluding Prayer

How precious, God, is your faithful love.  
So the children of Adam take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on  
the bounty of your house,  
you let them drink from your delicious streams. (Ps 36: 7-8)

## Sunday, July 21, 2024

*XVI Sunday in Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

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

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

## Gospel Reading – Mark 6: 30-34

### A Key to the Reading:

The text on which we will meditate on this 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time is brief. Only five verses. At first sight a few lines seem to be only a brief introduction to

the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves in the desert (Mk 6: 34-44). But if the Liturgy of this Sunday has separated from the rest and underlined these five verses, it means that they contain something very important that perhaps we would not notice if they were only used as an introduction to the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves.

In fact, these five verses reveal a characteristic of Jesus which has always struck and continues to strike us: his concern for health and the formation of the disciples, his accepting and welcoming humanity toward the poor people of Galilee, his tenderness towards persons. If the Church by means of the Sunday Liturgy, invites us to reflect on these aspects of the activity of Jesus it is in order to encourage us to prolong this same attitude of Jesus in the relationship that we have with others. During this reading we will be very attentive to the minute details of Jesus' attitude toward others.

### **A Division of the Text to Help in the Reading:**

- Mark 6: 30: Revision of the apostolic work
- Mark 6: 31-32: Concern of Jesus that the disciples get some rest
- Mark 6: 33: People have other criteria and follow Jesus
- Mark 6: 34: Moved to compassion, Jesus changes his plan and receives and welcomes the people.

### **The Text:**

<sup>30</sup> The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> And he said to them, 'Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that there was no time for them even to eat. <sup>32</sup> So they went off in the boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. <sup>33</sup> But people saw them going, and many recognized them; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them. <sup>34</sup> So as he stepped ashore, he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

## **A Moment of Prayerful Silence**

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

## **Some Questions**

*to help us in our personal reflection*

- Which is the aspect of Jesus' attitude which has pleased you the most and which aroused greatest admiration among the people in Jesus' time?
- Jesus' concern for the disciples and his concern to accept and welcome the people well: both of these are important. Which one of these prevails in Jesus' attitude?

- Compare Jesus' attitude with the attitude of the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23. What strikes the most?
- Is the attitude of our community the same as that of Jesus?

## Deepening the Theme

### The Context Which Enlightens the Text:

- Chapter six of Mark shows an enormous contrast! On the one hand Mark speaks about the banquet of death, held by Herod with the great of Galilee, in the palace of the Capital City, during which John the Baptist was killed (Mk 6: 17-29). On the other hand, the banquet of life, held by Jesus for the people of Galilee, hungry in the desert, so that they would not perish along the way (Mk 6: 35-44). The five verses of this Sunday's reading (Mk 6: 30-34) are placed exactly between these two banquets.
- These five verses underline two things:
  - they offer a picture of Jesus, the Formator of the Disciples;
  - they indicate that to announce the Good News of Jesus is not only a question of doctrine, but above all of acceptance, of goodness, of tenderness, of availability, of revelation of the love of God.

### Commentary on the Text:

- Mark 6: 30-32: The welcoming acceptance given to the disciples  
 These verses indicate that Jesus formed the new leaders. He involved the disciples in the mission and he used to take them immediately to a more peaceful place so as to be able to rest and make a revision of their mission (cfr. Lk 10: 17-20). He was concerned about their nourishment and of their rest, because the work of the mission was such that they did not even have the time to eat (cfr. Jn 21: 9-13).
- Mark 6: 33-34: Moved to compassion, Jesus changes his plans and receives the people  
 The people perceive that Jesus had gone to the other shore of the lake, and they follow him. When Jesus, in getting out of the boat, saw that crowd, he renounced to rest and began to teach them. Here we can see the abandonment in which the people were. Jesus was moved to compassion, "because they were like sheep without a shepherd". The one who reads this parable remembers the Psalm of the Good Shepherd (Ps 23). When Jesus becomes aware that the people have no shepherd, he began to be their shepherd. He began to teach. He guides the crowds in the desert of life, and the multitude could then sing: "The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing I shall want!"

### Extending the Information:

- A Picture of Jesus, the Formator

“To follow” was the term which formed part of the education system of the time. It was used to indicate the relationship between the Disciple and the Master. The relationship Master- Disciple is diverse from the relationship professor-pupil. The pupils attend the classes of the professor on a given subject. The disciples “follow” the Master and live with him. And it is precisely during this “living together” of three years with Jesus that the disciples received their formation.

Jesus, the Master is the axis, the center and the model of formation. In his attitudes it is a proof of the Kingdom, he incarnates the love of God and reveals it (Mk 6: 31; Mt 10: 30-31; Lk 15: 11-32). Many small gestures mirror this witness of life with which Jesus indicated his presence in the life of the disciples, preparing them for life and for the mission. This was his way of giving a human form to the experience which he himself had had with the Father:

- to involve them in the mission (Mk 6: 7; Lk 9: 1-2; 10: 1),
- once, he reviews this mission with them (Lk 10: 17-20),
- he corrects them when they make a mistake or when they want to be the first ones (Mk 10: 13-15; Lk 9: 46-48),
- he waits for the opportune moment to correct them (Mk 9: 33-35),
- he helps them to discern (Mk 9: 28-29),
- he challenges them when they are slow (Mk 4: 13; 8: 14-21),
- he prepares them for the time of conflict (Jn 16: 33; Mt 10: 17-25),
- he sends them out to observe and to analyze reality (Mk 8: 27-29; Jn 4: 35; Mt 16: 1-3),
- he reflects together with them on the questions of the present moment (Lk 13: 1-5),
- he places them before the needs of the multitude (Jn 6: 5),
- he corrects the mentality of revenge (Lk 9: 54-55),
- he teaches that the needs of the multitude are over and above the ritual prescriptions (Mt 12: 7, 12),
- he fights against the mentality which thinks that sickness is a punishment from God (Jn 9: 2-3),
- he spends time alone with them to be able to instruct them (Mk 4: 34; 7: 17; 9: 30-31; 10: 10; 13: 3),
- he knows how to listen, even when 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 for his sake (Mk 10: 17-31),
- he is severe with 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 be deviated from the road (Mk 8: 33; Lk 9: 54-55).



This is a picture of Jesus, the Formator. The formation in the “following of Jesus” was not in the first place the transmission of the truth to be learnt by heart, but rather a communication of the new experience of God and of life which radiated from Jesus for the Disciples. The community which formed itself around Jesus was the expression of this new experience. Formation led the person to see with other eyes, to have other attitudes. It arose in them a new awareness concerning the mission and themselves. Yes, it made them place their feet side by side to those who were excluded. In some, it produced, “conversion” because they accepted the Good News (Mk 1: 15).

- **How Jesus Announces the Good News to the Multitude**

The fact that John was in prison impels Jesus to return and to begin the announcement of the Good News. It was an explosive and creative beginning! Jesus goes around and through all of Galilee: the villages, the towns, the city (Mk 1: 39). He visits the communities. Finally, he changes residence and goes to live in Capernaum (Mk 1: 21; 2: 1), a city on the cross roads to several roads, and this facilitated the message to be diffused. He practically does not ever stop; he is always on the road. The Disciples go with him everywhere. In the fields, along the streets, on the mountain, in the desert, in the ship, in the Synagogues, in the houses. And they go with great enthusiasm!

Jesus helps the people, serving them in many ways: he drives out the evil spirits (Mk 1: 39), he cures the sick and those who are possessed by the devil (Mk 1: 34), he purifies those who are excluded because of some impurity (Mk 1: 40-45), he accepts the marginalized and relates and eats with them (Mk 2: 15). He announces, calls, and convokes. He attracts, consoles, and helps. This is a passion which is revealed. Passion for the Father and for the poor and abandoned people of his land. There he finds people who listen to him, he speaks and transmits the Good News. Everywhere.

In Jesus, everything is revelation which fascinates or captivates him from within! He himself is the proof, the living witness of the *Kingdom*. In him appears that which happens when a person allows God to reign, allows God to guide or direct his life. In his way of living and acting together with the others, Jesus transformed the nostalgia into hope! Suddenly people understood: “This was what God wanted for his people!”

And this was the beginning of the announcement of the Good News of the Kingdom which was rapidly diffused in the villages of Galilee. In a small way, like a seed, which then grows until it becomes a big tree, under which people could rest (Mk 4: 31-32). And people took care to diffuse the News.

The people of Galilee remained impressed with the way Jesus taught. “A new teaching! Given with authority! Different from that of the scribes!” (Mk 1: 22, 27). What Jesus did most was to teach (Mk 2: 13; 4: 1-2; 6: 34). And this was what he used to do (Mk 10: 1). More than fifteen times the Gospel of Mark says that Jesus *taught*. But Mark hardly ever says what he taught. Perhaps, he is not interested in the content? It depends on what people understand by content! To teach does not mean to teach only new truths and thus people learn them by heart. The content which Jesus must give does not only appear in the words, but also in his gestures and in the way in which he enters into relationship with the persons. The content is never separated from the person who communicates it. Jesus was a welcoming person (Mk 6: 34). He loved the people. Goodness and love which were visible in his words formed part of the content. They constitute

his temperament. A good content without goodness is like spilt milk. Mark defines the content of the teaching of Jesus as “*the Good News of God*” (Mk 1: 14). The Good News which Jesus proclaimed *comes from God* and reveals something *on God*. In everything which God says and does, the traits of the face of God are visible. The experience which he himself has of God, the experience of the Father is visible. To reveal God as Father is the source, the content and the purpose or end of the Good News of Jesus.

## Pray with Psalm 23 (22)

### Yahweh is My Shepherd

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing. In grassy meadows he lets me lie.  
By tranquil streams he leads me to restore my spirit.  
He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name.  
Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death I should fear no danger,  
for you are at my side.  
Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.  
You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head  
with oil;  
my cup brims over.  
Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life.  
I make my home in the house of Yahweh for all time to come.

## Final Prayer

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

## Monday, July 22, 2024

*Feast of Mary Magdalene*

## Opening Prayer

Lord,  
be merciful to your people.  
Fill us with your gifts  
and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope and love.  
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - John 20: 1-2, 11-18

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb

Mary was standing outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, as she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she replied, 'and I don't know where they have put him.'

As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him.'

Jesus said, 'Mary!' She turned round then and said to him in Hebrew, '*Rabbuni!*' - which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So, Mary of Magdala told the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and that he had said these things to her.

## Reflection

The Gospel today presents the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, whose feast we celebrate today. The death of Jesus, her great friend, makes her lose the sense of life. But she does not cease to look for him. She goes to the tomb to encounter anew the one whom death had stolen. There are moments in life in which everything crumbles down. It seems that everything has come to an end. Death, disasters, pain, disillusionments, betrayals! There are so many things that can make one lose the earth under our feet and produce in us a profound crisis. But something diverse can also take place. Unexpectedly, the encounter with a friend can give us back the sense of life and make us discover that love is stronger than death and defeat. In the way in which the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene is described we distinguish the stages followed, from the painful seeking for the dead friend to the encounter of the risen Lord. These are also the stages that we all follow, along our life, seeking God and in living out the Gospel. It is the process of death and of resurrection which is prolonged day after day.

- John 20: 1: Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb. There was a profound love between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. She was one of the few persons who had the courage to remain with Jesus until the hour of his death on the Cross. After the obligatory rest of the Sabbath, she returned to the tomb, to be in the place where she had met the Beloved for the last time. But, to her great surprise, the tomb was empty!
- John 20: 11-13: Mary Magdalene weeps, but seeks. As she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. The angels asked: "Why are you weeping?" Response: "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know

where they have put him!" Mary Magdalene looks for the Jesus she had known, the same one with whom she had lived during three years.

- John 20: 14-15: Mary Magdalene speaks with Jesus without recognizing him; the Disciples of Emmaus saw Jesus, but they did not recognize him (Lk 24: 15-16). The same thing happens to Mary Magdalene. She sees Jesus but does not recognize him. She thinks that it is the gardener. Jesus also asks, like the angels had done: "Why are you weeping?" And he adds "Who are you looking for?" Response: "If you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him!" She is still looking for the Jesus of the past, the same one of three days before. The image of the past prevents her from recognizing the living Jesus, who is standing in front of her.
- John 20: 16: Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus. Jesus pronounces the name "Mary!" (*Miriam*). This is the sign of recognition: the same voice, the same way of pronouncing the name. She answers "Master!" (*Rabbuni*). Jesus turns. The first impression is that death has been only a painful accident on the way, but that now everything has turned back as it was in the beginning. Mary embraces Jesus intensely. He was the same Jesus who had died on the cross, the same one whom she had known and loved. Here takes place what Jesus had said in the Parable of the Good Shepherd: "He calls his by name and they know his voice." "I know my sheep and my sheep know me!" (Jn 10: 2, 4, 14).
- John 20: 17: Mary Magdalene receives the mission to announce the resurrection to the Apostles. In fact, it is the same Jesus, but the way of being with her is not the same. Jesus tells her: "Do not cling to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father!" Jesus is going to be together with the Father. Mary Magdalene should not cling to him, but she has to assume her mission: "But go and find my brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father." He calls the disciples "my brothers." Ascending to the Father Jesus opens the way for us so that we can be close to God. "I want them to be with me where I am." (Jn 17: 24; 14: 3)
- John 20: 18: The dignity and the mission of Magdalene and of the women. Mary Magdalene is called the disciple of Jesus (Lk 8: 1-2); witness of his crucifixion (Mk 15: 40-41; Mt 27: 55- 56; Jn 19: 25), of his burial (Mk 15: 47; Lk 23: 55; Mt 27: 61), and of his resurrection (Mk 16: 1-8; Mt 28: 1-10; Jn 20: 1, 11-18). And now she receives the order, she is ordered to go to the Twelve and to announce to them that Jesus is alive. Without this Good News of the Resurrection, the seven lamps of the Sacraments would extinguish (Mt 28: 10; Jn 20: 17-18).

## Personal Questions

- Have you ever had an experience that has produced in you an impression of loss and of death? What has given you new life and the hope and joy of living?
- Mary Magdalene looked for Jesus in a certain way and found him again in another way. How does this take place in our life today?

## Concluding Prayer

God, you are my God, I pine for you; My heart thirsts for you,  
My body longs for you,  
As a land parched, dreary and waterless. (Ps 63: 1)

## Tuesday, July 23, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord,  
be merciful to your people.  
Fill us with your gifts  
and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope and love.  
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and  
ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 12: 46-50

While Jesus was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers appeared outside, wishing to speak with him. Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with you." But he said in reply to the one who told him, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother."

## Reflection

- The family of Jesus. The relatives reached the house where Jesus was. Probably they have come from Nazareth. From there up to Capernaum is a distance of forty kilometers. His mother also comes together with them. They do not enter, but they send a messenger: "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with you." Jesus' reaction is clear: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother." To understand well the sense of this response it is convenient to look at the situation of the family in the time of Jesus.
- In the Old Israel, the clan, that is, the large family (the community), was the basis for social living together. It was the protection of the families and of the persons, the guarantee of the possession of the land, the principle vehicle of the tradition, the defense of identity. It was the concrete way on the part of the people of that time to incarnate the love of God and the love toward neighbor. To defend the clan was the same as to defend the Covenant.

- In the Galilee at the time of Jesus, because of the system established during the long periods of government of Herod the Great (37 BC to 4 BC) and of his son Herod Antipas (4 BC to 39 AD), the clan, (the community) was becoming weaker. The taxes to be paid, both to the Government and to the Temple, the debts which were increasing, the individualistic mentality of the Hellenistic ideology, the frequent threats of violent repression on the part of the Romans and the obligation to accept the soldiers and give them hospitality, the ever-growing problem of survival, all this impelled the families to close themselves in self and to think only of their own needs. This closing up was strengthened by the religion of the time. For example: the one who gave his inheritance to the Temple, could leave his parents without any help. This weakened the fourth commandment which was the backbone of the clan (Mk 7: 8- 13). Besides this, the observance of the Norms of purity was a factor of marginalization for many persons: women, children, Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, possessed persons, tax collectors or Publicans, the sick, mutilated persons, and paraplegic persons.
- And thus, the concern with the problems of one's own family prevented the persons to meet in community. Now, in order that the Kingdom of God could manifest itself in community living of the people, the persons had to overcome the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves again to the large family, to the Community. Jesus gave the example. When his own family tries to take possession of him, he reacted and extended the family: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother." He created a community.
- Jesus asked the same thing from all those who wanted to follow him. Families could not close themselves up in self. The excluded and the marginalized had to be accepted in the life with others, and in this way feel accepted by God (Lk 14: 12-14) This was the path to attain the objective of the Law which said, "There must, then, be no poor among you" (Dt 15: 4). Like the great Prophets of the past, Jesus tries to consolidate community life in the villages of Galilee. He takes back the profound sense of the clan, of the family, of the community, as an expression of the incarnation of the love toward God and toward neighbor.

## Personal questions

- To live faith in the community. What place and what influence does the community have in my way of living faith?
- Today, in the large city, overcrowding promotes individualism which is contrary to life in community. What am I doing to counteract this evil?

## Concluding Prayer

I waited, I waited for Yahweh, then he stooped to me



and heard my cry for help.

He put a fresh song in my mouth, praise of our God. (Ps 40: 1, 3)

## Wednesday, July 24, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

Lord,  
be merciful to your people.  
Fill us with your gifts  
and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope and love.  
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Gospel Reading – Matthew 13: 1-9

That same day, Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such large crowds gathered round him that he got into the boat and sat there. The people all stood on the shore, and he told them many things in parables.

He said, 'Listen, a sower went out to sow.

As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up at once, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away.

Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Anyone who has ears should listen!'

### Reflection

In chapter 13 of the Gospel of Matthew the third great discourse begins, *the Discourse of the Parables*. As we already said before, in the commentary on the Gospel of July 9th, Matthew organized his Gospel like a new edition of the Law of God or like a new "Pentateuch" with its five books. For this reason, his Gospel is composed of five great discourses or teachings of Jesus, followed by narrative parts, in which he describes how Jesus put into practice what he had taught in the discourses. The following is the outline:

- *Introduction*: birth and preparation of the Messiah (Mt 1 to 4)
- Sermon on the Mountain: the entrance door to the Kingdom (Mt 5 to 7)
- Narrative Mt 8 and 9
- Discourse of the Mission: how to announce and diffuse the Kingdom (Mt 10)
- Narrative Mt 11 and 12
- Discourse of the Parables: the mystery of the Kingdom present in life (Mt 13)

- Narrative Mt 14 to 17
- Discourse of the Community: the new way of living together in the Kingdom (Mt 18)
- Narrative 19 to 23
- Discourse of the future coming of the Kingdom: the utopia which sustains hope (Mt 24 and 25)
- *Conclusion*: Passion, Death and Resurrection (Mt 26 to 28).

In today's Gospel we will meditate on the parable of the seed. Jesus had a way of speaking so popular by means of comparisons and parables. Generally, when he finished telling a parable, he did not explain it, but used to say: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Mt 11: 15; 13: 9, 43). Sometimes he would explain the meaning to the Disciples (Mt 13: 36). The parables speak of the things of life, seed, lamp, mustard seed, salt, etc. These are things that exist in daily life, for the people of that time as well as today for us. Thus, the experience that we have today of these things becomes for us a means to discover the presence of the mystery of God in our life. To speak in parables means to reveal the mystery of the Kingdom present in life.

- Matthew 13: 1-3: *Sitting in the boat, Jesus taught the people.* As it happened in the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5: 1-2), here also Matthew makes a brief introduction to the discourse of the Parables, describing Jesus who teaches in the boat, on the shore, and many people around him who listen. Jesus was not a person who was instructed (Jn 7: 15). He had not been to a higher school in Jerusalem. He came from inside the country, from Nazareth. He was unknown, a farmer and craftsman or artisan at the same time. Without asking permission from the religious authority, he began to teach the people. People liked to listen to him. Jesus taught especially by means of parables. We have already heard some of them: fishermen of men (Mt 4: 19), the salt (Mt 5: 13), the lamp (Mt 5: 15), the birds of the sky and the lilies of the field (Mt 6: 26, 28), the house constructed on the rock (Mt 7: 24). And now, in chapter 13, the parables begin to have a particular meaning: they serve to reveal the mystery of the Kingdom of God present amid the people and the activity of Jesus.
- Matthew 13: 4-8: *The parable of the seed taken from the life of the farmer.* At that time, it was not easy to live from farming. The land was full of stones. There was little rain, too much sun. Besides, many times, people in order to shorten the way, passed through the fields and destroyed the plants (Mt 12: 1). But despite all that, every year, the farmer would sow and plant, with trust in the force of the seed, in the generosity of nature. The parable of the sower describes that which we all know and do: the seed thrown by the farmer falls on the ground along the road, another part falls among the stones and thistles; still another part falls on good earth, where, according to the quality of the land, will produce thirty, sixty and even up to one hundred. A parable is a comparison. It uses things known by the people and which are visible, to explain that the Kingdom of God is an invisible and unknown thing. The people of Galilee understood about seeds, ground, rain, sun, and harvest. And

so now Jesus uses exactly these things that were known to people to explain the mystery of the Kingdom.

- Matthew 13: 9: *He, who has ears to hear, let him listen.* The expression “*He, who has ears, let him listen*” means: “It is this! You have heard. Now try to understand!” The way to be able to understand the parable is to search: “To try to understand!” The parable does not give everything immediately but pushes one to think and to make one discover starting from the experience which the auditors have of the seed. It opens to creativity and to participation. It is not a doctrine which comes ready to be taught. The parable does not give water in bottles, but the source. The farmer who listens to the parable says: “Seed in the round, I know what that means! But Jesus says that it has something to do with the Kingdom of God. What would that be?” And it is easy to imagine the long conversations of the people! The parable leads to listen to nature and to think of life. Once a person asked in a community: “Jesus says that we have to be salt. For what is salt good?” There was discussion and then at the end, ten different purposes that salt can have, were discovered. Then all this was applied to the life of the community, and it was discovered that to be salt is difficult and demanding. The parable worked well!

## Personal Questions

- When you were a child how was catechism taught to you? How do you compare some parts of life? Do you remember some important comparison that the catechist told you? How is the catechesis today in your community?
- Sometimes we are the roadside, sometimes the rock; other times the thorns or thistles, and other times good earth. What am I? What are we in our community? Which are the fruits which the Word of God is producing in my life, in my family, and in our community: thirty, sixty, one hundred?

## 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)

## Thursday, July 25, 2024

*Feast of St. James*

## Opening Prayer

Lord, be merciful to Your people.  
Fill us with Your gifts and make us always eager to serve You in faith, hope and love.  
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 20: 20-28

The mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, "What do you wish?" She answered him, "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your Kingdom." Jesus said in reply, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?" They said to him, "We can." He replied, "My chalice you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left, this is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

### Reflection

Jesus and the disciples are on the way to Jerusalem (Mt 20: 17). Jesus knows that He will be killed (Mt 20: 8). The Prophet Isaiah had already announced it (Is 50: 4-6; 53: 1-10). His death will not be the fruit of blind destiny or of a pre-established plan, but it will be the consequence of the commitment freely made of being faithful to the mission which He received from the Father together with the poor of the earth. Jesus had already said that the disciple has to follow the Master and carry his cross behind him (Mt 16: 21, 24). But the disciples did not understand what was happening (Mt 16: 22-23; 17: 23). Suffering and the cross did not correspond to the idea that they had of the Messiah.

- Matthew 20: 20-21: The petition of the mother of the sons of Zebedee. The disciples do not only not understand, but they continue to think about their personal ambitions. The mother of the sons of Zebedee, the spokesperson for her sons John and James, gets close to Jesus to ask for a favor: "Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at Your right hand and the other at Your left in Your Kingdom."

They had not understood Jesus' proposal. They were concerned only about their own interests. This shows clearly the tensions in the communities, both at the time of Jesus and of Matthew, as we also see in our own communities.

- Matthew 20: 22-23: Jesus' response. Jesus reacts firmly. He responds to the sons and not to the mother: "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" It is a question of the chalice of suffering. Jesus wants to know if they, instead of taking places of honor, are willing to give their own life up to death. Both reply, "We can!" This was a sincere response and Jesus confirms it: "You shall drink My cup." At the same time, it seems to be a hasty response, because a few days later, they abandon Jesus and leave Him alone in His hour of suffering (Mt 26: 51). They do not have a strong critical conscience, and they are not even aware of their own personal reality. Jesus then completes the statement, saying, "But it is not

Mine to grant that you sit at My right hand and My left, these seats belong to those to whom they have been allotted by My Father.” What Jesus can offer is the chalice of the suffering of the cross.

- Matthew 20: 24-27: “Among you this is not to happen.” “When the other ten heard this, they were indignant with the two brothers.” The request made by the mother in the name of her sons causes a heated discussion in the group. Jesus calls the disciples and speaks to them about the exercise of power: “The rulers of nations, you know, dominate over them and the great exercise their power over them. Among you this is not to happen: anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave.” At that time, those who held power had no concern for the people. They acted according to their own interests (cf. Mk 14: 3-12). The Roman Empire controlled the world, subduing it with the force of arms and, in this way, through taxes, customs, etc. succeeded in accumulating riches through repression and the abuse of power. Jesus had another response. He teaches against privileges and against rivalry. He overthrows the system and insists on the attitude of service, which is the remedy for personal ambition. The community has to prepare an alternative. When the Roman Empire disintegrates, victim of its own internal contradictions, the communities should be prepared to offer to the people an alternative model of living together.
- Matthew 20: 28: The summary of the life of Jesus. Jesus defines His life and His mission: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” In this definition of self-given by Jesus are implied three titles which define Him and which were for the first Christians the beginning of Christology: Son of Man, Servant of Yahweh and older brother (close relative). Jesus is the Messiah, Servant, announced by the prophet Isaiah (cf. Isa 42: 1-9; 49:1-6; 50: 4-9; 52: 13-53). He learned from His mother, who said, “Behold the servant of the Lord!” (Lk 1: 38). This was a totally new proposal for the society of that time.

## Personal Questions

- James and John ask for favors. Jesus promises suffering. What do I seek in my relationship with God and what do I ask for in prayer? How do I accept the suffering that comes in my life and which is the opposite of what we ask in prayer?
- Jesus says, “May it not be like that among you!” Is our way of living in the Church and in the community in accord with Jesus’ advice?
- “Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant.” In this world, as a boss, supervisor, department head, CEO, manager, or customer, how does “being great” differ from this? Is it possible to be great as Jesus asks and be great as the world understands it?

## Concluding Prayer

Then the nations kept saying, "What great deeds Yahweh has done for them!"  
Yes, Yahweh did great deeds for us, and we were overjoyed. (Ps 126: 2-3)

## Friday, July 26, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

Lord,  
be merciful to your people.  
Fill us with your gifts  
and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope and love.  
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and  
ever. Amen.

### Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 18-23

Jesus said to his disciples: 'So pay attention to the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the Evil One comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the seed sown on the edge of the path.

The seed sown on patches of rock is someone who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. But such a person has no root deep down and does not last; should some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, at once he falls away.

The seed sown in thorns is someone who hears the word, but the worry of the world and the lure of riches choke the word and so it produces nothing.

And the seed sown in rich soil is someone who hears the word and understands it; this is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.'

### Reflection

- **Context:** Beginning with chapter 12 on the one side we see there is opposition between the religious heads of Israel, the Scribes and the Pharisees, on the other side, within the crowds who listen to Jesus and are admired because of his marvelous actions, gradually, little by little a group of disciples is being formed, still of uncertain features, but who follow Jesus with perseverance. To twelve of these disciples Jesus has given the gift of his authority and of his power; he has sent them as messengers of the Kingdom, giving them demanding and radical instructions (10: 5-39). Now when controversy breaks out with his opponents, Jesus recognizes his true kinship, not in the lines of the flesh (mother, brothers), but in those who follow him, listen to him and fulfil the will of the Father (12: 46-50). This last account offers us the possibility to imagine that the audience to whom Jesus addressed his words is two-fold: on the one side the disciples to whom he has given to know the



mysteries of the Kingdom (13: 11) and who have the possibility to understand them (13: 50) and on the other side the crowds who seem to be deprived of this deep understanding (13: 11, 34-36). Before the large crowds which gather to listen to Jesus is presented, above all, the parable of the sower. Jesus speaks about a seed that falls or not on the earth. Its growth depends on the place where it falls; it is possible that it be hindered so that it cannot bear fruit. This is what happens in the first three types of earth “along the roadside” (the ground hardened by the passing of men and animals), “the rocky earth” (formed by rocks), «on the thorns” (it is the earth covered with thorns). Instead, the seed that falls on “good ground” bears excellent fruit even if at different levels. The reader is directed to be more attentive to the yield of the grain than to the gesture of the sower. Besides, Matthew focuses the attention of the listener on the good earth and the fruit that this earth can produce in an exceptional manner.

The first part of the parable ends with an admonition: “Anyone who has ears should listen” (v. 9); it is an appeal to the liberty of the listener. The word of Jesus may remain a “parable” for a crowd incapable to understand; it can reveal “the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven” for those who allow themselves to be upset or affected by its force. It is the acceptance of the Word of Jesus that distinguishes the disciples from the indeterminate crowds; the faith of the first ones reveals the blindness of the others and obliges them to look “beyond” the parable.

- To listen and to understand. It is always Jesus who leads the disciples on the right path for the understanding of the parable. In the future through the disciples, it is the Church to be guided in the understanding of the Word of Jesus. In the explanation of the parable the pair of two verbs “to listen” and “to understand” appears in 13: 33: That which has been sown in the good ground is the one who listens to the Word and understands it...” It is in the understanding that the disciple is distinguished, the one who daily listens to the Word of Jesus, from the crowds which, instead, listen to it occasionally.
- Hindrances to understanding. Jesus recalls, above all, the negative response to his preaching on the Kingdom of Heaven given by his contemporaries. Such a negative response is bound to the diverse impediments among them. The earth on the edge of the road; is that transformed by passersby into a trodden road; it is totally negative: “Throw the seeds on the pavement of the street, everybody knows that it serves nothing: the necessary conditions for growth do not exist. And, then people go by, step over it, and ruin the seed. The seed should not be thrown just any place” (Carlos Mesters). Above all, there is the personal responsibility of the individual: to accept God’s Word in one’s own heart; on the contrary, if it falls on a “trodden” heart, which is obstinate because of its own convictions and indifferent, he sides with the evil one who completes that persisting attitude of closeness to the Word of God. Then the rocky earth: If the first impediment was constituted by an insensitive, indifferent heart, now the image of the seed that falls on the rocks, on stones, and among bushes indicates a heart immersed in a superficial and worldly life. Such lifestyles are energies that prevent the Word

of God to bear fruit. They begin to listen, but immediately it is blocked, not only by tribulations and trials that are unavoidable, but also because of the involvement of the heart in concerns and riches. It is a life that is not profound but superficial, worldly, it is similar to instability. The good earth: is the heart that listens and understands the Word; this one bears fruit. Such fruit is the work of the Word in the heart that accepts it. It is a question of an active understanding, that allows itself to get involved by God's action present in the Word of Jesus. The understanding of his Word will continue to be inaccessible if we neglect the encounter with Him and, therefore, we do not allow it to overflow in us.

## Personal Questions

- Does listening lead to the deep understanding of God's Word or does it remain only an intellectual exercise?
- Are you a heart that accepts, that is available, docile to attain to a full understanding of the Word?

## Concluding Prayer

The Law of Yahweh is perfect, refreshment to the soul;  
The precepts of Yahweh are honest, light for the eyes. (Ps 19: 7-8)

## Saturday, July 27, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord,  
be merciful to your people.  
Fill us with your gifts  
and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope and love.  
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 24-30

Jesus put another parable before them, 'The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed dandelion among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, then the dandelion appeared as well. The owner's laborers went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the dandelion come from?" He said to them, "Some enemy has done this." And the laborers said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the dandelion you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the

harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into mybarn." '

## Reflection

Today's Gospel speaks to us about the parable of the seed. Whether in society or in the community or in our family and personal life, there is a mixture of good qualities and of incoherencies, limitations, and errors. Persons of diverse origins, each one with her own story, with her own lived experience, her own opinion, her own yearnings, her own differences, meeting community There are some persons who do not know how to live with differences. They want to be the judges of others. They think that they are the only ones who are right, and that others are in error. The parable of the seed and the darnel helps us not to fall into the temptation of excluding from the community those who do not think like us.

The background of the parable of the seed and the darnel. During centuries, because of the observance of the laws of purity, the Jews lived separated from other nations. This isolation had marked them. Even after being converted, some continued to follow this observance which separated them from others. They wanted total purity! Any sign of impurity had to be eradicated in the name of God. "Sin cannot be tolerated" some would say. But others, as for example Paul, taught that the new law which Jesus asked them to observe said the contrary! "Sin cannot be tolerated, but it is necessary to be tolerant with the sinner!"

- Matthews 13: 24-26: The situation: the darnel and the wheat grain grow together. The Word of God causes communities to be formed and this is good seed, but within the communities there are always things which are contrary to the Word of God. From where do these come? This was the discussion, or mystery which led to keep the parable of the darnel and the wheat.
- Matthew 13: 27-28a: The origin of the mixture which exists in life. The laborers asked the owner, the sower: "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" The owner responded: Some enemy has done this. Who is this enemy? The enemy, the adversary, Satan or the Devil (Mt 13: 39), is the one who divides, who takes away from the right path. The tendency to division exists in the community and in each one of us. The desire to dominate, to take advantage of the community to be more important and so many other interested desires divide, they are the enemy which sleeps in each one of us.
- Matthew 13: 28b-30: The diverse reaction before ambiguity. In the face of this mixture of good and of evil, the laborers want to eliminate the darnel. They thought: "If we leave everything in the community, we lose our reason for being! We lose our identity!" They wanted to send away those whom they thought were diverse. But this is not the decision of the owner of the land. He says: "Let both the darnel and the wheat grow together till the harvest!" What is decisive is not what each one says, but that which each one lives and does. God will judge us according to the fruit which we will produce (Mt 12: 33). The force and the dynamism of the Kingdom will manifest themselves in the

community. Even if it is small and full of contradictions, it is a sign of the Kingdom. But it is not the master or the owner of the Kingdom, neither can it consider itself totally just. The parable of the seed and of the darnel explains the way in which the force of the Kingdom acts in history. It is necessary to make a clear option for the justice of the Kingdom, and at the same time, together fight for justice, have patience and learn to live and to dialogue with differences and with contradictions. When harvest comes then there will be the division, the separation.

- The teaching in Parables. The parable is a pedagogical instrument which uses the daily life to indicate that life speaks to us of God. It becomes a reality and renders the look of people contemplative. A parable tends towards the things of life, and because of this it is an open teaching, because we all have some experience of things of life. The teaching in parables makes the person start from the experience that she has: seed, light, sheep, flowers, birds, father, net, little children, fish, etc. In this way daily life becomes transparent, revealing the presence and the action of God. Jesus did not usually explain the parables. He left the sense open; he did not determine it. This was a sign that he believed in the capacity of the people to discover the sense of the parable beginning from the experience of life. Sometimes, at the request from the disciples, he would explain the sense (Mt 13: 10.36). For example, this is what he did with the parable of the seed and the darnel (Mt 13: 36-43).

## Personal Questions

- How is the mixture between the seed and the darnel manifested in our community? Which are the consequences of this for our life?
- Looking into the mirror of the parable, with whom do I feel more in agreement: with the laborers who want to cut away the darnel, or with the owner of the field who orders to wait until the time of the harvest?

## Concluding Prayer

My whole being yearns and pines for Yahweh's courts,  
My heart and my body cry out  
for joy to the living God. (Ps 84: 2)

## Sunday, July 28, 2024

*17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time*

## Let Us Invoke the Holy Spirit

Our Father in heaven,  
you have given us your beloved Son, send your Spirit  
that we may eat and savor your gift.  
Give us our daily bodily and spiritual bread, may it provoke in us a hunger and

thirst

for you, for your Word and your banquet, where you will satisfy us with your presence, with your love and your *shalom*, in the joy of the communion with the brothers and sisters that you give us this day, that we may share with them the material and spiritual bread. Amen.

## Gospel Reading: John 6: 1-15

### The Premises and Key of Biblical and Liturgical Reading:

- Our passage contains an unusual characteristic: it narrates the only “inflated” episode in the Gospels. In fact, all together it is told six times (once in Luke and John, twice in each of Mark and Matthew). Apart from any historical-critical evaluation of this unusual repetition, early Christian tradition gave this episode great emphasis.
- Much discussion has gone on concerning the literary connections with the other Gospel stories, but really, we cannot tell whether there are any direct or indirect connections among the various Gospel stories. The nearest parallel to John seems to be the first text in Mark (6: 30-54), but John would have had an autonomous source, which he reworked so that it would fit in well with the discourse that follows.
- As is usual in the fourth Gospel, a discourse of great theological importance is closely coupled with the “sign”, which in this case is a miracle. Here, the discourse that follows covers almost the whole of the sixth chapter: it is the discourse on the “bread of life” (6: 26- 59), the great source of theological reflection on the sacrament of the Eucharist.
- Throughout the text there are several references to actions, words and ideas characteristic of the Christian liturgy, thus there seems to be a close relationship between this passage and the liturgical tradition of the eucharistic celebration, especially in view of the fact that the Gospel of John makes no reference to the institution of the Eucharist.
- In this year’s liturgical cycle, which is based on the Gospel of Mark, a series of Sunday Gospels taken from John are inserted at this point. The insertion takes place precisely where one would have expected the readings on the multiplication of the loaves. The choice of the first reading is a classic example of mutual illumination between the Testaments: we have the multiplication of loaves by the prophet Elisha (2Kings 4: 42-44). The parallel between the miracles throws light also on the prophetic aspect of the person of Jesus. Again, the second reading (Eph 4: 1-6) emphasizes an aspect of the eucharistic life of the Church: the communion built around Christ and nourished by the one eucharistic bread.
- The main themes of this passage are those that concern the symbolism of the bread and of sharing the meal, it also has an eschatological dimension. Other important motifs present in the text are those of faith in Jesus and in his way of interpreting messianism, here expressed through the Old Testament figure of Moses.

## The Text:

<sup>1</sup> After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.<sup>2</sup> And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased.<sup>3</sup> Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples.<sup>4</sup> Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.<sup>5</sup> Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?"<sup>6</sup> This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.<sup>7</sup> Philip answered him, "Two hundred *denarii* would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."<sup>8</sup> One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,<sup>9</sup> "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?"<sup>10</sup> Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand.<sup>11</sup> Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.<sup>12</sup> And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost."<sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten.<sup>14</sup> When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"<sup>15</sup> Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

## A Subdivision of the Text for a Better Understanding:

- vv. 1-4: Temporal, geographic and liturgical introduction.
- vv. 5-10: The preparatory dialogue between Jesus and the disciples.
- vv. 11-13: The meal "multiplied" and over-abundant.
- vv. 14-15: The reactions of the people and of Jesus.

## A Moment of Silence

*to allow the Word of God to impregnate our hearts and minds.*

- It is Spring and Easter is close. The air is still fresh and this makes it easier to follow and listen to the now famous, though controversial, rabbi of Nazareth.
- As I read and reread, I hear a voice, but still saying rather "strange" things": how is it possible to feed this great crowd of people?
- A few loaves and fewer fish...but we must not lose them, while we accept to share them. Look, they increase as we distribute them!
- At the end, we collect everything: it is very tiring, but bread is always precious, everywhere and at all times, especially this bread.
- I resume my journey with Him, without stopping, with a light and happy heart because of the great things that I have seen today, but also with a few more questions. I go on looking at Him and listening to Him, I let my heart echo His actions, the expressions of His face, His voice and His words.



## The Word Given to Us

- The “book of signs” of the fourth Gospel: Our passage comes from a part of the Gospel known as the “book of signs” (from 1: 19 to 12: 50), where we find descriptions of and comments on seven great “signs” of self-revelation (semeion, a symbolical miracle or action) worked by Jesus in this Gospel. Discourses and “signs” are closely correlated: theological discourses explain the “signs” and in the “signs” we find a concrete presentation of the contents of the discourses in a progressive deepening of the divine revelation and the consequent growing hostility towards Jesus.
- *Chapter 6 of John*: To clarify the chronology and geographical details of chapter 6, some propose that we change the places of chapters 5 and 6. This, however, would not resolve all the problems. It is better, then, to keep and respect what tradition has passed on to us, keeping in mind the historical-editorial problems involved, so as not to “unduly stress something which does not seem to have had great importance for the Evangelist” (R. Brown).
- *Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias*: The lake is identified as having two names; the first is the traditional one, the second is adopted by John in the New Testament (also in 21: 1), perhaps because it had appeared recently in the life of Jesus and was, therefore, in common use after his death and widespread especially among the Greeks.
- *And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased*: Before this (2: 23-25) we come across a similar situation of many believers in Jesus who had seen the “signs” he had worked. In both situations, Jesus shows clearly that he disapproves of the motivation (2: 24-25; 6: 5. 26).

The “signs” on those who were diseased, namely the healings that Jesus worked in Galilee are told by John, except for the healing of the son of the regional official (4: 46-54). However, with these words, this Evangelist lets it be understood that he had not told all the events and that he had chosen a few among many that he could have communicated to the readers (cfr also 21: 25).

- Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples: There is no way of knowing which mountain.

The scene of Jesus, like Moses, sitting surrounded by his disciples, is a recurring theme also found in the other Gospels (cfr Mk 4: 1; Mt 5: 1; Lk 4: 20). The action of sitting in order to teach was normal for rabbis, but John – contrary to Mk 5:34 – does not mention that Jesus taught on this occasion.

- *Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand*: The fourth Gospel makes three references to the celebration of the Passover by Jesus during his public life. This was the second (the first: 2: 13; the third: 11: 55) and we are told the religious and theological circumstances of everything said and done in chapter 6: the “bread given” by God like the manna, the going up the mountain by Jesus, like Moses, the crossing of the water as during the exodus

(in the following episode: 6: 16-21), the discourse on the theme of the bread that comes from God. Concerning the relationship between the manna given to Israel in the desert and the multiplication of the loaves, there are also several parallels recalling Numbers 11 (vv.1. 7-9. 13. 22).

Some actions of Jesus (for instance, the breaking of the bread), as also the many theological themes touched upon in the following discourse, are clear references to the liturgical actions of the *seder* at the Passover and to the liturgical readings in the synagogue for the feast.

The Passover is a springtime feast and, in fact, John notes that "there was much grass in the place" (6: 10; cfr Mt 14: 19 e Mk 6:39).

- *Seeing that a multitude was coming to him:* At the beginning of the narrative, it seemed that the people had been following him before, whereas here John seems to say that the crowd was arriving. Perhaps this is a reference to one of John's favorite themes and one greatly emphasized in this chapter: the coming to Jesus, an expression synonymous with complete adhesion to the faith (3: 21; 5: 40; 6: 35. 37. 45; 7: 37 and elsewhere).
- *Jesus said to Philip... Andrew, Simon Peter's brother:* These are two of the Twelve who in this Gospel seem to have a special role (cfr 1: 44 and 12: 21-22), whereas in the other Gospels they remain in the shadows. It seems that they were particularly venerated in Asia Minor, where the Gospel of John was written.
- *"How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?":* The question addressed to Philip may possibly be justified because he came from that geographical region.

If we interpret this question in the light of similar questions in the whole Gospel (1: 48; 2: 9; 4: 11; 7: 27-28; 8: 14; 9: 29-30; 19: 9), we discover its Christological importance: asking from where the gift comes is also to seek to understand the origin of the giver, in this case, Jesus. Thus, the question leads to the seeking the divine origin of Jesus.

- *This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do:* The "testing" the reaction of the disciple is indicated by a verb (*peirazein*) which usually has a negative meaning, of temptation, checking or deceit. The role of this sentence, however, is to protect the reader against any doubt that Jesus' question may be interpreted as ignorance.
- *"Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little":* The amount is equivalent to a laborer's salary for two hundred days of work (cfr. Mt 20: 13; 22: 2).

Mark (6: 37) puts it in such a way that we may think that such a quantity of bread would be sufficient for the present need, but John wants to emphasize the greatness of the divine intervention and the disproportion of human resources. Andrew's words, which follow, have the same purpose: "... but what are they among so many?"

- *"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish"*: Judging by the double diminutive of the Greek text (*paidarion*), the lad is really a small child: someone with no social standing. The same term is used in 2Kings (4: 12. 14.25; 5: 20) for the servant of Elisha, Giezi.

Barley loaves, unlike loaves made from wheat, were particularly simple food and cheap, used by poor people. It would seem (cfr Lk 11: 5) that the meal for one person was made up of three loaves. The dried fish (*opsarion*, again the use of a double diminutive) was the common food to go with the bread.

- *"Make the people sit down...in number about five thousand"*: In reality, according to the custom of the times, Jesus commands that they "lay down" or to "stretch out": the meal must be eaten in comfort, just as it is prescribed for the ritual meal of the Passover and as of obligation in banquets. All the Gospel reports of this episode only refer to the number of men present.
- "Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them...so also the fish": These actions and words of Jesus are very close to those of the eucharistic rite, although we cannot say that the one derives from the other.
- *"When he had given thanks"* is a translation of *eucharistein*, which was commonly used as distinct from *eulogein*, to bless, the verb used by the synoptic Gospels here; the first verb is characteristic of the Greek milieu, whereas the second comes directly from the milieu of Hebrew culture. If we consider the language in use at the time of writing of the Gospels, then we cannot say that there are any significant differences of content between the expressions, even though John's expression is, for us who are used to the Christian liturgical language, a much more direct reminder of the eucharistic sacrament. This is so true that the fourth Evangelist uses the same verb also in 11: 41, where we find some reminders of the sacrament.

As presider at the ritual Passover table, Jesus personally breaks the bread and gives it directly to the people. In the same way he will do this at the last supper. Most probably, however, things proceeded the way the synoptic Gospels describe them: Jesus gave the broken bread to the disciples so that they might distribute it. In fact, the crowd was too large for Him to be able to do it all alone. John, then, wishes to concentrate the whole attention of his readers on the person of Jesus, true and only giver of "the bread from heaven."

Let us follow closely the sequence of events: the multiplication takes place only after the breaking and the breaking of the bread takes place only after a "small lad" courageously gives up all his trivial resources. Those poor, small loaves are multiplied as they are broken! Jesus multiplies what we accept, a little blindly, to share with Him and with others.

- *As much as they wanted ... they had eaten their fill*: It is the abundance promised by the prophets when the time of *šalom* and of the festive eschatological banquet comes (cfr, e.g. Is 25: 6; 30: 23; 49: 9; 56: 7-9; Os 11: 4; Sl 37: 19; 81: 17; 132: 15).

Thus, the crowd is not wrong when it says of Jesus *"This is indeed the prophet*

*who is to come into the world*": a prophet who fulfils the divine promise of sending a prophet "equal to Moses" (Dt 18: 15-18) and who ushers in the messianic times preparing a free and abundant banquet, as promised by the ancient prophets.

- *"Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost"*: The disciples appear on the scene with the task of not letting any of the precious bread go to waste. In fact, this too is a "bread that perishes" and cannot be compared with the true "bread from heaven" (cfr 6: 24). The command to gather (*synagein*) the fragments recalls the prescription regarding the manna (cfr Ex 16: 16 ff).
- *So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves*: We cannot tell for certain whether the number of baskets is connected with the number of disciples. What is certain is that these words want to emphasize again the great abundance of food from those small barley loaves blessed by Jesus. John seems to pay scant attention to the two fishes offered with the bread, perhaps because the discourse that follows is all about bread.
- *When the people saw the sign*: The motive that John gives for the miracle just worked is not compassion for the crowd; this would have been well understood by the disciples present, who, however, according to Mark (6: 52 and 8: 14-21), did not understand the meaning of what had taken place.

The fourth Gospel, then, shows the "sign" significance of the miracle.

- Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself: Contrary to the other Evangelists, John gives the reason for Jesus' sudden disappearance after the miracle: he wanted to prevent that his role as Messiah might be "fouled" by political manifestations by the crowd. Jesus once more makes clear his choice (cfr Mt 4: 1-10), which he will repeat right to the end before Pilate (19: 33- 37).

## Questions to Direct Our Reflection

- The bread is multiplied because someone "very small" has the courage to renounce hanging on to his security (even though it was minimal, it was a little like the Hebrews hankering after the life in Egypt) risking failure or shamefacedness. The "young lad" of the Gospel story believes in Jesus, even though Jesus had promised nothing on this occasion. *Would I, would we do the same?*
- The lad is an insignificant person, the loaves are few and the fish even fewer. In the hands of Jesus everything becomes great and beautiful. There is a huge disproportion between what we are and what God can make of us, if we place ourselves in His hands. "Nothing is impossible for God": not converting the hardest of hearts, not transforming evil into and an instrument for good... God

fills in every disproportion between us and him. Do *I really believe this, in the bottom of my heart, even when everything seems to contradict it?*

- The material bread offered by God refers us to the bread we ought to share with so many men and women who, on this same earth we live on and whose resources we waste so thoughtlessly, struggle desperately for a slice of bread. *When we pray "give us this day our daily bread" do we at least think of those who have no bread and how we can help them?*
- Physical hunger and material bread remind us also of the "hunger for God" and the eschatological banquet. These are truths that we often put out of our thoughts because we prefer to think that they are far and distant from us. And yet, if we keep them present, they would help us to see the relative value of so many events and problems that seem to us greater than ourselves, and to live a more serene life busying ourselves only with what is essential. *When, during the eucharistic celebration we say "...as we wait in joyful hope" are we really fervently waiting for the glorious return of the One who loves us and who even now takes care of us?*

## Let Us Pray (Psalm 147)

Praising God in a hymn with a Passover flavor to Him who provides food and every kind of subsistence to the "little ones" of his people and to every living creature.

Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is seemly.

The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.

He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.

The Lord lifts up the downtrodden, he casts the wicked to the ground.

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God upon the lyre! He covers the heavens with clouds,

he prepares rain for the earth,

he makes grass grow upon the hills. He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens which cry.

His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a warrior;

but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

## Closing Prayer

From its earliest days, the Church has celebrated the Eucharist as the supper of the Passover of the Lord where it echoes the event of the multiplication of the loaves. Thus, our closing prayer today is one inherited from the Christians of the first century:

We thank you, Father, for life and the knowledge you have revealed to us through Jesus your servant. Glory to you forever.

Just as the broken bread was scattered here and there over the hills and when

gathered became one, so now, may your Church be gathered in your Kingdom from the ends of the earth;  
for yours is the glory and the power, through Jesus Christ forever. We thank you, holy Father,  
for your holy name that you make present in our hearts, and for the knowledge, faith and immortality  
that you revealed to us through Jesus, your servant. To you Glory forever.  
You, all powerful Lord, have created all things to the glory of your name;  
you have given humankind food and drink for comfort, so that humankind may give you thanks;  
but you have given us a spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your servant. Above all, we thank you because you are powerful.  
To you be glory forever. Remember, Lord, your Church, preserve her from every evil  
and make her perfect in your love;  
made holy, gather her from the four corners of the earth into your kingdom, prepared for her. For yours is the power and the glory forever.  
May your grace come and may this world pass by. Hosanna to the house of David.  
(from the *Didaché*, 9-10)

## Monday, July 29, 2024

*Sts. Martha, Mary and Lazarus*

### Opening Prayer

God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value. Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Gospel Reading - Luke 10: 38-42

During their journey Jesus came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.'

### Reflection

- The dynamics of the account. The condition of Jesus as an itinerant teacher offers Martha the possibility to receive him in her house. This account



presents the attitude of both sisters: Mary sitting down at Jesus' feet is all taken up listening to his Word; Martha, instead, is taken up completely by many services and she gets close to Jesus to protest about her sister's behavior. The dialogue between Jesus and Martha occupies a long space in the account (vv.40b-42): Martha begins with a rhetorical question, "Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself?" Then she asks for the intervention of Jesus so that he can call the sister back to the domestic work which she has abandoned: «Tell her to help me." Jesus answers in an affectionate tone; this is the sense of the repetition of the name, "Martha, Martha": he reminds her that she is concerned about "many things," and in reality she needs "only one" and he concludes recalling that the sister has chosen the best part, and will not be taken away from her. Luke has built up this account on a contrast: the two different personalities of Martha and Mary; the first one is all taken up by "many things," the second one does not do even one, she is all taken up with listening to the Master. The purpose of this contrast is to underline the attitude of Mary who dedicates herself to listen fully and totally to the Master, thus becoming the model of every believer.

- The person of Martha. She is the one who takes the initiative to receive Jesus in her house. In dedicating herself to receive the Master she is full of anxiety for the multiplicity of things to be prepared and by the tension of seeing herself alone to do it all. She is taken up by so much work, she is anxious, and experiences a great tension. Therefore, Martha "goes to Jesus" and addresses him a legitimate question for help: why should she be left alone by the sister. Jesus answers seeing that she is only worried, she is divided in the heart between the desire of serving Jesus with a meal worthy of his person and the desire to dedicate herself to listen to him. Jesus, therefore, does not disapprove the service of Martha, but only the anxiety with which she does it. But before, Jesus had explained in the parable of the sower that the seed that fell among the thorns recalls the situation of those who listen to the Word but allow themselves to be taken up by other concerns (Lk 8, 14). Therefore, Jesus does not disapprove the work of Martha, the value of acceptance and welcoming concerning his person, but he warns the woman about the risks in which she may fall: the anxiety and agitation. Jesus had already said something about these risks: "Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and everything else will be given to you as well" (Lk 12: 31).
- The person of Mary. She is the one who accepts the Word: she is described with the imperfect form: "she listened", a continuing action in listening to the Word of Jesus. Mary's attitude is in contrast with that full of anxiety and tension of her sister. Jesus says that Mary has preferred "the best part" that corresponds to the listening of his Word. From the Word of Jesus, the reader learns that there are not two parts of which one is qualitatively better than the other, but there is only the good one: to accept His Word. This attitude does not mean the evasion from one's own tasks or daily responsibilities, but only the knowledge that listening to the Word precedes every service, every activity.

- Balance between action and contemplation. Luke is particularly attentive to link listening to the Word, to relationship with the Lord. It is not a question of dividing the day in times dedicated to prayer and others to service, but attention to the Word precedes and accompanies the service. The desire to listen to God cannot be substituted by other activity: it is necessary to dedicate a certain time and place to seek the Lord. The commitment to cultivate listening to the Word comes from the attention to God: everything can contribute: the environment of the place, the time. However, the desire to encounter God should come from within one's own heart. There is no technical element which automatically leads one to encounter God. It is a problem of love: it is necessary to listen to Jesus, to be with Him, and then the gift is communicated, and falling in love begins. The balance between listening and service involves all believers; in family life as well as in professional and social life: What can we do so that baptized persons persevere and attain the maturity of faith? We should educate ourselves to listen to the Word of God. This is the most difficult but surest way to attain maturity of faith.

## Personal Questions

- Do I know how to create in my life situations and itineraries of listening? Do I limit myself only to listen to the Word of God in Church, or rather, do I dedicate myself to personal and profound listening looking for suitable times and places?
- Do you limit yourself to a private use of the Word or do you proclaim it in order to become light for others and not only a lamp which lights one's own private life?

## Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, who can find a home in your tent, who can dwell on your holy mountain?

Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly, who speaks the truth from the heart. (Ps 15: 1-2)

## Tuesday, July 30, 2024

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value. Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world.

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

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 36-43

Then, leaving the crowds, Jesus went to the house; and his disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable about the darnel in the field.' He said in reply, 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of man. The field is the world; the good seed is the subjects of the kingdom; the darnel, the subjects of the Evil One; the enemy who sowed it, the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. Well then, just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of falling and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Anyone who has ears should listen!

### Reflection

The Gospel today presents the explanation of Jesus, at the petition of the disciples, of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. Some experts think that this explanation, which Jesus gives to his disciples, is not Jesus', but of the community. This is possible and probable, because a parable, because of its nature, requires the involvement and the participation of the persons in the discovery of the significance. Like the plant is already contained within the seed, in the same way, certainly, the explanation of the community is in the parable. And it is precisely this objective that Jesus wanted and wants to attain with the parable. The sense which we are discovering today in the parable which Jesus told two thousand years ago was already enclosed, contained, in the story that Jesus told, like the flower is already contained in its seed.

- Matthew 13: 36: The request of the disciples to Jesus: the explanation of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. The disciples, in the house, speak and ask for an explanation of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. (Mt 13: 24-30). It has been said many times that Jesus, in the house, continued to teach his disciples (Mk 7: 17; 9: 28, 33; 10: 10). At that time, there was no television and people spent together the long winter evenings to speak about the facts and events of life. On these occasions, Jesus completed the teaching and the formation of his disciples.
- Matthew 13: 38-39: The meaning of each one of the elements of the parable. Jesus responds taking again each one of these elements of the parable and giving them significance: the field is the world; the good seed are the members of the Kingdom; the darnel is the members of the adversary (the evil one); the enemy is the devil; the harvest is the end of time, the reapers are the angels. And now reread the parable (Mt 13: 24-30) giving to each one of these six elements: field, good seed, darnel, enemy, harvest and reapers, the right significance. In this way the story assumes a completely new sense and it is possible to attain the objective that Jesus had in mind when he told people the parable of the darnel and the good seed. Some think that this parable should be understood as an allegory and not as a parable properly so called.

- Matthew 13: 40-43: The application of the parable or of the allegory. With the information given by Jesus, you will understand better its application: Just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of failing and all who do evil and throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the upright will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.”

The destiny of the darnel is the furnace; the destiny of the grain is to shine like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father. Behind these two images there is the experience of the persons. After they have listened to Jesus and have accepted him in their life, everything has changed for them. This means that in Jesus what they expected has taken place: the fulfilment of the promises. Now life is divided into before and after having accepted Jesus in their life. The new life has begun with the splendor of the sun. If they would have continued to live as before, they would be like the darnel in the furnace, life without meaning, which is good for nothing.

- Parable and Allegory. There is the parable. There is the allegory. There is the mixture of which is the more common form. Generally, everything in the parable is a call. In the Gospel of today, we have the example of an allegory. An allegory is a story which a person tells, but when she is telling it, she does not think about the elements of the story, but about the theme which must be clarified. In reading an allegory it is not necessary first to look at the story, because in an allegory the story is not constructed around a central point which later serves as a comparison, but rather each element has its own independent function, starting from the sense which it receives. It is a question of discovering what each element of the two stories tries to tell us about the Kingdom, as the explanation which Jesus gave of the parable: field, good seed, darnel, enemy, harvest, reapers. Generally, the parables are also allegories, a mixture of both.

## Personal Questions

- In the field everything is mixed up: darnel and grain. In the field of my life, what thing prevails: darnel or grain?
- Have you tried to speak with other persons to discover the sense of some parable?

## Concluding Prayer

How blessed is he who has Jacob's God to help him, his hope is in Yahweh his God,  
 who made heaven and earth,  
 the sea and all that is in them. (Ps 146: 5-6)

# Wednesday, July 31, 2024

## Opening Prayer

God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value. Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world.

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

## Gospel Reading – Matthew 13: 44-46

Jesus said to his disciples: 'The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field.

'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.

## Reflection

The Gospel today presents two brief parables from the discourse of the Parables. Both are like each other, but with significant differences to clarify better determinate aspects of the Mystery of the Kingdom, which the parables are revealing.

- Matthew 13: 44: The parable of the treasure hidden in the field. Jesus tells a very simple and brief story which could happen in the life of any person. He says: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field; someone finds it and hides it again, then he goes off with great joy, he sells everything he owns and buys the field'. Jesus does not explain, he only says: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is similar to a treasure hidden in a field'. In this way he urges the auditor to share with others what this story has aroused in them. I share some points that are discovered:
  - (a) The treasure, the Kingdom, is already found in the field, in life. It is hidden. We go through the field and step over the plants without being aware.
  - (b) The man finds the treasure, just out of chance. He did not expect to find it, because he was not looking for it.
  - (c) Seeing that it is a question of a very important treasure, what does he do? He does what we all would do to take possession of the treasure. He goes and he sells everything that he has and he buys the field. And, thus, together with the field he obtains the treasure also, the Kingdom. The condition is to sell everything!
  - (d) If the treasure, the Kingdom, is already in my life, then an important aspect of life begins to have a new value.
  - (e) In this story, what dominates is gratuity. The treasure is found by chance,

independently of our programs. The Kingdom comes! And we must draw the consequences and not allow this moment of grace to go by without bearing fruit.

- Matthew 13: 45-46: *The parable of the merchant of fine pearls*. The second parable is similar to the first one, but with an important difference. Let us try to discover it. The story is the following: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value, he goes off and sells everything he owns and buys it”. I share some points that I have discovered:

(a) it is the story of a merchant of pearls. His profession is to look for pearls. This is the only thing that he does in his life: to look for and to find pearls. Looking, he finds a pearl of great value. Here the discovery of the Kingdom is not just by chance, but it is the fruit of a long search.

(b) The merchant of pearls knows the value of the pearls, because many persons would like to sell him the pearls that they find. But the merchant does not allow himself to be deceived. He knows the value of his merchandise.

(c) When he finds a pearl of great value, he goes and sells everything which he owns and buys the pearl. The Kingdom is the greatest value.

Summarizing the teaching of the two parables. Both have the same objective: to reveal the presence of the Kingdom, but each one reveals it in a diverse way: through the discovery of the gratuity of God’s action in us, and through the effort and the search which each human being makes to discover always better, the sense of his/her life.

## Personal Questions

- A hidden treasure: have I found it sometimes? Have I sold everything to be able to buy it?
- To look for pearls: which is the pearl that you are looking for and you have not as yet found?

## Concluding Prayer

I will sing of your strength,  
in the morning acclaim your faithful love; you have been a stronghold for me,  
a refuge when I was in trouble. (Ps 59: 16)  
has never scorned his captive people. (Ps 69: 32-33)