



Lectio Divina

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¹ *St. Elisha, Prophet* (<https://ocarm.org/en/item/114-st-elisha-prophet>).

Saturday, June 1, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord, Father of goodness and mercy, You have sent your Son Jesus from heaven to reveal to us the authority and the sweetness of your love. Send us your Holy Spirit as He descended upon Christ on the baptism in the Jordan River, and the heavens open with your voice of salvation: "You are my Son, my beloved," may our hearts not discuss, nor close, but in full confidence that they can welcome your light and embrace of the Father, now and forever. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Mark 11: 27-33

Jesus and his disciples returned once more to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple area, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders approached him and said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority to do them?" Jesus said to them, "I shall ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was John's baptism of heavenly or of human origin? Answer me." They discussed this among themselves and said, "If we say, 'Of heavenly origin,' he will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'Of human origin?'"—they feared the crowd, for they all thought John really was a prophet. So they said to Jesus in reply, "We do not know." Then Jesus said to them, "Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Meditation

- "By what authority?". The word "authority" is central to this short passage and contains the secret of the faith journey and spiritual growth that we can fulfill, if we let ourselves be guided by the Word, in meditation of this Gospel. The provocative question addressed to Jesus by the scribes and chief priests makes us understand that how distant there is between him and them and that is why there can be no answer. For the priests and scribes "Authority" is "power," "strength", "dominion", "capable of enforcing laws and judge." But Jesus' authority is another thing; in Hebrew this word authority is from a root of the word that also means "similar to." In fact, Jesus makes it clear in the place that he was walking (v. 27) and that would lead us to understand that "authority" is similarity with the Father, the relationship of love with him, as between Father and son. It is no coincidence that he immediately appoints the baptism of John.
- "The baptism of John " Jesus leads us now clearly at the starting point, the source, where we really find ourselves in the encounter with God in the banks of the River Jordan, where he was baptized, is also prepared our place, because, like him, go down into the water, the fire of love and allow ourselves

to mark with the seal of the Holy Spirit, let us reach out, gather and visit with these words: "You are my Son, the beloved" (Mk 11). Jesus tells us that there is no other authority, or other greatness or riches than this.

- "From heaven or from human origin?". We want to be with God or with men, or we want follow God or men, or we want to enter into the light of the Open Skies (Mark 1: 10) or remain in the darkness of our loneliness?
- "Answer me." It's beautiful word of Jesus, repeated forcefully twice (vv. 29 and 30). He calls for a clear choice, a clear decision, sincere, authentic and profound. The verb "answer", in Greek means to express the attitude, the ability to distinguish, to separate things well. The Lord wants to invite us to enter into the deepest part of ourselves to let go through his words and so, in this strong relationship with Him, learning more and more to pull ourselves out of important decisions of our lives or even in our days.
- But there is something more to this word so simple and so beautiful. The Hebrew root expresses at the same time, the response, but also the misery, poverty, grief, humility. That is, there can be no real answer, if not humility, if not listening. Jesus is asking the priests and scribes, but to us, to enter into this dimension of life, this attitude of the soul: to humble before Him, recognizing our poverty, our need for him, because only this may be the real answer to his questions.
- They argued among themselves. "Another important verb that helps us to understand a little bit more about our inner world. This discussion is in fact a "talk through" as we sense from a literal translation of the Greek word used by Mark. These people in this passage are broken inside, are crossed by an injury, are not all in one piece in front of Jesus talking to each other, bringing together a number of reasons and considerations, instead of entering into that relationship and in that dialogue with the Father which was inaugurated with the baptism of Jesus, they remain outside, at a distance, as the son of the parable, who refuses to join in the feast of love (cf. Lk 15: 28). They also do not believe in the Word of God, once again repeated: "You are my Son, my beloved, in you I am well pleased" (Mk 1: 11) and continue to seek and desire the virtue of ' authority and power rather than the weakness of love.

Questions for Reflection

- The Lord teaches me his authority, even in my life, not domination, oppression or force but is love, and the ability to be alike, to be near. I would like to accept this authority of Jesus in my life, I would truly enter into this relationship of resemblance with him, am I ready to take the steps of this choice? Am I determined to follow this through?
- Maybe, approaching this Gospel, I did not expect to come back to the episode of Baptism and the experience so fundamental and source of the relationship with God the Father. Instead, once again, the Lord wanted to reveal his love so immense, that does not shrink in any effort, any obstacles just to reach me. Is my heart, right now, before him? Can I hear the voice of the Father speaks

to me and calls me "son", saying my name? Can I accept this statement of love? Do I trust him, believe him, and I give myself to Him? Do I choose heaven or still the earth?

- I cannot think out of this meditation without having given my answer. Jesus asks me specifically, that "Answer me" is also addressed to me today. I learned that there can be no one to answer without a real hearing and listening that can only come from true humility. Do I want to take these steps? Or just want to continue to respond with my own convictions, my old ways of thinking and feeling, from my conceit and self-sufficiency?
- One last thing. Looking inside of my heart, do I feel being 'too divided, as enemies of Jesus? Is there any wound in me that not allow me to be whole Christian, or a friend of Christ, or his disciple? What's in my life that I am broken, which separates me from him?

Final Prayer

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.

The decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart.

The command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.

The statutes of the LORD are true, all of them just; More desirable than gold, than a hoard of purest gold,

Sweeter also than honey or drippings from the comb.

Sunday, June 2, 2024

Solemnity - Corpus Christi.

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) A Key to the Reading:

Today, the feast of *Corpus Christi*, the Church places before us the scene of the Last Supper, the last meeting of Jesus with his disciples. This was a tense meeting, full of contradictions. Judas had already decided to betray Jesus (Mk 14: 10). Peter had protested that he would not deny him (Mk 14: 30). Jesus knew all this. But he did not lose his calm or his sense of friendship. Rather, it was precisely during this Last Supper that he instituted the Eucharist and realized the supreme sign of his love for them (Jn 13: 1).

The four verses that describe the Eucharist (Mk 14: 22-25) are part of a larger context (Mk 14: 1-31). The verses that come before and after the Eucharist, greatly help us understand better the significance of Jesus' action. Before the institution of the Eucharist, Mark speaks of the decision of the authorities to kill Jesus (Mk 1: 1-2), of the act of fidelity of the anonymous woman who anoints Jesus in anticipation of his burial (Mk 14: 3-9), of the betrayal pact of Judas (Mk 14: 10-11), of the preparation for the Passover (Mk 14: 12-16) and of the sign of the traitor (Mk 14: 17-21). After the institution, there follows the foretelling of the flight by all (Mk 14: 26-28) and the announcement that Peter would deny him (Mk 14: 29-31).

The liturgy of today cuts the text in pieces, but keeps the essential elements of the story of the institution of the Eucharist (Mk 14: 12-16, 22-26). In our text we keep verses 17-21 and 27-31, which are omitted in the text of the Mass. In our commentary we can limit ourselves to the text offered in the liturgy of the day. As we read, let us imagine we are with Jesus and the disciples in the room, partaking of the Last Supper, and let us seek to keep our attention on what strikes us most and what touches our hearts most. A division of the text to help us with the reading:

- Mark 14: 12: The disciples want to know where to celebrate the Passover
- Mark 14: 13-15: Jesus tells them where and how to prepare for the Passover
- Mark 14: 16: The disciples do what Jesus tells them to do
- Mark 14: 17-21: The announcement of the betrayal of Judas
- Mark 14: 22-24: Jesus gives a new meaning to the bread and wine
- Mark 14: 25-26: The final words
- Mark 14: 27-31: The announcement of the dispersion of all and of the denial of Peter

b) Gospel Text – Mark 14: 12-16, 22-26:

¹² On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed, his disciples said to him, 'Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' ¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the city and you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him, ¹⁴ and say to the owner of the house which he enters, "The Master says: Where is the room for me to eat the Passover with my disciples?" ¹⁵ He will show you a large upper room furnished with couches, all prepared. Make the preparations for us there.'

The disciples set out and went to the city and found everything as he had told them, and prepared the Passover.

When evening came he arrived with the Twelve ¹⁸ And while they were at table eating, Jesus said, 'In truth I tell you, one of you is about to betray me, one of you

eating with me.' ¹⁹They were distressed and said to him, one after another, 'Not me, surely?' ²⁰ He said to them, 'It is one of the Twelve, one who is dipping into the same dish with me. ²¹ Yes, the Son of man is going to his fate, as the scriptures say he will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born.'²² And as they were eating he took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them. 'Take it,' he said, 'this is my body.'²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he handed it to them, and all drank from it,²⁴ and he said to them, 'This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many. ²⁵ In truth I tell you, I shall never drink wine any more until the day I drink the new wine in the kingdom of God.'

²⁶ After the psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives. ²⁷ And Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away, for the scripture says: I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered;²⁸ however, after my resurrection I shall go before you into Galilee.'²⁹ Peter said, 'Even if all fall away, I will not.'³⁰ And Jesus said to him, 'In truth I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will have disowned me three times.'³¹ But he repeated still more earnestly, 'If I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And they all said the same.

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 part of this text struck you most and why?
- Name one by one the many events that the text describes.
- What is the attitude of Jesus towards Judas who betrays him, and towards Peter who denies him?
- What does the action of Jesus mean when he breaks the bread saying: "Take and eat! This is my body which will be given up for you!" How does this text help us understand the Eucharist better?
- Look into the mirror of the text, enter into your heart and ask yourself: "Am I like Peter who denies? Am I like Judas who betrays? Am I like the twelve who run away? Or am I like the anonymous woman who remained faithful (Mk 14: 3-9)?"

To Go Deeper into the Text

a) The Context:

We are in the room of the Last Supper. What happened over the last couple of days has heightened the tension between Jesus and the authorities. Jesus' solemn entry into Jerusalem (Mk 11: 1-11), the driving out of the sellers at the temple (Mk 11: 12-26), the discussions with the priests, the Scribes and the elders

(Mk 11: 27 to 12: 12), with the Pharisees and the Herodians (Mk 12: 13-17), with the Sadducees (Mk 12: 18-27), with the Scribes (Mk 12: 28- 40), his reflections on the offerings of the rich and the poor (Mk 12: 41-44), his announcement concerning the destruction of the Temple (Mk 13:1-3) and his discourse on the final judgment (Mk 13: 4-37): all these things helped to increase the opposition of the great against Jesus. On the one hand we have the anonymous woman, a faithful disciple who accepted Jesus as Messiah and as crucified (Mk 14: 2-9), on the other we have the disciples who could not understand and even less accept the Cross, and who wanted to run away, deny and betray (Mk 14: 17-21, 27-31). And in the middle of this tense and menacing environment we have the act of love of Jesus who gives himself completely while breaking the bread for his disciples.

In the 70's, in Mark's time, many Christians from fear had refused, denied or betrayed their faith. And now they were asking themselves: "Have we broken our relationship with Jesus? Is it possible that he has broken his relationship with us? Is it possible for us to go back?" There was no clear answer. Jesus had not left anything in writing. It was by reflecting on what happened and remembering the love of Jesus that Christians gradually discovered the answer. As we shall see in the commentary, by the way Mark describes the Last Supper, he communicates the reply he discovered to these questions of the community, namely, that the welcome and love of Jesus are greater than the defeat and failure of the disciples. A return is always possible!

b) A Commentary on the Text:

Mark 14: 12-16: *Preparation for the Passover Supper*

In complete contrast with the anonymous disciple who anointed Jesus, Judas, one of the twelve, decided to betray Jesus and conspired with the enemies who promised him money (Mk 14: 10-12). Jesus knows that he will be betrayed. Nevertheless, he seeks to fraternize with the disciples at the last supper. They must have spent a good bit of money to hire the "large upper room furnished with couches, all prepared" (Mk 14: 15). Then, it being the eve of the Passover, the city was overcrowded with visitors. The population usually tripled. It was difficult to find a room to meet in.

The night of the Passover, families came from all parts of the country, bringing with them their lamb for the sacrifice in the Temple and, immediately after, each family celebrated in the intimacy of the family the Passover Supper and ate the lamb. The celebration of the Passover Supper was presided over by the father of the family. That is why Jesus presided at the ceremony and celebrated the Passover with his disciples, his new "family" (cf. Mk 3: 33- 35).

That "large upper room" stayed in the memory of the first Christians as the place of the first Eucharist. They were there after the Ascension of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1: 13); they were there when the Holy Spirit descended upon them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1). It must have been in the same room that they met to pray when they were persecuted (Acts 4: 23, 31) and where Peter met with them after his liberation (Acts 12: 12). Memory is concrete, connected to times and places of life.

Mark 14: 22-26: The Eucharist is the act of supreme love.

The last meeting of Jesus with his disciples took place in the solemn atmosphere of the traditional celebration of the Passover. The contrast is very pronounced. On the one hand we have the disciples who feel insecure and do not understand what is going on. On the other hand we have Jesus, calm and master of the situation, presiding at the supper and fulfilling the act of the breaking of the bread, inviting his friends to partake of his body and blood. He does what he always prayed for: to give his life so that his friends might have life. This is the deep meaning of the Eucharist: to learn from Jesus to share oneself, to give oneself, without fear of the forces that threaten life. Life is stronger than death. Faith in the resurrection cancels the power of death. After the supper, Jesus goes to the Garden with his friends and announces that all will abandon him: They will flee or be scattered! But he already tells them: “after my resurrection I shall go before you into Galilee!” They break their relationship with Jesus, but not Jesus with them! He goes on waiting for them in Galilee, where three years previously he had first called them. That is, the certainty of the presence of Jesus in the life of the disciple is stronger than abandonment or flight! Jesus goes on calling. He always calls! It is always possible to come back! This is the message of Mark to the Christians of the 70's and for all of us.

The way Mark describes the Eucharist gives greater stress to the contrast between the action of Jesus and the attitude of the disciples. Before his act of love, Jesus speaks of the betrayal of Judas (Mk 14: 17-21) and, after the act of love he speaks of the denial of Peter and of the flight of the disciples (Mk 14: 26-31). Thus he places emphasis on the unconditional love of Jesus who overcomes the betrayal, the denial and the flight of his friends. It is the revelation of the gratuitous love of the Father! Anyone who experiences this love will say: “neither... the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord!” (Rm 8: 39).

Further information:

- **The celebration of the Passover in Jesus' times**

The Passover was the principal feast of the Jews. During this feast they commemorated their liberation from Egypt, which is at the origin of the people of God. But it was not just a simple recalling of the Exodus. The Passover was a door that opened once more every year so that the generations might have access to the same liberating action of God who, in the past, had given rise to his people. By the celebration of the Passover, each generation, each person, drew from the same spring from which their fathers in the past had drawn when they were liberated from slavery in Egypt. The celebration was like an annual rebirth.

In Jesus' times, the celebration of the Passover was such that the participants might travel the same journey that was travelled by the people after their liberation from Egypt. For this to happen, the celebration took place with many symbols: bitter herbs, a lamb poorly roasted, unleavened bread, a chalice of wine, and other symbols. During the celebration, the youngest son had to ask the father: “Dad, why is this night different from all other nights? Why are we eating bitter herbs? Why is the lamb poorly roasted? Why is the bread unleavened?” And the father would answer with a free narration of past events:

"The bitter herbs allow us to experience the hardness and bitterness of slavery. The poorly cooked lamb recalls the speed of the divine liberating action. The unleavened bread shows the need for renewal and constant conversion. It also recalls the lack of time to prepare everything because of the speed of the divine action". This manner of celebrating the Passover, presided by the father of the family, gave the presider freedom and creativity in the manner he conducted the celebration.

- **The Eucharist: The Passover celebrated by Jesus at the Last Supper**

It was in order to celebrate the Passover of the Jews that Jesus, on the eve of his death, met with his disciples. It was his last meeting with them. That is why we call it the "Last Supper" (Mk 14: 22-26; Mt 26: 26-29; Lk 22: 14-20). The many aspects of the Passover of the Jews continue to be valid for the celebration of the Passover of Jesus and form its background. They help us understand the whole significance of the Eucharist.

Taking advantage of the freedom that the ritual gave him, Jesus gave new significance to the symbols of bread and wine. When he shared the bread he said: *"Take and eat, this is my body given up for you!"* When he shared the chalice of wine he said: *"Take and drink, this is my blood shed for you and for many."* Finally, aware that this was the last meeting, the "last supper", Jesus said: *"I shall never drink wine any more until the day I drink new wine in the kingdom of God"* (Mk 14: 25). He thus united his commitment, symbolized by the broken and shared bread, with the utopia of the Kingdom.

Eucharist means celebrating the memory of Jesus who gives his life for us, so that it might be possible for us to live in God and to have access to the Father. This is the deep meaning of the Eucharist: to make present in our midst, and to experience in our lives, the experience of Jesus who gives himself in his death and resurrection.

- **The celebration of the Eucharist among the early Christians**

Not always have Christians succeeded in maintaining this ideal of the Eucharist. In the 50's, Paul criticizes the community of Corinth that, in the celebration of *the supper of the Lord*, did the exact opposite because *each one of you has his own supper first, and there is one going hungry while another is getting drunk* (1 Cor 1: 20-22). Celebrating the Eucharist as a memorial of Jesus means taking on the plan of Jesus. It means assimilating the plan of Jesus. It means assimilating his life shared, completely at the service of the lives of the poor.

At the end of the first century, the Gospel of John, rather than describe the rite of the Eucharist, describes how Jesus knelt down to render the lowest service of those times: *washing feet*. After rendering this service, Jesus does not say: *"Do this in memory of me"* (as is said at the institution of the Eucharist in Lk 22: 19; 1 Cor 11: 24), but he says: *"Do as I have done to you"* (Jn 13: 15). Instead of ordering a repetition of the rite, the Gospel of John asks for attitudes of life that keep alive the memory of the gift that Jesus offers himself without limits. The Christians of John's community felt they needed to insist on the meaning of the Eucharist as service rather as rite.

- **A Summary**

To forget the richness of the Passover of the Jews when we celebrate the Eucharist is like tearing down the wall where the frame is hung. The richness of

the celebration of the Passover, as it was celebrated in the Old Testament and in the times of Jesus, helps us deepen the meaning of the Eucharist and avoids the sense of routine that trivializes everything. Summarizing what we have said, here are some points that may enrich our celebrations:

- Be aware of the oppression in which we live today - chewing bitter herbs
- Remember the liberation from oppression – the answers of the father to the questions of the son
- Experience the speed of the liberating force of God – poorly cooked meat and unleavened bread
- Celebrate the Covenant; commit yourself once more – committing ourselves in eating the bread that Jesus offers
- Be thankful for the wonders of God towards us – acts of praise
- Rekindle faith, hope and love – encourage each other
- Remember what has already been achieved and what remains to be done – remember the things God has done for us
- Recreate the same gift that Jesus made of himself – washing feet
- Live the passion, death and resurrection – of the constant mystery of life
- Practice communion, source of fraternity – acts of peace and help

Praying with a Psalm: Psalm 16 (15)

The Lord is my share of the inheritance

Protect me, O God, in you is my refuge. To Yahweh I say, 'You are my Lord, my happiness is in none of the sacred spirits of the earth.' They only take advantage of all who love them. People flock to their teeming idols. Never shall I pour libations to them! Never take their names on my lips. My birthright, my cup is Yahweh; you, you alone, hold my lot secure.

The measuring-line marks out for me a delightful place, my birthright is all I could wish. I bless Yahweh who is my counsellor, even at night my heart instructs me. I keep Yahweh before me always, for with him at my right hand, nothing can shake me.

So my heart rejoices, my soul delights, my body too will rest secure, for you will not abandon me to Sheol, you cannot allow your faithful servant to see the abyss. You will teach me the path of life, unbounded joy in your presence, at your right-hand delight forever.

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, June 3, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

Your love never fails.

Hear our call.

Keep us from danger and provide for all our needs.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 12: 1-12

Jesus began to speak to the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders in parables. "A man planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and left on a journey. At the proper time he sent a servant to the tenants to obtain from them some of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. Again, he sent them another servant. And that one they beat over the head and treated shamefully.

He sent yet another whom they killed. So, too, many others; some they beat, others they killed. He had one other to send, a beloved son. He sent him to them last of all, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they seized him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come, put the tenants to death, and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this Scripture passage: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes?" They were seeking to arrest him, but they feared the crowd, for they realized that he had addressed the parable to them. So they left him and went away.

Reflection

Jesus is in Jerusalem. It is the last week of His life. He has returned to the portico of the Temple (Mk 11: 27) where He now begins the direct confrontation with the authorities. Chapters 11 and 12 describe the diverse aspects of this confrontation:

- (a) with the men buying and selling in the Temple (Mk 12: 11-26),
- (b) with the priests, elders and the scribes (Mk 11: 27 and 12: 12),
- (c) with the Pharisees and the Herodians (Mk 12: 13-17),
- (d) with the Sadducees (Mk 12: 18-27), and
- (e) once again with the scribes (Mk 12: 28-40).

Finally at the end the confrontation with all of them, Jesus comments on the widow's mite (Mk 12: 41-44). Today's Gospel describes part of the conflict with the priests, elders and the scribes (Mk 12: 1-12). All of these confrontations make the disciples, and us, understand more clearly what is Jesus' plan and what is the intention of those who have power.

- Mark 12: 1-9: The parable of the vineyard: the direct response of Jesus to men of power. The parable of the vineyard is a summary of the history of Israel. A beautiful summary taken from the prophet Isaiah (Is 5: 1-7). Through this story, Jesus gives an indirect response to the priests, scribes and elders who had asked Him, "What authority have You for acting like this? Who gave You authority to act like this?" (Mk 11: 28). In this parable Jesus
 - (a) reveals the origin of His authority: He is the Son, the heir (Mk 12: 6);
 - (b) He denounces the abuse of the authority of the tenants, that is, of the priests and of the elders who were not concerned about the people of God (Mk 12: 3-8);
 - (c) He defends the authority of the prophets, sent by God, but massacred by the tenants of the vineyard! (Mk 12: 2-5);
 - (d) He unmasks the authority which manipulates religion and kills the son because they do not want to lose the source of income which they have succeeded in accumulating for themselves throughout the centuries (Mk 12: 7).
- Mark 12: 10-12: The decision of men of power confirms the denunciation made by God. The priests, the scribes and the elders understood very well the meaning of the parable, but they were not converted. Rather, they maintained their own plan to arrest Jesus (Mk 12: 12). They rejected "the cornerstone" (Mk 12: 10), but they do not have the courage to do it openly, because they fear the people. Thus, the disciples know what awaits them if they follow Jesus!
- The men of power at the time of Jesus: In chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel of Mark we see those in power: priests, elders and scribes (Mk 11: 27); Pharisees and Herodians (Mk 12: 13); and Sadducees (Mk 12: 18).
 - Priests: They were the ones in charge of the worship in the Temple, where one tenth of the income was collected. The High priest occupied a central place in the life of the people, especially after the exile. He was chosen among the families who had more power and who were richer.
 - Elders or Chiefs of the people: They were the local chiefs, in the villages and in the cities. Their origin was the heads of the ancient tribes.
 - Scribes or Doctors of the Law: they were those in charge of teaching. They dedicated their life to the study of the Law of God and taught the people how to observe the Law of God in all things. Not all the scribes followed the same line. Some of them were with the Pharisees, others with the

Sadducees.

- Pharisees: Pharisee means “separated.” They fought in order that by means of the perfect observance of the Law of purity, people would succeed in becoming pure, separated, and holy as the Law and Tradition demanded! By means of the exemplary witness of their life within the norms of the time, they governed in almost all the villages of Galilee.

- Herodians: this was a group bound to Herod Antipas of Galilee who governed from 4 BC until 39 AD. The Herodians formed part of an elite class who did not expect the Kingdom of God in the future, but who considered it already present in Herod’s kingdom.

- Sadducees: They were an elite class, willing to incorporate Hellenism into their lives. They did not believe in oral law, only a literal interpretation of the written law, and thus, they did not accept the changes defended by the Pharisees, for example, faith in a resurrection and the existence of angels.

- Sanhedrin: This was the Supreme Tribunal of the Jews with 71 members among high priests, elders, Pharisees and scribes. It had the role of great power before the people and represented the nation before the Roman authority.

Personal Questions

- What is your reaction to Church authority? What is the difference between “just authority” and “unjust authority”?
- How do you exercise authority within your community, your family, and among peers?
- A position of authority is often at odds with humility. How do you, or would you, balance authority and humility in action?

Concluding Prayer

Integrity and generosity are marks of Yahweh
for He brings sinners back to the path.
Judiciously He guides the humble,
instructing the poor in His way. (Ps 25:8-9)

Tuesday, June 4, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

your love never fails. Hear our call. Keep us from danger and provide for all our needs.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 12: 13-17

Next, the priests, the scribes and the elders sent to Jesus some Pharisees and some Herodians to catch him out in what he said. These came and said to him, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man, that you are not afraid of anyone, because human rank means nothing to you, and that you teach the way of God in all honesty. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or not?' Recognizing their hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why are you putting me to the test? Hand me a denarius and let me see it.'

They handed him one and he said to them, 'Whose portrait is this? Whose title?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.' Jesus said to them, 'Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar -- and God what belongs to God.' And they were amazed at him.

Reflection

In today's Gospel, the confrontation between Jesus and the authority continues. The priests and the Scribes had been criticized and denounced by Jesus in the parable of the vineyard (Mk 12: 1-12). Now, they themselves ask the Pharisees and the Herodians to set up a trap against Jesus to be able to condemn him. They ask questions to Jesus concerning the taxes to be paid to the Romans. This was a controversial theme which divided public opinion. The enemies of Jesus want, at all costs, to accuse him and diminish the influence that he had on the people. Groups, which before were enemies between them, now get together to fight against Jesus. This also happens today. Many times, persons or groups, enemies among themselves, get together to defend their privileges against those who inconvenience them with the announcement of truth and of justice.

- Mark 12: 13-14: The question of the Pharisees and the Herodians. The Pharisees and the Herodians were the local leaders in the villages of Galilee. It was a long time since they had decided to kill Jesus (Mk 3: 6). Now, because of the order of the priests and of the elders, they want to know if Jesus is in favor or against the payment of taxes to the Romans, to Caesar. An underhanded or sly question, full of malice! Under the appearance of fidelity to the Law of God, they look for reasons to be able to accuse him. If Jesus says "You should pay!", they could accuse him of being a friend of the Romans. If he would say: "No, you do not have to pay!", they could accuse him to the authority of the Romans that he was subversive. This seemed to be a dead alley!
- Mark 12: 15-17: Jesus' answer. Jesus perceives their hypocrisy. In his response he does not lose time in useless discussion and goes straight to the center of the question. Instead of responding and of discussing the affair of the tribute to Caesar, he asks to be shown a coin and he asks: "Whose portrait and inscription is this?" They answered: "Caesar's!" The answer of Jesus: "Then pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God".

In practice, they already recognized the authority of Caesar. They were already giving to Caesar what belonged to Caesar, because they used his currency, his money to buy and to sell and even to pay the taxes of the Temple! That which interested Jesus was that they “gave to God what belongs to God!, that is, that they give restitution to the people to God, from their deviation, because with their teaching they blocked the entrance into the Kingdom (Mk 23: 13). Others explained this phrase of Jesus in another way: “Give to God what belongs to God!”, that is, practice justice and honesty as the Law of God demands, because your hypocrisy denies to God what is due to him. The disciples have to be aware!

- Taxes, tributes, taxes, and denarii. “In Jesus’ time, the people of Palestine paid many taxes, tributes and the tenth part of their income, both to the Romans as well as to the Temple. The Roman Empire invaded Palestine in the year 63 A.D. and they imposed many taxes and tributes. According to the estimates made, half or even more of the family salaries were used to pay the tributes, taxes and the tenth part of their income. The taxes which the Romans demanded were of two types: direct and indirect.

- The *Direct* tax was on property and on persons. The tax on property (*tributum soli*): the fiscal officers of the government verified how large the property was, the production and the number of slaves and they fixed the amount to be paid. Periodically, there was a verification through the *census*. The tax on persons (*tributum capitis*): was for the poor class who owned no land. This included both men and women, between 12 and 65 years of age. It was a tax on the force of work; 20% of the income of every person was used to pay taxes.

- The *Indirect* tax was placed on transactions of different types: a Crown of gold: Originally, it was a question of a gift to the emperor, but then it became an obligatory tax. This was paid on special occasions, for example: the feast and the visits of the emperor. *The tax on salt*: The salt was the monopoly of the emperor. It was necessary to pay the tribute on the salt for commercial use. For example, the salt used by fishermen to dry up the fish and to sell it. From this comes the word “*salary*”. *A tax on buying and selling*: for every commercial use 1% was paid. This money was paid to the fiscal officers during the holidays. When a slave was bought they demanded 4%. In every registered commercial contract, they demanded 2%. *The tax for exercising a profession*: There was need for everyone to have a license for everything. For example, a cobbler in the city of Palmira paid one denarius a month. A denarius was equivalent to the salary of one day. And even the prostitutes had to pay. *A tax for the use of public utilities*: Emperor Vespasiano introduced the tax in order to be able to use the public toilets in Rome. He would say: “Money does not stink!”

- Other taxes and obligations: toll or customs; forced work; Special expenses for the army (*to give hospitality to the soldiers; to pay for the food of the troops*); Taxes for the Temple and the worship.

Personal Questions

- Do you know some case of groups or of persons who were enemies between themselves, but who were then united to follow an honest person who bothered or inconvenienced and denounced them? Has this happened sometimes with you?
- What is the sense of this phrase today: "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God"?

Concluding Prayer

Each morning fill us with your faithful love, we shall sing and be happy all our days; Show your servants the deeds you do, let their children enjoy your splendor! (Ps 90: 14, 16)

Wednesday, June 5, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
 your love never fails. Hear our call.
 Keep us from danger and provide for all our needs.
 We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 12: 18-27

Then some Sadducees -- who deny that there is a resurrection -- came to Jesus and they put this question to him, 'Master, Moses prescribed for us that if a man's brother dies leaving a wife but no child, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married a wife and then died leaving no children. The second married the widow, and he too died leaving no children; with the third it was the same, and none of the seven left any children. Last of all the woman herself died. Now at the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be, since she had been married to all seven?' Jesus said to them, 'Surely the reason why you are wrong is that you understand neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For when they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry; no, they are like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising again, have you never read in the Book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him and said: I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is God, not of the dead, but of the living. You are very much mistaken.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel the confrontation between Jesus and the authority continues. After the priests, the elders and the Scribes (Mk 12: 1-12) and the Pharisees and

the Herodians (Mk 12: 13-17), now the Sadducees appear who ask a question about resurrection. A controversial theme, which caused argument and discussion among the Sadducees and the Pharisees (Mk 12: 18-27; cf. Acts 23: 6-1).

In the Christian communities of the years seventy, the time when Mark wrote his Gospel, there were some Christians who, in order not to be persecuted, tried to reconcile the project of Jesus with the project of the Roman Emperor. The others who resisted the Empire were persecuted, accused, and questioned by the authority of by the neighbors who felt annoyed, bothered by their witness. The description of the conflicts of Jesus with the authority was a very great help in order that the Christians did not allow themselves to be manipulated by the ideology of the Empire. In reading these episodes of conflict of Jesus with authority, the persecuted Christians were encouraged to continue on this road.

- Mark 12: 18-23. The Sadducees: The Sadducees were the aristocratic elite of landowners and traders. They were conservative. They did not accept faith in the Resurrection. At that time, this faith was beginning to be evaporated by the Pharisees and popular piety. It urged to the resistance of the people against the dominion of the Romans, and of the priests, of the elders and of the Sadducees themselves. For the Sadducees, the Messianic Kingdom was already present in the situation of well-being in which they were living. They followed the so called "Theology of Retribution" which distorted reality. According to this Theology God rewards with richness and well-being those who observe the Law of God, and he punishes with suffering and poverty those who do evil. This makes one understand why the Sadducees did not want changes. They wanted that religion remain as it was, immutable like God himself. Therefore they did not accept the faith in the Resurrection and in the help of the angels, who sustained the struggle of those who sought changes and liberation.
- Mark 12: 19-23. The question of the Sadducees: They go to Jesus to criticize and to ridicule the faith in the Resurrection, to tell about the fictitious case of the woman who got married seven times and at the end she died without having any children. The so-called Law of the levirate obliged the widow who had no children to marry the brother of the deceased husband. The son who would have been born from this new marriage would be considered the son of the deceased husband. And thus he would have descent. But in the case proposed by the Sadducees, the woman, in spite of the fact of having had seven husbands, remained without a husband. They asked Jesus: "In the Resurrection, when they will rise, to whom will the woman belong? Because seven had her as wife!" This was in order to say that to believe in the resurrection led the person to accept what was absurd.
- Mark 12: 24-27: The response of Jesus. Jesus responds harshly: Surely, the reason why you are wrong is that you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." Jesus explains that the condition of persons after death will be totally different from the present condition. After death there will be no marriage, but all will be as the angels in Heaven. The Sadducees imagined life in Heaven as life on earth. And at the end Jesus concludes: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living! You are in great error". The disciples are

warned: those who are on the side of these Sadducees will be on the side opposite to God.

Personal Questions

- Today, which is the sense of this phrase: God is not the God of the dead but of the living”?
- Do I also believe the same thing in the resurrection? What does the following mean for me: “I believe in the resurrection of the body and in life everlasting?”

Concluding Prayer

Lord, I lift up my eyes to you who are enthroned in heaven. Just as the eyes of slaves are on their masters' hand, or the eyes of a slave-girl on the hand of her mistress, so our eyes are on Yahweh our God, for him to take pity on us. (Ps 123: 1-2)

Thursday, June 6, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
your love never fails. Hear our call.
Keep us from danger and provide for all our needs.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 12: 28b-34

One of the scribes put a question to Jesus, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one, only Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true, that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And after that no one dared to question him anymore.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents a beautiful conversation between Jesus and a Doctor of the Law. The doctor wants to know from Jesus which is the first of all the

commandments. Today as well, many people want to know what is most important in religion. Some say: to be baptized. Others, to pray. Others say: to go to Mass or to participate in the worship on Sunday. Others say: to love your neighbor! Others are worried about the appearance or the charges or tasks in the Church.

- Mark 12: 28: The question of the Doctor of the Law. A doctor of the Law, who had seen the debate of Jesus with the Sadducees (Mk 12: 23-27), was pleased with the response of Jesus, and he perceives in him a great intelligence and wants to profit of this occasion to ask him a question: "Which is the first one of all the commandments?" At that time the Jews had an enormous number of norms which regulated, in practice, the observance of the Ten Commandments of the Law of God. Some said: "All these norms have the same value because they all come from God. It does not belong to us to introduce distinctions in the things of God". Others would say: "Some Laws are more important than others, that is why they oblige more!" The Doctor wanted to know Jesus' opinion.
- Mark 12: 29-31: The response of Jesus. Jesus responds by quoting a passage of the Bible to say that the first commandment is "to love God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength!" (Dt 6: 4-5). At the time of Jesus, the pious Jews made of this text of Deuteronomy a prayer which they recited three times a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. Among them it was known as today we know the Our Father. And Jesus adds, quoting the Bible again: the second one is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other more important commandment than this one". (Lev 19: 18). A brief and profound response! It is the summary of all that Jesus has taught about God and about life (Mt 7: 12).
- Mark 12: 32-33: The answer of the doctor of the Law. The Doctor agrees with Jesus and draws the conclusion: "To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself; this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice". In other words, the commandment of love is more important than the commandments related to worship and sacrifice in the Temple. This affirmation was already used by the prophets of the Old Testament (Ho 6: 6; Ps 40: 6-8; Ps 51: 16-17). Today, we would say that the practice of love is more important than novenas, promises, Masses, prayers, and processions.
- Mark 12: 34: The summary of the Kingdom. Jesus confirms the conclusion reached by the Doctor and says: "You are not far from the Kingdom of God!" In fact, the Kingdom of God consists in recognizing that love toward God is equal to the love of neighbor. Because if God is Father, we all are sisters and brothers and should show this in practice, living in community. "On these two commandments depend on the Law and the prophets" (Mt 22, 4). The disciples must keep in mind, fix in their memory, in their intelligence, in the heart, in the hands and in the feet this important law of love: God is only attained through the total gift of self to our neighbor!
- The first and most important commandment. The most important and first commandment was and will always be: "to love God with all your heart, with

all your mind and with all your strength” (Mk 12: 30). In the measure in which the People of God, throughout the centuries, has deepened the meaning and the importance of the love of God, it has become aware that God’s love is true and real only in the measure in which it is made concrete in the love to neighbor. And thus, the second commandment which asks for the love for neighbor, is like the first commandment of God’s love (Mt 22: 39; Mk 12: 31). “Anyone who says I love God, and hates his brother, is a liar” (1 Jn 4: 20). “On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets too” (Mt 22: 40).

Personal Questions

- For you, what is more important in religion and in life? Which are the concrete difficulties that you find, to be able to live that which you consider more important?
- Jesus tells the doctor: “You are not far from the Kingdom of God”. Today, am I nearer or farther away from the Kingdom of God than the doctor praised by Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Direct me in your ways, Yahweh, and teach me your paths.
Encourage me to walk in your truth and teach me since you are the God who saves me. (Ps 25: 4-5)

Friday, June 7, 2024

Solemnity – Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

Opening Prayer:

Lord Jesus, grant that we may stand before your Word in a listening attitude. Help us to stay calm, not to be superficial and distracted. If we meditate on your Word, then we shall, certainly, experience an invasion of tenderness, compassion and love that flows from your pierced heart on humanity. Grant that we may understand the symbolism of the blood and water flowing from your heart. Grant that we too may gather that blood and water so that we may share in your infinite passion of love and suffering when you underwent every physical and moral suffering. May our meditating on those symbols break our egoism, our self-centeredness, and our indifference. May the water and blood mentioned in today’s Gospel calm our anxieties and worries, take away our vainglory, purify our greediness, transform our fears into hopes and our darkness into light. As we open ourselves to the force of your Word, we say to you with all our heart and soul, “Jesus, you are truly the revelation of love”.

Gospel Reading – John 19: 31-37

³¹ It was the Day of Preparation, and to avoid the bodies' remaining on the cross during the Sabbath -- since that Sabbath was a day of special solemnity -- the Jews asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away. ³² Consequently the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with him and then of the other. ³³ When they came to Jesus, they saw he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs ³⁴ one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water. ³⁵ This is the evidence of one who saw it -- true evidence, and he knows that what he says is true -- and he gives it so that you may believe as well. ³⁶ Because all this happened to fulfil the words of scripture: Not one bone of his will be broken; ³⁷ and again, in another place scripture says: They will look to the one whom they have pierced.

A Moment of Silence:

Let the silence in this meeting with the Word be truly a prayer: a conversation with God, a listening to Him who reveals himself and calls you and invites you to be one with Him.

MEDITATIO

A Key to the Reading:

This passage of the Gospel begins with a mention of the Pasch of the Jews and with a request to Pilate (19: 31). For the Evangelist such an event holds extraordinary importance. The center of the Gospel passage is the piercing of the side whence flow blood and water. We should take note of the symbols in this passage: the blood symbolizes death and love to the end; the water whence life comes is the symbol of love expressed and communicated. In the context of the Pasch, these symbols point to the blood of the Lamb who conquers death, and the water, source that purifies. These symbols seek to show that this love (the blood) saves by giving its entire life (water-Spirit). That which the Evangelist witnessed, is the basis of faith. The passage is organized thus: first the obligation of rest on the festive day which leads to the request made of Pilate that the bodies be taken down (19: 31); there follows the scene on the cross when a soldier pierces Jesus' side (19: 32-34); finally the witness of the Evangelist, based on the Law and the Prophets (19: 35-37).

The Festive Rest and the Request to Pilate (19: 31):

The Jewish leaders, because of the legal purity required by the Pasch now close at hand, and worried that the execution of the death of Jesus might profane the Sabbath or even the whole feast of the Pasch, «asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away». They are not in the least aware that their Pasch has been substituted by Jesus' Pasch. The mention of the bodies is significant. Mention is made not only of the body of Jesus, but also of the bodies of those crucified with him, as if to express Jesus' solidarity with those crucified with him and with the whole of humanity.

Jesus' body on the cross, that makes him one with humanity, is, for the Evangelist, God's sanctuary (2: 21). The bodies of those crucified could not

remain on the cross on the Sabbath, since what was involved was the preparation for the most solemn feast in the Jewish tradition. Anyway, this feast will lose its traditional meaning and will be substituted by the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

«The Jews» put concrete requests before Pilate: that the legs of those crucified be broken so as to accelerate their death and thus avoid the problem that they pose at that particular time. None of these requests is carried out in the case of Jesus: the soldiers do not break his legs nor do they take him down from the cross.

The Pierced Side (19: 32-33):

The soldiers break the legs of those with Jesus, but when they get to Jesus they see «he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs...» It is significant that the soldiers break the legs of those crucified with Jesus. They are still alive and now that Jesus is dead, they too can die. It is as though Jesus, by dying before them, through his death has opened the way for them to the Father and now they can follow him. By stating that they did not break the legs of Jesus, the Evangelist seems to be saying: No one can take life from Jesus, because he gave his life of himself (10: 17ff; 19: 30). «One of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water». The reader may be surprised by the action of the soldier since hostility goes on even after death. The piercing with the point of the lance wants to destroy him forever. This act of hatred allows Jesus to give the kind of love that produces life. This fact is extraordinarily important and contains great wealth of meaning. The blood that flows from Jesus' side symbolizes his death, which he accepts so as to save humanity; it is an expression of his glory and of his love to the end (1: 14; 13: 1); it is the gift of the shepherd for his sheep (10: 11); it is the love of the friend who gives his life for his friends (15: 13). This supreme proof of love, which does not withdraw in the face of the suffering of death on a cross, is an object of contemplation for us on this solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. From his pierced side comes love, which love is his and at the same time inseparably that of the Father. The water that comes out also represents the Spirit, source of life. The blood and water witness to his love proclaimed and communicated. The allusion to the symbols of water and wine at the wedding feast of Cana is evident: the hour has come for Jesus to give the wine of his love. Now the definitive wedding has taken place. The law of supreme and sincere love (1: 17) shown on the cross, echoed in his commandment, «love one another as I have loved you» (13: 34), is poured out into the hearts of believers by the Spirit. The divine plan of love is fulfilled in Jesus in the outpouring of blood and water (19: 28-30); now it is the time for men and women to realize its fulfillment. In this fulfillment, we shall be aided by the Spirit that flows from the pierced side of Jesus, transforming us into a new humanity, capable of loving and of becoming children of God (1: 12).

The Witness of the Evangelist and of Scripture:

With the scene of Jesus pierced on the cross, the Evangelist gives proof of a great and solemn witness so that all who listen to him might come to believe. This final and supreme manifestation will form the foundation of the faith of future disciples. We should note that only here does the Evangelist address his readers with the plural "you": «so that you may believe as well.»

Jesus' pierced side on the cross is the great sign towards which all the persons mentioned throughout the Gospels converge, but above all, all the readers of today, to whom it is given to understand the full meaning of Jesus' existence. The passage concerning the pierced side is, for the Evangelist, the key that explains the giving of oneself for the salvation of humanity. Even if such a sign may seem paradoxical to the modern reader, in God's plan it becomes the manifestation of his saving power. Could not God have chosen another sign of his saving love? Why did he choose the sign of a man sentenced to death and death on a cross? What image of God do we see in this sign? God manifests himself solely in generous love capable of giving life.

A Few Questions:

- What place does the contemplation of the pierced heart of Jesus hold in your personal prayer? Do you allow yourself to be involved in the symbols of blood and water that express the mysterious gift of God to you and to humanity?
- Have you ever thought that at the time of greatest resistance to God and the death of Jesus, there begins the moment of grace, mercy, the gift of the Spirit and of the life of faith?
- How do you see your weaknesses? Do you see them as means of mercy, especially when you are ready to admit them? Do you not know that they may be instruments that God uses to evangelize your heart, to save you, to forgive you, and to give you new life to love in love?
- People who draw away from God, difficult young people, violence, hostility ... often give rise within us of moans, discomfort, bitterness and skepticism. Have you ever thought that God may be saving people in their sins and beginning with their sins? Have you ever thought that so many men, women, young people who are in prison or in communities for drug addicts experience in those who help them a meeting with the Lord and thus feel loved and saved by him?

ORATIO

Isaiah 12:2; 4cd; 5-6

Look, he is the God of my salvation: I shall have faith and not be afraid, for Yahweh is my strength and my song, he has been my salvation.'

'Praise Yahweh, invoke his name.

Proclaim his deeds to the people, declare his name sublime.

Sing of Yahweh, for his works are majestic, make them known throughout the world. Cry and shout for joy, you who live in Zion, For the Holy One of Israel is among you in his greatness.'

Closing Prayer:

At the end of this moment of listening to the Word, let us use the help of prayers that come from a loving and wise study of the Bible. Prayer begins with listening and leads to action «with a pure heart and right conscience». The

title of the prayer is “That I may love, Lord!”: Is it an empty dream to imagine a united humanity, where all are glad to live with others and feel useful, understood, and loved? How often people, yesterday, today and in the future, have had and will have such a dream, Lord! The need for unity and the desire for charity dwell in human nature. Love, the law that unites the universe, is the reason and vocation that You, Lord, entrust to everyone who comes to life. To live means to feel loved and to be able to love. When one feels lonely, empty, without love, it seems that life is worthless and colorless! How is it, then, Lord, that not all seek love, always, nor do they all live for others, nor are they capable of giving themselves? To give oneself to each other means transforming the existence of the world into gift. Grant, Lord, that I may understand and live this wonderful vocation of love! (*Lucio Renna*)

CONTEMPLATIO

On earth, the knowledge we can have of God is divine silence. Through the *lectio divina* our thirst for the Word is not quenched but is made more acute. St. Augustine said: «You find him only to seek him more avidly». When a heart is seduced by the Word, it feels as if it were dying if the encounter were to be deferred. This is what Teresa of Avila experienced: «*Muero por que no muero*» (I die because I do not die). To initiate this moment of contemplation, I would like to quote three sayings of Blessed Elisabeth of the Trinity. They are taken from a part entitled “a hymn” to suffering, but we must not think that suffering was the Absolute in her life. Rather she says that we are called to “enter into the joy of the Lord”. The first thought is: «Suffering is such a great thing, such a divine thing! It seems to me that if the Blessed in heaven could envy us one thing, they would envy us this treasure. It is such a powerful lever on the heart of the good God!» (Letter to Mrs. Angles, 14 August 1904). The second thought is: «Suffering is a string that produces even sweeter sounds and she (the soul) likes to make it its instrument to move more deliciously the heart of God» (Retreat on How to find heaven on earth). The last thought is: «Nothing moves God’s heart like suffering. If we cannot desire or go to meet it, then at least we can accept the trials that God sends us. The more he loves a soul, the more he makes it suffer» (Diary, 17 March 1889). Why is it that Blessed Elisabeth of the Trinity sees in suffering «such a great thing, such a divine thing that moves the heart of God?» Because it is the road taken by Christ. Christ’s Pasch, passion and death on the one hand and resurrection on the other are one as are concave and convex.

Saturday, June 8, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

O God, who has prepared a worthy dwelling place of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, through her intercession grant that we, your faithful, to be a living temple of your glory. We ask this, through Christ our Lord ...

Gospel Reading - Luke 2: 41-51

Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us?

Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

Meditation

- **"Every year the feast of Passover."** These words help us to better define the spiritual context in which the passage takes place and thus become, for us, the gateway to enter the mystery of his encounter with the Lord and His work of grace and mercy on us.
Together with Mary and Joseph, with Jesus, we too can live the gift of a new Passover, a "crossing" an excess, a spiritual movement that takes us "beyond". The passage is clear and strong, according to intuit what the Virgin Mary in this experience with his Son Jesus. Is the step from the street to the heart of the dispersion to interiority, from anguish to peace. All that remains is to make our journey that we go down the street and join the feast, the feast of pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover.
- **"Their way"** This is only the first of a series of verbs of motion, which follow one another along the verses of this passage. Maybe it can help record an 'attention, "they went", "return to the path", "group" (from the Latin *cum-ire*, "walking together"); "journey"; "back"; "went down with them "" arrive."
In parallel with this great physical movement, there is also a deep spiritual movement characterized by the verb "look", expressed also over, "they began to look for" "returned in search of him," "looking for you anxiously"; "why you sought me?"
This tells us that the journey, the true path that the Lord's word calls us, not a physical journey, but spiritual search is a journey of Jesus, of His Presence in our lives. And 'this is the direction in which we move, together with Mary and Joseph.
- **"They began to look for him"** here we can identify the core of the text, its fundamental message, it is important that we open ourselves to a deeper understanding of this reality. Also because Luke uses two different verbs to

express the "search", the first to *anazitéo* vv. 44 and 45, indicating an accurate, repeated, careful, as some of those who browse, from bottom to top and second to *zite* vv. 48 and 49, which indicates the search for something that is lost and you want to find. Jesus is the object of all this movement and deep inner being, is the object of desire, the longing of the heart ...

- **"Distressed"** It 'great to see how Mary opens her heart to Jesus, telling him everything she saw, what she felt within herself. She is not afraid to tell the truth to his Son, to tell him the feelings and experiences that they felt in deep. But what is this anguish, this pain that you saw in Mary and Joseph in search of Jesus, who went missing?
- **"Kept all these sayings in her heart"** Maria does not understand the words of Jesus, the mystery of his life and his mission and for this silent, accepts, makes space, keep in the heart. This is the true path of growth in faith and relationship with the Lord.

Once again, Luke gives us a very beautiful and meaningful word, a compound of the verb "keep" - dia - Tíree, which means literally "keeping through". That is the spiritual operation that Mary carry within herself and that give us as a precious gift, a legacy for our good relationship with the Lord, so that it can take us into a journey deep, deep, that does not stop at the surface, or half, which is not coming back, but it goes deep down. Mary takes us by the hand and guides us through all our heart, all her feelings, her experiences. And there, in the secrecy of ourselves, in our hearts, we can learn to find the Lord Jesus, that perhaps we had lost.

Some Questions

- The Word of the Lord, in its simplicity, is also very clear, very direct. An invitation to leave, to take part in the feast of Passover, is also directed to me. Do I decide to get up and get moving, to face the stretch of the road that Lord puts in front of me? And again, do I agree to join the feast of those who have decided in their hearts on pilgrimage?
- Do I feel like my experience of seeking the Lord? Or it does not seem important? Do I miss it? do I think I can do myself? In my life, do I ever realize that in my life be lost to the Lord? Have left him or forgotten.
- Anxiety, spoken of Mary, has ever been my journey of companion, sad presence of the day, or longer in my life? Maybe, thanks to this passage, I discover that, the anxiety is caused by the absence of the Lord, the loss of God, does this passage helps me, gives me a light, a key for my life?
- The path of the heart, which Mary traces so clearly before me now, do I seem to be viable? Do I want to engage in this challenge, with myself, with my surroundings, perhaps even with those who live closest to me? I am willing to choose to get a little 'deeper, to learn how to "keep through", to go deep, with all my being? For me, the Lord and the relationship with him are so important, so involved? And He is the precious friend, the dearest Presence to which I want to open wide my heart?

Closing Prayer

As she worshiped the LORD, she said: "My heart exults in the LORD, my horn is exalted in my God.

I have swallowed up my enemies; I rejoice in my victory.

There is no Holy One like the LORD; there is no Rock like our God. "Speak boastfully no longer, nor let arrogance issue from your mouths. For an all-knowing God is the LORD, a God who judges deeds.

The bows of the mighty are broken, while the tottering gird on strength.

The well-fed hire themselves out for bread, while the hungry batten on spoil.

The barren wife bears seven sons, while the mother of many languishes. "The LORD puts to death and gives life; he casts down to the nether world; he raises up again. The LORD makes poor and makes rich, he humbles, he also exalts.

He raises the needy from the dust; from the ash heap he lifts up the poor,

To seat them with nobles and make a glorious throne their heritage. He gives to the vower his vow and blesses the sleep of the just.

"For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he has set the world upon them.
1 Samuel 2: 1-8

Sunday, June 9, 2024

Tenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God, direct Your love that is within us, that our efforts in the name of Your Son may bring the human race to unity and peace. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 3: 20-35

20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family[a] heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

23 So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. 27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. 28 Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."

30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."

31 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

33 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Reflection

- The family of Jesus. The relatives reached the house where Jesus was. They have probably come from Nazareth. From there to Capernaum there is a distance of forty kilometers. His mother also comes with them. They do not enter, but they send a messenger: "Look, Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for You!" Jesus' reaction is clear: "Who are My mother and My brothers?" And He Himself responds by turning to look toward the crowd who is there around Him: "Here are My mother and My brothers! Anyone who does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother!" To understand the meaning of this response it is necessary to look at the situation of the family at the time of Jesus.
- In old Israel, the clan (the large family, the community), was the basis of living together. It was protection for families and people, the guarantee of possession of the land, the principle vehicle of tradition, and 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 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 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 Hellenism, the frequent threats of violent repression on the part of the Romans and the obligation to accept the soldiers and give them hospitality, and the ever growing problem of survival, impelled families to close themselves in on themselves and to think only of their own needs. This closing up was strengthened by the religion of the time. For example, 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). The observance of the norms of purity was a factor in the marginalization of many people too, such as women, children, Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, possessed people, tax collectors or publicans, the sick, mutilated people and paraplegics.
- The concern over the problems of one's own family prevented people from meeting in community. Now, in order that the Kingdom of God could manifest itself in community living, people had to overcome the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves to the larger family, and the

community. Jesus gave the example. When His own family tried to take control of Him, He reacted and extended the family: "Who are My mother and My brothers?" And He Himself gave the answer, turning His look toward the crowd, "Here are My mother and My brothers! Anyone who does the will of God is My brother, sister and mother!" (Mk 3:33-35). He created a community.

- Jesus asked the same thing from all those who wanted to follow Him. Families should not close themselves in on themselves. The excluded and the marginalized had to be accepted in life with others and feel accepted by God (Lk 14: 12-14). This was the path to attaining 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, the family, and the community as an expression of the incarnation of the love toward God and toward neighbor.

Personal Questions

- What place and what influence does the community have in my way of living the faith?
- Today, in the large city, overcrowding promotes individualism which is at odds with life in community. What am I doing to counteract this? How does one reconcile personal physical safety with community involvement in these urban areas?

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)

Monday, June 10, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of wisdom and love, source of all good, send your Spirit to teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way of peace.

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 5: 1-12

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went onto the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him.

Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them:

How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
 Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance.
 Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.
 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness: they shall have their fill.
 Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them.
 Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God.
 Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognized as children of God.
 Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
 'Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.

Reflection

From today, beginning of the 10th week of Ordinary Time, up to the end of the 21st Week of Ordinary time, the daily Gospels are taken from the Gospel of Matthew. Starting from the beginning of the 22nd week of Ordinary Time, up to the end of the Liturgical Year, the Gospels are taken from the Gospel of Luke. In Matthew's Gospel written for the communities of the converted Jews of Galilee and Syria, Jesus is presented as the New Moses, the new legislator. In the Old Testament the Law of Moses was codified in five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Imitating the ancient model, Matthew presents the New Law in five great discourses spread over in the Gospel:

- The Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5: 1 to 7: 29);
- The Discourse on the Mission (Mt 10: 1-42);
- The Discourse of the Parables (Mt 13: 1-52);
- The Discourse of the Community (Mt 18: 1-35);
- The Discourse of the Future of the Kingdom (Mt 24: 1 a 25: 46). The narrative parts, which have been put in among the five Discourses, describe the practice of Jesus and show how He observed the New Law and incarnated it in his life.
- Matthew 5: 1-2: The solemn announcement of the New Law. In agreement with the context of the Gospel of Matthew, in the moment when Jesus pronounces the Discourse on the Mountain, there were only four disciples with him (cf. Mt 4: 18-22). Few people. But an immense multitude was behind him (Mt 4: 25). In the Old Testament, Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Law of God. As it happened to Moses, Jesus went up to the Mountain, and seeing the crowd, he proclaimed the New Law. The solemn way in which Matthew introduces the proclamation of the New Law is significant: "Seeing the crowds, he went onto the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: How blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of Heaven is theirs". The eight Beatitudes open in a solemn way the "Discourse on the Mountain" – the sermon on the Mountain. In them Jesus defines who can be considered

blessed, who can enter into the Kingdom. There are eight categories of persons, eight entrance doors to the Kingdom, for the community. There are no other entrances! Anyone who wants to enter into the Kingdom should identify himself with at least one of these eight categories.

- Matthew 5: 3: Blessed are the poor in spirit. Jesus acknowledges the richness and the value of the poor (Mt 11: 25-26). He defines his own mission in these words: “to proclaim the Good News to the poor” (Lk 4: 18). He himself lives poorly. He possesses nothing for himself, not even a stone where to rest his head (Mt 8: 18 20). And to anyone who wants to follow him, he orders to choose: God or money! (Mt 6: 24). In Luke’s Gospel it is said: “Blessed are you who are poor!” (Lk 6: 20). But who is poor in spirit? It is the poor person who has the same spirit that animated Jesus. It is not the rich person, neither the poor person who has the mentality of a rich person. But rather it is the poor person who acts as Jesus, he thinks of the poor and recognizes the value in him. It is the poor person who says: “I think that the world will be better when the little one who suffers thinks of the least.”
 - a) Blessed the poor in spirit => theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven
 - b) Blessed the meek => they shall have the earth as inheritance
 - c) Blessed those who mourn => they will be consoled
 - d) Blessed those who hunger and thirst for justice => they shall have their fill
 - e) Blessed are the merciful => they shall have mercy shown them
 - f) Blessed are the pure in heart => they shall see God
 - g) Blessed are the peacemakers => they shall be recognized children of God
 - h) Blessed those persecuted in the cause of justice => theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Matthew 5: 4-9: The new project of life. Every time that in the Bible they try to renew the Covenant, they begin by re-establishing the rights of the poor and of the excluded. Without this, the Covenant cannot be renewed! This is the way the Prophets did, this is how Jesus did. In the Beatitudes, he announces the new Project of God which accepts the poor and the excluded. It denounces the system which excludes the poor and which persecutes those who fight for justice. The first category of the “poor in spirit” and the last category of those “persecuted for the cause of justice” receive the same promise of the Kingdom of Heaven. And they receive it beginning now, in the present, because Jesus says: “theirs **is** the Kingdom!” The Kingdom is already present in their life. Between the first and the last category, there are six others categories which receive the promise of the Kingdom. In them there is the new project of life which wants to reconstruct life totally through a new type of relationship: with **material goods** (the first two); with **persons among themselves** (2nd two); with **God** (3rd two). The Christian community should be an example of this Kingdom, a place where the Kingdom begins and takes shape, form beginning now.
- The three duos:

- i. First one: the meek and those who mourn: **the meek** are those poor of whom Psalm 37 speaks. They have been deprived of their land and they will inherit it again (Ps 37: 11; cf. Ps 37, 22, 29, 34). Those who mourn are those who weep in the face of injustices in the world and in people (cf. Ps 119: 136; Ez 9: 4; Tb 13: 16; 2 P 2: 7). These two Beatitudes want to reconstruct the relationship with material goods: the possession of the land and of the reconciled world.
 - ii. Second duo: those who hunger and thirst for justice and the merciful: Those who are **hungry and thirsty for justice** are those who desire to renew human living together, in such a way that once again it may be according to the demands of justice. The **merciful** are those who feel in their heart the misery of others because they want to eliminate the inequality between brothers and sisters. These two Beatitudes want to reconstruct the relationship among persons through the practice of justice and solidarity.
 - iii. Third duo: The pure in heart and the peacemakers: The **pure in heart** are those who have a contemplative look which allows them to perceive the presence of God in everything. Those **who promote peace, the peacemakers**, will be called children of God, because they make an effort so that a new experience of God can penetrate in everything and can integrate all things. These two Beatitudes want to build up the relationship with God: to see the presence of God which acts in everything, and be called son and daughter of God.
- Matthew 5: 10-12: The persecuted for the cause of justice and of the Gospel. The Beatitudes say exactly the contrary of what society in which we live says. In fact, in society, those who are persecuted for the cause of justice are considered as unhappy, wretched persons. The poor is unhappy. Blessed is the one who has money and can go to the Supermarket and spend as he wishes. Blessed is the one who is hungry for power. The unhappy and wretched are the poor, those who weep! In television, the novels diffuse this myth of the happy and fulfilled person. And without being aware, the novels become the model of life for many of us. Is there still place in our society for these words of Jesus: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice and of the Gospel? Blessed are the poor! Blessed are those who weep!"? And according to me, being a Christian, in fact, who is blessed?

Personal Questions

- We all want to be happy. All of us! But are we truly happy? Why yes? Why no? How can we understand that a person can be poor and happy at the same time?
- In which moments of your life have you felt truly happy? Was it a happiness like the one proclaimed by Jesus in the Beatitudes, or was it of another type?

Concluding Prayer

I lift up my eyes to the mountains; where is my help to come from?
My help comes from Yahweh who made heaven and earth. (Ps 121: 1-2)

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of wisdom and love, source of all good, send your Spirit to teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way of peace.

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 5: 13-16

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You are salt for the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing and can only be thrown out to be trampled under people's feet.

'You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lampstand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.

Reflection

Yesterday, in meditating on the Beatitudes, we passed through the door of entry of the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5: 1-12). Today in the Gospel we receive an important instruction on the mission of the Community. It should be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5: 13-16). Salt does not exist for itself, but to give flavor to the food. Light does not exist for itself, but for the service of people. At the time when Matthew wrote his Gospel, this mission was very difficult for the communities of the converted Jews. In spite that they were living in faithful observance of the Law of Moses, they were expelled from the Synagogues, cut away from their Jewish past. Regarding this, among the converted pagans, some said: "After the coming of Jesus, the Law of Moses has become obsolete". All this caused tension and uncertainty. The openness of some seemed to be criticism of the observance of others, and vice versa. This conflict brought about a crisis which led many to close up in their own position. Some wanted to advance, to go ahead, others wanted to place the light under the table. Many asked themselves: "In last instance, which is our mission?" Recalling and updating the words of Jesus, Matthew tries to help them.

- Matthew 5: 13-16: Salt of the earth. By using images of daily life, with simple and direct words, Jesus makes known which is the mission and the reason for being a Christian community: to be salt. At that time when it was very hot, people and animals needed to consume much salt. The salt, which was delivered by merchants in great blocks in the public square, was consumed by the people. What remained fell to the ground and lost its savor. "It no longer serves for anything, but it is thrown out and trampled under people's

feet". Jesus recalls this use to clarify for the disciples the mission which they have to carry out.

- Matthew 5: 14-16: Light of the world. The comparison is obvious. Nobody lights a candle and places it under the tub. A city built on the hilltop, cannot be hidden. The community should be light, it should enlighten. It should not be afraid to show the good that it does. It does not do it to make itself seen, but what it does can be seen. The salt does not exist for itself. The light does not exist for itself! This is how the community should be. It cannot remain enclosed. "Your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in Heaven."
- Matthew 5: 17-19: Not one dot, not one little stroke will disappear from the Law. Among the converted Jews there were two tendencies. Some thought that it was not necessary to observe the laws of the Old Testament because we are saved by the faith in Jesus and not by the observance of the Law (Rm 3: 21-26). Others thought that they should continue to observe the laws of the Old Testament (Acts 15: 1-2). In each one of the two tendencies there were some more radical groups. Before this conflict, Matthew tries to find a balance, the equilibrium, over and beyond the two extremes. The community should be the space, where this equilibrium can be attained and lived. The response given by Jesus continued to be very actual: "I have not come to abolish the law, but to complete it!" The communities cannot be against the Law, nor can they close themselves up in the observance of the law. Like Jesus did, they must advance forward, and show in a practical way that the objective which the law wants to attain in life is the perfect practice of love.

The different tendencies in the first Christian communities. The plan of salvation has three stages united among themselves from the earth to life: a) the Old Testament: the path of the Hebrew People, orientated, guided by the Law of God. b) The life of Jesus of Nazareth: it renews the Law of Moses starting from his experience of God, Father and Mother. c) The life of the communities: through the spirit of Jesus, they tried to live as Jesus lived it. The union of these three stages generates the certainty of faith that God is in our midst. The intention to break or weaken the unity of this plan of salvation gave rise to various groups and tendencies in the communities:

- The Pharisees did not recognize Jesus as Messiah and accepted only the Old Testament. In the communities there were some people who sympathized with the thought of the Pharisees (Acts 15: 5).
- Some converted Jews accepted Jesus as Messiah, but they did not accept the liberty of spirit with which the communities lived the presence of the Risen Jesus. (Acts 15: 1).
- Others, both converted Jews and pagans, thought that with Jesus had come the end of the Old Testament. From now on, Jesus alone and the life in the Spirit.
- There were also Christians who lived so fully the life in the liberty of the Spirit, that they no longer looked at the life of Jesus of Nazareth, nor the Old Testament (1 Cor 12: 3).

Now the great concern of the Gospel of Matthew is that of showing that the Old Testament, Jesus of Nazareth and the life in the Spirit cannot be separated. The three-form part of the same and only project of God and give us the central certainty of faith: The God of Abraham and of Sarah is present amid the communities by the faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

Personal Questions

- For you, in your life experience, for what does salt serve? Is your community salt? For you, what does light signify in your life? How is your community light?
- How do the people of the neighborhood see your community? Does your community have some attraction for others? Is it a sign? Of what? For whom?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh judiciously guides the humble, instructing the poor in his way. Kindness unfailing and constancy mark all his paths, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. (Ps 25: 9-10)

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
your prophets remind us in season and out of season of our responsibilities toward you and toward the world of people. When they disturb and upset us, let it be a holy disturbance that makes us restless, eager to do your will and to bring justice and love around us.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 17-19

Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, is to disappear from the Law until all its purpose is achieved.
Therefore, anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of Heaven.

Reflection

Today's Gospel (Mt 5: 17-19) teaches how to observe the law of God in such a way that its practice indicates in what its complete fulfilment consists (Mt 5: 17-19). Matthew writes in order to help the communities of the converted Jews to overcome the criticism of the brothers of their own race who accused them saying: "You are unfaithful to the Law of Moses." Jesus himself had been accused of infidelity to the Law of God. Matthew has the clarifying response of Jesus concerning his accusers. Thus, he gives some light to help the communities solve their problems.

Using images of daily life, with simple and direct words, Jesus had said that the mission of the community, its reason for being, is that of being salt and light! He had given some advice regarding each one of the two images. Then follow two or three brief verses of today's Gospel.

- Matthew 5: 17-18: Not one dot, nor one stroke is to disappear from the Law. There were several different tendencies in the communities of the first Christians. Some thought that it was not necessary to observe the laws of the Old Testament, because we are saved by faith in Jesus and not by the observance of the Law (Rm 3: 21-26). Others accepted Jesus, the Messiah, but they did not accept the liberty of spirit with which some of the communities lived the presence of Jesus. They thought that being Jews they had to continue to observe the laws of the Old Testament (Acts 15: 1, 5). But there were Christians who lived so fully in the freedom of the Spirit, who no longer looked at the life of Jesus of Nazareth, nor to the Old Testament and they even went so far as to say: "Anathema Jesus!" (1 Co 12: 3). Observing these tensions, Matthew tries to find some balance between both extremes. The community should be a space, where the balance can be attained and lived. The answer given by Jesus to those who criticized him continued to be actual for the communities: "I have not come to abolish the law, but to complete it!" The communities could not be against the Law, nor could they close up themselves in the observance of the law. Like Jesus, they should advance, and show, in practice, which was the objective which the law wanted to attain in the life of persons, that is, in the perfect practice of love.
- Matthew 5: 19: Not one dot or stroke will disappear from the Law. It is for those who wanted to get rid of all the law that Matthew recalls the other parable of Jesus: "Anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the Kingdom of Heaven." The great concern in Matthew's Gospel is to show that the Old Testament, Jesus of Nazareth and the life in the Spirit cannot be separated. The three of them form part of the same and unique project of God and communicate to us the certainty of faith: The God of Abraham and of Sarah is present amid the community by faith in Jesus of Nazareth who sends us his Spirit.

Personal Questions

- How do I see and live the law of God: as a growing horizon of light or as an imposition which limits my freedom?

- What can we do today for our brothers and sisters who consider all this type of discussion as obsolete and not actual? What can we learn from them?

Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, Jerusalem, Zion, praise your God.
For he gives strength to the bars of your gates,
he blesses your children within you. (Ps 145: 12-13)

Thursday, June 13, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of mercy and compassion,
you challenge us to be responsible for the good and the evil we do
and You call us to conversion.
God, help us to face ourselves that we may not use flimsy excuses for covering
up our wrongs.
Make us honest with ourselves, and aware that we can always count on Jesus
Christ to be our guide and strength on the road to You, now and for ever.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 5: 20-26

Jesus said to his disciples: "I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven. "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, *raqa*, will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny."

Reflection

The text of today's Gospel forms part of a broader or more extensive whole: Mt 5: 20 up to Mt 5: 48. In these passages Matthew tells us how Jesus interprets and explains the Law of God. Five times He repeats the phrase: You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, in truth I tell you! (Mt 5: 21, 27, 33, 38, 43). Before, He had said: Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;

no, I have come not to abolish, but to complete them (Mt 5: 17). The attitude of Jesus before the Law is, at the same time, one of breaking and of continuity. He breaks away from the erroneous interpretations, but maintains firm the objective which the Law should attain: the practice of a greater justice, which is Love.

- Matthew 5: 20: An uprightness which surpasses that of the Pharisees. This first verse presents the general key of everything which follows in Matthew 5: 20-48. The word Justice never appears in the Gospel of Mark, and it appears seven times in that of Matthew (Mt 3: 15; 5: 6, 10, 20; 6: 1, 33; 21: 32). This has something to do with the situation of the communities for which Mark wrote. The religious ideal of the Jews of the time was to be just before God. The Pharisees taught: people attain justice before God when they succeed to observe all the norms of the law in all its details! This teaching generated a legalistic oppression and caused great anguish in the people because it was very difficult to be able to observe all the norms (cfr. Rm 7: 21-24). This is why Matthew takes the words of Jesus on justice to show that it has to surpass the justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5: 20). According to Jesus, justice does not come from what I do for God in observing the law, but rather from what God does for me, accepting me as His son or as His daughter. The new ideal which Jesus proposes is the following: therefore, be perfect as is your Heavenly Father! (Mt 5: 48). That means: you will be just before God when you try to accept and forgive people as God accepts and pardons me, in spite of my defects and sins.

By means of these five very concrete examples, Jesus shows us what to do in order to attain this greater justice which surpasses the justice of the and the Pharisees. As we can see, today's Gospel takes the example of the new interpretation of the fifth commandment: You shall not kill! Jesus has revealed what God wanted when He gave this commandment to Moses.

- Matthew 5: 21-22: The law says: You shall not kill! (Ex 20: 13). In order to observe fully this commandment it is not sufficient to avoid murdering. It is necessary to uproot from within everything which, in one way or another, can lead to murder, for example, anger, hatred, the desire to revenge, insult, and exploitation, etc.
- Matthew 5: 23-24. The perfect worship which God wants. In order to be accepted by God and to remain united to Him, it is necessary to reconcile oneself with brother and sister. Before the destruction of the Temple, in the year 70, when the Christian Jews participated in the pilgrimages in Jerusalem to present their offerings at the altar and to pay their promises, they always remembered this phrase of Jesus. In the year 80, at the time when Matthew wrote, the Temple and the Altar no longer existed. They had been destroyed by the Romans. The community and the communitarian celebration became the Temple and the Altar of God.
- Matthew 5: 25-26: To reconcile oneself. One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew exists the most is reconciliation. That indicates that in the communities of that time, there were many tensions among the radical

groups with diverse tendencies and sometimes even opposing ones. Nobody wanted to cede to the other. There was no dialogue. Matthew enlightens this situation with the words of Jesus on reconciliation which demands acceptance and understanding. The only sin that God does not forgive is our lack of pardon toward others (Mt 6: 14). That is why one should try to reconcile yourself before it is too late!

Personal Questions

- Today there are many people who cry out for justice! What meaning does evangelical justice have for me?
- How do I behave before those who do not accept me as I am? How did Jesus behave before those who did not accept Him?

Concluding Prayer

From the depths I call to You, Yahweh:
Lord, hear my cry.
Listen attentively to the sound of my pleading! (Ps 130: 1-2)

Friday, June 14, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of wisdom and love,
source of all good, send Your Spirit to teach us Your truth and guide our actions
in Your way of peace.
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 5: 27-32

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna. "It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce. But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Reflection

In yesterday's Gospel, Jesus offered a rereading of the commandment: "Do not kill" (Mt 5: 20-26). In today's Gospel Jesus rereads the commandment "You shall not commit adultery." Jesus rereads the law starting from the intention that God had which was proclaimed centuries before on Mount Sinai. He seeks the spirit of the Law and does not limit himself to the letter. He takes up again and defends the great values of human life which constitute the background of each one of these Ten Commandments. He insists on love, on fidelity, on mercy, on justice, on truth, on humanity (Mt 9: 13; 12: 7; 23: 23; Mt 5: 10; 5: 20; Lk 11: 42; 18: 9). The result of the full observance of the Law of God humanizes the person. In Jesus we can see what happens when a person allows God to fill his life. The last objective is that of uniting both loves and the building up of fraternity in defense of life. The greater the fraternity, the greater will be the fullness of life and greater will be the adoration given by all creatures to God, Creator and Savior.

In today's Gospel, Jesus looks closely at the man-woman relationship in marriage, a fundamental basis of human living together. There was a commandment which said, "Do not commit adultery" and another one which said, "Anyone who divorces his wife, has to give her a certificate of divorce." Jesus takes up again both commandments, giving them a new meaning.

- Matthew 5: 27-28: Do not commit adultery. What does this commandment require from us? The ancient response was: a man cannot sleep with somebody else's wife. This was demanded by the letter of the commandment. But Jesus goes beyond, surpasses the letter and says, "But I say to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The objective of the commandment is reciprocal fidelity between man and woman who assume life together, as a married couple. This fidelity will be complete only if both know how to be faithful to one another in thought and in desire and have a total transparency between them.

- Matthew 5: 29-30: Tear out your eye and cut off your hand. To illustrate what Jesus has just said, He states a hard word which He uses on another occasion when He speaks of scandal to little ones (Mt 18: 9; Mk 9: 47). He says that if your right eye should be your downfall tear it out and throw it away, for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body thrown into hell. He affirms the same thing concerning the hand. These affirmations cannot be taken literally. They indicate the radical nature and the seriousness with which Jesus insists on the observance of this commandment. It means that if something in your life is causing you to sin, get rid of it!

Today there are many things which might drive or tempt us to sin, or to consider sin. It may be the Internet, a television show, money, etc. These things expose us to consider sinning perhaps, and if so, are best removed from our life in order "To be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect!" (Mt 5:48). To rephrase Jesus' advice in today's language: "if the TV causes you to sin, or tempts you to sin, or teaches you how to sin, turn the TV off!"

- Matthew 5: 31-32: The question of divorce. The man was permitted to give a certificate of divorce to the woman. In the discourse of the community, Jesus will say that Moses permitted this because the people were hardhearted (Mt 19: 8). “But I say to you: anyone who divorces his wife, give her a certificate of divorce; but I say to you: anyone who divorces his wife, except in the case of concubinage, exposes her to adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” There has been much discussion on this theme. Basing itself on this affirmation of Jesus, the Eastern Church permits divorce in case of “fornication,” that is, of infidelity. Others say that here the word fornication is the translation of an Aramaic or Hebrew word *zenuth* which indicated a marriage among people who were relatives, and which was forbidden. It would not be a valid marriage. In the Western Church as well, this only applies to valid marriages and where both parties are capable of understanding what marriage means, that it is not just a “lifestyle”. Where the marriage is not valid, there is not a divorce.

Leaving aside the correct interpretation of this word, what is important is to see the objective and the general sense of the affirmation of Jesus in the new reading which is done of the Ten Commandments. Jesus speaks about an ideal which should always be before my eyes. The definitive ideal is “to be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5: 48). This ideal is valid for all the commandments reviewed by Jesus. In the rereading of the commandment “Do not commit adultery,” this ideal is translated as transparency, honesty, and chastity between husband and wife. However, nobody can say, “I am perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect.” We can never merit the reward because we can never be perfect. What is important is to continue walking on the road and always turn our eyes toward the ideal. At the same time, as Jesus did, we have to accept people with the same mercy with which He accepted people and directed them toward the ideal.

Personal Questions

- How do you live in society today, with a constant flow of advertising based on immodesty, and still live within the advice of Jesus?
- How is this to be understood: “to be perfect like the Heavenly Father is perfect?”

Concluding Prayer

Of You my heart has said,
 “Seek His face!” Your face, Yahweh, I seek;
 do not turn away from me.
 Do not thrust aside Your servant in anger;
 without You I am helpless.
 Never leave me, never forsake me, God, my Savior. (Ps 27: 8-9)

Saturday, June 15, 2024

Opening Prayer

God of wisdom and love, source of all good,
send Your Spirit to teach us Your truth and guide our actions
in Your way of peace.

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 5: 33-37

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow. But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the Evil One."

Reflection

In today's Gospel, Jesus rereads the commandment: "Do not commit perjury." And here also He surpasses the letter, concerning the spirit of the law, and seeks to indicate the ultimate goal of this commandment: to attain total transparency in relationships among people. Here we can apply what we said concerning the two commandments "Do not kill" and "Do not commit adultery." It is a question of a new way of interpreting and setting into practice the law of Moses, starting from the new experience of God the Father which Jesus has brought to us. He rereads the law beginning with the intention that God had in proclaiming it centuries ago on Mount Sinai.

- Matthew 5: 33: It was said to our ancestors: you must not swear. The Law of the Old Testament said, "Do not commit perjury" and it added that the person should swear for the Lord. In the Psalms it is said that "one can go up to the Mountain of Yahweh and reach the holy place, if he has innocent hands and a pure heart, and does not confide in idols, nor swear in order to deceive" (Ps 24: 4). The same thing is said in other parts of the Old Testament (Eccl 5: 3-4), because one must be able to trust the words of others. In order to promote this reciprocal trust, tradition had invented the help of the oath. In order to strengthen one's own word, the person would swear on someone or on something which was greater than he and who could punish him if he did not do what he had promised. Things continue to be like this up to the present time. Whether in the Church or in society, there are some moments and occasions which demand a solemn oath from people. In the final analysis, the oath is the expression of the conviction that nobody can completely trust the word of another.
- Matthew 5: 34-36: But I say to you: do not swear. Jesus wants to heal this defect. It is not enough "not to swear." He goes beyond and affirms: "But I say

to you: do not swear at all: either by heaven, since that is God's throne; or by earth, since that is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, since that is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need to say is 'Yes' if you mean yes, and 'No' if you mean no. Anything more than this comes from the Evil One."

They would swear on heaven and on earth, on the city of Jerusalem, on their own head. Jesus shows that all that does not cure the pain and suffering from the lack of transparency and trust among people. What is the solution which He proposes?

- Matthew 5: 37: Let your speech be yes, yes; no, no. The solution which God proposes is the following: Let your speech be yes, yes; no, no; anything more than this comes from the Evil One. He proposes a radical and total honesty. Nothing more. Anything more that you say comes from the Evil One. Here again, we are confronted with an objective which will always remain in our mind and which we will never succeed in fulfilling completely. It is another expression of the new ideal of justice which Jesus proposes: "to be perfect like the Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5: 48). Jesus uproots any attempt to create the conviction that I am saved because I observe the law. Nobody can merit God's grace, because otherwise it would not be a grace. We observe the Law, not in order to merit salvation, but in order to thank with all our heart for the immense gratuitous goodness of God, who accepts us and saves us without any merit on our part.

Personal Questions

- How honest is my speech? How honest am I with myself as I answer that?
- Is Jesus addressing intent in this instruction, to be trustworthy without external aids?
- Or is He addressing the hypocrisy of having one truth when speaking and another when under oath?
- Or is He giving instructions to not do a physical act, as one might be asked to do in a modern courtroom?

Concluding Prayer

I bless Yahweh who is my counselor, even at night my heart instructs me.
I keep Yahweh before me always, for with Him at my right hand, nothing can shake me. (Ps 16: 7-8)

Sunday, June 16, 2024

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send us your Spirit, to open the Scriptures for us in the same way that you opened them for the disciples on the road to Emmaus. With the light of the Word, written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the terrible events of your condemnation and crucifixion. Thus, the cross, that seemed to be the end of all hope, could be seen by them as the source of life and resurrection.

Create in us the silence that will enable us to listen to your voice in creation and in Scripture, in the events of life and in other people, especially in the poor and the suffering. May your Word direct us so that we too, just like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, may experience the power of your resurrection and be witnesses for others of the truth that you are alive and that you live in our midst, as the source of fraternity, peace, and justice. We ask this of you, Jesus, Son of Mary, who have revealed the Father to us and have sent us your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Mark 4: 26-34

A Division of the Text

Mk 4: 26-29: The parable of the seed that springs up on its own

Mk 4: 30-32: The parable of the grain of mustard

Mk 4: 33-34: The conclusion regarding parables.

The Text

He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may enter and enlighten our lives.

Questions

to help us in our prayer and meditation

- What point struck you most? Why?
- Jesus did not explain the parables. He told the stories and awakened the

imagination in his listeners and their reflection on what they discovered. What have you discovered in the parables?

- The purpose of these words is to make life transparent. Over the years, has your life become more transparent, or has the opposite happened?

A Deeper Look at the Theme

a) For a Better Understanding

Why Jesus taught through parables: Jesus recounted many parables. All of them are taken from the life of the people. In this way he helped people to discover the things of God in everyday life, as life becomes more transparent, because the extraordinary things of God are hidden in the ordinary and common things of everyday life. The people could understand the things of life. The parables provide the key that opens that life and finds the signs of God in it.

Through the parables, Jesus helped the people to see the mysterious presence of the Kingdom in the things of life. A parable is a comparison. Jesus used the known and obvious things of life to help to explain the invisible and unknown things of the Kingdom of God. For example, the people of Galilee understood when someone talked about seeds, land, rain, sunshine, salt, flowers, fish, harvest etc., Jesus used all these things that the people knew very well, in his parables, to help to explain the mystery of the Kingdom.

The parable of the sower is a portrait of a farmer's life. At that time, it was hard to make a living from farming. The land was full of stones. There were many rough plants, not a lot of rain, and a strong sun. As well as that, often, the people in order to take shortcuts walked across the land and trampled on the plants (Mk 2,23). Despite all that, every year the farmer would plant, trusting in the power of the seed and in the generosity of nature.

A parable doesn't say everything, but induces a person to think and make discoveries, beginning with the experience the listeners have of the seed. This is not a neatly packaged doctrine that arrives all ready to be taught and embellished. The parable does not provide water in a bottle, but rather, leads people to the source. A farmer, listening, would say, "Seed in the ground, I know what that is, but Jesus is saying that this has something to do with the Kingdom of God! What could that be?" It's not difficult to imagine the long conversations that might follow with the crowd. The parable moves with the people and gets them to listen to nature and to think about life.

b) Commentary on the Text

It is wonderful to see Jesus, again and again, looking at life and at what's happening around him, for things and images that might help the people to detect and to experience the presence of the Kingdom. In today's Gospel, again, he tells two short stories about things that happen every day in our lives: The story of the seed that grows, all on its own, and the story of the tiny mustard that grows to be so big."

- *The story of the seed that grows all on its own*

The farmer who plants the seed knows the process: first the seed, then the green shoot, the leaf, the ear and the grain. The farmer knows how to wait and will not cut the stalk before it is ripe, but he does not know from where the power comes for the soil, the rain, the sun and the seed to make a seed turn into fruit. That's what the Kingdom of God is like. It's a process. There are stages and points of growth. It takes time and happens in time. The fruit comes at the right time but no one can explain its mysterious power. No one is its master!. Only God!

- *The story of the tiny mustard seed that turns into something very big*
The mustard seed is small, but it grows, to the point where the birds can make their nests in its branches. That's what the Kingdom is like. It begins as something very small, it grows and spreads its branches. The parable does not say who the birds are. The answer to that question will come later in the Gospel. The text suggests that it refers to the pagans who will not be able to get into the community and be sharers in the Kingdom.

Jesus explained the parable to his disciples

In the house, when they were on their own with Jesus, the disciples want to know what the parable means. They do not understand it. Jesus is astonished by their failure to understand (Mk 4:13) and at that point responds in a way that is difficult and mysterious. He says to his disciples, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'" (Mk 4:11-12) This makes the people wonder, What use is the parable then? Is it to make things clear or to hide them? Perhaps Jesus uses parables so that people will go on living in ignorance and not become converted? Certainly not!. Today's Gospel says that, "with many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it" (Mk4:33)

The parable reveals and hides at the same time! It reveals, to those who have become attuned, who accept Jesus, the Servant Messiah. It hides, from those who insist on seeing him as Messiah, mighty King. These see the images of the parable but they do not grasp their meaning.

Prayer - Psalm 96

Tell of his salvation from day to day

O sing to the Lord a new song;

sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name;

tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, "The Lord is king!The world is firmly established;
it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity."Let the heavens be glad,
and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joybefore the Lord; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,and the peoples with his truth.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, we give you thanks for your word that has helped us to see more clearly what is the will of the Father. Let your Spirit enlighten our actions and give us the strength to be able to do what your word had allowed us to see. Let us, like Mary your Mother, not just listen to the your Word, but also to put it into practice. You live and reign with the Father, in the unityof the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen

Monday, June 17, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength,without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ and to live according to your will.
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 38-42

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer no resistance to the wicked. On the contrary, if anyone hits you onthe right cheek, offer him the other as well; if someone wishes to go to law with you to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

Reflection

Today's Gospel forms part of a small literary unit which goes from Mt 5: 17 to Mt 5: 48, in which is described how to pass from the ancient justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5: 20) to the newjustice of the Kingdom of God (Mt 5: 48). It describes how to go up to the Mountain of the Beatitudes, from where Jesus announces the new Law of Love. The great desire of the Pharisees was to live in justice, to be just before God. And this is the desire of all of us. Just is the one who succeeds to live

where God wants him/her to live. The Pharisees tried to attain justice through the strict observance of the Law. They thought that with their own effort they could succeed in being where God wanted them to be. Jesus takes a stand concerning this practice and announces the new justice which should exceed, surpass the justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5: 20). In today's Gospel we are reaching almost the summit of the mountain. Only a little is lacking. The summit is described in one phrase: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5: 48), on which we will meditate in tomorrow's Gospel. Let us look closely at this last degree which is still lacking to reach the summit of the Mountain, of which Saint John of the Cross says: "Here reign silence and love".

- Matthew 5: 38: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. Jesus quotes a text of the Ancient Law saying: "You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth!" He shortened the text, because the complete text said: "Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, blow for blow" (Ex 21: 23-25). Like in the previous cases, here also Jesus makes a completely new rereading. The principle "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" was already found in the origin of the interpretation which the Scribes made of the law. This principle should be overthrown, because it perverts and destroys the relationship between persons and with God.
- Matthew 5: 39^a: Do not give back evil for evil received. Jesus affirms exactly the contrary: "But I say to you do not offer resistance to the wicked". Before some violence received, our natural reaction is to pay the other one with the same coin. Vengeance asks for "eye for eye, tooth for tooth". Jesus asks to pay back the evil not with evil, but with good. Because if we do not know how to overcome the violence received, the spiral of violence will take up everything and we will not know what to do. Lamec said: For a wound received I will kill a man, and for a scar I would kill a young person. If the vengeance of Cain was worth seven that of Lamec will count for seventy-seven" (Gen 4: 24). And it was precisely because of this terrible act of vengeance that everything ended in the confusion of the Tower of Babel. (Gen 11: 1-9). Faithful to the teaching of Jesus, Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans: "Never payback evil with evil; let your concern be to do good to all men. Do not allow yourselves to be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good" (Rm 12: 17, 21). To be able to have this attitude is necessary to have much faith in the possibility to recover that the human being has. How can we do this in practice? Jesus offers four concrete examples.
- Matthew 5: 39b-42: the four examples to overcome the spiral of violence. Jesus says: "rather (a) if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; (b) if anyone wishes to go to Law with you to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (d) And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him. (e) Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away" (Mt 5: 40-42). How are these four affirmations to be understood? Jesus himself helps us to understand. When the soldier hit him on the cheek, he did not offer the other cheek. Rather, he reacted with energy: "If there is some offence in what I said, point it out, but if not, why do you strike me?" (Jn 18: 23) Jesus does not teach us to be passive. Saint Paul thinks that paying evil with good "you will make others be ashamed" (Rm 12: 20). This faith in the possibility to recover the human

being is possible only beginning from the root which comes from the total gratuity of the creative love which God shows us in the life and the attitudes of Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Have you some time felt within you such a great anger as to want to apply the vengeance “eye for eye, tooth for tooth”? What did you do to overcome this?
- Does life in community, living together, favor today in the Church and in us the creative love which Jesus proposes in today’s Gospel?

Concluding Prayer

Give ear to my words, Yahweh, spare a thought for my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God! To you I pray. (Ps 5: 1-2)

Tuesday, June 18, 2024

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength, without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ and to live according to your will.
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 43-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have heard how it was said, You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

Reflection

In today’s Gospel we get to the summit of the Mountain of the Beatitudes, where Jesus proclaimed the Law of the Kingdom of God, the ideal of which can be summarized in this lapidarian phrase: “Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5: 48) Jesus was correcting the Law of God! Five times, one after another, he had already affirmed: “It was said, but I say to you!” (Mt 5: 21, 27, 31, 33, 38). This was a sign of great courage on his part, in public, before all the

people gathered there, to correct the most sacred treasure of the people, the origin of their identity, which was the Law of God. Jesus wants to communicate a new way of looking and of practicing the Law of God. The key, to be able to get this new look, is the affirmation: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect". Never will anyone be able to say: "Today I have been perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect!" We are always below the measure which Jesus has placed before us. Perhaps, because of this, he has placed before us an ideal which is impossible for us mortal beings to attain?

- Matthew 5: 43-45: It was said: You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy. In this phrase Jesus explains the mentality with which the Scribes explained the Law; a mentality which resulted from the divisions among the Jews and the non-Jews, between neighbor and non-neighbor, between saint and sinner, between the clean and the unclean, etc. Jesus orders to overthrow this pretense, these interested divisions. He orders to overcome divisions. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you! So that you may be children of your Father in Heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike". And from here we draw from the source from which springs the novelty of the Kingdom. This source is proper to God who is recognized as Father, who causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good. Jesus orders that we imitate this God: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (5: 48). And, it is in imitating this God that we can create a just society, radically new:
- Matthew 5: 46-48: Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. Everything is summarized in imitating God: "But I say to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven who causes the sun to rise on the bad as well as on the good and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? Therefore, you be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5: 43-48). Love is the beginning and the end of everything. There is no greater love than to give one's life for the brother (Jn 15: 13). Jesus imitated the Father and revealed his love. Every gesture, every word of Jesus, from his birth until the hour of his death on the cross, it was an expression of this creative love which does not depend on the gift received, neither does it discriminate the other because of race, sex, religion or social class, but which comes from wishing well in a completely gratuitous way. This was continually growing, from birth until his death on the Cross.

The full manifestation of the creative love in Jesus. This was when on the Cross he offered forgiveness to the soldier who tortured him and killed him. The soldier, employed by the Empire, placed the wrist of Jesus on the arm of the Cross, placed a nail and began to hammer. He hammered several times. The blood fell flowing down. The body of Jesus twisted with pain. The mercenary soldier, ignorant of what he was doing and of what was happening around him, continued to hammer as if it was a nail on the wall to hang a picture. At that moment Jesus addresses this prayer to the Father: "Father, forgive them; they

do not know what they are doing!" (Lk 23: 34). Despite all the will of men, the lack of humanity failed to extinguish humanity in Jesus. They take him, they mock him, they spit on his face, they scoff him, they make of him a clown king with a crown of thorns on the head, they scourged him, torture him, make him walk on the streets as if he were a criminal, he must listen to the insults of the religious authority, on Calvary they leave him completely naked at the sight of all. But the poison of lack of humanity fails to reach the source of humanity which sprang from the Heart of Jesus. The water which sprang from within was stronger than the poison from without, wanting to contaminate everything. Looking at that ignorant and rude soldier, Jesus felt compassion for the soldier and prayed for him and for all: "Father, forgive them!" And he adds even an excuse: "They are ignorant. They do not know what they are doing!" Before the Father, Jesus is in solidarity with those who torture him and ill treat him. Like the brother who sees his murder brothers before the judge and he, victim of his own brothers, tells the judge: "You know they are my brothers. They are ignorant. Forgive them. They will become better!" It was as if Jesus was afraid that the minimum anger against man could extinguish in him the remaining humanity which still existed. This unbelievable gesture of humanity and of faith in the possibility of recovering that soldier has been the greatest revelation of the love of God. Jesus can die: "It is fulfilled!" And bowing his head he gave up his spirit (Jn 19: 30). In this way he fulfilled the prophecy of the Suffering Servant (Is 53).

Personal Questions

- Which is the most profound reason for the effort which you make to observe God's Law: to merit salvation or to thank for God who in his immense goodness has created you, keeps you alive and saves you?
- What meaning do you give to the phrase: "to be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect?"

Concluding Prayer

Have mercy on me, O God, in your faithful love, in your great tenderness wipe away my offences; wash me clean from my guilt, purify me from my sin. (Ps 51: 1-2)

Wednesday, June 19, 2024

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength, without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ and to live according to your will.
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise, you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven.

So, when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win human admiration. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'When you are fasting, do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they go about looking unsightly to let people know they are fasting. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put scent on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

Reflection

The Gospel of today continues the meditation on the Sermon on the Mountain. In the previous days we have reflected at length on the message of chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel. In today's Gospel and the following days we meditate on the message of chapter 6 of this Gospel. The sequence of chapters 5 and 6 can help us to understand it. The passages in italics indicate the text of today's Gospel. The following is the schema:

- Matthew 5: 1-12: The Beatitudes: solemn opening of the New Law
- Matthew 5: 13-16: The new presence in the world: Salt of the earth and Light of the world
- Matthew 5: 17-19: The new practice of justice; relationship with the ancient law
- Matthew 5: 20-48: The new practice of justice: observing the new Law.
Matthew 6: 1-4: The new practice of piety: alms
- Matthew 6: 5-15: The new practice of the works of piety: prayer
Matthew 6: 16-18: The new practice of the works of piety: fasting
- Matthew 6: 19-21: New relationship to material goods: do not accumulate
Matthew 6: 22-23: New relationship to material goods: correct vision
Matthew 6: 24: New relationship to material goods: God and money
- Matthew 6: 25-34: New relationship to material goods: abandonment in Providence.

Today's Gospel treats three themes: alms giving (6: 1-4), prayer (6: 5-6) and fasting (6: 16-18). These are three works of piety of the Jews.

- Matthew 6: 1: Be careful not to parade your uprightness to attract attention. Jesus criticizes those who do the good works to be seen by men (Mt 6: 1). Jesus asks to build up interior security not in what we do for God, but in what God does for us. From the advice that he gives there results a new type of relationship with God: "Your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you" (Mt 6: 4). "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Mt 6: 8). "If you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive your failings" (Mt 6: 14). It is a new way which opens itself now to have access to the Heart of God our Father. Jesus does not allow that the practice of justice and of piety be used as a means for self-promotion before God and before the community (Mt 6: 2, 5, 16).
- Matthew 6: 2-4: How to practice almsgiving. To give alms is a way of sharing, very recommended by the first Christians (Acts 2: 44-45; 4: 32-35). The person who practices alms giving and sharing to promote herself before others merits to be excluded from the community, as it happened to Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5: 1-11). Today, in society as well as in the Church, there are persons who make great publicity of the good that they do to others. Jesus asks the contrary: to do good in such a way that the left hand does not know what the right hand does. It is the total detachment and the total gift in total gratuity of the love which believes in God the Father and imitates all that he does.
- Matthew 6: 5-6: How to practice prayer. Prayer places the person in direct relationship with God. Some Pharisees transformed prayer into an occasion to show themselves before others. At that time, when the trumpet sounded in the three moments of prayer, morning, noon and evening, they should stop in the place where they were to pray. There were people who sought to be in the corners in public places, in such a way that everybody would see that they were praying. Well then, such an attitude perverts our relationship with God. This is false and has no sense. Therefore, Jesus says that it is better to close up oneself in our room to pray in secret, maintaining the authenticity of the relationship. God sees you even in secret, and he always listens to you. It is a question of a personal prayer, not of a community prayer.
- Matthew 6: 16-18: How to practice fasting. At that time the practice of fasting was accompanied by some very visible external gestures: not to wash one's face, not to comb one's hair, use sober dresses. These were visible signs of fasting. Jesus criticizes this form of fasting and orders to do the contrary, and thus others cannot become aware that you are fasting: bathe, use perfume, and comb your hair well. In this way, only your Father who sees in secret knows that you are fasting and he will reward you.

Personal Questions

- When you pray, how do you live your relationship with God?
- How do you live your relationship with others in the family and in community?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, what quantities of good things you have in store for those who fear you, and bestow on those who make you their refuge, for all humanity to see. (Ps 31: 19)

Thursday, June 20, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, our hope and our strength, without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ and to live according to your will.
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 6: 7-15

Jesus said to his disciples: 'In your prayers do not babble as the gentiles do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So you should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us
today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us.
And do not put us to the test, but save us from the Evil One.

'Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the prayer of the Our Father, the Psalm which Jesus has left us. There are two redactions of the Our Father, of Luke (Lk 11: 1-4) and of Matthew (Mt 6: 7-13). The redaction of Luke is briefer. Luke writes for the community coming from paganism. He tries to help the persons who are beginning a path of prayer. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Our Father is found in the part of the Discourse of the Mountain, where Jesus orientates the disciples in the practice of the three works of piety: alms giving (Mt 6: 1-4), prayer (Mt 6: 5-15) and fasting (Mt 6: 26-18). The Our father forms part of a catechesis for the converted Jews. They were used to pray, but they had certain vices which Matthew wanted to correct. In the Our Father, Jesus summarizes all his teaching in seven petitions addressed to the Father. In these seven petitions, he takes the promises of the Old Testament and orders to ask the Father to help us to realize them. The first three refer to our relationship with God. The other four have to do with the community relationship that we have with others.

- Matthew 6: 7-8: The introduction to the Our Father. Jesus criticizes the persons for whom prayer was a repetition of magic formulae, of strong words, addressed to God to oblige him to respond to their petitions and needs. Anyone who prays has to seek, in the first place, the Kingdom, much more than the personal interests. The acceptance of prayer by God does not depend on the repetition of words, but rather on the goodness of God who is Love and Mercy. He wants our good and he knows our needs, even before we pray.
- Matthew 6: 9a: The first words: "Our Father in Heaven!" "Abba, Father, is the name which Jesus uses to address himself to God. It expresses the intimacy that he has with God and manifests the new relationship with God which should characterize the life of people in the Christian communities (Ga: 6; Rm 8: 15). Matthew adds to the name of Father the adjective our and the expression in Heaven. The true prayer is a relationship which unites us to the Father, to the brothers and sisters, to nature. Familiarity with God is not intimist but expresses the awareness of belonging to the great human family, in which all persons participate; of all races and of all creeds: Our Father. To pray to the Father is to enter in intimacy with him, it is also to be in harmony with the cry of all the brothers and sisters. It is to seek the Kingdom of God, in the first place. The experience of God the Father is the foundation of the universal fraternity.
- Matthew 6: 9b-10: The three petitions for the cause of God: the Name, the Kingdom, the Will. In the first part of the Our Father, we ask to restore our relationship with God. To do this Jesus asks (a) the sanctification of the Name revealed in Exodus on the occasion of the liberation from Egypt; (b) to ask for the coming of the Kingdom, expected by the people after the fall of the monarchy; (c) to ask for the fulfilment of God's Will, revealed in the Law which was in the center of the Covenant. The Name, the Kingdom, the Law: are three axis taken from the Old Testament which express how the new relationship with God should be. The three petitions indicate that it is necessary to live in intimacy with the Father, making his Name known, making him loved, doing in such a way that his Kingdom of love and of communion becomes a reality that his Will may be done on earth as it is in Heaven. In heaven, the sun and the stars obey the law of God and create the order of the Universe. The observance of the Law of God "on earth as it is in heaven" should be a source and a mirror of harmony and of well-being for the whole creation. This renewed relationship with God becomes visible only in the renewed relationship among us, which on his part is the object of other four petitions: our daily bread, the forgiveness of debts, not to fall into temptation, to deliver us from evil.
- Matthew 6: 11-13: The four petitions for the brothers: Bread, Forgiveness, Victory, Liberty. In the second part of the Our Father we ask to restore and renew the relationship between persons. The four petitions indicate how the structures of the community and of society should be transformed in such a way that all the children of God may live with equal dignity. The daily bread: "Daily Bread" (Mt 6: 1-36). The manna was a "test" to see if the people were capable to follow the Law of the Lord (Ex 16: 4), that is, if they were

capable to store food only for one day as a sign of faith that Divine Providence passes through the fraternal organization. Jesus invites them to walk toward anew Exodus, toward a new way of fraternal living together which can guarantee bread for all. Forgiveness of debts: the request of “forgiveness of debts” (6: 12) recalls the sabbatical year which obliged creditors to forgive all the debts to the brothers (Dt 15: 1-22) was to do away with inequalities and to begin anew. How to pray today: “Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us”? The rich countries, all of which are Christian, are getting richer, thanks to the external debt. Not to fall into Temptation: the petition “not to fall into temptation” (6: 13) reminds us of the errors committed in the desert, where the people fell into temptation (Ex 18: 1-7; Nb 20: 1-13; Dt 9: 7-29). To imitate Jesus who was tempted and obtained victory (Mt 4: 1-17). In the desert, the temptation pushed people to follow other paths, to go back, not to undertake the road of liberation and to be demanding on Moses who guided them. Freedom from Evil: evil is the Evil One, Satan, who seeks to deviate and who in many ways, seeks to lead persons not to follow the path of the Kingdom, indicated by Jesus. He tempted Jesus to abandon the Project of the Father and to be the Messiah according to the idea of the Pharisees, the Scribes and other groups. The Evil One takes us away from God and is a reason of scandal. He also entered in Peter (Mt 16: 23) and he also tempted Jesus in the desert. Jesus overcame him. (Mt 4: 1-11).

Personal Questions

- Jesus says “forgive us our debts”, but today we say “forgive us our offences”, what is easier to forgive offences or to cancel the debts?
- How do you usually pray the Our Father: mechanically or putting all your life and all your efforts in the words you pronounce?

Concluding Prayer

The mountains melt like wax, before the Lord of all the earth.
The heavens proclaim his saving justice, all nations see his glory. (Ps 97: 5-6)

Friday, June 21, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength, without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ and to live according to your will.
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 6: 19-23

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too.

'The lamp of the body is the eye. It follows that if your eye is clear, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be darkness. If then, the light inside you is darkened, what darkness that will be!'

Reflection

In today's Gospel we continue our reflection on the Sermon on the Mountain. Two days ago and yesterday we have reflected on the practice of the three works of piety: alms giving (Mt 6: 1-4), prayer (Mt 6: 5-15) and fasting (Mt 6: 16-18). Today's and tomorrow's Gospel presents four recommendations on the relationship with material goods, explaining clearly how to live the poverty of the first Beatitude: (a) not to accumulate (Mt 6: 19-21); (b) to have a correct idea of material goods (Mt 6: 22-23); (c) not serve two masters (Mt 6: 24); (d) to abandon oneself to Divine Providence (Mt 6: 25-34). Today's Gospel presents the first two recommendations: not to accumulate goods (19-21) and not to look at the world with diseased eyes (22-23).

- Matthew 6: 19-21: Do not accumulate treasures on earth. If, for example today on TV it is announced that next month sugar and coffee will be lacking in the market, we all will buy the maximum possible of coffee and sugar. We accumulate because we lack trust. During the forty years in the desert, the people were tested to see if they were capable to observe God's Law (Ex 16: 4). The test consisted in this: to see if they were capable to gather only the necessary manna for a single day, and not accumulate for the following day. Jesus says: "Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal. What does it mean to store up treasures in heaven? It is a question of knowing where I place the basis of my existence. If I place it on material goods of this earth, I always run the danger of losing what I have stored up. If I place the basis on God, nobody will be able to destroy it and I will have interior freedom to share with others what I possess. In order that this may be possible and feasible it is important to reach a community life together which will favour sharing and reciprocal help, and in which the greatest richness or the treasure is not material riches, but rather the richness or the treasure of fraternal living together born from the certainty brought by Jesus: God is Father and Mother of all. Because there where your treasure is, there is your heart.
- Matthew 6: 22-23: The light of your body is the eye. To understand what Jesus asks it is necessary to have new eyes. Jesus is demanding and asks very much; do not store up (6: 19- 21), do not serve God and money together

(6: 24), do not worry about what you are to eat or drink (6: 25-34). These demanding recommendations have something to do with that part of human life where persons are more anguished and worried. It also forms part of the Sermon on the Mountain, that it is more difficult to understand and to practice. And this is why Jesus says: "If your eye is diseased ". Some translate this as diseased eye and healthy eye. Others translate as mean or poor eye and generous eye. It is the same, in reality, the worse sickness that one can imagine is a person closed up in herself and in her goods and who trusts only these. It is the sickness of being stingy! Anyone who looks at life with this eye lives in sadness and in darkness. The medicine to cure this sickness is conversion, the change of mentality and of ideology. To place the basis of life on God and in this way our look becomes generous and the whole life becomes luminous, because it makes sharing and fraternity emerge.

•Jesus wants a radical change. He wants the observance of the Law of the sabbatical year, where it is said that in the community of believers there cannot be poor (Dt 15: 4). Human living together should be organized in such a way that a person should not have to worry about food and drink, about dress and house, about health and education (Mt 6: 25-34). But this is possible if we all seek the Kingdom of God and his justice first (Mt 6: 33). The Kingdom of God means to permit God to reign: it is to imitate God (Mt 5: 48). The imitation of God leads to a just sharing of goods and of creative love, which brings about a true fraternity. Divine Providence should be mediated by the fraternal organization. It is only in this way that it will be possible to eliminate any worry or concern for tomorrow (Mt 6: 34).

Personal Questions

Jesus says: "There where your treasure is, your heart is also". Where is my richness found: in money or in fraternity?

Which is the light which I have in my eyes to look at life, at events?

Concluding Prayer

For Yahweh has chosen Zion, he has desired it as a home. 'Here shall I rest for evermore, here shall I make my home as I have wished. (Ps 132: 13-14)

Saturday, June 22, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength, without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ and to live according to your will.
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 6: 24-34

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

'That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and what you are to wear. Surely life is more than food, and the body more than clothing!

Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are? Can any of you, however much you worry, add one single cubit to your span of life? And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these.

Now if that is how God clothes the wildflowers growing in the field which are there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you who have so little faith? So, do not worry; do not say, "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear?" It is the gentiles who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel helps us to review the relationships with material goods and presents two themes of diverse importance: our relationship with money (Mt 6: 24) and our relationship with Divine Providence (Mt 6: 25-34). The advice given by Jesus gave rise to several questions of difficult response. For example, how can we understand today the affirmation: "You cannot serve God and money" (Mt 6: 24)? How can we understand the recommendation not to worry about food, about drink and about dress (Mt 6: 25)?

- Matthew 6: 24: You cannot serve God and money. Jesus is very clear in his affirmation: "No one can serve two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot serve God and money... Each one has to make his/her own choice. They should ask themselves: "To what do I give the first place in my life: to God or to money?" On this choice will depend the understanding of the advice which follow on Divine Providence (Mt 6: 25-34). It is not a question of a choice made only in one's head, but rather of a very concrete choice of life that has something to do also with attitudes.
- Matthew 6: 25: Jesus criticizes the excessive worry about eating and drinking. This criticism of Jesus, even in our days, causes great fear in people, because the great worry of all parents is how to get food and clothing for their children. The reason for the criticism is that life is worth more than food and the body more than the clothes. To clarify or explain his criticism Jesus presents two parables: the birds of the air and the flowers.

- Matthew 6: 26-27: The parable of the birds of the air: life is worth more than food. Jesus orders them to look at the birds. They do not sow, or reap or gather into barns, but they always have something to eat because the Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are?" Jesus criticizes the fact that the worry about food occupies the whole horizon of the life of persons, without leaving space to experience and relish gratuity of the fraternity and of the sense of belonging to the Father. Therefore, the neo-liberal system is criminal because it obliges the great majority of persons to live 24 hours a day, worried about food and clothing, and produces in a rich minority, quite limited one, the anguish of buying and consuming up to the point of not leaving space for nothing else. Jesus says that life is worth more than the goods to be consumed! The neo-liberal system prevents from living the Kingdom.
- Matthew 6: 28-30: the Parable of the lilies in the fields: the body is worth more than clothing. Jesus asks to look at the flowers, the lilies of the fields. How elegant and beautiful God dresses them! "Now if that is how God clothes the wildflowers growing in the field which are there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you who have so little faith?" Jesus says to look at the things of nature, because seeing the flowers and the field, people will remember the mission which we have: to struggle for the Kingdom and to create a new life living together which can guarantee the food and the clothes for everybody.
- Matthew 6: 31-32: Do not be like the Gentiles. Jesus once again criticizes the excessive worry for food, drink, and clothing. And he concludes: "The Gentiles are concerned about these things!" There should be a difference in the life of those who have faith in Jesus and those who do not have faith in Jesus. Those who have faith in Jesus share with him the experience of the gratuity of God the Father, Abba. This experience of paternity should revolutionize the life together. It should generate a community life which is fraternal, and the seed of a new society.
- Matthew 6: 33-34: Set your hearts on the Kingdom first. Jesus indicates two criteria: "To seek first the Kingdom of God" and not to worry about tomorrow". To seek first the Kingdom and its justice is a means to seek to do God's Will and allow God to reign in our life. The search for God is concretely expressed in the search of a fraternal and just life together. And from this concern for the Kingdom springs a community life in which all live as brothers and sisters and nobody is lacking anything. Here there will be no worry of tomorrow, that is, there will be no worry to store up things. Seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice. The kingdom of God should be in the center of all our concerns. The Kingdom demands a life together, where there is no storing up of things, but sharing in such a way that all have what is necessary to live. The Kingdom is the new fraternal life together, in which each person feels responsible for others. This way of seeing the Kingdom helps to understand better the parables of the birds and the flowers, because for Jesus Divine Providence passes through the fraternal organization. To be concerned about the Kingdom of God and its justice is the same as to be concerned about accepting God, the Father and

of being brother and sister of others. Before the growing impoverishment caused by economic neo-liberalism, the concrete form which the Gospel presents to us and thanks to which the poor will be able to live is the solidarity and the organization.

A sharp knife in the hands of a child can be a mortal weapon. A sharp knife in the hand of a person hanging on a cord can be an arm which saves. The words of God on Divine Providence are like this. It would not be evangelical to say to a jobless father, who is poor, who has eight children and a sick wife: "Do not worry about food or drink! Because why worry about health and clothes?" (Mt 6: 25-28). We can say this only when we ourselves imitate Jesus, organize ourselves to share, guaranteeing in this way to the brother the possibility to survive. Otherwise, we are like the three friends of Job, that to defend God they told lies on human life (Job 13: 7). It would be like "abandoning an orphan and betraying a friend" (Job 7: 27). In the mouth of the system of the rich, these words can be a mortal arm against the poor. In the mouth of the poor they can be a real and concrete outlet for a better life together, more just and more fraternal.

Personal Questions

- What do I understand by Divine Providence? Do I trust in Divine Providence?
- We Christians have the mission of giving a concrete expression to what we have within. In which way are we expressing our trust in Divine Providence?

Concluding Prayer

I observe your instructions, I love them dearly. I observe your precepts, your judgements, for all my ways are before you. (Ps 119: 166-167)

Sunday, June 23, 2024

Twelfth 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 4: 35-41

a) A Key to the Reading:

There are days when life is like a small boat lost among the waves of a rough sea. Everything around us looks dark, a storm is brewing. God is hidden, Jesus is absent, no one close to us can help, encourage. One feels like giving up! Let us listen to the story of the calmed storm. As we read, let us pretend to be on the boat with Jesus and the disciples. Let us try to live with them what is happening and pay attention to Jesus' attitude and the reaction of the disciples.

b) A Division of the Text:

- Mark 4: 35-36: Jesus decides to cross over to the other side of the lake
- Mark 4: 37-38: A sudden storm endangers the life of all
- Mark 4: 39-40: Jesus calms the storm and criticizes the lack of faith
- Mark 4: 41: Fear and lack of understanding on the part of the disciples

c) The Text:

³⁵ With the coming of evening that same day, he said to them, 'Let us cross over to the other side.'³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind they took him, just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with him.³⁷ Then it began to blow a great gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped.³⁸ But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep.³⁹ They woke him and said to him, 'Master, do you not care? We are lost!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Quiet now! Be calm!' And the wind dropped, and there followed a great calm.⁴⁰ Then he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith?'⁴¹ They were overcome with awe and said to one another, 'Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What pleased you most in this text? Why?
- What situation do Jesus and his disciples find themselves in, and what is their reaction?
- What was the stormy sea in the times of Jesus? What is the stormy sea in the days Mark is writing his Gospel? What is the stormy sea for you today?

- Read Isaiah 43: 2 and Psalm 107 (106: 25-30, and compare these texts with the passage of the calmed storm. What can you conclude?
- What does all this mean in our life today?

To Go Deeper into the Theme

a) The Context that Sheds Light on the Text:

A beautiful painting hung on a well-lit wall seems even more beautiful thanks to the colors of the wall that underscores the beauty. The same is true of the painting of the calmed storm. The wall of the context makes it more beautiful. Mark has just narrated two parables that bring out the mystery of the Kingdom present in the things of life (Mk 4: 1-34). Now he begins to talk of the mystery of the Kingdom as present in the power exercised by Jesus for his disciples, for people and, above all, for the excluded and marginalized. Let us examine the sequence: Mark begins by presenting a Jesus who overcomes the sea, the symbol of chaos. In Jesus there is the power of a creator! (Mk 4: 35-41).

Immediately after that he shows a Jesus who overcomes and drives out evil spirits. In him there is a liberating power! (Mk 5: 1-20). Finally, he describes at length the way Jesus overcomes impurity and death. In him there is the power of life! (Mk 5: 21-43). In Jesus there is a creating power that liberates, purifies, and communicates life to those who approach him!

Mark is writing for the persecuted communities of the 70's who feel like a small boat lost on the sea of life, with little hope of being able to reach the desired harbor of peace. Jesus seems to be asleep in their boat, because they do not feel the divine power to save them from persecution. In that desperate situation, Mark brings together various passages that underline the power with which Jesus is present in the communities. It is the victorious Jesus! They need not fear. This is the aim of the story of the calmed storm.

b) A Commentary on the Text:

- Mark 4: 35-36: The point of departure: "Let us cross over to the other side". It had been a heavy day with much work. There were so many people that Jesus, so as not to be crushed by the crowd, had to go into a boat to teach them by means of a parable (Mk 4: 1). There were days when there was not even time to eat (Mk 3: 20). When he finished telling the people the parable, Jesus said to his disciples: "Let us cross over to the other side!" And there and then, they took him in the boat. Jesus was so tired that he stretched out and went to sleep. This is the first frame that Mark presents to us. A beautiful frame and quite human.
- Mark 4: 37-38: *The desperate situation: "Do you not care? We are lost!"* The lake of Galilee is close to high mountains. Sometimes between the cracks in the rocks the wind blows hard on the lake and causes sudden storms. This is what happened. A strong wind blew on the sea causing a storm. The boat filled with water! The disciples were experienced fishermen. If they thought they were about to perish, then this meant that the situation was very dangerous! Jesus is not aware of anything and goes on sleeping. This deep sleep is not only the sign of immense weariness, but

also an expression of his quiet faith in God. The contrast between Jesus' attitude and that of the two disciples is great!

- Mark 4: 9-40: *Jesus' reaction: "Have you still no faith?"*

Jesus wakes up not because of the waves but because of the desperate cry of the disciples: "Master! Do you not care? We are lost!" Jesus gets up. First he faces the sea and says: "Quiet now! Be calm!" And the sea calms down. Then he turns to his disciples and says to them: "Why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith?" The impression one gets is that the sea did not need to be calmed since there was no danger. It is like when one goes to a house and a little dog by the side of the master of the house, barks at the guest. There is no need to be afraid because the master is there to control the situation.

The passage of the calmed storm recalls the exodus, when the crowd, without any fear, crossed the waters of the sea (Ex 14: 22). It recalls the prophet Isaiah who said to the crowd: "should you pass through the waters, I shall be with you!" (Is 43: 2). Jesus retraces the passage and fulfils it in the prophecy made in the Psalm when it says: "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, and he brought them, overjoyed at the stillness, to the port where they were bound!" (Ps 107(106): 28-30).

- Mark 4: 41: *The lack of knowledge of the disciples: "Who can this be?"*

Jesus calms the sea and says: "Have you still no faith?" The disciples do not know what to say in reply and ask themselves "Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him!" To them Jesus seems to be a stranger! Despite the long time spent together, they do not really know who he is. Who can this be? With this question occupying their minds, the communities continued to read. And until today, this same question urges us to continue reading the Gospel. This is the desire to know Jesus more and more in our lives.

c) Further Information: Who is Jesus?

Names and Titles Given to Jesus:

Mark begins his Gospel with the words: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *Son of God*" (Mk 1: 1). At the end, at the time of the death of Jesus, a pagan soldier exclaims: "In truth this man was *Son of God!*" (Mk 15: 39) Thus both at the beginning and the end of the Gospel, Jesus is called Son of God. Between the beginning and the end, many other names are attributed to Jesus, more than twenty! Here is the list of names and titles attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Mark between the expression *Son of God* at the beginning (Mk 1: 1) and that at the end (Mk 15: 39):

- *Messiah, Christ* (that is, anointed) (Mk 1: 1; 8: 29; 14: 61; 15: 32)
- *Lord* (Mk 1: 3; 5: 19; 11: 3)
- *Beloved son* (Mk 1: 11; 9: 7)
- *Holy one of God* (Mk 1: 24)
- *Nazarene* (Mk 1: 24; 10: 47; 14: 67; 16: 6)

- *Son of Man* (Mk 2: 10, 28; 8: 31, 38; 9: 9, 12, 31; 10: 33, 45; 13: 26; 14: 21, 41, 62)
- *Bridegroom* (Mk 2: 19)
- *Son of God* (Mk 3: 11)
- *Son of the Most High* (Mk 5: 7)
- *Carpenter* (Mk 6: 3)
- *Son of Mary* (Mk 6: 3)
- *Prophet* (Mk 6: 4, 15; 8: 28)
- *Master* (frequently)
- *Good Master* (Mk 10: 17)
- *Son of David* (Mk 10: 47, 48; 12: 35-37)
- *Rabbuni* (Mk 10: 51)
- *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord* (Mk 11: 9)
- *Rabbi* (Mk 11: 21)
- *Son* (Mk 13: 32)
- *Shepherd* (Mk 14: 27)
- *Son of the Blessed One* (Mk 14: 61)
- *King of the Jews* (Mk 15: 2, 9, 18, 26)
- *King of Israel* (Mk 15: 32)

Jesus is greater than any of his titles or names:

Each name, title or attribute is an attempt to express what Jesus meant for some people. But a name, no matter how nice, will never unveil the mystery of a person and much less of the person of Jesus. Besides, some of these names, even the most important and traditional ones are questioned and doubted by Jesus himself. Thus, as we read on the Gospel, Mark constrains us to review our ideas and to ask ourselves each time once more: "In the last analysis, who is Jesus for me, for us?"

Some hoped that the Messiah would be the "Holy One of God" (Mk 1: 24), that is a *High Priest*. The devil alludes to this hope, but Jesus orders him to keep silent! (Mk 1: 24-25)

Others hoped that the Messiah would be the *Son of David*. But Jesus himself questions this title: "How can the Scribes maintain that the Christ is the son of David? David himself calls him Lord" (Mk 12: 35-37).

Others hoped for a Messiah *King*. But when Pilate asks Jesus whether he is a king, Jesus neither affirms nor denies, but replies: "It is you who say it" (Mk 15: 2). And when he was speaking of kings and rulers he insisted with his disciples: "Among you this is not to happen" (Mk 10: 42-43).

The same goes for the title of *Messiah*. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. But when Jesus draws the consequences and begins to speak of the cross, Peter will have none of it (Mk 8: 31-33). Jesus is the *Messiah*, but not the kind that Peter imagined.

People possessed by evil spirits called Jesus “Son of God” (Mk 3: 11) and “Son of the Most High” (Mk 5: 7). But Jesus ordered the evil spirits to keep silent and leave the persons possessed (Mk 3: 12; 5: 8). Before the court, the enemies accuse Jesus and ask: “Are you the Christ, the Son of Blessed One?” He replies: “I am! And you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with clouds of heaven” (Mk 14: 62). When he must confirm the name, Jesus does not say that he is the *Son of God, but that he is the Son of Man*. Is this the same thing? One thing is sure: Jesus is not the Son of God in the way that the evil spirits (Mk 3: 11; 5: 7) and his enemies imagine (Mk 14: 61). Then how is he the Son of God? The question remains an open ended one in the minds of the people, of the disciples and the readers!

Then, who is Jesus? The more we read the Gospel of Mark, the more all titles and criteria fall apart. Jesus is not any of these names, does not fit into any scheme, any title. He is greater than all of these. The more we read, the more we give up the idea of framing Jesus into some preconceived concept and accept him as he presents himself. Love seduces, the head does not! It is better to bow one’s head and adore and not fear when the sea breaks into a storm!

Praying with Psalm 107 (106): 21-43

If the Waters Stir, God will Protect Us!

Let them thank Yahweh for his faithful love, for his wonders for the children of Adam!

Let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and recount with shouts of joy what he has done! Voyagers on the sea in ships, plying their trade on the great ocean, have seen the works of Yahweh, 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, and he brought them, overjoyed at the stillness, to the port where they were bound. Let them thank Yahweh for his faithful love, for his wonders for the children of Adam!

Let them extol him in the assembly of the people, and praise him in the council of elders. He has turned rivers into desert, bubbling springs into arid ground, fertile country into salt-flats, because the people living there were evil.

But he has turned desert into stretches of water, arid ground into bubbling springs, and has given the hungry a home, where they have built themselves a city. There they sow fields and plant vines and reap a harvest of their produce. He blesses them and their numbers increase, he keeps their cattle at full strength.

Their numbers had fallen, they had grown weak, under pressure of disaster and hardship; he covered princes in contempt, left them to wander in trackless wastes. But the needy he raises from their misery, makes their families as numerous as sheep. At the sight the honest rejoice, and the wicked have nothing to say.

Who is wise? Such a one should take this to heart and come to understand Yahweh's faithful love.

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, June 24, 2024

Solemnity – The Nativity of John the Baptist

Let Us Recollect Ourselves in Prayer – Statio

Prayer of Cardinal Mercier to the Holy Spirit

Oh God, who has instructed your faithful, enlightening their hearts with the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us that in the same Spirit we may have the desire to do good and to enjoy always his comfort.

May there be Glory, adoration, love, and blessing to You Eternal Divine Spirit, Who has brought to earth for us the Savior of our souls. And may there be glory and honour to His most adorable Heart Who loves us with an infinite love.

Oh Holy Spirit, soul of my soul, I adore You: enlighten me, guide me, strengthen me, console me, teach me what I should do, give me your orders.

I promise to submit myself to all that will happen to me, allowed by You: I ask only that I may know Your Will.

Prayerful Reading of the Word - Lectio

Gospel Reading - Luke 1: 57-66, 80

The time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbors and relations heard that the Lord had lavished on her his faithful love, they shared her joy. Now it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother spoke up. 'No,' she said, 'he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'But no one in your family has that name,' and made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him called. The father asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And they were all astonished. At that instant his power of speech returned and he spoke and praised God. All their neighbors were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. 'What will this child turn out to be?' they wondered. And indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Meanwhile the child grew up and his spirit grew strong. And he lived in the desert until the day he appeared openly to Israel.

Pondering the Word - Meditatio

Key to the Reading

This passage of the Gospel forms part of the so-called accounts of the infancy of Jesus. In a particular way this text follows the scene of the Visitation of Mary “in the house of Zechariah” (Lk 1: 40) after the event of the Annunciation of the Angel, the messenger of the new creation.

In fact, the Annunciation inaugurates in a joyful way the fulfilment of God’s promise to His People (Lk 1: 26-38). The joy of the new times, which filled Mary, now inundates the heart of Elizabeth. She rejoices with the announcement brought by Mary (Lk 1: 41). Mary, on the other hand, “magnifies the Lord” (Lk 1: 46) because He has worked great things in her, just as He has worked great marvels for His people in need of salvation.

The expression “the time came” reminds us that this reality does not only strike Elizabeth about to give birth, but reveals also something of God’s project. In fact, Saint Paul tells us that when the completion of the time came, God sent His Only Begotten Son “born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption of sons” of God (Gal 4: 4).

In the Gospel Jesus in fact, speaks about the completion of times, especially in the Gospel of John. Two of these times are the wedding at Cana (Jn 2: 1-12) and the agony on the cross where Jesus exclaims that “all is fulfilled” (Jn 19: 30). In the fulfilment of the times Jesus inaugurates an era of salvation. The birth of John the Baptist inaugurates this time of salvation. In fact, at the arrival of the Messiah he exults and leaps in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth (Lk 1: 44). Later on, he will define himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jesus) who exults and rejoices because of the event of the wedding with the bride, the Church (Jn 3: 29).

The son will not be named as his father Zechariah, but John. Zechariah reminds us that God does not forget His people. In fact, his name means “God remembers”. His son will now be called “God remembers”, because God’s promises were being fulfilled. The prophetic mission of John has to indicate God’s mercy. In fact, he will be called *Johanan*, that is “God’s mercy”. This mercy is manifested in the visit to the People, precisely “as he had promised by the mouth of his holy prophets of ancient times” (Lk 1: 67-70). Thus, the name indicates the mission of the one about to be born. Zechariah will write the name of his son on a tablet so that all could see with admiration (Lk 1: 63). This tablet is the echo of another inscription, written by Pilate to be fixed on the cross of Jesus. This inscription revealed the identity of the mission of the Crucified: “Jesus, the Nazarene, King of the Jews” (Jn 19: 19). This writing also provoked the admiration of those who were in Jerusalem for the feast. John is the precursor of Jesus in everything. Already since his birth and childhood he points out to Christ. “Who will this child be? He is “the voice which cries out in the desert” (Jn 1: 23), impelling all to prepare the way of the Lord. He is not the Messiah (Jn 1: 20), but he indicates this with his preaching and above all with his lifestyle of asceticism in the desert. Meanwhile the child grew up and his spirit grew strong. He lived in the desert until the day he appeared openly to Israel”. (Lk 1: 80).

Questions to Direct the Meditation

- What has struck you in this passage and in the reflection?
- John identifies himself as the friend of the bridegroom. According to you, what is the meaning of this image?
- John the Baptist has always been seen by the Church as its type. He is the one who prepares the way for the Lord. Does this have some relevance for our daily life?

Oratio

Let us bless the Lord together with Zechariah (Lk 1: 68-79)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited his people, he has set them free, and he has established for us a saving power in the House of his servant David, just as he proclaimed, by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times, that he would save us from our enemies and from the hands of all those who hate us, and show faithful love to our ancestors, and so keep in mind his holy covenant.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant us, free from fear, to be delivered from the hands of our enemies, to serve him in holiness and uprightness in his presence, all our days.

And you, little child, you shall be called Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare a way for him, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the faithful love of our God in which the rising Sun has come from on high to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow dark as death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Contemplatio

Let us all together adore the mercy and the goodness of God repeating in silence: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

Tuesday, June 25, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
guide and protector of your people, grant us an unflinching 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 7: 6, 12-14

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls in front of pigs, or they may trample them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces."

"So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the Law and the Prophets. 'Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.'"

Reflection

Discernment and prudence in offering things of value. In the relationships with others Jesus, above all, warns about certain dangerous attitudes. The first one of these is not to judge (7: 1- 5): it is a true and proper prohibition, "do not judge," it is an action that influences every evaluation of contempt or of condemnation of others. The last judgment is the exclusive competence of God; our figures of measure and our criteria are relative; they are conditioned by our subjectivity. Any condemnation of others becomes a condemnation of oneself, in so far as it places us under the judgment of God and we exclude ourselves from pardon. If your eye is pure it is free from every judgment of the brothers you can relate with them in a true way before God. And now we consider the words of Jesus offered to us by the liturgical text: "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls in front of pigs, or they may trample them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces" (7: 6). At first sight this "saying" of Jesus sounds strange to the sensibility of today's reader. It may represent a true enigma. But it is a way of saying, of a Semitic language which has to be interpreted. At the time of Jesus just as in ancient culture dogs were not greatly appreciated, because they were considered somewhat savage and stray (U. Luz). But let us now consider the positive and didactic-wisdom aspect of the words of Jesus: Do not profane holy things; in last instance it is an invitation to use prudence and discernment. In the Old Testament the holy things are the meat for the sacrifice (Lv 22: 14; Ex 29: 33 ff; Nb 18: 8-19). The approach of the prohibition of throwing the pearls to the pigs is incomprehensible. For the Hebrews the pigs are impure animals, the quintessence of repugnance. On the contrary, the pearls are the most precious things that can exist. The warning of Jesus refers to those who feed the stray dogs with consecrated meat destined to the sacrifice. Such a behavior is evil and usually imprudent because usually those dogs were not fed and therefore, because of their insatiable hunger, they could turn back and attack their "benefactors".

The pearls at the metaphoric level could indicate the teachings of the wise or the interpretations of the "Torah". In Matthew's Gospel the pearl is the image of the Kingdom of God (Mt 13: 45ff). The interpretation which the evangelist gives mentioning this warning of Jesus is above all theological. Surely, this is the interpretation which seems to be more in harmony with the text and with the ecclesial reading of the words of Jesus: a warning to the Christian missionaries not to preach the Gospel just to anybody. (Gnilka, Luz).

To follow a path. In the final part of the discourse (7: 13-27), then Matthew includes, among the others, a conclusive admonition of Jesus who invites to make a decisive choice in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven: the narrow door (7, 13-14). The word of Jesus is not only something to be understood and to

interpret but, above all, it should become life. Now, to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven it is necessary to follow a path and to enter into the fullness of life through a “door”. The theme of the “path, the way” is very dear to the Old Testament (Dt 11: 26-28; 30: 15-20; Jr 21: 8; Ps 1: 6; Ps 118: 29-30; Ps 138: 4; Ws 5: 6-7 etc.). The road represented by two doors leads to different goals. A significance that is coherent with the admonishments of Jesus would be that, to the wide door is joined the wide path which leads to perdition or damnation, that is to say, to walk on a wide road is always something pleasant, but this is not said in our text. Rather it seems that Matthew agrees with the Jewish conception of the “road”; on the trail of Dt 30: 19 and Jr 21: 8 there are two roads that are in counter-position, that of death and that of life. To know how to choose among the diverse ways of life is decisive for entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who chooses the narrow road that of life should know that it is full of afflictions; narrow means tried by suffering for the sake of faith.

Personal Questions

- What impact does the word of Jesus have in your heart? Do you listen to it to live under the gaze of the Father and in order to be transformed personally and in the relationships with the brothers and sisters?
- The word of Jesus, or rather, Jesus Himself is the door who makes us enter into the filial and fraternal life. Do you allow yourself to be guided and attracted by the narrow and demanding path of the Gospel? Or rather do you follow the wide and easy road that consists in doing what pleases or that leads you to satisfy all your desires, neglecting the needs of others?

Concluding Prayer

We reflect on your faithful love, God, in your temple!
Both your name and your praise, God, are over the whole wide world.
Your right hand is full of saving justice. (Ps 48: 9-10)

Wednesday, June 26, 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 7: 15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them."

Reflection

We are reaching the final recommendations of the Sermon on the Mount. Comparing the Gospel of Matthew with that of Mark, one perceives a great difference in the way in which they present the teaching of Jesus. Matthew insists more on the content of the teaching and organizes it into five great discourses, of which the first one is the Sermon of the Mount (Mt 5 to 7). Mark says over fifteen times that Jesus taught, but he rarely says what He taught. In spite of this difference, both agree on a point: Jesus taught very much. To teach was what Jesus did the most (Mk 2: 13; 4: 1-2; 6: 34). He does it always (Mk 10: 1). Matthew is interested in the content. To teach is not only a way of communicating a truth in such a way that people learn it. The content is not limited to words, but it is also composed of gestures and in the way Jesus related Himself with people. The content is never separated from the person who communicates it. The person, in fact, is the origin of the content. Good content without intrinsic goodness is like milk spilled on the ground. It does not convince and conversion does not take place.

The final recommendations and the result of the Sermon on the Mount in the conscience of the people are the points of the Gospel of today (Mt 7: 15-20) and of tomorrow (Mt 7: 21-29). (The sequence of the Gospel of the days of the week are not always the same as that of the Gospels).

- Matthew 7: 13-14: Choose the sure way.
- Matthew 7: 15-20: The prophet is known by the fruits.
- Matthew 7: 21-23: Not only speak, but act.
- Matthew 7 :24-27: Construct the house on rock.
- Matthew 7: 28-29: The new conscience of the people.
- Matthew 7: 15-16^a: Beware of false prophets. In the time of Jesus, there were prophets of all types, people who announced apocalyptic messages to involve people in different movements of that time: Essenes, Pharisees, Zealots, and others (cf. Acts 5: 36-37). When Matthew writes there were also prophets who announced messages different from the one proclaimed by the community. The letters of Paul mention these movements and tendencies (cf. 1 Co 12: 3; Gal 1: 7-9; 2: 11-14; 6: 12). It must not have been easy for the community to make a discernment of spirits. This marks the importance of the words of Jesus on false prophets. The warning of Jesus is very strong: "Beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves". The same image is used when Jesus sends the disciples on mission: "I am sending you out as sheep among wolves" (Mt 10: 16 and Lc 10: 3). The

opposition between the ravenous wolf and the meek sheep is irreconcilable, unless the wolf is converted and loses its aggressiveness as the prophet Isaiah suggests (Is 11: 6; 65: 25). What is important here in our text is the gift of discernment. It is not easy to discern spirits. Sometimes it happens that personal interests or the interests of a group lead one to proclaim as false those prophets who announce the disturbing truth. That happened with Jesus. He was eliminated and put to death, considered a false prophet by the religious authorities of that time. Every so often, the same thing has happened and continues to happen in Christianity.

In our society today we experience false prophets in many ways. First, there are the obvious ones who proclaim ridiculous things in order to have some fame. There are others who use Christianity for personal gain. Those who get on television, or the Internet, or in a community and suggest that filling their bank account with money from the community members is what God wants. There are others who distort the word of God, or add to it or remove parts, in order to form their own separate community or beliefs. There are those that claim a personal revelation from God that is not consistent with Church teaching. Some claim to be God. The list can go on... Jesus warns us to not be misled. It is a wide road that carries all of these false prophets and teachers and their followers.

- Matthew 7: 16b-20: The comparison of the tree and of its fruits. To help to discern spirits, Jesus uses the comparison of fruit: "You will be able to tell them by their fruits." A similar criteria had been suggested in the book of Deuteronomy (Dt 18: 21-22). Jesus adds: "Can you pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way a sound tree produces good fruit, but a rotten tree bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit. Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. In the Gospel of John, Jesus completes the comparison: "Every branch in me that bears no fruit, he cuts away. Every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes to make it bear even more. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me. Those branches will be cut off and thrown into the fire to be burnt" (Jn 15: 2, 4, 6).

Some preach that believing in God will make you wealthy and give you the easy life. This is not Jesus' message. When the person saying this has used the charity of the community and the people to build a huge mansion for themselves and very little goes to the poor, this is contrary to Jesus' teaching. This is a lack of the fruit of good works that Jesus talks about, so it is easy to discern if one looks. This form of teaching does not produce good works. The same applies to those who preach violence, retribution, and even death for others. This is not consistent with Jesus' teaching. He does not advocate killing, nor does He ever suggest "getting even". In fact, He teaches the opposite, no matter what the offense. This is another fruit that can be used to discern the truth.

A false prophet does not even have to claim to be a prophet. The culture of death through abortion is one example. The fruit of abortion is innocent

death. It is even possible that those teaching the truth are labeled as false teachers by others. We can see this in the arguments among some in the Church and with various ecclesial communities.

Personal Questions

- Do you know any case in which a good and honest person who proclaimed a truth was condemned as a false prophet?
- How do the fruits of your actions reveal yourself to others?
- Can we use the same criteria, fruits or results, to discern the truth from the collective efforts of groups as well? Are there groups within Christianity or the Church that are so closed in on themselves that they produce little good fruit? Are there groups in Christianity or the Church that end up distorting truth or doctrine in their zeal or confusion? Can you identify some?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, look at my suffering and rescue me,
for I do not forget Your Law.
Plead my cause and defend me;
as You promised, give me life. (Ps 119: 153-154)

Thursday, June 27, 2024

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
guide and protector of your people, grant us an unflinching 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 7:21-29

Jesus said to his disciples: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?' Then I will declare to them solemnly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.'" "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined." When Jesus finished these

words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents the last part of the Sermon on the Mount:

- (a) it is not sufficient to talk and sing, it is necessary to live and to practice (Mt 7: 21-23).
- (b) the community constructed on the foundation of the new law of the discourse on the mount will remain standing at the moment of the storm (Mt 7: 24-27).
- (c) the words of Jesus are a severe judgment on the contemporary religious leaders, the scribes (Mt 7: 28-29).

The end of the Sermon on the Mount presents some opposition and a few contradictions which exist even in our time:

- (a) people who continually speak of God, but who do not do God's will. They use the name of Jesus, but do not practice a relationship with the Lord in their life (Mt 7: 21).
- (b) There are people who live in the illusion of working for the Lord, but on the day of encounter with Him, they will discover, tragically, that they have never known Him (Mt 7: 22-23).

The two last scenarios of the Sermon on the Mount, the house built on the rock (Mt 7: 24-25) and the house built on sand (Mt 7: 26-27), illustrate these contradictions. By means of these, Matthew denounces, and at the same time tries to correct, the separation between faith and life, between speaking and doing, between teaching and practicing.

- Matthew 7: 21: It is not sufficient to speak, it is necessary to practice. What is important is not to speak of God in a beautiful way or to know how to explain the bible well to others, but rather to do the will of the Father, and in this way, be a revelation of His face and of His presence in the world. Jesus made the same recommendation to the woman who praised Mary, His Mother. Jesus answered: "Blessed rather are those who listen to the Word of God and put it into practice" (Lk 11: 28).
- Matthew 7: 22-23: The gifts should be at the service of the Kingdom and the community. There were people with extraordinary gifts, for example the gift of prophecy, of exorcism, of healing, but they used these gifts for themselves, outside the context of the community. In the Day of Judgment, they will hear a hard sentence from Jesus: "Away from Me all evil doers". Evil is the opposite of justice. It is to do with Jesus what the doctors did with the law: to teach and not to practice (Mt 23: 3). Paul will say the same thing with other words and arguments: "Though I have the power of prophecy, to penetrate all mysteries and knowledge, and though I have all the faith necessary to move mountains, if I am without love, I am nothing. Though I should give away to the poor all that I possess, and even give up my body to be burned, if I am without love, it will do me no good whatever". (1Cor 13: 2-3).

- Matthew 7:24-27: The parable of the house built on the rock. The final conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount is to open oneself and to practice. Many people entrust their security to extraordinary gifts or to observance. But their true security does not come from prestige or from observance. It comes from God! It comes from the love of God who has loved us first (1 Jn 4:19). His love for us, manifested in Jesus, exceeds everything (Rm 8:38-39). God becomes our source of security when we seek to do His will. There He will be the rock which supports us in the moments of difficulty and storm.
- Matthew 7:28-29: To teach with authority. The Evangelist closes the Sermon on the Mount saying that the crowds admired the teaching of Jesus, “because He taught with authority, and not like the scribes”. The result from the teaching of Jesus is a critical understanding of the people in regard to the religious authority of the time. His simple and clear words resulted from His experience of God, from His life dedicated to the Father’s plan. People admired and approved the teaching of Jesus.

Community: the house built on the rock. In the Book of Psalms, we frequently find the expression: “God is my rock and my fortress... My God, my rock, my refuge, my stronghold, my saving strength...” (Ps 18:3). He is the defense and the strength of the one who seeks justice (Ps 18:21,24). The people who trust in this God, become in turn, a rock for others. Thus, the Prophet Isaiah invites people in the exile saying: “Listen to me you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh! Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father and Sarah who gave you birth” (Is 51:1-2). The prophet asks people not to forget the past. The people should remember that Abraham and Sarah, because of their faith in God, became rock, the beginning of the People of God. Looking toward this rock, the people should acquire courage to struggle and to escape from slavery. Matthew also exhorts the community similarly to have rock as foundation (Mt 7:24-25) and thus, they themselves can be rock to strengthen their brothers and sisters in their faith. This is the sense of the name which Jesus gave to Peter: “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16: 18). This was the vocation of the first community, called to unite itself with God, the living rock, so as to become also a living rock, because they listen and put into practice the Word. (Ps 2:4-10; 2:5; Ep 2:19-22).

Personal Questions

- How does our community seek to balance prayer and action, prayer and practice, to speak and to do, to teach and to practice? What could improve in our community, so that it will be a rock, a secure and welcoming house for all?
- To be rock for another is also to be in truth. Do I, and my community, know and understand Church teaching and the bible well enough and in truth such that I and we can be rock for others who need help in their Faith?
- There is another kind of rock. The rock in the parable of the sower. The seed (the Word) could not grow on rock. Do I read, learn, and grow from the Word

and from the saints that have given example before us, and from Church teaching? Am I like the rocky ground in the parable where the seed dries up or am I like a strong rock who gives stability to my brothers and sisters?

Concluding Prayer

Help us, God our Savior,
for the glory of Your name; Yahweh, wipe away our sins, rescue us for the sake of
Your name. (Ps 79: 9)

Friday, June 28, 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: 1-4

After Jesus had come down from the mountain large crowds followed him. Suddenly a man with a virulent skin-disease came up and bowed low in front of him, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can cleanse me." Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him saying, "I am willing. Be cleansed." And his skin-disease was cleansed at once. Then Jesus said to him, "Mind you tell no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering prescribed by Moses, as evidence to them."

Reflection

In chapters 5 to 7 we have heard the words of the New Law proclaimed on the Mountain by Jesus. Now, in chapters 8 and 9, Matthew indicates how Jesus put into practice that which he had just taught. In today's Gospel (Mt 8: 1-4) and of tomorrow (Mt 8: 5-17), we see closely the following episodes which reveal how Jesus practiced the Law: the cure of a leper (Mt 8: 1-4), the cure of the servant of the Roman soldier (Mt 8: 5-13), the cure of Peter's mother-in law (Mt 8: 14-15) and the cure of numerous sick people (Mt 8: 14-17).

- Matthew 8, 1-2: The leper asks: "Lord, if you are willing you can cleanse me". A leper comes close to Jesus. He was one who was excluded. Anybody who would touch him would remain unclean! This is why the lepers had to remain far away (Lv 13: 45-46). But that leper had great courage. He transgresses the norms of religion to be able to enter into contact with Jesus. Getting close to him he says: If you are willing you can cleanse me! That is: "It is not necessary

for you to touch me! It suffices that the Lord wants it and he will be cured". This phrase reveals two things:

- the sickness of leprosy which made people unclean;
- the sickness of solitude to which the person was condemned, separated from society and from religion. It also reveals the great faith of the man in the power of Jesus.

- Matthew 8: 3: Jesus touches him and says: I am willing. Be cleansed. Filled with compassion, Jesus cures two sicknesses. In the first place, to cure solitude, loneliness, before saying any word, he touches the leper. It is as if he would say: "For me, you are not excluded. I am not afraid to become unclean by touching you! And I accept you as a brother!" Then he cures the leper saying: I am willing! Be cleansed! The leper, in order to be able to enter in contact with Jesus, had transgressed the norms of the Law. Thus Jesus, in order to help that excluded person and reveal the new face of God, transgresses the norms of his religion and touches the leper.
- Matthew 8: 4: Jesus orders the man to go and show himself to the priest. At that time, a leper in order to be reintegrated into the community needed a certificate of healing confirmed by the priest. It is the same thing today. The sick person gets out of the hospital only if he has a certificate signed by the doctor of the department. Jesus obliges the person to look for that document, in order to be able to live normally. He obliges the authority to recognize that the man had been cured. Jesus not only heals but wants the healed person to be able to live with others. He reintegrates the person in the fraternal life of the community. The Gospel of Mark adds that the man did not present himself to the priest. Instead, "He went away and started freely proclaiming and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into the town, but stayed outside in deserted places (Mk 1, 45). Why could Jesus no longer enter openly into the town? Because he had touched the leper and had become unclean before the religious authority who embodied the law of that time. And now, because of this, Jesus was unclean and had to be away far from everybody. He could no longer enter into the city. But Mark shows that people cared very little for these official norms, because people came to Jesus from all parts! This was totally overthrowing things! The message which Mark gives us is the following: to take the Good News of God to the people, we should not be afraid to transgress the religious norms which are contrary to God's project and which prevent a fraternal spirit and love. Even if this causes some difficulty to the people, as it did to Jesus.

In Jesus everything is revelation of what he has within himself! He does not only announce the Good News of the Kingdom. He is an example, a living witness of the Kingdom, a revelation of God. In Him appears what happens when a human being allows God to reign, allows God to occupy the center of his life.

Personal Questions

In the name of the Law of God, the lepers were excluded and they could not live with others. In our Church are there norms and customs which are not written and, which up until now, marginalize persons and exclude them from living together with others and from communion. Do you know any such persons? Which is your opinion concerning this? Jesus had the courage to touch the leper. Would you have this courage?

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, June 29, 2024

Solemnity. SS Peter and Paul

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading – Matthew 16: 13-19

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Reflection

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

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

(a) To be rock: Peter has to be Rock that is the stable basis for the Church in such a way that it can prevail against the gates of hell. With these words which Jesus addressed to Peter, Matthew encourages the persecuted community of Syria and Palestine, to see in Peter the leader who belongs to their origin. In spite of persecution and weakness, the community has a firm basis, guaranteed by the word of Jesus. The notion of being rock based on faith evokes the word of God to the people in exile: "Listen to Me, you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh; consider the rock (*pietra*) from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug; consider Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave birth to you. When I called him, he was the only one, but I blessed him and made him numerous" (Is 51: 1-2). This indicates that a new beginning of the People of God is with Peter.

(b) The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom. The same power of binding and loosing is also given to the communities (Mt 18:18) and to the other disciples (Jn 20: 23). One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists is reconciliation and pardon. It is one of the more important tasks of coordinators of the communities. By imitating Peter, they should bind and loosen, that is, do in such a way that there is reconciliation and reciprocal acceptance, construction of fraternity, even up to seventy times (Mt 18: 22).

- Matthew 16: 21-22 - Jesus completes what was missing in Peter's response, and Peter reacts. Jesus begins saying that He had "to go to Jerusalem and suffer very much on the part of the Elders, of the high priests and of the scribes, and be killed and on the third day, rise from the dead.". Saying that He had to go and would be killed, or that it was necessary to suffer, He indicated that suffering had been foreseen by the prophecies. The way of the Messiah is not only one of triumph and glory, but also one of suffering and of the cross! If Peter accepts Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, he has to accept Him also as Messiah servant who will be killed. But Peter does not accept Jesus' correction and tries to draw Him

away. Taking Jesus aside, he began to rebuke Him: Heaven preserve You, Lord, this must not happen to You!”

- Matthew 16: 23 - Jesus’ reply to Peter: stumbling stone. Jesus’ response is surprising. Peter wanted to steer Jesus in another direction. Jesus reacts: “Get behind Me, Satan. You are an obstacle in My path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do.” Peter has to follow Jesus, and not the contrary. Jesus is the one who gives the directions. Satan is the one who draws people away from the road traced by Jesus. Once again the expression rock – pietra - appears, but now in the contrary sense. Peter, at one time, is the supporting rock; at other times, the stumbling block! The communities at the time of Matthew were like that, characterized by ambiguity. This is the way we all are, according to what John Paul II said, that the papacy itself was characterized by the same ambiguity of Peter: rock of support for the faith and stumbling block in the faith.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, June 30, 2024

Thirteenth 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 5: 21-43

A Key to the Reading:

In this 13th Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Church asks us to meditate on two of Jesus' miracles worked for two women. The first miracle is worked for a woman considered impure because she suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years. The second is worked for a twelve-year-old girl who has just died. According to the thinking of the times, any person who touched blood or a dead body was considered impure. Blood and death were factors that excluded people! Thus, these two women were marginalized, excluded from taking part in the community. Today, too, we have categories of people who are excluded or who feel excluded from taking part in the Christian community. What are the factors today that cause people to be excluded, both from the Church and from society?

Mark describes the two miracles quite vividly. The text is long. As you read, think that you are among the crowd around Jesus on the way to Jairus' house. As you walk in silence, try to pay attention to the many attitudes of the people involved in the miracles: Jairus, the girl's father, the crowd, the woman suffering from the hemorrhage, the disciples and the girl. Ask yourself what would be your attitude.

A Division of the Text:

- Mark 5: 21-24: The point of departure: Jairus loses his daughter. Jesus goes with him and the crowd follows
- Mark 5: 25-26: The situation of the woman suffering from an irregular hemorrhage
- Mark 5: 27-28: The woman's reasoning in the presence of Jesus
- Mark 5: 29: The woman succeeds in what she wants and is healed
- Mark 5: 30-32: The reaction of Jesus and of the disciples
- Mark 5: 33-34: The conversation between Jesus and the woman healed because of her faith
- Mark 5: 35-36: The conversation between Jesus and Jairus
- Mark 5: 37-40: The arrival at Jairus' house and the reaction of the crowd
- Mark 5:41-43: The raising of the girl back to life

The Text:

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered round him and he stayed by the lake. ²² Then the president of the synagogue came up, named Jairus, and seeing him, fell at his feet ²³ and begged him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is desperately sick. Do come and lay your hands on her that she may be saved and may live.' ²⁴ Jesus went with him and a large crowd followed him; they were pressing all round him.

²⁵ Now there was a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years; ²⁶ after long and painful treatment under various doctors, she had spent all she had without being any the better for it; in fact, she was getting worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and she came up through the crowd and touched his cloak from behind, thinking, ²⁸ 'If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved.' ²⁹ And at once the source of the bleeding dried up, and she felt in herself that she was cured of her complaint.

³⁰ And at once aware of the power that had gone out from him, Jesus turned round in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' ³¹ His disciples said to him, 'You see how the crowd is pressing round you; how can you ask, "Who touched me?"' ³² But he continued to look all round to see who had done it. ³³ Then the woman came forward, frightened and trembling because she knew what had happened to her, and she fell at his feet and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ 'My daughter,' he said, 'your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free of your complaint.'

³⁵ While he was still speaking some people arrived from the house of the president of the synagogue to say, 'Your daughter is dead; why put the Master to any further trouble?' ³⁶ But Jesus overheard what they said and he said to the president of the synagogue, 'Do not be afraid; only have faith.' ³⁷ And he allowed no one to go with him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ So they came to the house of the president of the synagogue, and Jesus noticed all the commotion, with people weeping and wailing unrestrainedly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and crying? The child is not dead, but asleep.' ⁴⁰ But they ridiculed him. So he turned them all out and, taking with him the child's father and mother and his own companions, he went into the place where the child lay. ⁴¹ And taking the child by the hand he said to her, '*Talitha kum!*' which means, 'Little girl, I tell you to get up.' ⁴² The little girl got up at once and began to walk about, for she was twelve years old. At once they were overcome with astonishment, ⁴³ and he gave them strict orders not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What pleased you or touched you most in this text? Why?
- What is the attitude of the woman who touched Jesus? What gives her the strength to touch him?
- Why were the disciples unable to understand what was going on between Jesus and the crowd?
- Who was Jairus? What is Jesus' attitude towards Jairus, his wife and daughter?
- A woman is healed and integrated into the life of the community. A girl is

raised from her deathbed. What do these actions of Jesus teach us today for our life within the family and in community?

Going Deeper into the Theme

- The context of yesterday and of today: Throughout his Gospel, Mark goes on giving information concerning the person of Jesus. He shows how the mystery of the Kingdom is mirrored in the power that Jesus exercises on behalf of his disciples, of the crowd and, above all, on behalf of those excluded and marginalized. However, the more this power is manifested, the less the disciples comprehend and it is clear that they must change their ideas concerning the Messiah. Otherwise, their incomprehension will keep on getting worse and they run the risk of growing apart from Jesus.

In the 70's, the time when Mark was writing his Gospel, there was a very great tension within the Christian communities between the converted Jews and the converted pagans. Some Jews, especially those who had belonged to the group of Pharisees, continued to remain faithful to the observance of the laws on purity as found in their millennia-old culture and, thus, found it difficult to live with the converted pagans, because they thought that the pagans lived in a state of impurity. Thus, the story of the two miracles worked by Jesus for the two women was of great help in overcoming old taboos.

A commentary on the text:

- **Mark 5: 21-24: The point of departure: Jairus loses his daughter. Jesus goes with him and the crowd follows.**
The crowd joins Jesus who has just come across from the other side of the lake. Jairus, head of the synagogue, asks Jesus' help for his daughter who is dying. Jesus goes with him and the crowd follows, pushing him on every side because they all want to be close to Jesus when he is about to work a miracle. This is the point of departure of the two following episodes: the healing of the woman suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years and the raising of the twelve-year-old girl.
- **Mark 5: 25-26. The situation of the woman suffering from an irregular hemorrhage**
Twelve years of hemorrhaging! For this reason, the woman was excluded since in those times blood made a person impure as well as anyone who touched that person. Mark says that the woman had spent all her money on doctors but instead of getting better had got worse. An insoluble situation!
- **Mark 5: 27-28. The woman's reasoning in the presence of Jesus**
She had heard about Jesus. A new hope grew in her heart. She said to herself: "If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved". The catechism of those days said: "If I just touch his clothes, I shall become impure". The woman thinks the exact opposite! This is a sign of great courage. It is also a sign of the fact that woman did not quite agree with what the authorities taught. The woman goes into the middle of the crowd that was pushing Jesus on all sides and, almost secretly, succeeds in touching Jesus.
- **Mark 5: 29: The woman succeeds in getting what she wants and is healed**

At that very moment she feels healed in her body. To this day, in Palestine, on a bend in the road near the lake of Galilee and close to Capharnaum, we can read this inscription on a stone: "Here, in this place, the woman thought to be impure but full of faith, touched Jesus and was healed!"

- **Mark 5: 30-32. The reaction of Jesus and of his disciples**

Jesus, too, felt power coming out of him "Who has touched me?" The disciples react: "You see how the crowd is pressing round you; how can you ask, 'Who touched me?'" Here again we have a little disagreement between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus had a sensitivity not seen by the disciples. They react like everyone else and do not understand Jesus' different reaction: But Jesus does not give up and goes on asking.

- **Mark 5: 33-34. The conversation between Jesus and the woman healed because of her faith**

The woman realizes that she has been found out. This is a difficult and dangerous moment for her. According to the belief of those days, someone impure who, like this woman, went among the crowd, would contaminate all just by touching her. Such a person made everyone impure before God (Lv 15: 19-30). The punishment for this was that she would be taken aside and stoned. In spite of this, the woman has the courage to do what she did. But the woman, fearful and trembling, falls at his feet and tells him the truth. Jesus then pronounces his final judgement: "My daughter...your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free of your complaint!" Beautiful and very human words! By saying "My daughter", Jesus welcomes the woman into the new family, into the community growing around him. What she thought came to pass. Jesus recognizes that without the faith of that woman he could not have worked the miracle.

- **Mark 5: 35-36. The conversation between Jesus and Jairus**

Just at that moment emissaries from Jairus' house arrive to tell him that his daughter was dead. There was no need to trouble Jesus further. For them death was the great frontier and Jesus could not cross it! Jesus listens, looks at Jairus and encourages him to be like the woman, namely, to believe that faith can achieve whatever a person believes. Jesus says to him: "Do not be afraid; only have faith!"

- **Mark 5: 37-40. Jesus goes to Jairus' house and the reaction of the crowd**

Jesus goes apart from the crowd and allows only some of his disciples to go with him. When they arrive at Jairus' house, he sees people weeping over the death of the girl. He says: "The child is not dead but asleep." The people in the house laugh. They know when someone is asleep and when someone is dead. It is the laughter of Abraham and Sara, that is, the laughter of those who cannot believe that nothing is impossible for God!" (Jn 17: 17; 18: 12-14; Lk 1: 37). For them also, death is an obstacle that cannot be overcome. Jesus' words carry a much deeper meaning. In Mark's time, the situation of the community seemed to be one of death. They had to hear the words: "You are not dead! You are asleep! Wake up!" Jesus takes no notice of the laughter and enters the room where we find the child, himself, the three disciples and the father of the child.

- **Mark 5: 41-43. The raising of the child**

Jesus takes the child by her hand and says: "*Talitha kum!*" And the child gets up. Much shouting! Jesus stays calm and asks that food be brought to the child. The healing of two women! One twelve-year old and one who suffered from hemorrhage and was excluded for twelve years! The exclusion of the girl begins at the age of twelve because that is when she begins menstruating. She begins to die! Jesus has greater power and raises her: "Get up!"

Further Information

Women in the Gospels

In New Testament times, women were marginalized for the simple fact that they were women (cf. Lv 15: 19-27; 12: 1-5). Women did not take part in the public life of the synagogue and they could not be witnesses. That is why many women put up resistance to such exclusion. Even in Esdra's time, when the marginalization of women was greater, (cf. Esd 9: 1-2; 10: 2-3), resistance grew, as in the cases of Judith, Esther, Ruth, Noemi, Susannah, the Sulamite woman and others. This resistance is echoed in and welcomed by Jesus. Here are some examples of non-conformity and of resistance of women in daily life and Jesus' acceptance of them:

The *prostitute* has the courage to challenge the laws of society and religion. She enters the house of a Pharisee to meet Jesus. When she meets him, she meets love and forgiveness and is defended against the Pharisees. The woman *bent double* does not even hear the shouts of the chief of the synagogue. She wants to be healed, even though it is the Sabbath. Jesus welcomes her as a daughter and defends her against the chief of the synagogue (Lk 13: 10-17). The woman considered *impure* because she was losing blood, has the courage to go in the middle of the crowd and to think just the opposite of what the official doctrine taught. The official doctrine said: "Anyone who touches her will be impure!" But she said: "If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved!" (Mk 5: 28). She is not censured and is healed. Jesus says that her healing is the fruit of faith (Mk 5: 25-34). The Samaritan woman, who is despised and considered *heretical*, has the courage to approach Jesus and to change the direction of the conversation started by him (cf. Jn 4: 19, 25). In John's Gospel, she is the first person to hear the secret that Jesus is the Messiah (Jn 4: 26). The *gentile* woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon does not accept her exclusion and speaks in such a manner as to make Jesus listen to her (Mk 7: 24-30). The *mothers with little children* challenge the disciples and are welcomed and blessed by Jesus (Mt 19: 13-15; Mk 10: 13-16). The women who challenged the authorities and stayed at the foot of the cross of Jesus (Mk 15: 40; Mt 27: 55-56, 61), were also the first to experience the presence of Jesus after the resurrection (Mk 16: 5-8; Mt 28: 9-10). Among them was Mary Magdalene who was considered to have been *possessed by evil spirits* and was healed by Jesus (Lk, 8: 2). She was given the *order* to pass on the Good News of the resurrection to the apostles (Jn 20: 16-18). Mark says that "they used to **follow** him and **look after** him when he was in Galilee. And many other women were there who had **come up** to Jerusalem with him" (Mk 15: 41). Mark uses three important words to define the life of these women:

follow, look after, come up to Jerusalem. These three words describe the ideal disciple. *They represent the model for the other disciples who had fled!*

Praying with Psalm 103 (102)

Thanking God for all that he does for us!

Bless Yahweh, my soul,
from the depths of my being, his holy name; bless Yahweh, my soul,
never forget all his acts of kindness. He forgives all your offences,
cures all your diseases,
he redeems your life from the abyss,
crowns you with faithful love and tenderness; he contents you with good things
all your life, renews your youth like an eagle's.
Yahweh acts with uprightness,
with justice to all who are oppressed; he revealed to Moses his ways,
his great deeds to the children of Israel. Yahweh is tenderness and pity,
slow to anger and rich in faithful love; his indignation does not last forever, nor
his resentment remain for all time; he does not treat us as our sins deserve, nor
repay us as befits our offences.
As the height of heaven above earth,
so strong is his faithful love for those who fear him. As the distance of east from
west,
so far from us does he put our faults.
As tenderly as a father treats his children, so Yahweh treats those who fear him;
he knows of what we are made, he remembers that we are dust.
As for a human person -- his days are like grass, he blooms like the wildflowers;
as soon as the wind blows he is gone, never to be seen there again.
But Yahweh's faithful love for those who fear him is from eternity and forever;
and his saving justice to their children's children;
as long as they keep his covenant, and carefully obey his precepts.
Yahweh has fixed his throne in heaven, his sovereign power rules over all.
Bless Yahweh, all his angels,
mighty warriors who fulfil his commands, attentive to the sound of his words.
Bless Yahweh, all his armies, servants who fulfil his wishes. Bless Yahweh, all his
works, in every place where he rules. Bless Yahweh, my soul.

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.