



Lectio Divina

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LECTIO DIVINA JUNE 2022

LECTIO DIVINA JUNE 2022	1
Wednesday, June 1, 2022	3
Thursday, June 2, 2022	4
Friday, June 3, 2022	6
Saturday, June 4, 2022	8
Sunday, June 5, 2022	10
Monday, June 6, 2022	15
Tuesday, June 7, 2022	16
Wednesday, June 8, 2022	19
Thursday, June 9, 2022	20
Friday, June 10, 2022	22
Saturday, June 11, 2022	24
Sunday, June 12, 2022	26
Monday, June 13, 2022	30
Tuesday, June 14, 2022	32
Wednesday, June 15, 2022	33
Thursday, June 16, 2022	35
Friday, June 17, 2022	38
Saturday, June 18, 2022	39
Sunday, June 19, 2022	42
Monday, June 20, 2022	47
Tuesday, June 21, 2022	49
Wednesday, June 22, 2022	51
Thursday, June 23, 2022	53
Friday, June 24, 2022	55
Saturday, June 25, 2022	61
Sunday, June 26, 2022	64
Monday, June 27, 2022	69
Tuesday, June 28, 2022	71
Wednesday, June 29, 2022	73
Thursday, June 30, 2022	79

Wednesday, June 1, 2022

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

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

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

May the Spirit make us also so much one that we graciously share with one another our God-given riches and gifts as people. We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 17: 11b-19

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

Reflection

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

- John 17: 11b-12: Keep them in Your name! Jesus channels His concern into prayer: "Keep those You have given Me true to Your name, so that they may be one like Us!" Everything which Jesus does in His life, He does in the Name of God. Jesus is the manifestation of the Name of God. The Name of God is Yahweh, JHWH. In the time of Jesus, this name was pronounced saying, "Adonai," "Kyrios," "Lord." In the discourse of Pentecost, Peter says that Jesus, because of His Resurrection, was constituted Lord: "For this reason the whole House of Israel can be certain that the Lord and Christ whom God has made is this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2: 36). And Paul says that this has been done so that "every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God, the Father" (Phil 2:11). It is the Name which is above all other names" (Phil 2: 9). JHWH or Yahweh, the Name of God, took on a concrete face in Jesus of Nazareth! Unity has to form around this name: keep those you have given Me true to Your name so that they may be one like We are. Jesus wants the unity of the communities in such a way that they can resist the world which hates them and persecutes them. The people united around the name of Jesus will never be conquered!

- John 17: 13-16: That they may share My joy to the full. Jesus is bidding farewell. In a short time, He will go away. The disciples continue in the world. They will be persecuted and be afflicted. Because of this, they are sad. Jesus prays that their joy may be full. They want to continue to be in the world without being of, or belonging to, the world. This means to live in the system of the Empire, whether liberal or Roman, without allowing themselves to be contaminated. Like Jesus, and with Jesus, they should live in the opposite direction of the world.
- John 17: 17-19: As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world. Jesus asks that they be consecrated in truth. That is, that they may be capable of dedicating their whole life to giving witness of their convictions concerning Jesus and God the Father. Jesus sanctified Himself in the measure in which, during His life, He revealed the Father. He asks that the disciples enter into the same process of sanctification. Their mission is the same as Jesus' mission. They sanctify themselves in the measure in which, living in love, they reveal Jesus and the Father. To sanctify oneself means to become human like Jesus. Pope Leo the Great said, "Jesus was so human, but so human, as only God can be human." For this reason, we should live in opposition to the world, because the system of the world dehumanizes human life and renders it contrary to the intentions of the Creator.

For Personal Consideration:

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Thursday, June 2, 2022

Opening Prayer

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and Father of all people,
we believe in You
and we know that You loved Jesus with a deep and trusting, lasting love. Let Your Holy Spirit pour out this love into the hearts of all those
who believe in Jesus, our Savior and shepherd.
Let this love unite us in one common bond of understanding and respect for one another and let that love lead us
to live for one another and to serve one another for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 17: 20-26

Lifting up his eyes to heaven, Jesus prayed saying: "I pray not only for these, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them."

Reflection

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

- John 17: 20-23: So that the world may believe it was You who sent Me. Jesus expands the horizon and prays to the Father: "I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in Me. May they all be one, just as, Father, You are in Me and I am in You, so that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe it was You who sent Me." Behold, here emerges Jesus' great concern for unity which should exist in the communities. Unity does not mean uniformity, but rather to remain in love, in spite of tensions and conflicts. A love which unifies to the point of creating, among all, a profound unity like the unity which exists between Jesus and the Father. The unity in love revealed in the Trinity is the model for the communities. For this, through love among people, the communities reveal to the world the most profound message of Jesus. People said of the first Christians, "See how they love one another!" The present-day division among the three religions which came from Abraham is really tragic: the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. And even more tragic is the division among us Christians who say that we believe in Jesus. If we are divided, we do not deserve credibility. Ecumenism is at the center of the last prayer of Jesus to the Father. It is His testament. To be a Christian and not be ecumenical is a contradiction. It means to contradict the last Will of Jesus.
- John 17: 24-26: "So that the love with which You loved Me may be in them." Jesus does not want to remain alone. He says, "Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am so that they may always see My glory, which You have given Me, because You loved Me before the foundation of the world." Jesus is happy when we are all together with Him. He wants His disciples to have the same experience of the Father which He had. He wants us to know the Father and that He knows us. In the Bible, the word to know is not limited to a rational theoretical knowledge but presupposes the experience of the presence of God living in love with the people of the community.
- That they may be one as We are one. (Unity and Trinity in the Gospel of John) The Gospel of John helps us to understand the mystery of the Trinity, the communion among the three Divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Of the four Gospels, John is the one which puts more stress on the profound unity among the Father, the Son and the Spirit. From the text of John (Jn 17: 6-8) we see that the

mission of the Son is the supreme manifestation of the love of the Father. And this unity between the Father and the Son makes Jesus exclaim, "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10: 30). Between the Son and the Father there is such an intense unity that one who sees the face of one also sees the face of the other. And fulfilling this mission of unity received from the Father, Jesus reveals the Spirit. The spirit of Truth comes from the Father (Jn 15: 26). At the bidding of the Son (Jn 14: 16), the Father sends the Spirit to each one of us in such a way that He will remain with us, encouraging us and giving us strength. The Spirit also comes to us from the Son (Jn 16: 7-8). Thus, the Spirit of Truth, who journeys with us, is the communication of the profound unity which exists between the Father and the Son (Jn 15: 26-27). The Spirit cannot communicate a truth which is different from the truth of the Son. Everything which is in relationship with the mystery of the Son, the Spirit makes known to us (Jn 16: 13-14). This experience of unity in God was very strong in the communities of the Beloved Disciple. The love which unites the Divine Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - allows us to experience God through union with the people in a community of love. This was also the experience of the community, where love should be the sign of God's presence in the midst of the community (Jn 13: 34-35). This love builds unity in the community (Jn 17: 21). They looked at the unity in God in order to understand the unity among themselves.

For Personal Consideration

- Bishop Don Pedro Casaldáliga said, "The Trinity is truly the best community." In the community of which you are a part, can you see any human sign of the Divine Trinity?
- Ecumenism: Am I interested in ecumenism? How do I approach it with others?
- Do I know the doctrine and beliefs of the Church well enough to enter into ecumenical discussion with others without misleading myself or others?
- What limits do I put on ecumenical activity in my life? Should there be limits?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, You will teach me the path of life, unbounded joy in Your presence, at Your right hand delight for ever. (Ps 16: 11)

Friday, June 3, 2022

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
You have appointed shepherds in Your Church to speak Your word to us and to build community in Your name. We pray You today:
May they be shepherds like Your Son who look for those who have lost the way, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded and make the weak strong.
May they all be ministers
of Your tender love and service,
as Jesus was, Your Son and our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 21: 15-19

After Jesus had revealed himself to his disciples and eaten breakfast with them, he said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." He then said to Simon Peter a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

Reflection

We are in the last days before Pentecost. During the time of Lent, the selection of the Gospels of the day continues the ancient tradition of the Church. Between Easter and Pentecost, the Gospel of John is preferred. And thus, during these last days before Pentecost, the Gospels of the day narrate the last verses of the Gospel of John. When we return to Ordinary Time, we will go back to the Gospel of Mark. In the weeks of Ordinary Time, the Liturgy proceeds to a continuous reading of the Gospel of Mark (from the 1st to the 9th week of Ordinary Time), of Matthew (from the 10th to 21st week of Ordinary Time) and of Luke (from the 22nd to the 34th week of Ordinary Time). The Gospel readings for today and tomorrow speak about Jesus' last encounter with His disciples. It was an encounter of celebration, marked by tenderness and affection. At the end Jesus calls Peter and asks him three times, "Do you love Me?" Only after having received three times the same affirmative response, Jesus entrusts to Peter the mission of taking care of the sheep. In order to be able to work in the community, Jesus does not ask many things of us. What He asks of us is to have much love!

- John 21: 15-17: Love at the center of the mission. After a whole night of fishing in the lake catching not even one fish, they go to the shore. The disciples discover that Jesus has prepared bread and roasted fish for them. When they finish eating, Jesus calls Peter and asks him three times, "Do you love Me?" Three times, because Peter denied Jesus three times (Jn 18: 17, 25-27). After the three affirmative responses, Peter also becomes a "Beloved Disciple" and receives the order to take care of the sheep. Jesus does not ask Peter if he has studied exegesis, theology, morals, or canon law. He only asks, "Do you love Me?" Love in the first place. For the communities of the Beloved Disciple the force which supports and maintains unity is love.
- John 21: 18-19: The foreshadowing of death. Jesus tells Peter, "Truly I tell you: when you were young, you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt around you and take you where you do not want to go!" Throughout life, Peter, and we too, gain maturity. The practice of love will take root in life and people will no longer be the bosses of their own life. Service to the brothers and sisters out of love will prevail and will lead us. How we dress is often a reflection or necessity of the work we do. If we choose to accept it, God can "dress" us in new clothing for a new destination according to His wants, and send us where we may not want to go. Somebody else will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go. For Peter there is a meaning, as the Evangelist comments: "He tells him this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God." Then Jesus adds: "Follow Me."

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

For Personal Consideration

- Look within yourself and say, “What is the most profound reason that motivates me to work in the community – love, or a concern for ideas?”
- Jesus asks Peter three times. Each time he answers you can feel a rising tension, one that says “what can I do to show you if you don’t believe me?” It isn’t a casual conversation. Do I have this forcefulness in responding to Jesus in my life, or just a casualness?
- Do I allow myself to be dressed by someone else for service to others? Do I go where He leads me? Is my attitude my answer to Jesus’ question: “Follow Me.”?
- What is “my life”? It is not only biological. It is also lifestyle, actions, and identity that come from ego, pride, and self-will. There is something in common though: To “lay down one’s life” has a totality to it. Do I “lay down” my pride, ego, will, wants, and lifestyle for others in my community, or for the “little ones”, the poor or rejected? Is it in totality, or just when it is convenient?

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, June 4, 2022

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
like Mary, the women and the apostles on the day before the first Pentecost, we are gathered in prayer.
Let the Holy Spirit descend also upon us, that we may become enthusiastic believers and faithful witnesses to the Person and the good news of Jesus.
May our way of living bear witness that Jesus is our light and life, now and forever.

Gospel Reading - John 21: 20-25

Peter turned and saw the disciple following whom Jesus loved, the one who had also reclined upon his chest during the supper and had said, "Master, who is the one who will betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours? You follow me." So the word spread among the brothers that that disciple would not die. But Jesus had not told him that he would not die, just "What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours?" It is this disciple who testifies to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written.

Reflection

Today's Gospel begins with Peter's question: "Lord, what about him?" Jesus begins to speak with Peter.

- John 21: 20-21: Peter's question concerning John's destiny. At this moment, Peter turned back and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved and asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus had just indicated Peter's destiny, and now Peter wants to know from Jesus what is this other disciple's destiny. It is a matter of curiosity which does not deserve a proper response from Jesus.
- John 21: 22: The mysterious response of Jesus. Jesus says, "If I want him to stay behind until I come, what does it matter to you? You are to follow Me." A mysterious utterance which ends again with the same affirmation as before: Follow me! Jesus seems to want to bridle Peter's curiosity. Just as each one of us has his/her own history, in the same way each one of us has his/her own way of following Jesus. Nobody is the exact copy of another person. Each one of us should be creative in following Jesus. This also recalls the laborers in the vineyard (Mt 20: 1-15). Each of us also has our own history and relationship with Jesus which is personal and directed by Him if we accept it.
- John 21: 23: The Evangelist clarifies the meaning of Jesus' response. Ancient tradition identifies the Beloved Disciple with the Apostle John and says that he died when he was almost one hundred years old. Putting together John's old age with Jesus' mysterious response, the Evangelist clarifies things saying, "The rumor then went out among the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet, Jesus had not said to Peter, 'He will not die,' but, 'If I want him to stay behind until I come; what does that matter to you?'" Perhaps, it is a warning to be attentive to the interpretation of the words of Jesus and not base one's beliefs on any rumor.
- Peter's questions, and the assumptions of the other disciples, could be an example of the sins of pride (*hyperēphania*), sadness or envy (*lypē*), and dejection or acedia

(*akēdia*) in terms of the concepts of the fourth century monk Evagrius Ponticus, among others. Rather than rejoicing at the favorable treatment they thought John had, Peter wanted to know the details. Then the rumors and the gossip went out.

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

For Personal Consideration

- Is there something in your life which Jesus has done and which could be added to this book which will never be written?
- Peter is very concerned about the other disciple rather than live his own “Follow Me” at that moment. Does this also happen to you?
- Several Church Doctors and Fathers talk about overcoming vices such as envy and pride with virtues. Many of their ways of life are an answer to “Follow Me”. How well informed are you about these and how might they be put to use personally in answering His call?
- One’s whole life is a relationship with Jesus. This is true for others as well. When there is gossip about another person, do you think Jesus says “What concern is it of yours?” at those moments too?

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, June 5, 2022

Pentecost Sunday

Opening Prayer

Most merciful Father, on this most holy day I cry to You from my room behind closed doors. I raise my prayer to You in fear and immobility in the face of death. Grant that Jesus may come to me and dwell at the center of my heart that He may drive away all fear and all darkness. Grant me Your peace, which is true peace, peace of heart. Grant that the Holy Spirit may come to me, the Spirit who is the fire of love, that warms and enlightens, that melts and purifies; who is living water, flowing even to eternal life, that quenches and cleans, that baptizes and renews; who is the strong and at the same time soft wind, the breath of Your voice and breath; who is a dove announcing pardon, a new and lasting beginning for the whole world. Send Your Spirit upon me when I read and listen to Your Word so that I may penetrate the mysteries it holds; grant that I may be overwhelmed and submerged, baptized and made into a new person, so that I may give my life to You and to my brothers and sisters. Amen. Alleluia

Gospel Reading - John 14: 15-16, 23-26

Placing the Passage in Its Context:

These few verses, which are not even well connected, are a few drops of water taken from an ocean. In fact, they are part of that long and grandiose discourse in John's Gospel, which begins with chapter 13: 31 and goes up to and including the whole of chapter 17. The whole of this very deep discourse deals with only one theme, that is, the "going of Jesus", which we find in 13: 33: "Yet a little while I am with you... Where I **go** you cannot come" and in 16: 28: "I came from the Father and have come into the world. Again I leave the world and **go** to the Father" and again in 17: 13: "Now I am **coming** to you, [Father]". Jesus' going to the Father signifies also our going, our faith journey in this world; it is here that we learn to follow Jesus, to listen to Him, to live like Him. It is here that we receive the complete revelation of Jesus in the mystery of the Trinity as well as the revelation concerning a Christian life, its power, its tasks, its joys and sorrows, its hopes, and struggles. In reflecting on these words, we find the truth of the Lord Jesus and of ourselves before Him and in Him.

These verses speak especially of three very strong consolations for us: the promise of the coming of the Consoler; the coming of the Father and the Son within those who believe; the presence of a master, the Holy Spirit, through whom the teachings of Jesus will never cease.

To Help Us with the Reading of the Passage:

vv. 15-16: Jesus reveals that the observance of the commandments is not a matter of obligation, but a sweet fruit that is born of the love of the disciple for Him. This loving obedience is due to the all-powerful prayer of Jesus for us. The Lord promises another Consoler, sent by the Father, who will always remain with us in order to drive away our solitude once and for all.

vv. 23-24: Jesus repeats that love and observance of the commandments are two vital truths essentially related to each other, that have the power to introduce the disciple into the mystical life, that is, into the experience of immediate and personal communion with Jesus and with the Father.

v. 25: Jesus says something very important: there is a substantial difference between what He said while He was *with* the disciples and what He will say later, when, thanks to the Spirit, He will be *in* them, *within* them. At first, understanding is limited because the relationship with Him is an external one: the Word comes from outside and reaches ears, but not pronounced within. Later, understanding will be full.

v. 26: Jesus announces the Holy Spirit as master who will teach no longer from outside but from within us. He will give new life to the words of Jesus, those forgotten will be remembered and will be understood by the disciples within their capabilities.

The Text:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always." Jesus answered and said to him, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name - he will teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you."

A Time of Prayerful Silence

I go to the Master's school, the Holy Spirit. I sit at His feet and I abandon myself in His presence. I open my heart, without any fear, so that He may instruct, console, reprove and make me grow.

A Few Questions

- "*If you love Me*". Is my relationship with Jesus a relationship of love? Do I make room for Him in my heart? Do I look within myself honestly and ask, "Where is love in my life? Is there any?" If I realize that there is no love within me, or just a little, do I try to ask myself, "What is preventing me, what is it that keeps me closed, imprisoned, rendering me sad and lonely?"
- "*You will observe My commandments*". I notice the verb "to observe" with the many meanings it implies: to look after well, to protect, to pay attention, to keep alive, to reserve and preserve, not to throw away, to keep carefully, with love. Am I aware and enlightened by these attitudes, by my relationship as disciple, as Christian, with the Word and the commandments that Jesus gave us for our happiness?
- "*He will give you another Console*". How often have I searched for someone to console me, to look after me, to show me affection and care for me! Am I truly convinced that true consolation comes from the Lord? Or do I still trust much more in the consolations I find, the ones that I beg for here and there, that I gather like crumbs without ever being able to be satisfied?
- "*Make our home with Him*". The Lord stands at the door and knocks and waits. He does not force or oblige. He says, "If you wish...". He suggests that I might become His home, the place of His repose, of His intimacy. Jesus is ready and happy to come to me, to unite Himself to me in a very special kind of friendship. But, am I ready? Am I expecting His visit, His coming, His entering into my most intimate, most personal self? Is there room for Him in the inn?
- "*He will...bring to your remembrance all that I have said*". The word "remembrance" recalls another very important, even essential matter. Am I challenged and scrutinized by scripture? What is it that I recall? What do I try to remember, to bring to life in my interior world? The Word of the Lord is a most precious treasure; it is the seed of life that is sown in my heart; but do I look after this seed? Do I defend it from a thousand enemies and dangers that assail it: the birds, the rocks, the thorns, the evil one? Do I, every morning, carry with me a Word of the Lord to remember during the day and to make my inner light, my strength, my food?

A Key to the Reading

I now approach each one of the characters in the reading and I listen prayerfully, meditatively, reflectively, in contemplation...

- **The Face of the Father:**

Jesus says, *"I will ask the Father"* (v. 26) and thus draws aside a little the mysterious veil surrounding prayer: prayer is the life that leads to the Father. To go to the Father, we are given the way of prayer. As Jesus lives His relationship with the Father by means of prayer, so also must we. I need to read the Gospels and become a careful searcher of signs concerning this secret of the love of Jesus and His Father, so that, by entering into that relationship, I too may grow in the knowledge of God, my Father.

"He will give you another Consoler". The Father is the one who gives us the Consoler. This gift is preceded by the Father's act of love, who knows that we need consolation: He saw my misery in Egypt and heard my cry. He indeed knows my sufferings and sees the oppressions that torment me (cf. Ex 3: 7-9); nothing goes unnoticed by His infinite love for me. That is why He gives us the Consoler. The Father is the Giver. Everything comes to us from Him and no one else.

"My Father will love him" (v. 24). The Father is the lover who loves with an eternal love, absolute, and inviolable. Thus do Isaiah, Jeremiah and all the Prophets say (cf. Jer 31: 3; Isa 43: 4, 54: 8; Hos 2: 21, 11: 1).

"We will come to him". The Father is united with the Son, Jesus, and is one with Him, and with Him, comes to each one of us. He moves, goes out, bends and walks towards us. Urged by a mad and inexplicable love, He comes to us.

"And we will make our home with him". The Father builds His house within us; He makes of us, of me, of my existence, of my whole being, His home. He comes and will not leave but faithfully stays.

- **The Face of the Son:**

"If you love Me..." (v. 15); *"If anyone loves Me..."* (v. 23). Jesus enters into a unique and personal relationship with me, face to face, heart to heart, soul to soul; He wants to have an intense relationship, unique, unrepeatable, and He unites me to Him by love if I so wish. He always puts an "if" and says when He asks me by name: "If you wish...". The only way He constantly seeks to come to me is through love. In fact, it is noticeable that the use of the pronouns "you" and "anyone" are connected to "me" by the verb "to love" and no other verb.

"I will ask the Father" (v. 16). Jesus is the one who prays, who lives by prayer and for prayer. The whole of His life is summed up by prayer and in prayer. He is the supreme and eternal priest who intercedes for us and offers prayers and supplications together with tears (cf. Heb 5: 7), for our salvation; "He is able at all times to save those who come to God through Him, since He lives always to make intercession for them" (Heb 7: 25).

"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word" (v. 23); *"He who does not love Me, does not keep My words"* (v. 24). Jesus offers me His Word, He gives it to me in trust that I may look after it and guard it, that I may place it in my heart and there keep it warm, watch over it, contemplate it, listen to it and thus make it bear fruit. His word is a seed; it is the most precious pearl of all, for which it is worthwhile selling every other wealth; it is the treasure hidden in the field worth digging for without counting the cost; it is the fire that makes the heart burn within my breast; it is the lamp that illumines our steps even in the darkest night. Love for the Word of Jesus can be identified by my love for Jesus Himself, for His whole being, because, after all, He is the Word. That is why, in this passage, Jesus is crying out to my heart that He is the one I must keep.

- **The Face of the Holy Spirit:**

"The Father will give you another Consoler" (v. 16). The Father gives us the Holy Spirit; this is "the good gift and every perfect gift from above" (Jas 1: 17). He is "the other Consoler" other than Jesus, who goes and comes back so as not to leave us alone, abandoned. While I am in this world, I do not lack consolation, but am comforted by the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is not just consolation, but is much more: He is a living person and living with me always. This presence, this company is capable of giving me joy, true joy. In fact Paul says, "The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace..." (Gal 5: 22; cf. Rom 14: 17).

"to be with you forever". The Spirit is in our midst, He is with me, just as Jesus was with His disciples. His coming is a physical, personal presence; I do not see Him, but I know that He is there and that He will never leave me. The spirit is always here and lives with me and in me, with no limitations of time or space; thus He is the Consoler.

"He will teach you all things" (v. 26). The Holy Spirit is the teacher, He who opens the way for conscience, experience; no one except Him can lead me, inform me, give me new form. His is not a school where one acquires human knowledge that creates pride and does not liberate; His teachings, His whisperings, His precise directions come from God and lead back to God. The Spirit teaches true wisdom and true knowledge (Ps 118: 66), He teaches the Father's will (Ps 118: 26, 64), His ways (Ps 24: 4), His commandments (Ps 118, 124, 135), which are life. He is a teacher capable of leading me to the whole truth (Jn 16: 13), who gives me deep freedom, even to the time of the separation of the soul and the spirit, for He alone, who is God, can bring me to life and resurrection. As God, He is humble; He lowers Himself, descends from His throne and enters into me (cf. Acts 1: 8; 10: 44), He gives Himself to me entirely and absolutely; He is not jealous of His gift, of His light, but gives without limits.

A Moment of Prayer: Psalm 30

A Hymn of Praise to God, Who Has Sent Us the New Life of the Spirit From On High

Ref. You have given me the fullness of life, Lord, alleluia!

I will extol Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast drawn me up,
and hast not let my foes rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried to Thee for help, and
Thou hast healed me.

O Lord, Thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among
those gone down to the Pit.

Sing praises to the Lord, O you His saints, and give thanks to His holy name.

For His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved."

By thy favor, O Lord,

Thou hast established me as a strong mountain; Thou didst hide Thy face, I was
dismayed.

To Thee, O Lord,

I cried; and to the Lord I made supplication.

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me! O Lord, be Thou my helper!"

Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing;

Thou hast loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, that my soul may praise
Thee and not be silent.

O Lord my God, I will give thanks to Thee for ever.

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, allow me to speak to You again. It is difficult for me to go away from my meeting with the Word because You are present there. Therefore, live and act in me. I present to You, to Your intimacy, Your Love, my face of disciple; I mirror myself in You, O Holy Spirit. I offer You, finger of God's right hand, my features, my eyes, my lips, my ears... work in me Your healing, Your liberation and salvation that I may be reborn, today, a new person from the womb of Your fire, the breath of Your wind. Holy Spirit, I was not born to be alone. I beg You, therefore, send me brothers and sisters that I may proclaim to them the life that comes from You. Amen. Alleluia!

Monday, June 6, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
keep before us the wisdom and love you have revealed in your Son.
Help us to be like Him in word and deed,
for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading – John 19: 25-34

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

Reflection

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

- Jn 19: 30-34: They are present courageously at a time when Jesus has already declared that "it is fulfilled" (Jn 19: 30). The mother of Jesus is present at the hour that finally "has come". That hour was foretold at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2: 1ff). The fourth Gospel had remarked then that "the mother of Jesus was there" (Jn 2: 1). Thus, the person that remains faithful to the Lord in His destiny, he/she is a beloved disciple. The Evangelist keeps this disciple anonymous so that each one of us may see him/herself mirrored in the one who knew the mysteries of the Lord, who laid his head on Jesus' chest at the last supper (Jn 13: 25). The mother standing beneath the cross (cf. Jn 19: 25), accepted her Son's testament of love and welcomed all people in the person of the beloved disciple as sons and daughters to be reborn unto life eternal.
- Jesus takes an active part in His death, He does not allow Himself to be killed like the thieves whose legs were broken (Jn 19: 31-33), but commits His spirit (Jn 19: 30). The details recalled by the Evangelist are very important: Seeing His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing near her, Jesus said to His mother, "Woman, this is your son." Then to the disciple He said, "This is your mother." (Jn 19: 26-27). These simple words of Jesus bear the weight of revelation, words that reveal to us His will: "this is your son" (v. 26); "this is your mother" (v. 27). These words also recall those pronounced by Pilate on the Lithostrotos: "This is the man" (Jn 19: 5). With these words, Jesus on the cross, his throne, reveals His will and His love for us. He is the lamb of God, the shepherd who gives His life for His sheep. At that moment, by the cross, He gives birth to the Church, represented by Mary, Mary of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene, together with the beloved disciple (Jn 19: 25).

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Tuesday, June 7, 2022

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 the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

Reflection

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 converted Jews. Although 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 become adamant in their own position. Some wanted to advance, to go ahead, while others wanted to place the light under the table. Many asked themselves, "In the final analysis, what 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 what the mission is 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 practice in order 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 in itself. "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). There are Christian groups today that believe only this as well. Others thought that they should continue to observe the laws of the Old Testament (Acts 15: 1-2). In each of the two tendencies there were even more radical groups. Before this conflict, Matthew tries to find a balance, the equilibrium, over and above 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 timely: "I have not come to abolish the law, but to complete it!" The communities cannot be against the Law, nor can they close themselves off in the observance of the law. Like Jesus, they must move forward and

show in a practical way that the objective which the law wants to attain in life is the perfect practice of love.

- Jesus completes the law by His summation: to love one another. He sums it up by example, as well as His instruction (Mk 12: 31-33). To believe in Jesus is not just believing some history, it is also believing who Jesus is, and therefore, the importance of following His instruction. To love, and to work in imitation of Jesus in love, demands outward action and a sincere concern and care for every brother and sister in the world, all of God's children, starting with our community.
- 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 (1Cor 12: 3).
 - Now the great concern of the Gospel of Matthew is to show 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 plan of God and give us the central certainty of faith: The God of Abraham and of Sarah is present in the midst of the communities by faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

Personal Questions

- Salt and light are taken for granted today. We have salt in all of our food and electric lights at any time. What would you choose to use instead of salt and light for examples today, and why?
- Through modern travel and technology, our community can be seen (observed) by those next door or by other people or communities across the globe. Is our community a "city on a hill" for the worldwide community? How can we be salt and light for someone nearby as well as in another country?
- Those Jesus sent on the mission went out and did not sit at home or in an office waiting to be visited. How do we "go out" to meet others and other communities near and far on our mission, as individuals, as an individual local community, or as a larger community?

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 8, 2022

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

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven."

Reflection

Today's Gospel (Mt 5: 17-19) teaches how to observe the law of God in its complete fulfillment (Mt 5: 17-19). Matthew writes in order to help the communities of converted Jews 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 Jesus' clarifying response to His accusers. Thus, Matthew sheds 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 the 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 first Christian communities. 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 message 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 that they even went so far as to say, "Anathema Jesus!" (1 Cor 12: 3). Observing these tensions, Matthew tries to find some balance between both extremes. The community should be a place where the balance can be attained and lived. Jesus' answer to those who criticized Him continued to be relevant 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 themselves off in the observance of the Law. Like Jesus, they should advance and show in practice, the objective that the Law wanted to attain in people's lives, that is, in the perfect practice of love.

- Matthew 5: 17-18: Not one dot or stroke will disappear from the Law. It is for those who wanted to get rid of the law altogether that Matthew recalls the other parable of Jesus: "Anyone who breaks 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 plan of God and communicate to us the certainty of faith: The God of Abraham and of Sarah is present in the midst of the community by faith in Jesus of Nazareth who sends us His Spirit.

Personal Questions

- How do I see and live God's law: as a freedom to do anything I please, as an imposition which restricts me, or as a guide to grow in love?
- What can we do today for our brothers and sisters who consider all of this type of discussion as obsolete and not relevant?
- How does this view of the Law and the Commandments affect me? As a line which defines sin, as rules to avoid vice, or as a guide in attaining virtue?

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 9, 2022

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 forever.

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 Jews 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 10, 2022

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 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 11, 2022

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: 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 12, 2022

Most Holy Trinity

LECTIO

Opening Prayer:

O God, who in sending Your Son Jesus have revealed abundantly Your love for the salvation of all people, stay always with us and continue to reveal Your attributes of compassion, mercy, clemency and fidelity. Spirit of Love, help us to grow in the knowledge of the Son so that we may have life.

Grant that, by meditating Your Word on this feast day, we may become more aware that Your mystery is a hymn to shared love. You are our God and not a solitary God. You are Father, fruitful source. You are Son, Word made flesh, close and fraternal love. You are Spirit, all-embracing love.

Gospel Reading - John 16: 12-15

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you."

A Time of Prayerful Silence:

With St. Augustine we say, "Grant me time to meditate on the secrets of your law, do not shut the door to those who knock. Lord, fulfill your plan in me and unveil those pages. Grant that I may find grace before you and that the deep secrets of your Word may be revealed to me when I knock."

Meditatio

Preamble:

Before we start the Lectio, it is important to pause briefly on the context of our liturgical passage. Jesus' words in Jn 16: 12-15 are part of a section of the Gospel known by exegetes as the Book of Glory (13: 1-17: 26). In His farewell discourse, Jesus reveals His intimate self, calls the disciples friends and promises them the Holy Spirit who will accompany them as they accept the mystery of His person. The disciples, then, are invited to grow in love towards the Master who gives Himself to them completely. In this section, we can distinguish three well-defined sequences or parts. The first includes chapters 13-14 and treats of the following theme: the new community is founded on the new commandment of love. Through His instructions, Jesus explains that the practice of love is the way that the community must walk in its journey to the Father. In the second part, Jesus describes the position of the community in midst of the world. He reminds them that the community He founded carries out its mission in the midst of a hostile world and can only acquire new members if it practices love. This is the meaning of "bearing fruit" on the part of the community. The condition for a fruitful love in the world is: remain united to Jesus. It is from Him that life flows – the Spirit (Jn 15: 1-6); union with Jesus with a love like His so as to establish a relationship of friendship between Jesus and His disciples (Jn 15: 7-17).

The community's mission, like that of Jesus, will be carried out in the midst of the hatred of the world, but the disciples will be strengthened by the Spirit (Jn 15 :26-16: 15). Jesus tells them that the mission in the world implies pain and joy and that He will be absent-present (Jn 16: 16-23a). He simply assures them of the support of the Father's love and His victory over the world (Jn 16: 23b-33). The third part of this section includes Jesus' prayer: He prays for His present community (Jn 17: 6-19); for the community of the future (Jn 17: 20-23); and expresses His desire that the Father glorify those who have known Him and, finally, that His mission in the world may be fulfilled (Jn 17: 24-26).

Meditation

- The voice of the Spirit is Jesus' voice

Previously, in Jn 15: 15, Jesus had told His disciples what He had heard from the Father. This message was not nor could it have been grasped by the disciples in all its force. The reason is that the disciples, for the present, ignored the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross and the substitution of the new way of salvation for the old. With His death, a new and definitive saving power comes into the life of humanity. The disciples will understand Jesus' words and actions after the resurrection (Jn 2: 22) or after His death (Jn 12: 16).

In Jesus' teaching there are many matters and messages to be understood by the community as it gradually faces new events and circumstances; it is in daily life and in the light of the resurrection that it will understand the meaning of His death-exaltation.

It will be the Holy Spirit, Jesus' prophet, who will communicate to the disciples what they have heard from Him. In the mission that Jesus' community will carry out it will be the Holy Spirit who will communicate to them the truth in that He will explain and help them to apply that which Jesus is and means as the manifestation of the Father's love. Through His prophetic messages, the community does not transmit a new doctrine but constantly proposes the reality of the person of Jesus, in the witness to and orientation of its mission in the world. The voice of the Holy Spirit, which the community will hear, is the voice of Jesus Himself. In the wake of the Old Testament prophets who interpreted history in the light of the covenant, the Holy Spirit becomes the determining factor in making Jesus known, giving the community of believers the key to an understanding of history as a continual confrontation between what the "world" stands for and God's plan. The starting point for reading one's presence in the world is Jesus' death-exaltation, and as Christians

grow in this understanding they will discover in daily life “the sin of the world” and its harmful effects.

The role of the Holy Spirit is a determining factor for the interpretation of the mystery of Jesus’ life in the life of the disciples: He is their guide in undertaking a just commitment on behalf of humanity. To succeed in their activities for humankind, the disciples have to listen to the problems of life and history, and be attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit, the only reliable source for getting a real sense of the historical events in the world.

- The Holy Spirit’s voice: true interpreter of history

Then Jesus explains how the Holy Spirit interprets human life and history. First, by manifesting His “glory”, that He will take “what is Mine”. More specifically, “what is Mine” means that the Holy Spirit draws His message from Jesus, whatever Jesus said. To manifest the glory means manifesting the love that He has shown by His death. These words of Jesus are very important because they avoid reducing the role of the Holy Spirit to an illumination. The Spirit’s role is to communicate Jesus’ love and places Jesus’ words in harmony with His message and also with the deeper sense of His life: Love expressed in giving His life on the cross. This is the Holy Spirit’s role, the Spirit of truth. Two aspects of the role of the Holy Spirit that enable the community of believers to interpret history are: listening to the message and understanding it and being in harmony with love. Better still, Jesus’ words mean to communicate that only through the communication of the love of the Holy Spirit is it possible to know who a person is, to understand the purpose of life, and to create a new world. The model is always Jesus’ love.

- Jesus, the Father, the Holy Spirit and the community of believers (v.15)

What does Jesus mean when He says “everything the Father has is Mine”? First that what Jesus has is shared with the Father. The first gift of the Father to Jesus was His glory (Jn 1: 14), or more precisely, faithful love, the Spirit (Jn 1: 32; 17: 10). This communication is not to be understood as static but rather as dynamic, that is, ongoing and mutual. In this sense the Father and Jesus are one. Such mutual and constant communication permeates Jesus activity so that He is able to realize the designs of the Father and His plan for the whole of creation. So that believers may be able to understand and interpret history, they are called to live in harmony with Jesus, accepting the reality of His love and making this love concrete for others. This is the Father’s plan that the love of Jesus for His disciples may be realized in all. God’s plan as realized in Jesus’ life must be realized in the community of believers and guide the believer’s commitment in their endeavor to improve everyone’s life. Who carries out the Father’s plan in Jesus’ life? It is the Holy Spirit who unites Jesus and the Father and carries out and fulfills the Father’s plan and makes the community of believers partakers in this dynamic activity of Jesus: “will be taken from what is Mine”. Thanks to the action of truth of the Holy Spirit, the community listens to Him and communicates Him concretely as love.

- The Holy Spirit communicates to the disciples all the truth and wealth of Jesus; He dwells in Jesus; “comes” into the community and when He is received renders the community partakers in Jesus’ love.

Some Questions:

- A serious danger threatens the Christian community today. Are we not tempted to **divide** Jesus, following either a human Jesus who through His actions has

changed history, or a glorious Jesus detached from His earthly existence and thus also from ours?

- Are we aware that Jesus is not just a historical example but also and above all the present **Savior**? That Jesus is not just an object of contemplation and joy, but the Messiah whom we must follow and with whom we must collaborate?
- God is not an abstraction, but the Father made **visible** in Jesus. Are you committed to “seeing Him” and recognizing Him in Jesus’ humanity?
- Do you listen to the voice of the Spirit of truth who **communicates** to you Jesus’ whole truth?

Oratio

Psalm 103: Send Your Spirit, Lord, to Renew the Earth

This is a joyful hymn of thanksgiving that invites us to meditate on humanity's fall and God's eternal mercy. After sin, sickness and death, comes the kind and loving action of God: He fills us with good things all our lives.

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 offenses, 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 for ever, nor His
resentment remain for all time;
He does not treat us as our sins deserve, nor repay us as befits our offenses.
As tenderly as a father treats his children, so Yahweh treats those who fear Him;
But Yahweh's faithful love for those who fear Him is from eternity and for ever;
Bless Yahweh, all His angels,
mighty warriors who fulfill His commands, attentive to the sound of His words.
Bless Yahweh, all His armies, servants who fulfill His wishes. Bless Yahweh, all His works,
in every place where He rules. Bless Yahweh, my soul.

Closing Prayer:

Spirit of truth
You make us children of God,
so that we can approach the Father in trust.
Father, we turn to You with one heart and one soul and we ask You:
Father, send Your Holy Spirit! Send Your Spirit upon the Church.
May every Christian grow in harmony with Christ's love, with the love of God and of
neighbor.
Father, renew our trust
in the Kingdom that Jesus came to proclaim and to incarnate on earth.
Let us not be dominated by delusion or be conquered by weariness.

May our communities be a leaven that produces justice and peace in our society.

Monday, June 13, 2022

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 that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow."

Reflection

Today's Gospel forms part of a small literary unit which goes from Mt 5: 17 to Mt 5: 48, which describes how to pass from the ancient justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5: 20) to the new justice of the Kingdom of God (Mt 5: 48). It describes how to go up to the Mount 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. This is the desire of all of us. Just is the one who succeeds in living 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 surpass the justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5: 20). In today's Gospel we are almost reaching the summit of the mountain. Only a little is lacking. The summit is described in one sentence: "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). As in the previous cases, here 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 among people 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." When some violence

is 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. Lamech 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, then Lamech 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 pay back 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” (Rom 12: 17, 21). To be able to have this attitude it is necessary to have much faith in the possibility of recovery 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.
 - (c) And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him.
 - (d) 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 explicitly and invite another strike. Rather, by not threatening or not blocking another blow, He still “offers” the other cheek. At the same time, He reacted with energy: “If there is some offense 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” (Rom 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 ever 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?
- In your daily life, how would you implement or act out the four examples in Matthew 5: 39b-42?
- How can these affirmations of Jesus be applied to immigration and allowing immigration into the country?
- Many times, people will agree with affirmations such as these, and then give a BUT... and proclaim exclusions, exceptions, and limitations. Consider real-life modern situations that suggest an opportunity for “turning the other cheek”, “giving more than is asked”, eye for an eye”, etc. Do you too have a BUT, or ONLY IF limitation in your answer? Would Jesus say the same thing?

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 14, 2022

Opening Prayer

Lord God, from You comes the initiative of love. You seek us out and You tell us: I am your God; you are my people. You love us in Jesus Christ, Your Son. God, may our response of love go far beyond the demands of any law. May we seek You and commune with You in the deepest of our being and may we express our gratitude to You by going to our neighbor with a love that is spontaneous like Yours. We ask You this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 43-48

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers and sisters only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Reflection

In today's Gospel we see how Jesus has interpreted the commandment "You shall not kill" in such a way that its observance leads to the practice of love. Besides saying "You shall not kill" (Mt 5: 21), Jesus quoted four other commandments of the ancient law: you shall not commit adultery (Mt 5: 27), you shall not bear false witness (Mt 5: 33), eye for eye, and tooth for tooth (Mt 5: 38) and, in today's Gospel, you shall love your neighbor and will hate your enemy (Mt 5: 43), five times, Jesus criticizes and completes the ancient way of observing these commandments and indicates the new way to attain the objective of the law, which is the practice of love (Mt 5: 22-26; 5: 28-32; 5: 34-37; 5: 39-42; 5: 44-48).

Love your enemies. In today's Gospel Jesus quotes the ancient law which says: You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy. This text is not found like this in the Old Testament. It is more a question of the mentality of the time, according to which there was no problem if a person hated his enemy. Jesus was not in agreement and says: But I tell you: 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, set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to His. And Jesus gives us the proof. At the hour of His death He observed that which He preached.

Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing. A soldier takes the wrist of Jesus and places it on the arm of the cross, places a nail and begins to hammer it in. Several times. The blood was flowing down. The body of Jesus contorted with pain. The soldier, a mercenary, ignorant, far from knowing what he was doing, and of what was happening around him, continued to hammer as if it were a piece of the wall of his

house and he had to put up a picture. At that moment Jesus prays for the soldier who tortures Him and addresses His prayer to the Father: Father, forgive them! They know not what they are doing! He loved the soldier who killed Him. Even wanting it with all their strength, the lack of humanity did not succeed to kill in Jesus His humanity and love! He will be imprisoned, they will spit on Him, will laugh and make fun of Him, they will make of Him a false king crowning Him with a crown of thorns, they will torture Him, will oblige Him to go through the streets like a criminal hearing the insults of the religious authority. On Calvary they will leave Him completely naked in the sight of all. But the poison of this lack of humanity did not succeed in suppressing the source of love and humanity which sprang from within Jesus. The water of the love which sprang from within was stronger than the poison of hatred which was coming from without. Looking at that soldier, Jesus felt sorrow and prayed for him and for all: Father, forgive them! They know not what they are doing! Jesus, in solidarity, almost excuses those who were ill-treating and torturing Him. He was like a brother who goes with his murderous brothers before the judge and he, the victim of his own brothers, says to the judge: They are my brothers, you know they are ignorant. Forgive them! They will become better! He loved the enemy!

Be perfect as is your Father who is in Heaven. Jesus does not want to frighten, because this would be useless. He wants to change the system of human living altogether. The notion which He constructs comes from the new experience He has from God the Father, full of tenderness and who accepts all! The words of threat against the rich cannot be an occasion of revenge on the part of the poor. Jesus orders that we have a contrary attitude: Love your enemies! True love cannot depend on what one receives from others. Love should want the good of others independently of what they do for me. This is the way God's love is for us.

Personal Questions

- Am I capable to love my enemies?
- Contemplate Jesus, in silence, who at the hour of His death, loved the enemy who killed Him.

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, June 15, 2022

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: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

Reflection

The Gospel of today continues the meditation on the Sermon on the Mount. 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 following is the schema:

- Matthew 5: 13-12: 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 to Providence.

Today's Gospel treats three themes: almsgiving (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 good works to be seen by others (Mt 6: 1). Jesus says 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 comes 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 the practice of justice and piety to 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, and highly recommended by the first Christians (Acts 2: 44-45; 4: 32-35). The person who practices almsgiving and sharing to promote themselves before others merits exclusion 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 people who make great publicity of the good that they do for others. Jesus asks the contrary: 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 at the three moments of prayer; morning, noon and evening, they should stop 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, such an attitude perverts our relationship with God. This is false and has no sense. This is why Jesus says that it is better to close up ourselves in our rooms 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, to wear sober dress. These were visible signs of fasting. Jesus criticizes this form of fasting and orders the contrary, so others cannot be 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 where others can see you, such as at Mass, do you make a show of your praying, or do you do it humbly and without grand showy gestures?
- When you give or help someone, either at the collection, or on the street, or near others, do you talk louder or make a show of it, or do you become quieter and more private with the other person?
- It is rare these days that anyone fasts and also goes out in the manner Jesus describes. But we have other ways to do that. When giving, or doing some manner of sacrifice for others, do you complain, or groan to others about it, or give subtle clues that you are doing this thing?

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 16, 2022

Opening Prayer

Lord God,

You speak Your mighty word to us, but we cannot hear it
unless it stirs our lives
and is spoken in human terms.
Keep speaking Your word to us, Lord, and open our hearts to it,
that it may bear fruit in us when we do Your will
and carry out what we are sent to do.
We ask You this through Your living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 6: 7-15

Jesus said to his disciples: "In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. "This is how you are to pray: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. "If you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."

Reflection

There are two versions of the Our Father: Luke (Lk 11: 1-4) and Matthew (Mt 6: 7-13). In Luke, the Our Father is shorter. Luke writes for the communities which came from Paganism. In Matthew the Our Father is found in the Discourse on the Mountain, in the part where Jesus orientates the disciples in the practice of the three works of piety: alms (Mt 6: 1-4), prayer (Mt 6: 5-15) and fasting (Mt 6: 16-18). The Our Father forms part of a catechesis for the converted Jews. They were accustomed to pray but had some vices which Matthew tries to correct.

- Matthew 6: 7-8: The faults to be corrected. Jesus criticizes the people for whom prayer was a repetition of a magic formula, strong words addressed to God to oblige Him to respond to our needs. The acceptance of our prayer by God does not depend on the repetition of words, but on God's goodness, on God who is love and mercy. He wants our good and knows our needs even before we pray to Him.
- Matthew 6: 9a: The first words: Our Father, Abba Father, is the name which Jesus uses to address Himself to God. It reveals the new relationship with God that should characterize the life of the communities (Gal 4: 6; Rm 8: 15). We say Our Father and not My Father. The adjective places the accent on the awareness or knowledge that we all belong to the great human family of all races and creeds. To pray to the Father is to enter in intimacy with Him. It also means to be sensitive to the cry of all the brothers and sisters who cry for their daily bread. It means to seek in the first place the Kingdom of God. The experience of God as our Father is the foundation of universal fraternity.
- Matthew 6: 9b-10: Three requests for the cause of God: The Name, the Kingdom, the Will. In the first part we ask that our relationship with God may be re-established again. To sanctify His name: The name JAHVE means I am with you! God knows. In this name He makes Himself known (Ex 3: 11-15). The name of God is sanctified when it is used with faith and not with magic; when it is used according to its true objective, not for oppression but for the liberty or freedom of the people and for the construction of the Kingdom. The coming of the Kingdom: The only Lord and King of life is God (Is 45: 21; 46: 9). The coming of the Kingdom is the fulfillment of all the hopes and promises. It is life in plenitude, the overcoming of frustration suffered with

human kings and governments. This Kingdom will come when the Will of God will be fully accomplished. To do His will: The will of God is expressed in His Law. His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. In Heaven the sun and the stars obey the laws of their orbit and create the order of the universe (Is 48: 12-13). The observance of the law of God will be a source of order and well-being for human life.

- Matthew 6: 11-13: Four petitions for the cause of the brothers: Bread, Pardon, Victory, Liberty. In the second part of the Our Father we ask that the relationship among persons may be restored. The four requests show how necessary it is to transform or change the structures of the community and society in order that all the sons and daughters of God may have the same dignity. The daily bread. In Exodus the people received the manna in the desert every day (Ex 16: 35). Divine Providence passed through the fraternal organization, the sharing. Jesus invites us to live a new Exodus, a new fraternal way of living together which will guarantee the daily bread for all (Mt 6: 34-44; Jo 6: 48-51).
- Forgive us our debts: Every 50 years, the Jubilee Year obliged people to forgive their debts. It was a new beginning (Lv 25: 8-55). Jesus announces a new Jubilee Year, a year of grace from the Lord (Lk 4: 19). The Gospel wants to begin everything anew! Do not lead us into temptation, do not put us to the test: In Exodus, people were tempted and fell (Dt 9: 6-12). The people complained and wanted to go back (Ex 16: 3; 17: 3). In the new Exodus, the temptation will be overcome by the strength which people receive from God (I Co 10: 12-13). Deliver us from evil: The Evil One is Satan, who draws away from God and is a cause of scandal. He succeeds in entering in Peter (Mt 16: 23) and to tempt Jesus in the desert. Jesus overcomes him (Mt 4: 1-11). He tells us: Courage, I have conquered the world! (Jn 16: 33).
- Matthew 6: 14-15: Anyone who does not forgive will not be forgiven. In praying the Our Father, we pronounce the phrase which condemns us or absolves us. We say: Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass us (Mt 6: 12). We offer God the measure of pardon that we want. If we forgive very much, He will forgive us very much. If we forgive little, He will forgive little. If we do not forgive, He will not forgive us.

Personal Questions

- Jesus prayer says forgive our debts . In some countries it is translated as forgive our offenses . What is easier to forgive, the offenses or to forgive the debts?
- Christian nations of the Northern Hemisphere (Europe and USA) pray everyday: *Forgive our debts as we forgive those who are in debt to us!* But they do not forgive the external debt of poor countries of the Third World. How can we explain this terrible contradiction, source of impoverishment of millions of people?
- Debt, in the context of society, is not only money. In fact, in referring to people who have served time in jail we say “they have paid their debt to society”. Do we accept these people back into society? Not only have they paid their “debt”, they are often treated as having not been forgiven.
- How do we forgive others in terms of immigration, documented or not, and accept them into our communities?

Concluding Prayer

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, let us acclaim His name together.
I seek Yahweh and He answers me, frees me from all my fears. (Ps 34: 3-4)

Friday, June 17, 2022

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 for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. "The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light; but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness. And if the light in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be."

Reflection

In today's Gospel we continue our reflection on the Sermon on the Mount. The last few days we have reflected on the practice of the three works of piety: almsgiving (Mt 6: 1-4), prayer (Mt 6: 5-15), and fasting (Mt 6: 16-18). The Gospels for today and tomorrow present four recommendations on the relationship with material goods, clearly explaining 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) to 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 (6: 19-21) and not to look at the world with diseased eyes (6: 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 might all buy the most coffee and sugar we can. We accumulate because we lack trust. During the forty years in the desert, the people were tested to see if they were capable of observing God's Law (Ex 16: 4). The test consisted of this: to see if they were capable of gathering 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 in 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 which will favor 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, 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 people are anguished and worried. It also forms a part of the Sermon on the Mount that is more difficult to understand and practice. 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 worldly things. 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, a change of mentality and ideology. To place the basis of life on God allows our look to become generous and 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 can 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

- We are stewards of what God gives us and He tells us not to store up these goods for ourselves. How do I manage this in real life? What have I stored up? Should I share a little part or everything?
- When I share, or give to others, do I give a little and keep most of it, or give most and keep only what I need for the day?
- In giving, the Church talks of time, talent, and treasure. What would be ways of hoarding these instead of sharing them? Are there other things from God to be given to others? Do I share a little and enjoy the most for myself?

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 18, 2022

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 serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wildflowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil."

Reflection

Today's Gospel helps us to review our relationship 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 difficult questions. For example, how can we understand 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: God or money?" This choice will depend on understanding the advice which follows about Divine Providence (Mt 6:25-34). It is not a question about a choice made only in one's head, but rather a very concrete choice of life that has to do with attitudes.
- Matthew 6: 25: Jesus criticizes excessive worry about eating and drinking. This criticism of Jesus, even in our day, 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. In order 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 people, without leaving space to

experience and relish gratuity and fraternity and the sense of belonging to the Father. This is why materialism is wrong, because it obliges the great majority of people to live 24 hours a day, worried about food and clothing, and produces in a rich minority, quite a limited one, the anguish of buying and consuming up to the point of not leaving space for anything else. Jesus says that life is worth more than the goods to be consumed! Materialist prevents living the Kingdom.

- Matthew 6: 28-30: the parable of the lilies in the fields: the body is worth more than clothing. Jesus asks us 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 of 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 clothing for everybody.
- Matthew 6: 31-32: Do not be like the Gentiles. Jesus once again criticizes the excessive worry over food, drink, and clothing. 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 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 for a fraternal and just life together. 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 for tomorrow, that is, there will be no worry about storing up things.
- Seek first of all the kingdom of God and its justice. The kingdom of God should be at the center of all of 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 us to better understand the parables of the birds and the flowers, because for Jesus, Divine Providence passes through the community. 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 with others. Before the growing impoverishment caused by economic consumerism, the concrete form which the Gospel presents to us gives us an alternative so that the poor will be able to live via the solidarity of 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 save. 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! 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 of surviving. Otherwise, we are like the three friends of Job, that in order to defend God they told lies (Job 13: 7). It would be like "abandoning an orphan and betraying a friend". In the mouth 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? How do I express it in real life? Can it be better expressed now that I look at it and myself?
- In helping others we participate in Divine Providence, which is to participate in the Kingdom as well. What are the opportunities I had today to help and participate in God's plan to help sustain others that I missed or avoided or shrunk away from?
- When I pass someone on the street asking for money, do I just toss them a coin or do I spend time to find out what they need and who they are? Is there more that I can do? Even talking to them and treating them as a friend is a form of welcoming them into the community and respect for a brother or sister – something they likely do not feel.

Concluding Prayer

I observe Your instructions, I love them dearly.
I observe Your precepts, Your judgments,
for all my ways are before You. (Ps 119: 166-167)

Sunday, June 19, 2022

Corpus Christi

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us 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 on the way to 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 the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

Reading

A Key to the Reading: the Literary Context:

Our text comes from the middle of Luke's Gospel: Jesus expands and intensifies His mission in the villages of Galilee and He sends the twelve disciples to help Him (Lk 9: 1-6). This news reaches the ears of Herod, the same who had John the Baptist killed (Lk 9:7-9). When the disciples come back from their mission, Jesus invites them to go to a solitary place (Lk 9: 10). *Then follows our text concerning the multiplication of the loaves* (Lk 9: 11-17).

Immediately after this, Jesus asks, "Who do people say that I am?" (Lk 9: 18-21). Then, for the first time, He goes on to speak of His passion and death and the consequences of all this for the disciples (Lk 9: 22-28). Then we have the Transfiguration where Jesus

speaks with Moses and Elijah concerning His passion and death in Jerusalem (Lk 9: 28-43). There follows another proclamation of His passion, to the consternation and incomprehension of His disciples (Lk 9: 44-50). Finally, Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem to meet His death (Lk 9: 52).

A Division of the Text:

- Luke 9: 10: They go to a place apart.
- Luke 9: 11: The crowd learns that Jesus is there and He welcomes them.
- Luke 9: 12: The disciples worry about the people going hungry.
- Luke 9: 13: Jesus makes a suggestion and the reply of the disciples.
- Luke 9: 14-15: Jesus' initiative to resolve the problem of the people's hunger
- Luke 9: 16: Eucharistic connotations and sense.
- Luke 9: 17: The great sign: all will eat.

Gospel Text - Luke 9:10-17

When the apostles returned, they explained to him what they had done. He took them and withdrew in private to a town called Bethsaida. The crowds, meanwhile, learned of this and followed him. He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and he healed those who needed to be cured. As the day was drawing to a close, the Twelve approached him and said, "Dismiss the crowd so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms and find lodging and provisions; for we are in a deserted place here." He said to them, "Give them some food yourselves." They replied, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have, unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people." Now the men there numbered about five thousand. Then he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty." They did so and made them all sit down. Then taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments were picked up, they filled twelve wicker baskets.

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 did you like best and what struck you most in the text?
- In what situation does the crowd find itself according to the text?
- What is the reaction or feeling of the disciples before the situation of the crowd?
- What is the reaction or feeling of Jesus before the situation of the crowd?
- Which facts from the Old Testament story does this text recall?
- Do you know of any initiatives of people today who give the hungry crowd food to eat?
- How do we help the crowd? Do we distribute fish or do we teach them to fish?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the theme.

The Historical Context of Our Text:

The historical context of Luke's Gospel always has two aspects: the aspect of the times of Jesus, that is, the 30's in Palestine, and the context of the Christian communities of the 80's for whom he is writing his Gospel.

At the time of Jesus in Palestine, the people lived in expectation of a Messiah who would be a new Moses and who would repeat the great signs worked by Moses in Exodus: leading the people through the desert and feeding them with manna. The multiplication of the loaves in the desert was for the crowd a sign that the messianic time had come (cf. Jn 6: 14-15).

In Luke's time, in the Greek communities, it was important to confirm the Christians in the conviction of their faith and to give them direction in the midst of difficulties. The way Luke describes the multiplication of the loaves, recalls the celebration of the Eucharist as celebrated in the communities in the 80's, and helps them to deepen their understanding of the Eucharist in their daily lives. Besides, in his description of the multiplication of the loaves, as we shall see, Luke recalls important figures in the history of the people of God: Moses, Elijah and Elisha, thus showing that Jesus is truly the Messiah who is to come to fulfill the promises of the past.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Luke 9: 10: Jesus and the disciples go apart in a lonely place.
The disciples return from the mission to which they were sent (Lk 9: 1-6). Jesus invites them to go to a lonely place near Bethsaida, north of Lake Galilee. Mark's Gospel adds that He invites them to rest a little (Mk 6: 31). When Luke describes the mission of the 72 disciples, He is also describing Jesus' revision to His missionary activity, an activity carried out by the disciples (Lk 10: 17-20).
- Luke 9: 11: The crowd seeks Jesus and Jesus welcomes them.
The crowd knows where Jesus went and they follow Him. Mark is more explicit. He says that Jesus and the disciples went by boat whereas the crowd followed on foot by another road to a specific place. The crowd arrives before Jesus (Mk 6: 32-33). When Jesus arrives at the place of rest, He sees the crowd and welcomes them. He speaks to them of the Kingdom and heals the sick. Mark adds that the crowd was like sheep without a shepherd. Before such a situation, Jesus reacts as a "good shepherd", leading the crowd by His words and feeding them with loaves and fishes (Mk 6: 34ff).
- Luke 9: 12: The worry of the disciples and the hunger of the crowd.
The day is fading; it is almost sunset. The disciples are worried and ask Jesus to send the crowd away. They say that it is impossible to find food sufficient for so many people in the desert. For them, the only solution is to let the people go to nearby villages to buy bread. They cannot imagine any other solution.
Reading between the lines of this description of the situation of the crowd, we find something very important. People forget to eat in order to stay with Jesus. This means that Jesus must have known how to attract people, even to the point that they forget everything to follow Him in the desert.
- Luke 9:13: Jesus' suggestion and the reply of the disciples.
Jesus says, "You give them something to eat". The disciples are frightened, because they only have five loaves and two fish. It is they who must solve the problem and the only thing that comes to their mind is to send the crowd away to buy bread. They can only think of the traditional solution, namely that someone has to obtain bread

for the people. Someone has to get money, buy bread and distribute it among the crowd, but in the desert such a solution is impossible. They cannot see any other possibility. In other words, if Jesus insists on not sending the crowd away, then there is no solution to the hunger of the crowd. It does not occur to them that the solution could come from Jesus and from the crowd itself.

- Luke 9: 14-15: Jesus' initiative to solve the problem of the hunger.
There were five thousand people. That's a lot of people! Jesus asks the disciples to make them sit in groups of fifty. It is at this point that Luke begins to use the bible to throw light on the facts of Jesus' life. He recalls Moses. It was Moses who first gave the hungry crowd something to eat in the desert after leaving Egypt (cf. Num 1-4). Luke also recalls the prophet Elisha. It was he, in fact, who in the Old Testament, had made a few loaves more than sufficient to feed a multitude (2 Kings 4: 42-44). The text suggests, then, that Jesus is the new Moses, the new prophet who must come into the world (cf. Jn 6: 14- 15). The multitude of the communities knew the Old Testament, and half an allusion would have been sufficient for them. Thus they discover gradually the mystery that is unfolding in the person of Jesus.
- Luke 9: 16: Recalling the Eucharist and its meaning.
When the people sit on the ground, Jesus multiplies the loaves and asks the disciples to distribute them. It is important to note the way Luke describes this action. He says, "Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, raised His eyes to heaven, and said the blessing over them; then He broke them and handed them to His disciples to distribute among the crowd". This manner of speaking to the communities of the 80's (and of all times) recalls the Eucharist. For these very words will be used (and are still used) in the celebration of the Supper of the Lord (22: 19). Luke suggests that the Eucharist must lead to the multiplication of the loaves, that is, to sharing. It must help Christians to take care of the concrete needs of the neighbor. It is the bread of life that gives courage and leads the Christian to face the problems of the crowd in a new way, not from outside, but from among the crowd.
- Luke 9: 17: The great sign: all will eat.
All will eat, all will be satisfied and there will be full baskets left over! An unexpected solution, performed by Jesus and born from within the crowd itself, beginning from the little that they had brought, five loaves and two fish, and there were twelve baskets full of scraps after the five thousand had eaten of the five loaves and two fish!

A Deepening: The Greater Miracle:

Some will ask, "There was no miracle then? It was just a sharing?" Here are three reflections by way of an answer:

- *A first reflection:* Which would be the greater miracle today: for instance, that on a certain day of the year, say Christmas, everyone has enough to eat and receives a Christmas hamper; or perhaps that people begin to share their bread so that no one goes hungry and there would be leftovers for other crowds. Which would be the greater miracle? What do you think?
- *A second reflection:* The word *miracle* (miraculum) comes from the verb *to admire*. A miracle is an extraordinary action, outside the normal, that causes *admiration and leads to think of God*. The great *miracle*, the greatest miracle of all, is (1) Jesus Himself, God made man! Thus God becomes extraordinarily human as only God can be human! Another great *miracle* is (2) the change that Jesus succeeds in working among the crowd that is used to solutions from outside. Jesus succeeds in making the crowd face its problem from within and to take into account the means at their disposal. A *great miracle*, an extraordinary thing is (3) that through this gesture

of Jesus', all eat and there are leftovers! When we share, there is always more... and leftovers! So there are three great miracles: Jesus Himself, the conversion of people and the sharing of goods leading to an abundance! Three miracles born of a new experience of God as Father revealed to us in Jesus. This experience of God changed all mental categories and the way of life. It opened an entirely new horizon and created a new way of living together with others. This is the greatest miracle: another world made possible!

- *A third reflection:* It is difficult to know how things happened. No one is saying that Jesus did not work a miracle. He worked many miracles! But we must not forget that the greatest miracle is the resurrection of Jesus. Through their faith in Jesus, people begin to live in a new way, sharing bread with the brothers and sisters who have nothing and are hungry: "None of their members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from them to present it to the apostles" (Acts 4: 34-35). When a miracle is described in the bible, the greater attention is drawn not towards the miraculous aspect, but rather towards the meaning the miracle has for life and for the faith of the community of those who believe in Jesus, the revelation of the Father. In the so-called "first world" of the so-called "Christian" countries, animals have more to eat than human beings of the "third world". Many people are hungry! This means that the Eucharist has not taken deep root yet, nor does it reach out as it could and should.

The Prayer of a Psalm: 81(80)

The God who Frees and Feeds His People

Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob! Raise a song, sound the timbrel, the sweet lyre with the harp.
Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day. For it is a statute for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob. He made it a decree in Joseph,
when He went out over the land of Egypt. I hear a voice I had not known:
"I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket.
In distress you called, and I delivered you;
I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah.
Hear, O My people, while I admonish you! O Israel, if you would but listen to Me!
There shall be no strange god among you; you shall not bow down to a foreign god. I
am the Lord your God,
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. "But My people did not listen to My voice; Israel
would have none of Me.
So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels.
O that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!
I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their foes.
Those who hate the Lord would cringe toward Him, and their fate would last forever.
I would feed you with the finest of wheat,
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You 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 what 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 20, 2022

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: 1-5

Jesus said to his disciples: "Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove that splinter from your eye,' while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye."

Reflection

In today's Gospel we continue to meditate on the Sermon on the Mount, found in chapters 5 to 7 of the Gospel of Matthew. During the 10th and 11th week we have seen chapters 5 and 6. Beginning today, we will see chapter 7. These three chapters, 5, 6, and 7, offer an idea of how the catechesis was done in the communities of the converted Jews in the second half of the first century in Galilee and in Syria. Matthew unites and organizes the words of Jesus to teach how the new way of living the law of God should be.

- After having explained how to re-establish justice (Mt 5: 17 to 6: 18) and how to restore the order of creation (Mt 6: 19-34), Jesus teaches how the life in community should be (Mt 7: 1-12). At the end He presents some recommendations and final advice (Mt 7: 13-27). Then follows an outline of the entire Sermon on the Mount:
 - Matthew 5: 1-12: The Beatitudes: solemn openness 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 the works of piety: alms giving.
 - 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: The new relationship to material goods: do not store up.
 - Matthew 6: 22-23: The new relationship to material goods: a correct vision.

- Matthew 6: 24: The new relationship to material goods: God or money.
 - Matthew 6: 25-34: The new relationship to material goods: trust in Providence
 - Matthew 7: 1-5: The new community life together: do not judge.
 - Matthew 7: 6: The new community life together: do not despise the community.
 - Matthew 7: 7-11: The new community life: trust in God produces sharing.
 - Matthew 7: 12: The new community life together: the Golden Rule.
 - Matthew 7: 13-14: Final recommendations to choose the sure way.
 - Matthew 7: 15-20: Final recommendations, the prophet is known by his fruits.
 - Matthew 7: 21-23: Final recommendations to not only speak but also practice.
 - Matthew 7: 24-27: Final recommendations to construct the house on rock.
- The community-lived experience of the Gospel (Mt 7: 1-12) is the touchstone. It is where the seriousness of the commitment is defined. The new proposal of life in community embraces many aspects: do not observe the splinter in your brother's eye (Mt 7: 1-5), do not throw your pearls in front of pigs (Mt 7: 6), do not be afraid to ask God for things (Mt 7: 7-11). This advice reaches the summit in the Golden Rule: Always treat others as you would like them to treat you (Mt 7: 12). The Gospel of today presents the first part: Matthew 7: 1-5.
 - Matthew 7: 1-2: Do not judge and you will not be judged. The first condition for a good life together in community is not to judge brother or sister. That is, to eliminate the preconceptions which prevent a transparent community life. What does this mean concretely? John's Gospel gives an example of how Jesus lived in community with the disciples. Jesus says: "I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learned from My Father" (Jn 15: 15). Jesus is an open book for His companions. This transparency comes from His total trust in the brothers and sisters and has its origin in His intimacy with the Father who gives Him the force of opening himself up totally to others. Anyone who lives in this way with his brothers and sisters accepts others as they are, without any preconceptions, without previously imposing any conditions, without judging. Mutual acceptance without any pretension and with total transparency! This is the ideal of the new community life, which has come from the Good News which Jesus has brought to us: God is our Father, and therefore, we are all brothers and sisters. It is a difficult ideal, but as beautiful and attractive as the other one: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.
 - Matthew 7: 3-5: You observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the great log in your own. Immediately Jesus gives an example: Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye, and never notice the great log in your own? And how dare you say to your brother, "Let me take that splinter out of your eye, when look, there is a great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye". When hearing this phrase, we usually think of the Pharisees who despised the common people, considering them ignorant and they considered themselves better than others (cf. Jn 7: 49; 9: 34). In reality, this statement of Jesus serves for all of us. For example, it is often the case that we criticize the very thing in others that we do ourselves. We observe the splinter in the eye of our brothers, and we do not see the big log in our own eyes. These logs can cause many people today to have difficulty in believing in the Good News of Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Think about the things I criticize other for. Does it reveal the same behavior, in some way, in me?
- Does this show that we all have more in common than in differences, and that it is only the log in the eye that is the problem in understanding this?
- Splinters and logs share a similar nature: both are wood. What faults do I share with others in my community or family which I seem to be blind to in myself?

Concluding Prayer

Your kindnesses to me are countless, Yahweh;
true to Your judgments,
give me life. (Ps 119: 156)

Tuesday, June 21, 2022

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: 6, 12-14

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces. "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the Law and the Prophets. "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few."

Reflection

- Discernment and prudence in offering things of value. In relationships with others Jesus, warns about certain dangerous attitudes. The first one of these is to not judge (7: 1-5): it is a true and proper prohibition, "do not judge." It is an action that influences and drives contempt or condemnation of others. The last judgment is the exclusive competence of God. Our figures of measure and our criteria are relative and 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, that is to say, is free from every judgment of the brothers, then you can relate with them in a true way before God. 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” (Mt 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 in a Semitic language that 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 wild. But let us now consider the positive and didactic-wisdom aspect of the words of Jesus: do not profane holy things. In the 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 act of throwing 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 behavior is evil and imprudent because those dogs were usually 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 interpretation 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 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 to just anybody.
- To follow a path. In the final part of the discourse (7: 13-27), Matthew includes, among the others, an admonition of Jesus who invites us to make a choice in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven: through 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 consistent with the admonishments of Jesus would be that the wide door is joined to the wide path which leads to perdition or damnation, that is to say, to walk on a wide road is something pleasant, and capable of handling a great many travelers, 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 many 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. Narrow paths, especially with a cart, are tricky and tough to travel. It is also less traveled. Matthew is telling his readers that most may not choose this path, so don’t expect it to be the way of the majority. Christianity was a new way, a new path, and many of the people of that time may not want to travel that path.

Personal Questions

- Examine your day today. Are there instances where you did not treat a brother or sister as you would want to be treated? Do you make excuses as you ask yourself, saying “oh, it wouldn’t matter to me if he did that” rather than taking responsibility?
- 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 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 22, 2022

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. Ac 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 23, 2022

Birth of John the Baptist

Statio

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 honor 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. (*Prayer of Cardinal Mercier to the Holy Spirit*)

Lectio

From the Gospel according to Luke (1: 57-66, 80)

When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John." But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name." So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be?" For surely the hand of the Lord was with him. The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Meditatio

Key to the Reading

This passage of the Gospel forms part of the account 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 by the Angel, the messenger of the new creation.

In fact, the Annunciation inaugurates, in a joyful way, the fulfillment 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 who is about to give birth, but also reveals something of God's plan. 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 as children" of God (Gal 4: 4).

In the Gospel, Jesus 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 fulfillment 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 after 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, which is "God is 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. 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 Meditate On

- Do you or your community rejoice when God shows great mercy on another in the community, or do you grumble or even ignore it?
- John identifies himself as the friend of the bridegroom. According to you, what is the meaning of this image?
- John the Baptist is the one who prepares the way for the Lord. How is this relevant in 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 daybreak on high will 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

Friday, June 24, 2022

Opening Prayer

My Father, I come before You today with a sorrowful heart, because I know I am among the number of those, who even though they are sinners, believe to be just. I feel within myself the weight of my heart made of rock and of iron.

Today, I would also like to be among those who get close to Your Son to listen to Him; I would like to stop doing like the Pharisees and the scribes who, before Your love, murmur and criticize.

I beg You, my Lord, touch my heart with Your words, with Your presence and win it over with only a look, with only one of Your caresses. Take me to Your table, so that I may also eat Your good bread, or even just the crumbs, Your Son Jesus, grain of wheat, who became spike and nourishment of salvation. Do not leave me outside, but allow me to enter to the table of Your mercy. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Luke 15: 3-7

Text:

Jesus addressed this parable to the Pharisees and scribes: "What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance."

The Context:

This brief passage constitutes only the beginning of the great chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke, a very central chapter, almost in the heart of the Gospel and of its message. Here, in fact, are enclosed the three accounts of the mercy, like only one parable: the sheep, the coin, and the son, are an image of one only reality, they bear in themselves all the richness and the preciousness of man before God's eyes, the Father. Here is the last significance of the Incarnation and of the life of Christ in the world: the salvation of all, Jews and Greeks, slaves or free, men or women. Nobody should remain outside the banquet of mercy.

In fact, precisely the previous chapter to this one narrates the invitation to the table of the king and also gives to us this call: "Come, everything is ready!" God is waiting for us, next to the place that He has prepared for us, so that we can be His guests, so as to make us also participate in His joy.

The Structure:

Verse 3 is the introduction and connects us with the previous situation, that is, the one in which Luke describes the joyful movement, of love and conversion, of the sinners and publicans, who without fear, continue to get close to Jesus to listen to Him. It is here that the murmuring, the anger, the criticism are triggered and therefore, the refusal of the Pharisees and the scribes, convinced of having in themselves justice and truth.

Therefore, the parable that follows, which is structured in three accounts, wants to be the response of Jesus to this murmuring; in last instance, the response to our criticism, to our grumbling and mumbling against Him and His inexplicable love.

Verse 4 begins with a rhetorical question, which already presupposes a negative response: nobody would act as the Good Shepherd, as Christ. It is precisely there, in His behavior, in His love for us, for all, where His truth is. Verses 5 and 6 tell the story. They describe the actions, the sentiments of the shepherd: his search, his fatigue, his joy which become tenderness and care for the sheep that has been found, the sharing of this joy with the friends. At the end, with verse 7, Luke wants to depict the face of God,

personified in Heaven: He anxiously waits for the return of all His children. He is a God, a Father who loves sinners, who recognize themselves in need of His mercy, of His embrace and He cannot be pleased with those who believe themselves to be just and remain far away from Him.

Meditate on the Word

A Moment of Prayerful Silence:

Now, as the publican and the sinners, I also desire to get close to the Lord Jesus to listen to His words, to pay attention with heart and mind, to everything which He wants to tell me. Then, I open myself, I allow myself to be reached by His voice, by His look on me, which reaches to the depth of my being...

Some Ways to Deepen:

“Which one among you?”

It is necessary to begin with this strong question of Jesus, addressed to His interlocutors at that moment, but also addressed to us today. We are seriously placed before ourselves, to understand who we are, how we are in the depth of ourselves. “Who is a true man among us?” says Jesus. Like a few verses further down He will say, “Which woman?”. It is more or less the same question which the Psalmist asked, when he said: “What is man?” (8: 5) and which Job repeated, speaking with God, “What is this man?” (7: 17).

Therefore, here, in this brief account of Jesus, in this parable of the mercy, we find the truth: we understand who is truly a man among us. But in order to do this, it is necessary that we encounter God, hidden in these verses, because we must confront ourselves with Him, we must mirror ourselves in Him and find ourselves. The behavior of the shepherd with his sheep tells us what we should do, how we should be and reveals to us how we are in reality, it shows us our nakedness and our wounds, our profound sickness. We, who believe that we are gods, we are not even human beings.

Let us see why...

“Ninety nine – one”

Behold that God’s light immediately places us in confrontation with a very strong reality, shocking for us. In this Gospel we find, a flock, one as many others, quite numerous, perhaps belonging to a wealthy man: one hundred sheep: a perfect, symbolic, divine number. The fullness of the children of God, all of us, each one, one by one, nobody can remain excluded. But in this reality, an unthinkable thing happens: a great, unbalanced maximum division is created: on the one hand 99 sheep and on the other only one. There is no acceptable proportion here. And just the same these are God’s ways. Immediately we think and ask ourselves, to which group do we belong? Are we among the 99? Or are we that only one, that is alone, so great, so important so as to be the counterpart of the rest of the flock?

Let us look attentively to the text. The only sheep, the one alone, immediately emerges from the group because it is lost, gets lost, in one word, lives a negative experience, a dangerous one, perhaps even a mortal one, but, surprisingly, the shepherd does not allow it to leave like that. He does not wash his hands; rather, he abandons the others, who had remained with him, and goes to look for it. Is such a thing possible? Can an abandonment of this dimension be justified? Here we began to enter into crisis, because surely it came spontaneously to us to classify ourselves as being among the 99, who remained faithful. Instead, the shepherd goes and runs in search of the bad one, the one which did not merit anything, but only the solicitude and the abandonment which it sought for itself.

Then what happens? The shepherd does not give up immediately. He does not even think of returning or going back. He does not seem to be concerned about his other sheep, the 99. The text says that he “goes “on” after the lost one, until he finds it”. The preposition is most interesting, “on”, it seems almost a picture of the shepherd who bends down with the heart, with the thought, with the body, on that only sheep. He searches the land, seeks for the prints, which he most surely knows and which he has engraved on his hands (Isa 49: 16); he questions the silence, to hear if there is still an echo of its bleating at a distance. He calls it by name, he repeats the conventional sign, the one with which each day he has welcomed and accompanied it. And finally, he finds it. Yes, it could not be otherwise, but there is no punishment, no violence, no harshness. Only an infinite love and an overflowing joy. Luke says: “He places it on his shoulders very happily...”. He rejoices and celebrates at home with his friends and neighbors. The text does not even say if the shepherd returned to the desert to take back the other 99 sheep.

Before all this, it is clear, very clear, that we should be that only one, that sheep which was alone, loved so much, preferred in that way. We should recognize that if we are lost, that we have sinned, that without the shepherd we are nothing. This is the great passage that the word of the Gospel calls us to fulfill, today: to free ourselves from the weight of our presumed justice, to remove or set aside the yoke of our self-sufficiency and also that we place ourselves on the side of sinners, of the impure, of robbers. Behold why Jesus begins by asking us, “Which man among you?”

“In the desert”

This is the place of the just, of those who believe that they are right, without sin, without a stain. They have not as yet entered into the Promised Land. They are outside, far away, excluded from the joy, from the mercy. Like those who have not accepted the invitation to the banquet of the king and who withdrew, some with one excuse, others with another.

We are in the desert and not in the house, just like the only one. Not at the table of the shepherd, where there is good and substantial bread, where there is the wine which rejoices the heart. The table prepared by the Lord: His Body and His Blood, where the Shepherd becomes Himself the sheep, the immolated Lamb, nourishment of life. He who does not love his brother, who does not open his heart to mercy, as the Shepherd of the flock does, cannot enter into the house, but remains outside. The desert is his inheritance, his dwelling place, and in the desert there is no food, no water, no pasture, nor enclosure for the sheep.

Jesus eats together with sinners, with the publicans, with the prostitutes, with the least, the excluded and prepares the table, His banquet, with rich dishes, excellent wine, and tasty food (Isa 25: 6). He also invites us to this table.

Interesting Parallel Passages:

- 2 Samuel 12: 1-4:

In the same town were two men, one rich, the other poor. The rich man had flocks and herds in great abundance; the poor man had nothing but a ewe lamb, only a single little one which he had bought. He fostered it and it grew up with him and his children, eating his bread, drinking from his cup, sleeping in his arms; it was like a daughter to him..... Matthew 9: 10-13:

Now while he was at table in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and His disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 When He heard this He replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. 13 Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is

what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed, I came to call not the upright, but sinners."

- Luke 19: 1-10: Zacchaeus

- Luke 7: 39:

When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is and what sort of person it is who is touching him and what a bad name she has."

- Luke 5: 27-32:

When He went out after this, He noticed a tax collector, Levi by name, sitting at the tax office, and said to him, "Follow me." And leaving everything Levi got up and followed Him. In His honor Levi held a great reception in his house, and with them at table was a large gathering of tax collectors and others. The Pharisees and their scribes complained to His disciples and said, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus said to them in reply, "It is not those that are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the upright but sinners to repentance."

- Matthew 21: 31-32:

Jesus said to them, "In truth I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, showing the way of uprightness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.'

Brief Comments of the Spiritual Tradition of Carmel:

S. Therese of the Child Jesus:

Speaking of Father Giacinto Loyson, who had left the Carmelite Order and then abandoned the Church, Therese writes to Celine as follows: "It is certain that Jesus desires much more than we do to lead back this poor lost sheep to the flock..." (L 129). "Jesus deprives His sheep of His sensible presence, in order to give His consolation to sinners..." (L 142).

Speaking about Pranzini, of whom she had read his conversion at the supreme moment, just before his execution, when taking the crucifix, he kissed the holy wounds, she writes, "Then his soul went to receive the merciful sentence of the One who declares that in Heaven there will be greater joy for one sinner alone who does penance than for 99 just ones who do not need to do penance..." (MA 46 r).

Blessed Elizabeth:

"The priest in the confessional is the minister of this God who is so good, who leaves his 99 faithful sheep to run and look for the one alone which got lost..." Diary, 13/03/1899).

Saint John of the Cross:

"His desire was so great that the Spouse would liberate and redeem his spouse from the hands of sensuality and of the devil, that having accomplished this, he rejoices like the good Shepherd who, after having gone around very much, he finds the lost sheep and with great joy places it on his shoulders" (CB XXI, Annotation)

The Word and Life

Some questions:

- “... having lost only one of them...” The Gospel immediately calls our attention to the strong and painful reality of getting lost, of the loss. That one sheep of the flock stranded away from the road, separated from the others. It is not a question only of an event, something that happened, but rather it is a characteristic of the sheep; in fact, in verse 6 it is called “the lost one”, almost as if this was its true name.
- Here is the starting point, the truth. It is speaking about us. We are the dispersed sons, the lost ones, the erring ones, that is, the sinners, the publicans. It is useless to continue to believe that we are just, to consider ourselves better than others, worthy of the Kingdom, of God’s presence, almost with the right to grumble, to murmur against Jesus who, instead, pays attention to those who make a mistake. I should ask myself, before this Gospel, if I am ready to fulfill or go through this profound course of conversion, of a very strong interior revision. I must decide myself on which side I want to be: if to allow myself to be carried on the shoulders of the shepherd or to remain at a distance, that is, alone, with my own justice. But if I do not know how to use mercy, if I do not know how to accept, to forgive, to esteem, how can I expect all this for myself?
- “...the 99 in the desert...” I should open the eyes on this reality: the desert. Where do I believe that I am? Where do I live? Where do I walk? Which are my pastures? Do I believe that I am secure, that I dwell in the house of the Lord, among His faithful sons, but perhaps it is truly like that. The Psalm says, “In grassy meadow, the Lord lets me lie”. But do I feel that I am in this rest? Then, why am I so anxious, restless, unsatisfied, always searching something more, better, greater? I look at my life: is it not a bit of a desert? Where there is no love and compassion, where I remain closed off to my brothers and sisters and I do not know how to accept them as they are, with their limitations, with the errors that they commit, in the sufferings that perhaps they inflict on me. There the desert begins, there I am less and there I feel hungry and thirsty. This is the moment to allow my heart to be changed: to recognize myself as miserable in order to become merciful.
- “... he goes after the lost sheep until he finds it...” We have seen that the text describes very delicately the action of the shepherd: he leaves behind all the sheep and goes to look for the only one which is lost. The verb may seem a bit strange, but it is very effective. Like Hosea says concerning God, that He speaks to His People whom He loves, like to a spouse: “There I will speak to her heart” (2:16). It is a movement, it is being carried by love; a patient bending down, tenacious, which does not give up, but which always insists. In fact, the true love is never diminished. The Lord acts in this way towards each one of His sons and daughters. If I look back, if I think about my own history, I become aware of how much love, how much patience, how much pain, He has also experienced for me, to find me, to give me back that which I wasted and lost. He has never abandoned me. I recognize this, it is truly like that.
- But, at this point, what do I do, with such gratuitous love, such great love, overflowing love? If I keep it closed up in my heart, it gets lost. It cannot be kept until the following day, like the manna; otherwise it gets worms, it becomes rotten. Today, I have to hand it over, distribute it. Look out, if I do not love. I try to think about my attitude toward my brothers and sisters, those whom I meet every day, with whom I share my life. How do I behave before them? At the least, am I similar in some way to the beautiful shepherd, to the good shepherd, who goes out to seek, who gets close to, who bends down with tenderness, attention, friendship, or even with love? Or am I superficial, truly unconcerned about anybody, I leave each one to make his own choice, to live his own sorrows, without being ready, in any way, to share with him, to bear them together? What kind of a brother or sister am I? What father or mother am I?

- “Rejoice with me!” This passage ends with a feast, which then becomes a true and proper banquet, according to the description which Luke gives at the end of the parable. A king’s meal, a solemn feast, with the best dishes, held apart, to fatten the animal, for the occasion, with the most beautiful dresses, with shoes on the feet and the ring on the finger, a joy which always becomes greater, which is contagious, a joy together. This is the invitation which the Father, the King, addresses to us every day, every morning; He desires that we also participate in His joy because of the return of His sons, our brothers. Does this upset me, get me angry? Would I rather want to remain peacefully, perhaps with a threatening face of one who wants to settle the accounts with the errors, with the loss of one or the other? Is my heart open? Is it ready for this joy of God? Or do I prefer to remain outside, perhaps to recriminate or reproach what seems to me not given, that is, the part of the patrimony which corresponds to me, the special prize or reward to celebrate with whomever I wish? But I understand well that if I do not enter now into God’s banquet, where the poor have been invited, the limping, the cripple, the blind, those whom nobody wants; if I do not participate in the common joy of mercy, I will remain outside forever, sad, closed up in myself, in darkness and weeping, as the Gospel says.

The Word Becomes Prayer

Psalm 102: 1-4, 8-13

The Lord is good and great in His love.

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 offenses,

cures all your diseases,

He redeems your life from the abyss,

crowns you with faithful love and tenderness;

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 offenses.

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;

Final Prayer

Good and merciful Father, praise to You for Your love which You have revealed to us in Christ, Your Son! You, merciful, call all to become mercy. Help me to recognize that every day I need Your pardon, Your compassion, that I need the love and understanding of my brothers and sisters. May Your Word change my heart and make me capable of following Jesus, to go out every day, together with Him to look for my brothers in love. Amen.

Saturday, June 25, 2022

The Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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, may 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 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 upon 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. What the Virgin Mary intuits in this experience with her 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 journey 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: "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 over and over again: "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 to which the Lord's word calls us, is not a physical journey, but a journey in search 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 indicating accurate, repeated, careful, as some of those who browse, from bottom to top, and second 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 is great to see how Mary opens her heart to Jesus, telling Him what she felt within herself. She is not afraid to tell the truth to her Son, to tell Him the feelings and experiences that they felt deeply. But what is this anguish, this pain that you saw in Mary and Joseph in search of Jesus, who went missing?

These 3 days of looking, the journey to Jerusalem, and not understanding His words afterward, may also be considered a prefiguring the narrative of His death and Resurrection.

- "Kept all these sayings in her heart"

Mary does not understand the words of Jesus, the mystery of His life and His mission and for this remains silent, accepts, makes space, keeps them in her 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 which means literally "keeping through." That is the spiritual operation that Mary carries 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 her heart, all her feelings, her experiences. And there, in the secrecy of ourselves, in our hearts, we can learn to find the Lord Jesus, whom perhaps we had lost.

There is also a loss for Mary and Joseph. Up until now, Joseph was identified with "my father". Now it is changed. He is not just her son, or their son, but son of our Heavenly Father. In all this is another sorrow, one of parents, that they do not understand their child: "But they did not understand what He said to them."

Some Questions

- * There are many foreshadows of the Passion in this passage. Can I identify the depth of things symbolized here?
- * Do I feel like I am seeking the Lord? Or does it not seem important? Is it an active part of my life every day?
- Has anxiety, spoken by Mary, ever been my companion on the journey of 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 help me, give me a light and a key for my life?
- As a parent (past, future, or present), do I see a relationship and partnership with God the Father in raising my children, and do I give room for God to be an active participant in this? Am I a wall between God and them, or am I translator, or do I allow them to build their relationship at the same time?

Closing Prayer

And 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. 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 26, 2022

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

"Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us to read the scriptures with the same mind with which 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 suffering and death. Thus, the cross which had seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the resurrection and source of new life.

Create silence in us so that we may listen to Your voice in creation, 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 on the way to Emmaus, may experience the power 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 the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen."

Reading

A Key to the Reading: The Literary Context

In the context of Luke's Gospel, the text for this Sunday is at the beginning of the new phase of Jesus' activity. The frequent conflicts with the people and the religious authorities (Lk 4: 28; 5: 21, 30; 6: 2, 7; 7: 19, 23, 33-34, 39) confirmed Jesus as being the Servant Messiah as foreseen in Isaiah (Isa 50: 4-9; 53: 12) and as assumed by Jesus Himself from the beginning of His apostolic activities (Lk 4: 18). From now on, Jesus begins to proclaim His passion and death (Lk 9: 22, 43-44) and decides to go to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51). This change in the course of events created a crisis among the disciples (Mk 8: 31-33). They cannot understand and are afraid (Lk 9: 45), because they still hold on to the old way of thinking of a glorious Messiah. Luke describes various episodes touching on the old mentality of the disciples: the desire to be the greatest (Lk 9: 46-48); the will to control the use of the name of Jesus (Lk 9: 49-50); the violent reaction of James and John at the refusal of the Samaritans to welcome Jesus (Lk 9: 51-55). Luke also points out how hard Jesus tries to get His disciples to understand the new concept

concerning His mission. This Sunday's text (Lk 9: 51-62) gives some examples of the way Jesus tried to form His disciples.

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Luke 9: 51-52: Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem.
- Luke 9: 52-53: A village in Samaria does not welcome Him.
- Luke 9: 54: The reaction of John and James at the Samaritans' refusal.
- Luke 9: 55-56: Jesus' reaction to the violence of James and John.
- Luke 9: 57-58: Jesus' first condition for following Him.
- Luke 9: 59-60: Jesus' second condition for following Him.
- Luke 9: 61-62: Jesus' third condition for following Him.

The Gospel Text - Luke 9: 51-62

When the days for Jesus' being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem, and he sent messengers ahead of him. On the way they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his reception there, but they would not welcome him because the destination of his journey was Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they journeyed to another village. As they were proceeding on their journey someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." And to another he said, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." And another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home." To him Jesus said, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God."

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 the text pleased you most and which touched you most?
- What defects and limitations of the disciples can we discover in the text? Do we share those defects and limitations?
- What teaching method does Jesus use to correct these defects?
- What facts from the Old Testament are recalled in this text?
- With which of these three vocations (vv. 57-62) do you identify yourself? Why?
- Which of the defects of Jesus' disciples is most prevalent in us, His disciples of today?

A Key to the Reading

that may help us to go deeper into the theme.

The Historical Context of Our Text:

The historical context of Luke's Gospel always contains the following two aspects; the context of the time of Jesus in the 30's in Palestine, and the context of the Christian communities of the 80's in Greece for whom Luke is writing his Gospel.

At the time of Jesus in Palestine. It was not easy for Jesus to form His disciples. It is not simply the fact of following Jesus and living in community that makes a person holy and perfect. The greatest difficulty comes from "the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod" (Mk 8: 15), that is, from the time's dominant ideology, promoted by the official religion (the Pharisees) and by the government (the Herodians). Fighting against the *leaven* was part of the formation He gave His disciples; especially that the manner of thinking of the great had taken deep root and always raised its head again in the minds of the little ones, the disciples. The text of our meditation this Sunday gives us an insight into the way Jesus faced this problem.

In Luke's time, within the Greek communities. For Luke, it was important to help the Christians and not leave them prey to the "leaven" of the Roman Empire and pagan religion. The same applies today. The "leaven" of the neo-liberal system, spread by the media, propagates a consumerist and self-centered mentality, contrary to Gospel values. It is not easy for people to realize that they are being duped: "What I have in my hand is nothing but a lie!" (Isa 44: 20).

A Commentary on the Text:

- Luke 9: 51-52a: Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem.
"Now as the time drew near for Him to be taken up to heaven". This statement shows that Luke reads Jesus' life in the light of the prophets. He wants to make it quite clear to his readers that Jesus is the Messiah in whom is accomplished that which the prophets foretold. The same manner of speaking is in John's Gospel: "Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to pass from this world to the Father, ..." (Jn 13: 1). Jesus is obedient to the Father, "He decisively set out towards Jerusalem."
- Luke 9: 52-53: A village in Samaria does not welcome Him.
Hospitality was one of the pillars of community life. It was difficult for anyone to let someone spend the night outside without welcoming him (Jn 18: 1-5; 19: 1-3; Gen 19: 15-21). But in Jesus' time, the rivalry between Jews and Samaritans urged the people of Samaria not to welcome Jews who were on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and this led the Jews from Galilee not to pass through Samaria when they went to Jerusalem. They preferred to go through the valley of the Jordan. Jesus is against this discrimination and, therefore, goes through Samaria. Consequently, He suffers discrimination and is not made welcome.
- Luke 9: 54: The violent reaction of John and James at the refusal of the Samaritans.
Inspired by the example of the prophet Elijah, James and John want to call down fire from heaven to exterminate that village! (2 Kings 1: 10, 12; 1 Kings 18: 38). They think that by the simple fact that they are with Jesus, everyone should welcome them. They still cling to the old mentality, that of privileged persons. They think that they can keep God on their side to defend them.
- Luke 9: 55-56: Jesus' reaction to the violence of James and John.
"Jesus turned and rebuked them." Some versions of the bible, basing their translation on some old manuscripts wrote: "You know not what spirit dwells in you. The Son of Man did not come to take the life of men, but to save it". The fact that someone is with Jesus does not give that person the right to think that he or she is superior to others or that others owe them honor. The "Spirit" of Jesus demands the opposite: to forgive seventy times seven (Mt 18: 22). Jesus chose to forgive the criminal who prayed to Him on the cross (Lk 23: 43).

- Luke 9: 57-58: The first condition for following Jesus. One says, "I will follow you wherever you go". Jesus' reply is very clear and without any hidden meaning. He leaves no room for doubt: the disciple who wishes to follow Jesus must impress this on his or her mind and heart: Jesus has nothing, not even a stone to lay His head on. The foxes and the birds are better off because they at least have holes and nests.
- Luke 9: 59-60: The second condition for following Jesus. Jesus says to one: "Follow Me!" These were the words addressed to the first disciples: "Follow Me" (Mk 1: 17, 20; 2: 14). The reaction of the one called is positive. The person is ready to follow Jesus. He only asks that he may be allowed to bury his father. Jesus' reply is hard: "Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God". This is probably a popular proverb used for saying that one has to be radical in one's decision making. The one who is ready to follow Jesus must leave everything behind. It is as though one were dead to all one's possessions resurrected to another life.
- Luca 9: 61-62: The third condition for following Jesus. A third one says, "I will follow you, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home." Again, the reply of Jesus is hard and radical: "Once the hand is laid on the plow, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Jesus is more demanding than the prophet Elijah when Elijah called Elisha to be his disciple (1 Kings 19: 19-21). The New Testament is greater than the Old Testament in its demands on the practice of love.

A Further Deepening: Jesus the Formator

The process of the formation of the disciples is demanding, slow, and painful, because it is not easy to give birth to a new experience of God in them, a new vision of life and of the neighbor. It is like being born again! (Jn 3: 5-9). The old mindset keeps creeping back in the life of people, of families and communities. Jesus spares no effort in forming His disciples. He gave much time to this, not always successfully. Judas betrayed Him, Peter denied Him, and in the moment of trial, all abandoned Him. Only the women and John stayed close to Him, near the cross. But the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent to us after His resurrection completed the work Jesus began (Jn 14: 26; 16: 13). Apart from what we have said concerning the text of this Sunday (Lk 9: 51-62), Luke speaks of many other examples to show how Jesus went about forming His disciples and helping them to overcome the misleading mentality of the time:

In Luke 9: 46-48 the disciples argue among themselves as to who is the greatest among them. The competitive mindset here is that of fighting for power, characteristic of the society of the Roman Empire, and it had already infiltrated the just-beginning and small community of Jesus! Jesus tells them to hold to the opposite way of thinking. He takes a child to His side and identifies Himself with the child: "Anyone who welcomes this little child in My name welcomes Me; and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes the one who sent Me!" The disciples were arguing as to who was *the greatest*, and Jesus tells them to look at and welcome *the smallest*! This is the point most stressed by Jesus and the one to which He witnessed: "[I] did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10: 45).

In Luke 9: 49-50, someone who was not part of the group of the disciples was using the name of Jesus to drive out devils. John saw him and stopped him: "Let us stop him because we do not know him". In the name of the community, John stops a good action! He thought he owned Jesus and wanted to stop anyone from using the name of Jesus to do good. He wanted a closed community. This was the old mentality of the "Chosen people, a separate people!" Jesus replies: "Do not forbid him, because anyone who is not against you is for you". The aim of formation cannot lead to a feeling of privilege

and ownership, but must lead to an attitude of service. What is important for Jesus is not whether someone is part of the group or not, but whether the person is doing the good that should be done by the community.

Here are some more examples of the way Jesus educated His disciples. It was a way of giving human form to the experience He had of God the Father. You can complete the list:

- He involves them in His mission and on their return He goes over what happened with them (Mk 6: 7; Lk 9: 1-2; 10: 1-12, 17-20)
- He corrects them when they go wrong (Lk 9: 46-48; Mk 10: 13-15)
- He helps them to discern (Mk 9: 28-29)
- He questions them when they are slow (Mk 4: 13; 8: 14-21)
- He prepares them for the conflict (Mt 10: 17ff)
- He reflects with them concerning present problems (Lk 13: 1-5)
- He sends them to look at reality (Mk 8: 27-29; Jn 4: 35; Mt 16: 1-3)
- He confronts them with the needs of the people (Jn 6: 5)
- He teaches them that the needs of the people are above ritual prescriptions (Mt 12: 7, 12)
- He defends them when they are criticized by their adversaries (Mk 2: 19; 7: 5-13)
- He thinks of their rest and nourishment (Mk 6: 31; Jn 21: 9)
- He spends time alone with them to teach them (Mk 4: 34; 7: 17; 9: 30-31; 10: 10; 13: 3)
- He insists on vigilance and teaches them to pray (Lk 11: 1-13; Mt 6: 5-15).

Psalm 19 (18), 8-14

The Law of God - Source of Formation

The precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the ordinances of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them is Thy
servant warned;

in keeping them there is great reward. But who can discern his errors?

Clear me from hidden faults.

Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over
me!

Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight,
O Lord,
my rock and my redeemer.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You 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

what 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 27, 2022

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 8: 18-22

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

Reflection

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

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

people who want to follow Jesus are Samaritans. Luke stresses the ecumenical openness of Jesus who also accepts non-Jews to be His disciples.

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

Personal Questions

- In what way am I living the "following of Jesus"?
- The foxes have their dens and the birds of the sky have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. How can we live this aspect of discipleship today?

- In what ways and how often do I tell Jesus to “hold off” and wait while I do my own thing at the moment, rather following always and everywhere?
- In what way is living a conventional life like telling Jesus to wait? If He calls us radically like He called the disciples, and we say “yes,” how is it that we continue to live “like everyone else” still?

For Further Study

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

Concluding Prayer

Fix your gaze on Yahweh and your face will grow bright, you will never hang your head in shame.

A pauper calls out and Yahweh hears, saves him from all his troubles. (Ps 34: 5-6)

Tuesday, June 28, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

You call Your children to walk in the light of Christ.

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

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 8: 23-27

As Jesus got into a boat, his disciples followed him. Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves; but he was asleep. They came and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" He said to them, "Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?" Then he got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. The men were amazed and said, "What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?"

Reflection

- Matthew writes for the converted Jews of the years 70's who felt lost like a boat in the middle of a stormy sea, without the hope of being able to get to the desired port. Jesus seems to be asleep in the boat and it seems to them that no divine power will

come to save them from the persecution. In the face of this desperate and anguished situation, Matthew puts together several episodes of the life of Jesus to help the community discover, in the midst of an apparent absence, the welcoming and powerful presence of Jesus the conqueror who dominates the sea (Mt 8: 23-27), who conquers and casts away the power of evil (Mt 9: 28-34) and who has the power to forgive sins (Mt 9: 1-8). In other words, Matthew wants to communicate hope and to suggest that the communities have no reason to fear. This is the reason for the narration of the storm calmed by Jesus in today's Gospel.

- Matthew 8: 23: *The starting point: to enter into the boat.* Matthew follows the Gospel of Mark but makes it shorter and inserts it in the new outline which he has adopted. In Mark, the day had been very tiring because of the work that they had done. Having finished the discourse of the parables (Mk 4: 3-34), the disciples take Jesus into the boat and He was so tired that He fell asleep on a cushion (Mk 4: 38). Matthew's text is very brief. It only says that Jesus went into the boat and that the disciples accompanied Him. Jesus is the Master. The disciples *follow* the Master.
- Matthew 8: 24-25: *The desperate situation: "We are lost!"* The Lake of Galilee is close to high mountains. Sometimes, as the wind is forced upward by the mountains, moisture condenses over the lake causing a sudden storm. Strong wind, agitated sea, and a boat full of water are the result! The disciples were experienced fishermen. If they thought that they were about to sink, it meant that the situation was truly dangerous! Jesus, however, is not aware and continues to sleep. They cried out, "*Save us, Lord, we are lost!*" In Matthew the profound sleep of Jesus is not only a sign of tiredness. It is also the expression of the calm trust of Jesus in God. The contrast between the attitude of Jesus and that of the disciples is enormous!
- Matthew 8: 26: *The reaction of Jesus: "Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith!"* Jesus wakes up, not because of the waves, but because of the desperate cry of the disciples. He turns to them saying, "*Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith!*" He then stood up and rebuked the winds and the sea, because there was no danger. It is like when one arrives at a friend's house, and the dog, at the side of his master, barks very much. One should not be afraid, because the master is present and controls the situation. The episode of the storm calmed by Jesus evokes the episode, when people, without fear, passed across the water of the sea (Ex 14: 22). Jesus recreates this episode. He recalls the prophet Isaiah who said to the people: "*If you have to go across the water, I will be with you!*" (Isa 43: 2). The episode of the calmed storm recalls and fulfills the prophecy announced in Psalm 107:
 - Those who ploughed the waves in the sea on the ships, plying their trade on the great ocean, they have seen the works of the Lord, His wonders in the deep.
 - By His word He raised a storm-wind lashing up towering waves.
 - Up to the sky then down to the depths; their stomachs were turned to water. They staggered and reeled like drunkards, and all their skill went under.
 - They cried out to Yahweh in their distress. He rescued them from their plight. He reduced the storm to calm, and all the waters subsided.
 - He brought them overjoyed at the stillness, to the port where they were bound (Ps 107: 23-30)
- Matthew 8: 27: *The fear of the disciples: "Who is this man?"* Jesus asks, "*Why are you so frightened?*" The disciples do not know what to answer. Astounded, they ask themselves, "*What kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?*" In

spite of the long time that they had lived with Jesus, they still do not know who He is. Jesus seems to be a foreigner to them! Who is this man?

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

Personal Questions

- What was the agitated sea at the time of Jesus? What was the agitated sea at the time when Matthew wrote his Gospel? Today, what is the agitated sea for us? Have you ever been on the point of drowning in the agitated waters of the sea of your life? What saved you?
- Who is Jesus for me? Which is the name of Jesus which expresses my faith and my love better?
- Do I take time to ask and pray for “the peace of Christ”, to have calm in my personal storms?

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, June 29, 2022

St. Peter and Paul, Apostles

Opening Prayer

“Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind with which 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 suffering and death. Thus, the cross which

had seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the resurrection and source of new life.

Create in us silence so that we may listen to Your voice in creation, 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 power 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 – Matthew 16: 13-19

A Key to the Reading:

The liturgical text of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul is taken from the Gospel of Matthew: 16: 13-19. In our commentary we also include verses 20 -23, because in the entirety of the text, verses 13 to 23, Jesus turns to Peter and twice calls him "rock". Once he calls him the foundation stone (Mt 16: 18) and once the rock of scandal (Mt 16: 23). Both statements complement each other. While reading the text, it is good to pay attention to Peter's attitude and to the solemn words that Jesus addresses to him on two occasions.

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- 13-14: Jesus wishes to know what people think of him.
- 15-16: Jesus asks the disciples and Peter makes his confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of God!"
- 17-20: Then we have Jesus' solemn reply to Peter (a key phrase for today's feast).
- 21-22: Jesus explains the meaning of Messiah, but Peter reacts and refuses to accept.
- 22-23: Jesus' solemn reply to Peter.

The Text:

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi 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." 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 him 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."

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.

- Today there are many who want to put themselves before Jesus and His message. They come with an attitude that distorts His words, often for personal gain. Can you see and identify some of them? What rebuke might they be deserving of?
- Who do the people think Jesus is? Who do Peter and the disciples think Jesus is?
- There can be many ways to deny Jesus, for instance, to be embarrassed to discuss such things in "polite company". Have I ever denied Jesus?
- Peter is rock in two ways: what are they?
- What kind of rock is our community?
- In the text we find several opinions as to who Jesus is and several ways of presenting the faith. Today too, there are several opinions as to who Jesus is. Which opinions does our community know? What kind of mission does that imply for us?

A Key to the Reading

to enter deeper into the theme.

The Context:

In the narrative parts of his Gospel, Matthew follows the sequence of Mark's Gospel. However, he also quotes a source known to him and Luke. Rarely does he give information that is solely his, as in today's Gospel. This text and the dialogue between Jesus and Peter is interpreted variously, even in opposite directions in the various Christian churches. In the Catholic Church, this text forms the basis for the primacy of Peter. Without diminishing in any way the importance of this text, it might be good to situate it in the context of Matthew's Gospel, where elsewhere the qualities ascribed to Peter are also attributed to other people. They do not belong exclusively to Peter.

Commentary on the Text:

- a) Matthew 16: 13-16 The opinions of the people and those of the disciples concerning Jesus.
Jesus wishes to know what people think of Him. The answers are quite varied: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. When Jesus asks the disciples' opinion, Peter replies in their name: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Peter's reply is not new. On a previous occasion, when Jesus walked on the water, the other disciples had made a similar profession of faith: "Truly You are the Son of God!" (Mt 14: 33). This is an acknowledgment that in Jesus the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled. In John's Gospel, Martha makes the same profession of faith: "You are the Christ, the Son of God who is come into the world" (Jn 11: 27).
- Matthew 16: 17 - Jesus' reply to Peter: Blessed are you, Peter!
Jesus proclaims Peter "blessed" because he has been given a revelation from the Father. Jesus' reply is not new. On a previous occasion, Jesus had made the same proclamation of blessedness to the disciples because they were hearing and seeing that which no one else knew before (Mt 13: 16), and He praised the Father because He had revealed the Son to little ones and not to the learned (Mt 11: 25). Peter is one of the little ones to whom the Father reveals Himself. The perception that God is

present in Jesus does not "come from flesh and blood", it is not the result of study or merit of human effort, but a gift that God gives to whom He pleases.

- Matthew 16: 18-20 - Peter's qualifications: Being foundation stone and taking possession of the keys of the Kingdom.
 - 1. Being Rock: Peter has to be rock, that is, he has to be a strong foundation for the Church, so that she may stand up to the assaults of the gates of hell. Through these words addressed by Jesus to Peter, Matthew encourages the suffering and persecuted communities in Syria and Palestine, who saw in Peter the leadership that had marked them from the beginning. In spite of being weak and persecuted, they had a solid foundation, guaranteed by the words of Jesus. In those days, the communities cultivated a very strong sentimental tie with the leaders who had established them. Thus, the communities of Syria and Palestine cultivated their relationship with the person of Peter; those of Greece with the person of Paul; some communities in Asia with the person of the beloved disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypse. Identifying themselves with the leader of their origin helped them to grow better in their identity and spirituality. But this also gave rise to conflict as in the case of the community of Corinth (1Cor 1: 11-12). Even today, there are Christian communities, ecclesial communities, who follow a particular leader and identify with him or her.

Being rock as foundation of the faith, recalls to mind the word of God to the people in exile in Babylonia: "Listen to me, you who pursue justice, who seek the Lord; look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the pit from which you were quarried; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sara, who gave you birth; when he was but one, I called him, I blessed him and made him many" (Is 51: 1-2). When applied to Peter, this quality of foundation stone points to a new beginning for the people of God.

- 2. The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom to bind and to loosen, that is, to reconcile people with God. The same power of binding and loosing is given to the communities (Mt 18: 8) and to the disciples (Jn 20: 23). One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists is reconciliation and pardon (Mt 5: 7, 23-24, 38-42, 44-48; 6: 14-15; 18: 15-35). The reality is that in the 80s and 90s, there were many tensions and divisions within families in the communities in Syria because of faith in Jesus. Some accepted Him as Messiah whereas others did not, and this was the source of many contrasting views and conflicts. Matthew insists on reconciliation. Reconciliation kept on being one of the most important tasks of coordinators of the communities. Like Peter they must bind and loose, that is, work so as to bring about reconciliation, mutual acceptance, and build up true fraternity.

The Church: the word Church, in Greek, *ekklesia*, is found 105 times in the New Testament, almost always in the Acts and the Epistles. We find the word only three times in the Gospels and only in Matthew. The word means "a called assembly" or "chosen assembly." The word applies to the people gathered, called by the Word of God, a people that seeks to live the message of the Kingdom brought by Jesus. The Church is not the Kingdom, but an instrument and a sign of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is greater. In the Church, the community, all must see or should see what happens when a group of people allows God to rule and take possession of their life.

- Matthew 16: 21-22 - Jesus Completes What is Lacking in Peter's Reply, and Peter Reacts by Not Accepting.

Peter had confessed: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" In keeping with the prevailing ideology of the time, he imagined a glorious Messiah. Jesus corrects

him: "It is necessary that the Messiah suffer and be killed in Jerusalem." With the words "it is necessary", He says that suffering had been foreseen in the prophecies (Is 53: 2-8). If the disciples accept Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, then they must accept Him also as the Servant Messiah who must die. Not just the triumph of glory but also the way of the cross! But Peter will not accept Jesus' correction and tries to change His mind.

- Matthew 16: 23 - Jesus' Reply to Peter: Rock of Scandal.

Jesus' reply is surprising: "Get behind me, Satan, you are a scandal to me, for you do not mind the things of God, but those of men!" Satan is the one who leads us away from the path marked out for us by God. Jesus literally says: "Get behind me!" (in Latin, *vada retro!*). Peter wanted to steer and point the way. Jesus says: "Get behind me!" Jesus, not Peter, is the one who points the way and sets the rhythm. The disciple must follow the master. He must live in constant conversion. Jesus' word was also a message to all those who led the communities. They must "follow" Jesus and they may not go before as Peter wished to do. It is not only they who are able to point the way or the manner. On the contrary, like Peter, instead of being a rock of support, they can become rock of scandal, a stumbling block. Such were some leaders of the communities at the time of Matthew. There were ambiguities. The same may happen among us today.

A Further Explanation of the Gospels Concerning Peter:

A portrait of St. Peter

Peter was transformed from fisherman of fish to fisherman of men (Mk 1: 7). He was married (Mk 1: 30). He was a good man and very human. He tended naturally to a role of leadership among the twelve disciples of Jesus. Jesus respected this natural quality and made Peter the leader of His first community (Jn 21: 17). Before joining Jesus' community, Peter's name was Simon bar Jona (Mt 16: 17), Simon son of Jonah. Jesus nicknamed him *Cephas* or Rock, and this then became Peter (Lk 6: 14).

By nature, Peter could have been anything but rock. He was courageous in speech, but at the hour of danger he fell victim to fear and fled. For instance, when Jesus came walking on the water, Peter asked: "Jesus, can I too come to you on the water?" Jesus replied: "Come, Peter!" Peter then went out of the boat and started walking on the water. But when a bigger wave came along, he was afraid and began to sink. He then cried out: "Save me, Lord!" Jesus took hold of him and saved him (Mt 14: 28-31). At the last supper, Peter said to Jesus: "I shall never deny you, Lord!" (Mk 14: 31); yet a few hours later, in the palace of the high priest, in front of a servant girl, when Jesus had already been arrested, Peter denied Jesus, swearing that he had no connection with Him (Mk 14: 66-72). In the garden of olives, when Jesus had been arrested, he even used his word (Jn 18: 10), but then fled, leaving Jesus alone (Mk 14: 50). Peter was not naturally rock!

Yet the weak and human Peter, so like us, did become rock because Jesus had prayed for him: "Peter, I have prayed for you so that your faith may not fail; and, when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22: 31-32). That is why Jesus was able to say: "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church" (Mt 16: 18). Jesus helped him to become rock. After the resurrection, in Galilee, Jesus appeared to Peter and asked him twice: "Peter, do you love Me?" And Peter replied twice: "Lord, you know that I love you" (Jn 21: 15, 16). When Jesus put the same question to him the third time, Peter was hurt. He must have remembered that he had denied Him three times. So he answered: "Lord, you know all things! You know that I love you!" It was then that Jesus entrusted to him the care of the sheep: "Peter, feed My sheep!" (Jn 21: 17).

With Jesus' help, the strength of the rock grew in Peter and He revealed Himself on the day of Pentecost. On that day, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples, Peter opened the doors of the upper room where they were all gathered behind closed doors for fear of the Jews (Jn 20: 19), and, infused with courage, began to announce the Good News of Jesus to the people (Acts 2: 14-40). From then on, he never stopped! Because of this courageous proclamation of the resurrection, he was arrested (Acts 4: 3). During the interrogation he was forbidden to announce the good news (Acts 4: 18), but Peter did not obey the prohibition. He said: "We must obey God rather than man!" (Acts 4: 19; 5: 29). He was arrested again (Acts 5: 18, 26). He was scourged (Acts 5: 40). But he said: "Thank you very much. But we shall go on!" (cf. Acts 5: 42). Tradition tells us that at the end of his life, when he was in Rome, Peter had another moment of fear. But then he went back, was arrested and condemned to death on the cross. However, he asked that he might be crucified with his head down. He thought that he was not worthy to die in the same way as his master, Jesus. Peter was true to himself and to Jesus to the very end.

Psalm 103 (102)

Thanksgiving: Bless the Lord, O my soul;
and all that is within me, bless His holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all His benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.
The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known His ways to Moses,
His acts to the people of Israel.
The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always chide,
nor will He keep His anger for ever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor requite us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far does He remove our transgressions from us.
As a father pities his children,
so the Lord pities those who fear Him.
For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.
As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the Lord
is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him,
and His righteousness to children's children,

to those who keep His covenant
and remember to do His commandments.
The Lord has established His throne in the heavens,
and His kingdom rules over all.
Bless the Lord, O you His angels,
you mighty ones who do His word,
hearkening to the voice of His word!
Bless the Lord, all His hosts,
his ministers that do His will!
Bless the Lord, all His works,
in all places of His dominion.
Bless the Lord, O my soul!

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You 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 the Word but also practice it. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Thursday, June 30, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 1-8

After entering a boat, Jesus made the crossing, and came into his own town. And there people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Courage, child, your sins are forgiven." At that, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said, "Why do you harbor evil thoughts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"— he then said to the paralytic, "Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home." He rose and went home. When the crowds saw this, they were struck with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to men.

Reflection

- The extraordinary authority of Jesus. To the reader, Jesus appears as a person invested with extraordinary authority by means of words and actions (Mt 9: 6-8). The

authoritative word of Jesus strikes evil at its root: in the case of the paralytic man, on sin that affects the man in his liberty and obstructs his living: “Your sins are forgiven” (v. 5); “Rise, pick up your bed and go home” (v. 6). Truly all the forms of paralysis of the heart and mind to which we are subject are canceled by the authority of Jesus (9:6), because during His life on earth He met all these forms. The authoritative and effective word of Jesus awakens paralyzed humanity (9: 5-7) and gives it the gift of walking (9: 6) in a renewed faith

- The encounter with the paralytic. After the storm and a visit to the country of the Gadarenes, Jesus returns to Capernaum, His city. And as He was on His way, He met the paralytic. The healing did not take place in a house, but along the road. Therefore, along the road that leads to Capernaum they brought Him a paralytic man. Jesus addresses him, calling him “My son,” a gesture of attention that soon becomes a gesture of salvation: “your sins are forgiven you” (v. 2) The forgiveness of sins which Jesus pronounces on the part of God to the paralytic refers to the bond between sickness, failure, and sin. This is the first time that the evangelist attributes this particular divine power to Jesus in an explicit way. For the Jews, a person’s illness was considered a punishment because of sins committed. The physical illness was always considered a consequence of one’s own or one’s parents’ moral evil (Jn 9: 2). Jesus restores to man the condition of salvation freeing him from illness as well as from sin.
- For some of those who were present, for the scribes, the words of Jesus which announced forgiveness of sins was a true and proper blasphemy. According to them, Jesus was arrogant because God alone can forgive sins. They did not manifest openly such a judgment of Jesus but expressed it by murmuring among themselves. Jesus, who penetrates their hearts, sees their considerations and reproves them because of their unbelief. The expression of Jesus “To prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” (v. 6) He is going to indicate that not only God can forgive sins, but with Jesus, also man.
- The crowd, in contrast to the scribes, is seized by fear before the cure of the paralytic and glorifies God. The crowd is struck by the power to forgive sins manifested in the healing. People exult because God has granted such power to the Son of Man. Is it possible to attribute this to the ecclesial community where forgiveness of sins was granted by order of Jesus? Matthew has presented this episode on forgiveness of sins with the intention of applying it to fraternal relationships within the ecclesial community. In it the practice to forgive sins, by delegation of Jesus, was already in force; a practice which was not shared in the Synagogue. The theme of forgiveness of sins is repeated also in Mt 18 and, at the end of Matthew’s Gospel it is affirmed that this is rooted in the death of Jesus on the Cross (26: 28). But in our context the forgiveness of sins is linked with the demand of mercy present in the episode which follows, the call of Matthew: “...mercy is what pleases Me, not sacrifice. And indeed, I came to call not the righteous but sinners” (Mt 9: 13). Such words of Jesus mean to say that He has made visible the forgiveness of God, above all, in His relationships with the Publicans or tax collectors, and sinners, in sitting at table with them.
- This account takes up again the problem of sin and the forgiveness which should be given. It is a story that should occupy a privileged place in the preaching of our ecclesial communities.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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