



Lectio Divina

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Lectio Divina July 2022

Lectio Divina July 2022	2
Friday, July 1, 2022	3
Saturday, July 2, 2022	5
Sunday, July 3, 2020	6
Monday, July 4, 2022	11
Tuesday, July 5, 2022	14
Wednesday, July 6, 2022	16
Thursday, July 7, 2022	18
Friday, July 8, 2022	20
Saturday, July 09, 2022	23
Sunday, July 10, 2022	24
Monday, July 11, 2022	27
Tuesday, July 12, 2022	30
Wednesday, July 13, 2022	32
Thursday, July 14, 2022	34
Friday, July 15, 2022	36
Saturday, July 16, 2022	39
Sunday, July 17, 2022	40
Monday, July 18, 2022	45
Tuesday, July 19, 2022	48
Wednesday, July 20, 2022	49
Thursday, July 21, 2022	52
Friday, July 22, 2022	54
Saturday, July 23, 2022	56
Sunday, July 24, 2022	58
Monday, July 25, 2022	64
Tuesday, July 26, 2022	66
Wednesday, July 27, 2022	68
Thursday, July 28, 2022	70
Friday, July 29, 2022	72
Saturday, July 30, 2022	74
Sunday, July 31, 2022	76

Friday, July 1, 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: 9-13

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

Reflection

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

- Matthew 9: 9 - *The call to follow Jesus*. The first persons called to follow Jesus are four fishermen, all Jewish (Mt 4: 18-22). Now Jesus calls a tax collector, considered a sinner and treated as an unclean person by the community of the most observant of the Pharisees. In the other Gospels, this tax collector is called Levi. Here, his name is Matthew, which means *gift of God or given by God*. The communities, instead of excluding the tax collector and of considering him unclean, should consider him a *Gift of God* for the community, because his presence makes the community become a sign of salvation for all! Like the first four who were called, in the same way also Matthew, the tax collector, leaves everything that he has and follows Jesus. The following of Jesus requires breaking away from many things. Matthew leaves the tax office, his source of revenue and follows Jesus!

- Matthew 9:10: *Jesus sits at table with sinners and tax collectors.* At that time the Jews lived separated from the tax collectors and sinners and they did not eat with them at the same table. The Christian Jews should break away from this isolation and sit at table with the tax collectors and with the unclean, according to the teaching given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mountain, the expression of the universal love of God the Father (Mt 5: 44-48). The mission of the communities was that of offering a place to those who did not have it. But this new law was not accepted by all. In some communities persons coming from paganism, even if they were Christians, were not accepted around the same table (cf. Ac 10: 28; 11: 3; Ga 2: 12). The text of today's Gospel shows us Jesus who sits at table with tax collectors and sinners in the same house, around the same table.
- Matthew 9: 11: *The question of the Pharisees. Jews were forbidden to sit at table with the tax collectors and with sinners, but Jesus does not follow this prohibition. Rather he becomes a friend to them. The Pharisees seeing the attitude of Jesus, ask the disciples: "Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?"* This question may be interpreted as an expression of their desire to know why Jesus acts in that way. Others interpret the question like a criticism of Jesus' behavior, because for over five hundred years, from the time of the slavery in Babylon until the time of Jesus, the Jews had observed the laws of purity. This secular observance became a strong sign of identity. At the same time, it was a factor of their separation in the midst of other peoples. Thus, because of the laws on purity, they could not nor did they succeed to sit around the same table to eat with tax collectors. To eat with tax collectors meant to get contaminated, to become unclean. The precepts of legal purity were rigorously observed, in Palestine as well as in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora. At the time of Jesus, there were more than five hundred precepts to keep purity. In the years 70's, at the time when Matthew wrote, this conflict was very actual.
- Matthew 9: 12-13: *"Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice.* Jesus hears the question of the Pharisees to the disciples, and he answers with two clarifications: the first one is taken from common sense: *"It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick."* The second one is taken from the Bible: *"Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice."* Through these clarifications, Jesus makes explicit and clarifies his mission among the people: *"I have not come to call the upright but sinners."* Jesus denies the criticism of the Pharisees; he does not accept their arguments, because they came from a false idea of the Law of God. He himself invokes the Bible: *"Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice."* For Jesus, mercy is more important than legal purity. He refers to the prophetic tradition to say that mercy has greater value for God than all sacrifices (Ho 6: 6; Is 1: 10-17). God has profound mercy and is moved before the failures of his people (Ho 11: 8-9).

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, July 2, 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: 14-17

The disciples of John approached Jesus and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

Reflection

- Matthew 9:14: *The question of John's disciples concerning the practice of fasting.* Fasting is quite an ancient usage, practiced by almost all religions. Jesus Himself practiced it for forty days (Mt 4:2). But He does not insist that the disciples do the same thing. He leaves them free. Because of this, the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees, who were obliged to fast, want to know why Jesus does not insist on fasting: "*Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not?*"
- Matthew 9:15: *Jesus' answer.* Jesus answers with a comparison in the form of a question: "*Surely the bridegroom's attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them?*" Jesus associates fasting with mourning, and He considers Himself the bridegroom. When the bridegroom is with His friends, that is, during the wedding feast, they have no need to fast. When Jesus is with them, with His disciples, it is a feast, the wedding feast. Therefore, they should not fast. But one day the bridegroom will go away. It will be a day of mourning. Then, if they want, they can fast. Jesus refers to His death. He knows and feels that if He continues on this way of liberation, the authorities will want to kill Him.
- Matthew 9:16-17: *New wine in new wineskins!* In these two verses, the Gospel of Matthew gives two separate sayings of Jesus on the patch of new cloth on an old cloak and on the new wine in new skins. These words throw light on the discussions and the conflicts of Jesus with religious authority of the time. A patch of new cloth

is not put on an old cloak, because when it is washed, the new piece of cloth shrinks and pulls on the old cloak and tears it and the tear becomes bigger. Nobody puts new wine in old skins, because when the new wine ferments, it tears the old skins. New wine in new skins! The religion defended by the religious authority was like a piece of old cloth, like an old wineskin. Both the disciples of John and the Pharisees tried to renew the religion. In reality, they barely put some patches, and because of this, they ran the risk of compromising and harming both the new and the old uses. The new wine which Jesus brings to us tears the old skins. It is necessary to know how to separate things. Most probably, Matthew presents these words of Jesus to orientate the communities in the years of the 80's. There was a group of Jewish Christians who wanted to replace the newness of Jesus with the Judaism of the time before His coming. Jesus is not against what is "old." He does not want what is old to be imposed on that which is *new*. Similarly, Vatican II cannot be reread with the mentality before the Council, as some try to do today.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, July 3, 2020

14th Sunday of 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 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."

Reading

A Key to the Reading:

Jesus' preaching draws many people (Mk 3: 7-8). A small community begins to form around him. At first, two persons (Mk 1: 16-18); then another two (Mk 1: 19-20); then twelve (Mk 3: 13- 19); and now in our text, more than seventy-two persons (Lk 10: 1). The community continues to grow. One thing Jesus insists on is community life. He set the example. He never wished to work alone. The first thing he did at the beginning of his preaching in Galilee was to call people to live with him and share in his mission (Mk 1: 16-20; 3: 14). The ambience of fraternity that grows around Jesus is a **foretaste of the Kingdom**, a proof of the new experience of God with the Father. Thus, if God is Father and Mother, then we are all one family of brothers and sisters. Thus is the community born, the new family (cf. Mk 3: 34-35).

This Sunday's Gospel tells us of practical things to direct the seventy-two disciples in their proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom and in rebuilding community life. Proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and rebuilding community life are two sides of the same coin. One does not exist and cannot make sense without the other. While reading the text, try to look for this connection between community life and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Luke 10: 1: The Mission
- Luke 10: 2-3: Co-responsibility
- Luke 10: 4-6: Hospitality
- Luke 10: 7: Sharing
- Luke 10: 8: Communion around the table
- Luke 10: 9^a: Welcoming those excluded
- Luke 10: 9^b: The coming of the Kingdom
- Luke 10: 10-12: Wiping the dust from their feet
- Luke 10: 17-20: The names written in heaven

Text:

1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself would be visiting. 2 And he said to them, 'The harvest is rich but the laborers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to do his harvesting. 3 Start off now, but look, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. 4 Take no purse with you, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!" 6 And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you. 7 Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not move from house to house. 8 Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is put before you. 9 Cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you." 10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not make you welcome, go out into its streets and say, 11 "We wipe off the very dust of your town that clings to our feet, and leave it with you. Yet be sure of this: the kingdom of God is very near." 12 I tell you, on the great Day it will be more bearable for Sodom than for that town. 17 The seventy-two came back rejoicing. 'Lord,' they said, 'even the devils submit to us when we use your name.' 18 He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 Look, I have given you power to tread down serpents and scorpions and the whole strength of the enemy; nothing shall ever hurt you. 20 Yet do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What pleased or struck you most in this text? Why?
- Name each of the things that Jesus tells the disciples to do and the things to avoid.
- What does Jesus wish to clarify through each of these suggestions so different from those common in everyday life?
- How can we put into practice what the Lord asks: “take no purse with you”, “do not move from house to house”, “salute no one on the road”, “wipe off the very dust from your feet”?
- Why are these suggestions of Jesus a sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God?
- Jesus tells us to be attentive to the most important thing when he says: “your names are written in heaven!” What does this mean for us?

To Go Deeper into the Theme

The Literary and Historical Context:

A little before our text, in Luke 9: 51, is the beginning of the second phase of Jesus' apostolic activities, that is, a long journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 29). The first phase took place in Galilee and began with the presentation of Jesus' programme in the synagogue of Nazareth (Lk 4: 14-21). In the second phase, he goes to Samaria, sends messengers ahead of him (Lk 9: 52) and draws new disciples (Lk 9: 57-62). The second phase begins with the appointment of the other 72 disciples and with the presentation of the program that will guide them in their missionary activities (Lk 10: 1-16). Thus, Luke suggests that these new disciples are not Jews from Galilee but Samaritans, and that the place where Jesus proclaims the Good News is no longer Galilee but Samaria, the territory of the excluded. The aim of the mission given to the disciples is the rebuilding of community life. In Jesus days, many movements tried new ways of life and of sharing life: the Pharisees, the Essenes, the Zealots, John the Baptist and others. Many formed communities of disciples (Jn 1: 35; Lk 11: 1; Acts 19: 3) and had their missionaries (Mt 23: 15). But there was one great difference. The communities of Pharisees, for instance, lived apart from people. The community around Jesus lives among the people. Jesus' proposal to the 72 disciples is to recover the old community values that were being lost, like hospitality, welcoming, sharing, communion around the table, accepting the excluded. Jesus tries to renew and reorganize communities in such a way that they may become an expression of the Covenant, an expression of the Kingdom of God.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Luke 10: 1: The Mission
Jesus sends the disciples to the places he would be visiting. The disciple is Jesus' spokesperson. He is not the master of the Good News. Jesus sends them in pairs. This allows for mutual help and thus the mission is not that of an individual but of the community. Two persons represent the community better.

- Luke 10: 2-3: Co-responsibility
Their first task is to ask God to send laborers. All of Jesus' disciples must feel responsible for the mission. Thus, they have to pray to the Father for the continuance of the mission. Jesus sends his disciples like lambs among wolves. The mission is a difficult and dangerous task. The system within which they lived and within which we still live continues to resist the reorganization of people living in community. Anyone who, like Jesus, proclaims love in a society organized on individual and collective selfishness, will be a lamb among wolves and will be crucified.
- Luke 10: 4-6: Hospitality
Jesus' disciples may not take anything with them, no purse, no sandals. All they can take with them is peace. This means that they had to rely on the *hospitality* of the people. Thus, the disciple who goes carrying nothing but peace, shows he trusts people. He thinks that he will be accepted and that thus people will feel respected and confirmed. In this way the disciples were criticizing the laws concerning exclusion and brought out the old values of community sharing of the people of God. Salute no one on the road means that they must not waste time with matters not pertaining to the mission. This may be a reference to the episode of the death the Sunamite's son, where Elisha says to his employee, "Go! If anyone salutes you, do not answer" (2 Kings 4: 29), because this was a matter of life and death. Proclaiming God's Good News is a matter of life and death!
- Luke 10: 7: Sharing
The disciples must not move from house to house but must stay in the same house. They must live together with and share in the life and work of the local people, and live on what they receive in exchange, the laborer deserves his wages. This means that they must trust in *sharing*. Through this new practice, they recovered one of the old traditions of the people of God, criticizing a culture of accumulation that was characteristic of the Roman Empire and so proclaimed a new model for people to live together.
- Luke 10: 8: Communion around the table
The disciples must take what food and drink they offer. When the Pharisees went on a mission, they went prepared. They took with them purse and money so that they could provide for their own food. They maintained that they could not trust the food of the people because it was not always ritually "pure." Thus, the observance of the Law of legal purity, instead of helping to overcome divisions, weakened the life of communitarian values. Jesus' disciples must not be separate from the people but rather accept *communion around the table*. When coming into contact with people they were not to be afraid of losing legal purity. The community value of fraternal living together is greater than the observance of ritual norms. By acting thus, they criticised the current laws on purity, and proclaimed a new way to purity, to intimacy with God.
- Luke 10:9^a: Welcoming those excluded
The disciples must look after the sick, cure lepers and drive out evil spirits (cf Mt 10:8). This means that they must welcome into the community those who had been excluded from it. The practice of solidarity is a criticism of a society that excluded a person from the rest of the community. And thus, is recovered the ancient prophetic tradition of *go'el*. From earliest times, the strength of the clan or the community was revealed in its defense of the value of a person, a family and the possession of land, and was concretely practiced every "seven times seven years" in the celebration of the jubilee year (Lv 25: 8-55; Dt 15: 1-18).
- Luke 10: 9^b: The coming of the Kingdom

Hospitality, sharing, communion around the table, welcoming the excluded (*goêl*) were four pillars for sustaining community life. But because of the difficult situation of poverty, unemployment, persecution and oppression from the Romans, these pillars were broken. Jesus wants to rebuild them and affirms that, if they go back to these four values, the disciples can proclaim to the four winds: The Kingdom of God is very near to you! Proclaiming the Kingdom does not mean teaching truth and doctrine but bringing people to a new way of living and sharing, a new way of acting and thinking, based on the Good News that Jesus proclaims: God is Father and therefore we are all together brothers and sisters.

- Luke 10: 10-12: Wiping the dust from their feet
How can we understand such a hard threat? Jesus came to bring an entirely new thing. He came to recover the communitarian values of the past: hospitality, sharing, communion around the table and welcoming the excluded. This explains the severity of the words used against those who refuse to accept the message. They are not refusing something new, but their own past, their own culture and wisdom! Jesus' plan for the 72 disciples was aimed at digging up the memory, recovering the communitarian values of the oldest tradition, to rebuild the community and renew the Covenant, to renew life and thus to make God the new great Good News in the life of people.
- Luke 10: 17-20: The names written in heaven
The disciples come back from the mission and get together with Jesus to evaluate what they had done. They begin by telling their stories. With great joy, they inform him that, in the name of Jesus, they were able to drive out evil spirits! Jesus helps them in their discernment. If they were able to drive out evil spirits, it was because Jesus had given them that power. While they stay with Jesus, no evil can come to them. And Jesus says that the most important thing was not driving out evil spirits, but that their names are written in heaven. To have one's name written in heaven means to be certain of being known and loved by the Father. Sometime before this, James and John had asked to bring down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans (Lk 9: 54). Now, through the proclamation of the Good News, Satan falls from heaven (Lk 10: 18) and the names of the Samaritan disciples are entered in heaven! In those days, many thought that whatever was Samaritan was of the devil, of Satan (Jn 8: 48). Jesus changes everything!

Further information:

The small communities being formed in Galilee and in Samaria are above all "a foretaste of the Kingdom". The community around Jesus is like the face of God transformed into New News for the people, above all for the poor. Is our community like this?

Here are some characteristics of the community that grew around Jesus. These are characteristics of the face of God revealed in them. They may act as a mirror for the revision of our community:

- "You have only one master, and you are all brothers" (Mt 23: 8). The foundation of the community is not knowledge or power, but equality among the brothers and sisters. It is *fraternity*.
- Jesus insists on *equality between men and women* (Mt 19: 7-12) and gives orders to men and women (Mt 28: 10; Mk 16: 9-10; Jn 20: 17). They all "follow" Jesus from Galilee (Mk 15: 41; Lk 8: 2-3).

- They had a common house shared with the poor (Jn 13: 29). This *sharing* must reach the soul and heart of all (Acts 1: 14; 4: 32). It must reach the point that there are no secrets among them (Jn 15: 15).
- *The power of service.* "Anyone who wants to be first among you, must be slave to all!" (Mk 10: 44). Jesus sets the example (Jn 13: 15). "The Son of man came not be served, but to serve" (Mt 20: 28). "Here am I among as one who serves" (Lk 22: 27). "We are useless servants!" (Lk 17: 10)
- Because of many conflicts and divisions, Jesus insists that the community be a place of forgiveness and reconciliation, not of mutual condemnation (Mt 18: 21-22; Lk 17: 3-4). The power to forgive was given to Peter (Mt 16: 19), the apostles (Jn 20: 23) and the communities (Mt 18:18). God's pardon is passed on to the community.
- They prayed *together* in the Temple (Jn 2: 13; 7: 14; 10: 22-23). Sometimes Jesus forms smaller groups (Lk 9: 28; Mt 26: 36-37). They pray before meals (Mk 6: 41; Lk 24: 30) and frequent the synagogues (Lk 4: 16).
- *Joy* that no one can take away (Jn 16: 20-22) "Blessed are you!" Your name is written in heaven (Lk 10: 20), their eyes will see what has been promised (Lk 10: 23-24), the Kingdom is yours! (Lk 6: 20).

The community around Jesus is the model for the early Christians after the resurrection (Acts 2: 42-47)! The community is like the face of God transformed into Good News for the people.

Praying the Psalm 146 (145)

The Face of God, Confirmed by Jesus

Alleluia! Praise Yahweh, my soul! I will praise Yahweh all my life,
 I will make music to my God as long as I live. Do not put your trust in princes,
 in any child of Adam, who has no power to save.
 When his spirit goes forth he returns to the earth, on that very day all his plans come to
 nothing.
 How blessed is he who has Jacob's God to help him, his hope is in Yahweh his God,
 who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them. He keeps faith forever,
 gives justice to the oppressed, gives food to the hungry; Yahweh sets prisoners free.
 Yahweh gives sight to the blind, lifts up those who are bowed down. Yahweh protects
 the stranger,
 he sustains the orphan and the widow. Yahweh loves the upright,
 but he frustrates the wicked.
 Yahweh reigns forever, your God, Zion, from age to age.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your Word that has clarified for us the will of the Father.
 Grant that your Spirit may enlighten our actions and give us the strength to put into
 practice that which your Word has revealed to us. Grant that we, like Mary, your Mother,
 may not only listen to your Word but also put it into practice. Who lives and reigns with
 the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Monday, July 4, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 18-26

While Jesus was speaking, an official came forward, knelt down before him, and said, "My daughter has just died. But come, lay your hand on her, and she will live." Jesus rose and followed him, and so did his disciples. A woman suffering hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the tassel on his cloak. She said to herself, "If only I can touch his cloak, I shall be cured." Jesus turned around and saw her, and said, "Courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you." And from that hour the woman was cured. When Jesus arrived at the official's house and saw the flute players and the crowd who were making a commotion, he said, "Go away! The girl is not dead but sleeping." And they ridiculed him. When the crowd was put out, he came and took her by the hand, and the little girl arose. And news of this spread throughout all that land.

Reflection

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

- Matthew 9: 18-19: The death of the little girl. When Jesus was still speaking, an official of the place came to intercede for his daughter who has just died. He asks Jesus to go to impose His hands on her so that "she will live." The official thinks that Jesus has the power to make his daughter rise from the dead. This is a sign of much faith in Jesus on the part of the little girl's father. Jesus rises and goes with him, taking only His disciples. This is the starting point of both episodes which follow: the cure of the woman who had been suffering for the past twelve years from a hemorrhage, and the resurrection of the little girl. The Gospel of Mark presents both of these episodes, but with many details: the official was called Jairus, and he was the president of the Synagogue. The little girl was not dead as yet, and she was twelve years old, etc. (Mk 5: 21-43). Matthew gives a briefer version of Mark's lively narration.
- Matthew 9: 20-21: The situation of the woman. While they were on the way to the official's house, a woman who had been suffering for twelve years because of an irregular hemorrhage got close to Jesus seeking to be cured. Twelve years with a

hemorrhage! This is why she was marginalized, excluded, because as we have said, at that time blood rendered the person impure. Mark says that the woman had spent all she had with doctors, but instead of improving her situation had become worse (Mk 5: 25-26) But she had heard some speak about Jesus (Mk 5: 27). This is why a new hope sprang up in her. She told herself, "If I can just touch His clothes, I shall be saved." The catechism of that time said: "If I touch His clothes, I will remain impure." The woman thinks exactly the contrary! This was a sign of great courage! It was a sign also that women were not in agreement with everything that the religious authority taught. The teaching of the Pharisees and of the scribes did not succeed in controlling the thinking of the people. Thank God! The woman got close to Jesus from behind. She touched the end of His cloak and she was cured.

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

Personal Questions

- Today, what are the categories of people who feel excluded from participating in the Christian community? What are the factors which cause the exclusion of so many people and render life difficult for them in the family and in society?
- "The little girl is not dead. She sleeps!" She is not dead! You are sleeping! Wake up! This is the message of today's Gospel. What does it tell me? Am I one of those who laugh?
- Have I suffered ridicule from others in society for having Faith? If not, why not? Trusting in God goes against many modern beliefs. Should I expect this reaction?

Concluding Prayer

I shall praise You to the heights, God my King, I shall bless Your name for ever and ever.
Day after day I shall bless You,
I shall praise Your name for ever and ever. (Ps 145: 1-2)

Tuesday, July 5, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 9: 32-38

A demoniac who could not speak was brought to Jesus, and when the demon was driven out the mute man spoke. The crowds were amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "He drives out demons by the prince of demons." Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."

Reflection

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

- Matthew 9: 32-33a: The cure of a mute person. In just one verse Matthew describes the arrival of the possessed person before Jesus, the expulsion of the demon and the attitude of Jesus. The illnesses were many and social security non-existent. The illnesses were not only deficiencies of the body: deafness, blindness, paralysis, leprosy and so many other sicknesses. In fact, these illnesses were nothing else than a manifestation of a much deeper and vast evil which undermined the health of people, and that is the total abandonment and the depressing and inhumane state in which they were obliged to live. The activity and the cures of Jesus were directed not only against physical sickness, but also and above all against this greater evil of material and spiritual abandonment, in which people were obliged to live the few years of life. Then, in addition to the economic exploitation which stole half of the family stipend, the official religion of that time, instead of helping people to find strength in God, to resist and have hope, taught that sickness was a punishment from God for sin. This increased in them the sentiment of exclusion and condemnation. Jesus did quite the contrary. The acceptance of Jesus, full of tenderness, and the cure

of the sick, form part of the effort to knit together human relationships among people and to re-establish community and fraternal living in the villages of Galilee, His land.

- Matthew 9: 33b-34: The twofold interpretation of the cure of the mute man. Before the cure of the possessed mute man, the reaction of the people is one of admiration and of gratitude: "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!" The reaction of the Pharisee is one of mistrust and malice: "It is through the prince of devils that He drives out devils!" They were not able to deny the facts which cause admiration in the people, the only way which the Pharisees find to neutralize the influence of Jesus before the people is to attribute the expulsion to the power of the evil one. Mark presents an extensive argument of Jesus to demonstrate the lack of coherence and the malice of the interpretation given by the Pharisees (Mk 3: 22-27). Matthew does not present any response by Jesus to the interpretation of the Pharisees, because when malice is evident, truth shines by itself.
- Matthew 9: 35: Tireless, Jesus goes through the villages. The description of the tireless activity of Jesus is beautiful in which emerges the double concern to which we referred: the acceptance full of tenderness and the cure of the sick: "Jesus went through all the towns, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and all kinds of illness." In the previous chapters, Matthew had already referred several times to this itinerant activity of Jesus in the villages and towns of Galilee (Mt 4: 23-24; 8: 16).
- Matthew 9: 36: The compassion of Jesus. "Seeing the crowds, He felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd." Those who should be shepherds were not shepherds; they did not take care of the flock. Jesus tries to be the shepherd (Jn 10: 11-14). In this, Matthew sees the realization of the prophecy of the Servant of Yahweh, who took upon Himself our sickness, and bore our infirmities" (Mt 8: 17 and Isa 53: 4). As it was for Jesus, the great concern of the Servant was "to find a word of comfort for those who were discouraged." (Isa 50: 4). Jesus shows the same compassion toward the abandoned crowd on the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves: they are like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 15: 32). The Gospel of Matthew has a constant concern in revealing to the converted Jews of the communities of Galilee and of Syria that Jesus is the Messiah announced by the prophets. For this reason, frequently, he shows that in Jesus' activity the prophecies are fulfilled (cf. Mt 1: 23; 2: 5, 15, 17, 23; 3: 3; 4: 14-16, etc.).
- Matthew 9: 37-38: The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few. Jesus transmits to the disciples the concern and the compassion which are within Him, and in paraphrase: "The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few! Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers for His harvest!"

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, July 6, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 1-7

Jesus summoned his Twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness. The names of the Twelve Apostles are these: first, Simon called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. Jesus sent out these Twelve after instructing them thus, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Reflection

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

Introduction: the birth and preparation of the Messiah (Mt 1 to 4)

- Sermon on the Mount: the entrance door into the Kingdom (Mt 5 to 7)
- Narrative Mt 8 and 9
- Discourse on the Mission: how to proclaim and spread the Kingdom (Mt 10)
- Narrative Mt 11 and 12
- Discourse on the Parables: The mystery of the Kingdom present in life (Mt 13)
- Narrative Mt 14 to 17
- Discourse on the Community: the new way of living together in the Kingdom (Mt 18)

- Narrative 19 to 23
- Discourse on the future coming of the Kingdom: the utopia which sustains hope (Mt 24 and 25)

Conclusion: Passion, Death and Resurrection (Mt 26 to 28)

Today's Gospel presents to us the beginning of the Discourse on the Mission in which the accent is placed on three aspects: (a) the call of the disciples (Mt 10: 1); (b) the list of the names of the twelve Apostles who will be the recipients of the Discourse on the Mission (Mt 10: 2-4); (c) the sending out of the twelve (Mt 10: 5-7).

- Matthew 10:1: The call of the twelve disciples. Matthew had already spoken about the call of the disciples (Mt 4:18-22; 9:9). Here, at the beginning of the Discourse on the Mission, he presents a summary: "He summoned His twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and all kinds of illness." The task, or the mission, of the disciple is to follow Jesus, the Master, forming community with Him and carrying out the same mission of Jesus: to drive out unclean spirits, to cure all sorts of diseases and all sorts of illness. In Mark's Gospel they receive the same two-fold mission, formulated with other words: Jesus constituted the group of twelve to remain with Him and to send them out to preach and cast out devils" (Mk 3: 14-15).
 - 1) To be with Him, that is to form a community, in which Jesus is the center.
 - 2) To preach and to be able to cast out devils, that is, to announce the Good News and to conquer the force of evil which destroys the life of the people and alienates people.

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

- Matthew 10: 2-4: The list of the names of the Twelve Apostles. A good number of these names come from the Old Testament. For example, Simon is the name of one of the sons of the Patriarch Jacob (Gen 29: 33). James is the same as Jacob (Gen 25: 26). Judas is the name of another son of Jacob (Gen 35: 23). Matthew also had the name of Levi (Mk 2: 14), who was another son of Jacob (Gen 35: 23). Of the Twelve Apostles seven have a name which comes from the time of the Patriarchs. Two are called Simon; two are called James; two are called Judas; one Levi! Only one has a Greek name: Philip. This reveals the people's desire to start history again from the beginning! Perhaps it is good to think about the names which are given today to children when they are born, because each one of us is called by God by his/her name.
- Matthew 10: 5-7: The sending out or the mission of the twelve apostles to the lost sheep of Israel. After having given the list of the names of the twelve, Jesus sends them out with the following command: "Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town. Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand." In this one command there is a three-fold insistence on showing that the preference of the mission is for the house of Israel:
 - (1) Do not go among the gentiles,
 - (2) do not enter into the towns of the Samaritans,
 - (3) rather go to the lost sheep of Israel. Here appears a response to the doubt of the first Christians concerning opening up to pagans.

Paul, who strongly affirmed the openness to the Gentiles, agrees in saying that the Good News of Jesus should first be announced to the Jews and then to the gentiles (Rm 9: 1-11, 36; cf. Acts 1: 8; 11: 3; 13: 46; 15: 1, 5, 23-29). But then, in the same Gospel of Matthew, in the conversation of Jesus with the Canaanite woman, openness to the gentiles will occur (Mt 15: 21-29).

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

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

Seek Yahweh and His strength, tirelessly seek His presence!

Remember the marvels He has done, His wonders, the judgments He has spoken. (Ps 105: 4-5)

Thursday, July 7, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,
through the obedience of Jesus, Your servant and Your Son, You raised a fallen world.

Free us from sin

and bring us the joy that lasts forever.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 7-15

Jesus said to his Apostles: "As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Without

cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick. The laborer deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, look for a worthy person in it, and stay there until you leave. As you enter a house, wish it peace. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; if not, let your peace return to you. Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words, go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. Amen, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.”

Reflection

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

- Matthew 10: 7: *The objective of the mission: to reveal the presence of the Kingdom. “Go and announce the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.”* The principal objective is that of announcing that the Kingdom is close at hand. This is the novelty which Christ brings to us. For the other Jews there was still a long time before the coming of the Kingdom. It would have come only after they had done their own part. The coming of the Kingdom depended, according to them, on their effort. For the *Pharisees*, for example, the Kingdom would be attained only after the perfect observance of the Law. For the *Essenes*, when the country would have purified itself. But Jesus thinks in a different way. He has a different way of reading the facts of life. He says that the hour has already arrived (Mk 1:15). When He says that the Kingdom is close at hand or that the Kingdom is already among us, in our midst, He does not mean to say that the Kingdom is just arriving at that moment, but that it is *already there*, independently of the effort made by the people. What they all expected was already present among the people, gratuitously, but the people did not know it, nor perceive it (cf. Lk 17: 21). Jesus is aware of this because He sees reality with different eyes. He reveals and announces to the poor of His land this hidden presence of the Kingdom in our midst (Lk 4: 18). It is the mustard seed which will receive the rain of His word and the warmth of His love.
- Matthew 10: 8: *The signs of the presence of the Kingdom: accept the excluded.* How should the presence of the Kingdom be announced? Only through words and discourses? No! The signs of the presence of the Kingdom are above all concrete gestures or acts, done gratuitously: *“Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out the devils. You received without charge; give without charge.”* This means that the disciples should accept within the community those who have been excluded. This practice of solidarity both criticizes religion and society which exclude and proposes concrete solutions.
- Matthew 10: 9-10: *Do not take anything for the journey. Unlike other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus should not take anything: “Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or a spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the laborer deserves his keep.”* This means that they have to trust in the hospitality of the people. The disciples who go without anything, taking only peace (Mk 10: 13), show that they trust the people. It shows a trust in grace from God to act in people and to provide for them. It is certain that they will be welcomed, that they will be able to participate in the life and the work of the people of the place and that they will be able to survive with what they will receive in exchange, because the laborer *deserves his keep*. This means that the disciples should trust in sharing. It is also another way of respecting the poor, by not taking

from them, and of contrasting the Good News with the laws of the time that demanded payment and tax for so many things. The social structure of the day was built on taking. Jesus builds a structure and community built on giving freely. By means of this practice they criticize the laws of exclusion and recover the ancient values of community life.

- Matthew 10: 11-13: *To share peace in the community.* The disciples should not go from house to house but should seek people of peace and remain in that house. That is, they should practice stability. Thus, through that new practice, they criticize the culture of accumulation which characterized the politics of the Roman Empire, and they announced a new model of living together. Once all these requirements were respected, the disciples could cry out: *The Kingdom of God has arrived!* To announce the Kingdom does not mean, in the first place, to teach truths and doctrine, but lead toward a new fraternal manner of living and of sharing starting from the Good News which Jesus has brought to us: God and Father and Mother of all men and women.
- Matthew 10: 14-15: *The severity of the menace.* How is such a severe menace to be understood? Jesus has brought us something completely new. He has come to rescue the community values of the past: hospitality, sharing, communion around the table, acceptance of the excluded. That explains the severity toward those who reject the message, because they do not reject something new, but their own past, their own culture and wisdom! The objective of the pedagogy of Jesus is to dig out from the memory, to recover the wisdom of the people, to reconstruct the community, to renew the Covenant, to rebuild life.

Personal Questions

- Today, how can we put into practice the recommendation not to take anything for the journey when going to a mission?
- Jesus orders His disciples to look for people of peace, so as to be able to remain in their house. Today, who would be a person of peace to whom to address oneself in the announcement of the Good News?
- Why would stability, as in not going from house to house while staying in a town, be important?

For Further Study

Most, if not all, monastic traditions include a vow of stability – to stay in one place. Take some time to read the ancient rules which guide our various communities, such as the Rule of St Benedict, St Albert, St Bruno, and so on. The authors of these rules often explain why a particular rule is made, and from where in the Gospel it is inspired. This can give insight into these instructions of Jesus and a historical perspective on the development of Christianity through the Middle Ages.

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, July 8, 2022

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 16-23

Jesus said to his Apostles: "Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. Amen, I say to you, you will not finish the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

Reflection

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

- Matthew 10: 16-19: Danger and trust in God. Jesus introduces this part of His discourse with two metaphors: sheep in the midst of wolves; prudent as serpents, simple as doves. The first one serves to show the difficult and dangerous context to which the disciples are sent. On the one hand, the dangerous situation is made evident; on the other, the expression "I send you" expresses protection. Also regarding the astuteness of the serpent and the simplicity of the dove Jesus seems to put together two attitudes: trust in God, and prolonged and attentive reflection on the way in which we should relate with others.
- Jesus, then, following this, gives an order that seems at first sight filled with mistrust: "Beware of men...", but, in reality, it means to be attentive to possible persecutions, hostility, and denouncement. The expression "will deliver you" does not only refer to the accusation in the tribunal, but above all, it has a theological value: the disciples who are following Jesus can experience the same experience of the Master of "being delivered into the hands of men" (17: 22). The disciples must be strong and resist in order "to give witness." The fact of being delivered to the tribunal should become a witness for the Jews and for the pagans. It bears the possibility of being able to draw them to the person and the cause of Jesus and, therefore, to the knowledge of the Gospel. This positive implication is important as a result of witnessing, characterized by credible and fascinating faith.
- Matthew 10: 20: the divine help. So that all this may take place in the mission-witness of the disciples it is essential to have the help that comes from God. That is to say, we

should not trust our own security and resources, but the disciples, in critical, dangerous, and aggressive situations, found help and solidarity in God for their lives. The Spirit of the Father is also promised for their mission (v.20). He is the one who acts in them when they are committed to their mission of evangelization and of witnessing. The Spirit will speak through them.

- Matthew 10: 21-22: Threat-consolation. Once again the announcement of threat is repeated in the expression “will be delivered”: Brother will betray brother, a father against his son, the sons against the parents. It is a question of a true and great disorder in social relationships, the breaking up of the family. Persons who are bound by the most intimate family relationships – such as parents, children, brothers and sisters – will fall in the misfortune of mutually hating and eliminating one another. In what sense does such a division of the family have to do with witness on behalf of Jesus? Such breaking up of the family relationships could be caused by the diverse attitudes that are taken within the family, regarding Jesus. The expression “you will be hated” seems to indicate the theme of the hostile rejection on the part of the contemporaries and of those He sent. This phrasing can also apply to the larger community, using the sense of the word “brother” as we have done earlier. The community of Israel will find one against another as those following the Good News will be persecuted and rejected by those remaining in the old law. The strong sense of Jesus’ words find a comparison in another part of the New Testament: “Blessed are you if you are insulted for the sake of Christ’s name, because the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God, rests upon you. No one of you should suffer as a murderer or thief or evil doer or as a spy. But if one suffers as a Christian, do not blush, because of this name, rather give glory to God.” The promise of consolation follows the threat (v.3). The greatest consolation for the disciples will be that of “being saved,” of being able to live the experience of the Savior, that is to say, to participate in His victories.

Personal Questions

- What do these pronouncements of Jesus teach us today for understanding the mission of the Christian?
- Do you know how to trust in divine help when you experience conflicts, persecutions and trials?
- In what ways have you been persecuted? Was it for standing with Jesus or was I in the wrong? Did I find strength at any of these times, or did I fold?
- Has the Spirit spoken through you to others?

For Further Study

In all the day-to-day interactions with others, in business, the market, in school, and in community and family, it is often difficult to discern whether persecutions that day were for His name or our own views and wants, and whether the Spirit did the talking or our own pride did. St Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, wrote the *Spiritual Exercises* to help one discern the action of the Spirit in one’s Life. The theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar points out that the Exercises direct one to choosing God’s choice in life, a self-abandonment to God, which is ultimately what today’s Gospel says to do. There are many books on St Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises, besides his original work, which explain what and how. Take time to read one or more and perhaps practice them.

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, July 09, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 24-33

Jesus said to his Apostles: "No disciple is above his teacher, no slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, for the slave that he become like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household! "Therefore, do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father."

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents to us various instructions of Jesus on the behavior that the disciples have to adopt in the exercise of their mission. What strikes most in these instructions are two warnings: (a) the frequency with which Jesus refers to the persecutions and suffering which they will have to bear; (b) the insistence repeated three times to the disciples not to be afraid.

- Matthew 10: 24-25: Persecutions and sufferings which mark the life of the disciples. These two verses constitute the final part of a warning of Jesus to the disciples concerning persecutions. The disciples should know that, because of being disciples of Jesus, they will be persecuted (Mt 10: 17-23). But this should not be a reason for worry, because a disciple should imitate the life of the Master and share the trials with Him. This is part of discipleship. "A disciple is not greater than the teacher or a servant greater than his master; it is sufficient for the disciple to grow to be like his teacher and the servant like his master." If they called Jesus Beelzebul, how much more will they insult His disciples? In other words, the disciple of Jesus should be worried if, in his life, there are no persecutions.

- Matthew 10: 26-27: Do not be afraid to tell the truth. The disciples should not be afraid to be persecuted. Those who persecute them pervert the meaning of the facts and spread calumnies which change truth into lies. But no matter how great the lie, the truth will triumph at the end and will make the lie crumble down. This is why we should not be afraid to proclaim truth, the things which Jesus has taught. Every day, the means of communication pervert the meaning of things and the people who proclaim the truth are considered as criminals; they make our system appear as just and it perverts the meaning of human life.
- Matthew 10: 28: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body. The disciples should not be afraid of those who kill the body, who torture, who strike and cause suffering. Those who torture can kill the body, but they cannot kill liberty and the spirit in the body. They should be afraid, yes, that the fear of suffering may lead them to hide or to deny the truth, and that this will lead them to offend God, because anyone who draws away from God will be lost forever.
- Matthew 10: 29-31: Do not be afraid, but trust in Divine Providence. The disciples should not fear anything, because they are in God's hands. Jesus tells them to look at the birds of the air. Two sparrows are sold for a penny, but not one of them will fall to the ground without the Father knowing. Every hair on your head has been counted. Luke says that not one hair falls without our Father wanting it (Lk 21: 18). And so many hairs fall from our heads! Because of this "Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows." This is the lesson which Jesus draws from the contemplation of nature.
- Matthew 10: 32-33: Do not be afraid to be the witnesses of Jesus. At the end Jesus summarizes everything in this sentence: "If anyone declares himself for Me in the presence of human beings, I will declare Myself for him in the presence of My Father in heaven; 33: the one who instead will disown Me in the presence of human beings, I will disown him in the presence of My Father in heaven." Knowing that we are in God's hands and that God is with us, at every moment, we have the necessary courage and the peace to render witness and to be disciples of Jesus.

Personal Questions

- What are you afraid of? Why?
- Have you ever been persecuted because of your commitment to announce the Good News of God which Jesus announced to us?
- Persecution is not comfortable. There can be many small persecutions throughout a day. Do you ever deny Jesus in little things to make your life more comfortable and not make trouble? How is this important?

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, July 10, 2022

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

LECTIO

Opening Prayer:

Prayers of Blessed Giorgio Preca in Il Sacratio dello spirito di Cristo

Lord God, you are present and I am in you: Give me wisdom to know your spirit.

Lord God, you are present and I am in you:

Grant me the gift of the spirit of the Master, my Christ Jesus.

Lord God, you are present and I am in you: Guide my every way with your light.

Lord God, you are present and I am in you: Teach me to do your will at all times.

Lord God, you are present and I am in you:

Do not let me stray from your Spirit, the Spirit of love.

Lord God, you are present and I am in you:

Do not abandon me when my strength fails.

Gospel Reading:

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live."

29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, 34 and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Prayerful Silent Time:

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

MEDITATIO

A Key to the Reading:

This is chapter 10 of Luke's Gospel. It is the central part of Luke's Gospel, and it follows Jesus' journey to Jerusalem: «Now as the time drew near for him to be taken up to heaven, he resolutely took the road for Jerusalem» (Lk 9: 51). We know that for Luke, Jerusalem is the city where salvation will take place, and Jesus' journey to Jerusalem forms a central theme. Luke's story begins in the holy city (Lk 1: 5) and ends in the same city (Lk 24: 52). In this middle section, Luke will repeatedly insist on the fact that Jesus is going towards Jerusalem (for instance in Lk 13: 22; 17: 11). In this text, which tells the

parable of the good Samaritan in the context of a discussion with a doctor of the law concerning the greatest commandment, we again find the theme of a journey, this time from Jerusalem to Jericho (Lk 10: 30). The parable is part of this middle section of the Gospel that begins with Jesus, a pilgrim together with his disciples on their way to Jerusalem. He sends them ahead to prepare for him to stop at a Samaritan village and there they only find hostility precisely because they were on their way to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51-53). The Samaritans avoided pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem and were hostile to them. "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him, in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself was to visit" (Lk 10: 1). Seventy-two is the traditional number of pagan nations.

The Fathers of the Church (Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and others), keeping in mind all the symbolism associated with Jerusalem, the holy city of salvation, interpret this parable in a particular way. In the man who goes from Jerusalem to Jericho they see Adam who represents the whole human race expelled from Eden, the celestial paradise, because of sin. The Fathers of the Church see the thieves as the tempter who takes us away from God's friendship with his wiles and who holds us slaves in our humanity wounded by sin. In the priest and the Levite they see the insufficiency of the old law for our salvation that will be accomplished by our Good Samaritan, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, who, leaving the celestial Jerusalem, comes to the aid of our sinful condition and heals us with the oil of grace and the wine of the Spirit. In the inn, the Fathers see an image of the Church and in the inn-keeper they see the pastors into whose hands Jesus entrusts the care of his people. The departure of the Samaritan from the inn is seen by the Fathers as the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to sit at the right hand of the Father, but who promises to come back to reward each person according to his or her merit. Jesus then leaves the two denarii to the Church for our salvation, the two denarii that are the Sacred Scriptures and the Sacraments that help us on our way to holiness.

This allegorical and mystical interpretation of the text helps us to accept well the message of this parable. The text of the parable begins with a dialogue between a doctor of the law who stands to put the Lord to the test by asking: «Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?» (Lk 10: 25). Jesus replies with another question: «What is written in the law? What do you read there?» (Lk 10: 26). We must see this dialogue as a confrontation between two masters, a thing quite common in those days as a system of clarifying and deepening points of law. The polemical tone prevailing here is different from that in Mark where the question is asked by a Scribe who «had listened to them debating (Jesus and the Sadducees), and had observed how well Jesus had answered them» (Mk 12: 28) then puts the question to Jesus. This Scribe is well disposed to listen to Jesus, so much so that Jesus ends the dialogue with: «You are not far from the kingdom of God» (Mk 12: 34). Matthew, however, places this question in the context of a debate between Jesus and the Sadducees with the Pharisees present who when they "heard that he had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to disconcert him, one of them put a question..." (Mt 22: 34-35). Jesus gives an immediate reply quoting the commandment of love as found in Deuteronomy and Leviticus.

Only in Luke's text is the question not about which is the greatest commandment but about how to inherit eternal life, a question dealt with again in the Synoptic Gospels on the lips of the rich young man (Mt 19: 16; Mk 10: 17; Lk 18: 18). As in Mark, so also here, Jesus praises the doctor of the law: «You have answered right... do this and life is yours» (Lk 1: 28). But the doctor of the law was not yet satisfied with Jesus' answer and wanting «to justify himself» (Lk 10: 28) for having asked the question asks again "and who is my neighbor"! This second question introduces and connects the following parable with the dialogue between Jesus and the doctor of the law. We also notice an inclusion between verse 26 that ends the debate and leads us to the tale of the parable in verse 37, which ends definitively the dialogue and the parable. In this verse, Jesus repeats to the doctor of the law that he had defined the neighbor as one who was compassionate: «Go and do the same yourself». This phrase of Jesus reminds us of the words at the last supper as

recorded in John, when, after the washing of the feet, Jesus invites his disciples to follow his example (Jn 13: 12-15). At the last supper, Jesus bequeaths to his disciples the commandment of love understood as willingness “to give one’s life” in love for each other as the Lord has loved us (Jn 15: 12-14).

This commandment goes beyond the observance of the law. The priest and the Levite have kept the law by not approaching the poor wounded man who is left half dead, so as not to defile themselves (Lev 21: 1). Jesus goes beyond the law and desires his disciples to do as he does.

«By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples» (Jn 13: 35). For the disciple of Jesus mere philanthropy is not enough. The Christian is called to something more, which he or she accomplishes in imitation of the Master, as the Apostle Paul said: «We are those who have the mind of Christ» (1 Cor 2: 16) «Because the love of Christ overwhelms us when we reflect that one man has died for all» (2 Cor 5: 14).

Some questions:

- What touched you most in the parable?
- With whom in the story do you identify?
- Have you ever thought of Jesus as the Good Samaritan?
- Do you feel the need for salvation in your life?
- Can you say with the apostle Paul that you have the mind of Christ?
- What urges you to love your neighbor? Is it the need to love and be loved, or is it compassion and the love of Christ?
- Who is your neighbor?

ORATIO

Canticle - 1Pt 2: 21-24

21 Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

CONTEMPLATIO

Contemplation is knowing how to adhere with one’s mind and heart to the Lord who by his Word transforms us into new beings who always do his will. “Knowing these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (Jn 13: 17)

Monday, July 11, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

May all who follow Him

reject what is contrary to the gospel.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 10: 34-11: 1

Jesus said to his Apostles: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's enemies will be those of his household. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward." When Jesus finished giving these commands to his Twelve disciples, he went away from that place to teach and to preach in their towns.

Reflection

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

- Matthew 10: 34-36: I have not come to bring peace to the earth but the sword. Jesus always speaks of peace (Mt 5: 9; Mk 9: 50; Lk 1: 79; 10: 5; 19: 38; 24: 36; Jn 14: 27; 16: 33; 20: 21, 26). How can we understand the statement in today's Gospel which seems to say the contrary: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; no, I have not come to bring peace but the sword." This affirmation does not mean that Jesus was in favor of division and the sword. No! Jesus wants neither the sword (Jn 18: 11) nor division. He wants the union of all in truth (cf. Jn 17: 17-23). At that time, the announcement of the truth that He, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Messiah became a reason of great division among the Jews. In the same family or community, some were in favor and others were radically contrary. In this sense the Good News of Jesus was truly a source of division, a "sign of contradiction" (Lk 2: 34) or, as Jesus said, He was bringing the sword. In this way the other warning is understood: "I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; a person's enemies will be the members of his own household". In fact, that was what was happening in the families and in the communities: much division, much discussion, the consequence of the announcement of the Good News among the Jews of that time, because some accepted while others rejected. Today the same thing happens. Many times, when the Church renews itself, the appeal to the Good News becomes a 'sign of contradiction' and of division. People who for years have lived comfortably in their routine of Christian life do not want to allow themselves to be bothered by the 'innovations' of Vatican Council II. Disturbed by the changes, they used all their intelligence to find arguments in defense of their opinions and to

condemn the changes, considering them contrary to what they thought was the true faith.

- Matthew 10: 37: No one who prefers father or mother to Me is worthy of Me. Luke gives this same statement, but much more demanding. Literally he says, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, his sons and brothers, his sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk 14: 26). How can this affirmation of Jesus be combined with the other one in which He says to observe the fourth commandment: love and honor father and mother? (Mk 7: 10-12; Mt 19: 19). (The Greek word used in Luke is *μισέω*, which has slightly different meaning than how *hate* is used in English. It's usage means "to love less," to denounce (comparatively) between the two. It does not carry the animosity we commonly associate with hate.) However, two observations: (1) The fundamental criterion on which Jesus insists always is this one: the Good News of God should be the supreme value of our life. In our life there can be no greater value. (2) The economic and social situation at the time of Jesus was such that the families were obliged to close themselves up in themselves. They no longer had the conditions to respect the obligations of human community living together as, for example, sharing, hospitality, invitation to a meal, and the acceptance of the excluded. This individualistic closing up in self, caused by the national and international situation, produced distortion:
 - (1) It made life in community impossible
 - (2) It limited the commandment "honor father and mother" exclusively to the small family nucleus and no longer to the larger family of the community
 - (3) It prevented the full manifestation of the Good News of God, because if God is Father/Mother we are brothers and sisters of one another. And this truth should be expressed in the life of the community. A living and fraternal community is the mirror of the face of God. Living together without community is a mirror which disfigures the face of God.

In this context, the request of Jesus, "to hate father and mother" means that the disciples should overcome the individualistic closing up of the small family on itself, and extend it to the community dimension, preferring to communal love to limiting it to familial love. Jesus Himself put into practice what He taught others. His family wanted to call Him to close Himself up in self. When they told Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside and they are looking for You", He answered: "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" Looking at the people around Him He said: "Behold, My mother and My brothers. Anyone who does the will of God is My brother, My sister and My mother" (Mk 3: 32-35). He extends the family! This was and continues to be, even today for the small family, the only way to be able to keep and transmit the values which He believes.

- Matthew 10: 38-39: The demands of the mission of the disciples. In these two verses, Jesus gives important and demanding advice: (a) To take up the cross and follow Jesus: Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in My footsteps is not worthy of Me. In order to perceive all the significance and importance of this first advice, keep in mind the witness of Saint Paul: "But as for me, it is not of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal 6: 14). To carry the cross presupposes, even now, a radical drawing away from the sinful system which reigns in the world. (b) To have the courage to give one's life: "Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for My sake will find it". Only the one who in life has been capable of giving himself totally to others will feel fulfilled. This second piece of advice

confirms the deepest human experience; the source of life is in the gift of life. In giving one receives. "If the grain of wheat does not die ..." (Jn 12: 24).

- Matthew 10: 40: The identification of the disciple with Jesus and with God Himself. This human experience of contribution and of the gift received has a clarification, a deepening: "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes Me: and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes the One who sent Me." In the total gift of self, the disciple identifies himself with Jesus; there the encounter with God takes place, and God allows Himself to be found by the one who seeks Him.
- Matthew 10: 41-42: The reward of the prophet, of the just and of the disciple. The discourse of the Mission ends with one sentence on reward: "Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person. If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without reward". In this statement the sequence is very meaningful: the prophet is recognized because of his mission as one sent by God. The upright person is recognized by his behavior, by his perfect way of observing the law of God. The disciple is recognized by no quality or mission, but simply by his social condition of being least among the people. The Kingdom is not made of great things. It is like a very big house which is constructed with small bricks. Anyone who despises the brick will have great difficulty in constructing the house. Even a glass of water serves as a brick for the construction of the Kingdom.
- Matthew 11: 1: The end of the discourse of the mission. When Jesus had finished instructing His twelve disciples, He moved from there to teach and preach in their towns. Now Jesus leaves to put into practice what He has taught. We will see this in chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel of Matthew.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Tuesday, July 12, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 20-24

Jesus began to reproach the towns where most of his mighty deeds had been done, since they had not repented. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And as for you, Capernaum: Will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the nether world. For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Reflection

The Discourse on the Mission occupies chapter 10. Chapters 11 and 12 describe the mission which Jesus carried out and how He did it. The two chapters mention how the people either adhered to Him, doubted the evangelizing action of Jesus, or rejected it. John the Baptist, who looked at Jesus with the eyes of the past, does not succeed in understanding Him (Mt 11: 1-15). The people, who looked at Jesus out of interest, were not capable of understanding Him (Mt 11: 16-19). The great cities around the lake, which listened to the preaching of Jesus and saw His miracles, did not want to open themselves up to His message (this is the text of today's Gospel) (Mt 11: 20-24). The wise and the doctors, who appreciated everything according to their own science, were not able to understand the preaching of Jesus (Mt 11: 25). The Pharisees, who trusted only in the observance of the law, criticized Jesus (Mt 12: 1-8) and decided to kill Him (Mt 12: 9-14). They said that Jesus acted in the name of Beelzebul (Mt 12: 22-37). They wanted a proof in order to be able to believe in Him (Mt 12: 38-45). Not even His relatives supported Him (Mt 12: 46-50). Only the little ones and the simple people understood and accepted the Good News of the Kingdom (Mt 11: 25-30). They followed Him (Mt 12: 15-16) and saw in Him the Servant announced by Isaiah (Mt 12: 17-21).

This way of describing the missionary activity of Jesus was a clear warning for the disciples who together with Jesus and walked through Galilee. They could not expect a reward or praise for being missionaries of Jesus. This warning is also valid for us who today read and meditate on this discourse on the mission, because the Gospels were written for all times. They invite us to confront the attitude that we have with Jesus with the attitude of the people who appear in the Gospel and to ask ourselves if we are like John the Baptist (Mt 11: 1-15), like the people who were interested (Mt 11: 16-19), like the unbelieving cities (Mt 11: 20-24), like the doctors who thought they knew everything and understood nothing (Mt 11: 25), like the Pharisees who only knew how to criticize (Mt 12: 1-45) or like the simple people who went seeking for Jesus (Mt 12: 15) and who, with their wisdom, knew how to understand and accept the message of the Kingdom (Mt 11: 25-30).

- Matthew 11: 20: The word against the cities which did not receive Him. The space in which Jesus moved during those three years of His missionary life was small; only a few square kilometers along the Sea of Galilee around the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin. Only that! So it was in this very limited space where Jesus made the majority of His discourses and worked His miracles. He came to save the whole of humanity, and almost did not get out of the limited space of His land. Tragically, Jesus had to become aware that the people of those cities did not want to accept the message of the Kingdom and were not converted. The cities

become more rigid in their beliefs, traditions and customs and did not accept the invitation of Jesus to change their life.

- Matthew 11: 21-24: Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are worse than Tyre and Sidon. In the past, Tyre and Sidon, inflexible enemies of Israel, ill-treated the People of God. Because of this they were cursed by the prophets. (Is 23: 1; Jer 25: 22; 47: 4; Ezek 26: 3; 27: 2; 28: 2; Joel 4: 4; Am 1: 10). And now Jesus says that these cities, symbols of all evil, would have already been converted if in them had been worked all the miracles which were worked in Chorazin and Bethsaida. The city of Sodom, the symbol of the worst perversion, was destroyed by the anger of God (Gen 18: 16 to 19: 29). And now Jesus says that Sodom would exist today, because it would have been converted if it had seen the miracles that Jesus worked in Capernaum. Today we still live this same paradox. Many of us who are Catholics since we were children, have many solid and firm convictions, so much so that we stop reaching for perfection of charity. And in some places, Christianity, instead of being a source of change and of conversion, becomes the refuge of the most reactionary forces of the politics of the country.

Personal Questions

- How do I place myself before the Good News of Jesus: like John the Baptist, like the interested people, like the doctors, like the Pharisees or like the simple and poor people?
- Does my city, or my country, deserve the warning of Jesus against Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida?
- If someone, a Christian, already follows Jesus, how does this passage apply? What is the message for them?

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, July 13, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father, Your light of truth guides us to the way of Christ. May all who follow Him reject what is contrary to the Gospel.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 25-27

At that time Jesus exclaimed: "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed

them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.”

Reflection

- Context. The liturgical passage of Mt 11: 25-27 represents a turning point in the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus is asked the first questions regarding the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. The first one to ask the first questions on the identity of Jesus is John the Baptist, who through his disciples asks Him a concrete question: “Are You the one who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?” (11:3). Instead, the Pharisees, together with the scribes, address words of reproach and judgment to Jesus: “Look, Your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath” (12: 2). Up until now in chapters 1 to 10, the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven in the person of Jesus did not seem to find any obstacles, but beginning with chapter 11, we find some concrete difficulties. Or rather many begin to take a stand with regard to Jesus: sometimes He is “the object of scandal,” of fall (11:6); “this generation,” in the sense of this human descent, does not have an attitude of acceptance regarding the Kingdom that is to arrive; the cities along the lake are not converted (11: 20); concerning the behavior of Jesus a true and proper controversy springs up (chapter 12), and thus they begin to think how to put Him to death (12: 14). This is the climate of mistrust and of protest into which Matthew inserts this passage.
- Now the moment has arrived in which to question oneself about the activity of Jesus: how to interpret the “works of Christ” (11: 2, 19)? How can these thaumaturgic actions be explained (11: 20, 21, 23)? Such questions concern the crucial question of Messiahship of Jesus, and judge not only “this generation” but also the cities around the lake which have not converted as the Kingdom of Heaven gets closer in the person of Jesus.
- To become small. The most efficacious way to carry out this conversion is to become “small.” Jesus communicates this strategy of “smallness” in a prayer of thanksgiving (11: 27) which has a wonderful parallel in the witness rendered to the Father on the occasion of the Baptism (11: 27). Experts love to call this prayer a “hymn of rejoicing, exultation.” The rhythm of the prayer of Jesus begins with a confession: “I praise You,” “I confess to You.” Such expressions of introduction render Jesus’ words quite solemn. The prayer of praise that Jesus recites presents the characteristics of an answer addressed to the reader. Jesus addresses Himself to God with the expression “Lord of Heaven and earth,” that is, to God as creator and guardian of the world. In Judaism, instead, it was the custom to address God with the invocation “Lord of the world,” but they did not add the term “Father,” a distinctive characteristic of the prayer of Jesus. The reason for the praise and the disclosing of God: because You have hidden..., revealed. The hiding referred to the “wise and intelligent” concerns of the scribes and the Pharisees, completely closed up and hostile to the coming of the Kingdom (3: 7 ff; 7: 29; 9: 3, 11, 34). The revelation is to the little ones, the Greek term says “infants,” those who cannot speak as yet. Thus, Jesus indicates the privileged audience of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven as those who are not experts of the Law and are not instructed.
- What are “these things” that are hidden or revealed? The content of this revelation or hiding is Jesus, the Son of God, the one who reveals the Father. It is evident for the reader that the revelation of God is linked indissolubly to the person of Jesus, to His Word, to His Messianic actions. He is the one who allows the revelation of God and not the Law or the premonitory events of the end of time.

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

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Thursday, July 14, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

May all who follow Him
 reject what is contrary to the Gospel.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 28-30

Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Reflection

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

- Matthew 11: 25-26: Only the little children accept and understand the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus recites a prayer: "I thank You Father, Lord of Heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children." The wise, the doctors of that time, have created a system of laws which they imposed on the people in the name of God (Mt 23: 3-4). They thought that God demanded this observance from the people. But the law of love, which Jesus has revealed to us, said the contrary. What is important in order to be saved is not what we do for God, but what God, in His great love, does for us! God wants mercy and not sacrifice (Mt 9: 13). The simple and poor people understood Jesus' way of speaking and rejoiced. The wise said that Jesus was in error. They could not come to understand His teaching. "Yes, I praise you! He praised the Father that the little children understand the message of the Kingdom despite it being hidden from the wise and the learned! If they want to understand it they have to become the pupils of the little children! This way of thinking and of teaching makes people feel uncomfortable.
- Matthew 11: 27: The origin of the new Law: the Son knows the Father. What the Father has to tell us He has given to Jesus, and Jesus reveals it to the little children, so that they may be open to His message. Jesus, the Son, knows the Father. He knows what the Father wanted to communicate to us, when many centuries ago He gave His Law to Moses. Today, Jesus is teaching many things to the poor and to the little children and, through them, to all His Church.
- Matthew 11: 28-30: The invitation of Jesus which is still valid today. Jesus invites all those who are tired to go to Him, and He promises them rest. In our communities today, we should be the continuation of this invitation which Jesus addresses to people who were tired and oppressed by the weight of the observance asked by the laws of purity. He says, "Learn from Me for I am meek and humble of heart." Many times, this saying has been manipulated, to ask people for submission, meekness and passivity. Jesus wants to say the opposite. He asks people not to listen to "the wise and learned," the professors of religion of that time, and to begin to learn from Him, from Jesus, a man who came from Galilee, without higher instruction, who says He is "meek and humble of heart." Jesus does not do as the scribes, who exalt themselves because of their science, but He places Himself at the side of the people who are exploited and humiliated. Jesus, the new Master, knows by experience what takes place in the heart of the people who suffer. He has lived this well and has known it during the thirty years of His life in Nazareth.
- How Jesus puts into practice what He taught in the Discourse on the Mission. Jesus has a passion: to announce the Good News of the Kingdom. He had a passion for the Father and for the people of His country who are poor and abandoned. There, where Jesus found people who listened to Him, Jesus announced the Good News, in any place: In the synagogues during the celebration of the Word (Mt 4: 23), in the houses of friends (Mt 13: 36); walking along the way with the disciples (Mt 12: 1-8); along the

shore of the sea, sitting in the boat (Mt 13: 3); on the Mount from where He proclaims the Beatitudes (Mt 5: 1); in the squares and in the cities, where people would bring the sick to Him (Mt 14: 34-36). Also in the Temple of Jerusalem, during the pilgrimage (Mt 26: 55)! In Jesus everything is revelation of everything which He bore inside Himself! He not only announced the Good News of the Kingdom; He Himself was and continues to be a living sign of the Kingdom. In Him we see clearly what happens when a human being allows God to reign in his life. Today's Gospel reveals the tenderness with which Jesus welcomes the little children. He wanted them to find rest and peace. And because of this choice of His for the little children and the excluded, He was criticized and persecuted. He suffered very much! The same thing happens today. When a community tries to open itself to be a place of welcome and consolation for the little children and the excluded of today who are the foreigners and the migrants, many people do not agree and criticize.

Personal Questions

- Have you ever experienced the rest promised by Jesus?
- How can the words of Jesus help our community to be a place of rest for our life?
- How can one be meek and humble while at the same time striving for promotion or advancement at work or in the community?
- To follow Jesus requires radical change. How can this be an easy yoke or a light burden?

Concluding Prayer

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

Friday, July 15, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

May all who follow Him

reject what is contrary to the Gospel.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 12: 1-8

Jesus was going through a field of grain on the sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "See, your disciples are doing what is unlawful to do on the sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry, how he went into the house of God and ate the bread of offering, which neither he nor

his companions but only the priests could lawfully eat? Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests serving in the temple violate the sabbath and are innocent? I say to you, something greater than the temple is here. If you knew what this meant, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned these innocent men. For the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath."

Reflection

In today's Gospel we see that there are many conflicts between Jesus and the religious authority of that time. They are conflicts regarding the religious practices of that time: fasting, purity, observance of the Sabbath, etc. In our day, they would be conflicts regarding, for example, matrimony between divorced persons, friendship with prostitutes, acceptance of homosexuals, communion without being married by the Church, Sunday mass obligation, fasting on Good Friday. The conflicts were many: at home, in school, in work, in the community, in the Church, in personal life, in society. They were conflicts regarding growth, relationship, age, mentality. So many of them! To live life without conflicts is impossible! Conflict is part of life and starts at birth. We are born with birth pangs. Conflicts are not accidents along the way, but form part of the journey, of the process of conversion. What strikes us is the way in which Jesus faces the conflicts. In the discussion with His enemies, He was not trying to show them that He was right, but wished to make the experience which He, Jesus, had of God, Father and Mother, prevail. The image of God which others had was that of a severe Judge who only threatened and condemned. Jesus tries to have mercy prevail, since the objective of the Law is the practice of Love.

- Matthew 12: 1-2: *To pick grain on the Sabbath day and the criticism of the Pharisees.* On a Sabbath day, the disciples went through the fields and they picked grain to eat them. They were hungry. The Pharisees arrived and invoke the Bible to say that the disciples were transgressing the law of the Sabbath (cf. Ex 20:8-11). Jesus also uses the Bible and responds invoking three examples taken from Scripture: (1) that of David, (2) that of the legislation on work of the priests in the temple and (3) from the action of the Prophet Hosea, that is, He quotes a historical book, a legislative book and a prophetic book.
- Matthew 12: 3-4: *The example of David.* Jesus recalls that David himself did something which was forbidden by the Law, because he took the sacred bread of the temple and gave it to the soldiers to eat, because they were hungry (1 Sam 21: 2-7). No Pharisee had the courage to criticize King David!
- Matthew 12: 5-6: *The example of the priests.* Accused by the religious authority, Jesus argues beginning from what they themselves, the religious authority, do on the Sabbath day. On the Sabbath day, in the Temple of Jerusalem, the priests worked very much more than the other days of the week, because they had to sacrifice the animals for the sacrifices; they had to clean, sweep, carry burdens, kill the animals, etc. Yet nobody said that this was against the Law. They thought of it as normal! The Law itself obliged them to do all this (Num 28: 9-10).
- Matthew 12: 7: *The example of the prophets.* Jesus quotes a verse from the prophet Hosea: *I want mercy and not sacrifice.* The word mercy means to have the heart (cor) in the misery (*miseri*) of others, that is, the merciful person has to be very close to the suffering of the people, has to identify himself/herself with them. The word sacrifice means to have (*ficio*) a thing consecrated (*sacri*), that is, that the one who offers a sacrifice separates the sacrificed object from profane use and places it at a distance from the daily life of the people. If the Pharisees had had this way of looking at the life of the prophet Hosea, they would have known that the most pleasing sacrifice for God is not that the consecrated persons lives far away from reality, but that

he/she places his/her consecrated heart totally in the service of the brothers and sisters in order to relieve them from their misery. They would not have considered guilty those who in reality were innocent.

- Matthew 12: 8: *The Son of Man is the master of the Sabbath.* Jesus ends with this statement: *The Son of Man is the master of the Sabbath!* Jesus Himself is the criterion for interpretation of the Law of God. Jesus knows the *Tanakh* (the Hebrew bible) by heart and invokes it to indicate that the arguments of the others had no foundation. At that time, there were no printed bibles as we have today. In every community there was only one copy written by hand, which remained in the synagogue. If Jesus knew the bible so well, it means that during the thirty years of His life in Nazareth, He had participated intensely in the life of the community, where Scripture was read every Saturday. The new experience of God the Father made Jesus discover God's intention in decreeing the laws of the Old Testament. Having lived thirty years in Nazareth and feeling as His own the oppression and exclusion of so many brothers and sisters, in the name of the law, Jesus must have perceived that this could not be the meaning of the law. If God is Father, then He accepts all as sons and daughters. If God is Father, then we should be brothers and sisters among ourselves. Jesus lived this and prayed for this, from the beginning until the end. The law should be at the service of life and of fraternity. "The human being is not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for the human being" (Mk 2: 27). Because of His great fidelity to this message, Jesus was condemned to death. He disturbed the system, and the system defended itself, using its force against Jesus, because He wished that the Law be placed at the service of life, and not vice-versa. We need to know the bible in depth and to participate deeply in the community, as Jesus did.

Personal Questions

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

For Further Study

To know the bible in depth can be difficult. Various passages may seem to contradict each other, unless put into a broader context where all of a particular reference can be put together in one place. This is one way people use bible quotations to distort their real meaning. The Vatican has tools online to help. The bible is online in searchable form in an approved version at

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_INDEX.HTM

along with a concordance which lists and links every word in the bible in an index at

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_FA.HTM

and allows a user to collect similar words and ideas in one place to help discern their real meaning. Look at these online and see if they can help you learn the bible to a greater depth and understanding.

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, July 16, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

May all who follow Him reject what is contrary to the Gospel.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 12: 14-21

The Pharisees went out and took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. When Jesus realized this, he withdrew from that place. Many people followed him, and he cured them all, but he warned them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through Isaiah the prophet: Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom I delight; I shall place my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not contend or cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope.

Reflection

The Gospel today has two parts: (a) describes the various reactions of the Pharisees and of the people who listen to the preaching of Jesus; and (b) describes what Matthew sees in these reactions: the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Servant of Yahweh, announced by Isaiah.

- Matthew 12: 14: The reaction of the Pharisees: they decide to kill Jesus. This verse is the conclusion of the previous episode, in which Jesus challenges the malice of the Pharisees, by curing the man who had a withered hand (Mt 12: 9-14). The reaction of the Pharisees was to hold a Council meeting against Jesus. Thus, they come to the breaking of the relationship between the religious authority and Jesus. In Mark, this episode is much more explicit and provocative (Mk 3: 1-6). He says that the decision to kill Jesus was not only that of the Pharisees, but also of the Herodians (Mk 3: 6). Altar and throne joined together against Jesus.
- Matthew 12: 15-16: The reaction of the people: to follow Jesus. When Jesus learned the decision of the Pharisees, He went away from the place where He was. People follow Him. Even knowing that the religious authority has decided to kill Jesus, the people do not go away from Jesus, but rather they follow Him. Many followed Him and He cured them all but warned them not to make Him known. People know how to discern. Jesus asks them not to spread the news, not to say what He is doing. A great contrast! On the one side, the conflict of life and death, between Jesus and the religious authority, and on the other the movement of the people who were desirous

of encountering Jesus! They were, above all, the marginalized and the excluded who presented themselves to Jesus with their illness and their infirmities. They, who were not accepted in society or in the religious field, were accepted by Jesus.

- Matthew 12: 17: The concern of Matthew: Jesus is our Messiah. This reaction, different from that of the Pharisees and of the people, moved Matthew to see here the realization of the prophecy of the Suffering Servant. On the one hand, the Servant was persecuted by the authority which insulted Him and spat on His face, but He does not turn back. He presents His face hard as a rock, knowing that He will not be disappointed (Is 50:5- 7). On the other hand, the Servant is sought and expected by the people. The crowd coming from far is waiting for His teaching (Is 42: 4). This is exactly what is happening to Jesus.
- Matthew 12: 18-21: Jesus fulfills the prophecy of the Servant. Matthew presents the entire first Canticle of the Servant. Read the text slowly, thinking of Jesus and the poor who today are excluded:

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

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

How precious, God, is Your faithful love.

So the children of Adam take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. They feast on the bounty of Your house,

You let them drink from Your delicious streams. (Ps 36: 7-8)

Sunday, July 17, 2022

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Create in us silence so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples from Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of fraternity,

justice, and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

Gospel Reading – Luke 10: 38-42

A Key to the Reading:

The text of the Gospel for this Sunday narrates the visit of Jesus to the house of Martha and Mary. Jesus tells Martha: *“Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her!”* Throughout the centuries, many times these words have been interpreted as a confirmation on the part of Jesus of the fact that contemplative life, hidden in the monasteries, is better and more sublime than the active life of those who work in the field of evangelization. This interpretation is not very correct, because it lacks the foundation of the text. In order to understand the significance of these words of Jesus (and of any word) it is important to take into account, to consider the context, that is, the context of the Gospel of Luke as well as the broader context of the work of Luke which includes the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Before verifying the broader context of the Acts of the Apostles, let us try to gaze a bit at the text in itself and try to see how it is placed in the immediate context of the Gospel of Luke.

During the reading, try to feel that you are present in Mary's house and feel close to the environment and to the outreach or importance of the words of Jesus, not only as Martha hears them but also as the community for which Luke writes his Gospel hears them and also how we hear them, us, who today hear these such inspiring words of Jesus.

A Division of the Text to Help in the Reading:

- Luke 10: 38: Martha welcomes Jesus into her house
- Luke 10: 39-40a: Mary listens to the words of Jesus, Martha is busy with the service in the house
- Luke 10: 40b: Martha complains and asks Jesus to intervene
- Luke 10: 41-42: Answer of Jesus

Text:

38 In the course of their journey he came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. 40 Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.' 41 But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, 42 and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which is the point in this text which pleased you the most or struck you? Why?
- What would Jesus want to say with that affirmation: “one thing alone is necessary”?
- Which was the “better part” which Mary chose and which will not be taken from her?
- A historical event can have a more profound symbolical sense. Did you succeed in discovering a symbolical sense in the way in which Luke describes Jesus’ visit to the house of Martha and Mary?
- Read attentively Acts 6: 1-6 and try to discover the bond of union between the problem of the apostles and the conversation of Jesus with Martha.

To Go Deeper into the Theme

Context of the Gospel of Luke:

In Luke 9, 51 begins the second stage of the apostolic activity of Jesus, the long journey from Galilee up to Jerusalem. At the beginning of the journey, Jesus gets out of the Jewish world and enters into the world of the Samaritans (Lk 9, 52). Even though He is not well received by the Samaritans (Lk 9, 53), He continues in their territory and even corrects the Disciples who think differently (Lk 9, 54-55). In responding to those who ask to follow Him, Jesus makes explicit the significance of everything that has happened, and indicates to them the demands of the mission (Lk 9, 56-62).

Then Jesus appoints other seventy-two disciples to go on mission before Him. The sending out of the twelve (Lk 9, 1-6) was in the world of the Jews. The sending out of the seventy-two is for the non Jewish world. Having finished the mission, Jesus and the Disciples meet and evaluate the mission, and the Disciples give an account of the many activities that they carried out, but Jesus insists on the greatest certainty that their names are written in Heaven (Lk 10, 17-37).

Then follows our text which describes the visit of Jesus to the house of Martha and Mary (Lk 10, 38-42). Luke does not specifically indicate where the village of Martha and Mary is found, but in the geographical context of his Gospel, the reader imagines that the village is found in Samaria. From the Gospel of John we know that Martha and Mary lived in Bethany, a small village near Jerusalem (Jn 11, 1). Besides, John tells us that they had a brother named Lazarus.

Comment on the Text:

- Luke 10, 38: Martha welcomes Jesus into her house
 “In the course of the journey, he came to a village and, a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house” Jesus was on the way. Luke does not always say where Jesus was passing by, but many times that Jesus is on the way (Lk 9: 51, 53-57; 10: 1, 38; 11: 1; 13: 22, 23; 14: 25; 17: 11; 18: 31, 35; 19: 1, 11, 28, 29, 41, 45; 20: 1). Because Jesus was firmly decided to go up to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51). This decision orientates Him during all the stages of the journey. The entrance into the village and into the house of Martha and Mary is a stage more of this long journey up to Jerusalem and forms part of the realization of Jesus’ mission. From the beginning, the objective of the journey is definitive: to carry out His mission of Servant, announced by Isaiah (Is 53: 2-10; 61: 1-2) and assumed by Jesus in Nazareth (Lk 4: 16-21).
- Luke 10: 39-40a: Mary listened to his words, Martha was taken up with the service.
 “She had a sister, named Mary, who sitting at the feet of Jesus, listened to his word; Martha, instead was all taken up with all the serving”. A normal supper at home, in

the family. While some speak, others prepare the food. The two tasks are important and necessary, both complement one another, especially when it is a question of welcoming someone who is coming from outside. In affirming that “Martha was all taken up with all the serving” (*diaconia*), Luke evokes the seventy-two disciples who were also busy with many activities of the missionary service (Lk 10: 17-18).

- Luke 10: 40b: Martha complains and asks Jesus to intervene.
“Martha came to him and said: ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the service all by myself? Please tell her to help me’” Another familiar scene, but not so normal. Martha is busy only with the preparation of the food, while Mary is sitting, and is speaking with Jesus. Martha complains. Perhaps Jesus interferes and says something to the sister to see if she will help her in the service in the *diaconia*. Martha considers herself a servant and thinks that the service of a servant is that of preparing the food and that her service in the kitchen is more important than that of her sister who is speaking with Jesus. For Martha, what Mary does is not a service, because she says: “Do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the service all by *myself*?” But Martha is not the only servant. Jesus also assumes his role as servant, that is of the Servant announced by the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah had said that the principal service of the Servant is that of being before God in prayer listening in order to be able to discover a word of comfort to take to those who are discouraged. The Servant said: “The Lord God has given me a disciple’s tongue, for me to know how to give a word of comfort to the weary. Morning by morning he makes my ear alert to listen like a disciple” (Is 50: 4). Now, Mary has an attitude of prayer before Jesus. And the question arises: Who carries out the service of a servant better: Martha or Mary?
- Luke 10: 41-42: Response of Jesus
“The Lord then answered: ‘Martha, Martha, you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken from her’” A beautiful answer and a very human one. For Jesus, a good conversation with persons, who are friends is important and even more important than eating (cf. Jn 4: 32). Jesus does not agree with the worries of Martha. He does not want that the preparation of the meal interrupt the conversation. and it is as if he would say: “Martha, it is not necessary to prepare so many things! A small thing suffices! And then come to participate in such a beautiful conversation!” This is the principal significance, so simple and human of the words of Jesus. Jesus likes a good conversation. and a good *conversation* with Jesus produces *conversion*. But in the context of the Gospel of Luke, these decisive words of Jesus assume a more profound symbolical significance:
 - Like Martha, the disciples also, during the mission, were worried about many things, but Jesus clarifies well that the more important thing is that of having their names written in Heaven, that is, to be known and loved by God (Lk 10: 20). Jesus repeats to Martha: “You worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one.
 - A short time before the Doctor of the Law had reduced the commandments to one alone: “To love the Lord God above all things and your neighbor as yourself” (Lk 10, 27). Observing this only and better commandment, the person will be ready to act with love, like the Good Samaritan and not like the priest or the Levite who do not fulfil their duty well (Lk 10, 25-42). The many services of Martha should be carried out beginning by this unique service truly necessary which is the loving attention to persons. This is the better part that Mary has chosen and which will not be taken from her.
 - Martha is concerned about serving (*diaconia*). She wanted to be helped by Mary in the service of the table. But which is the service which God wants? This is the

fundamental question. Mary is more in agreement with the attitude of the Servant of God, because, like the Servant, she is now in the attitude of prayer before Jesus. Mary cannot abandon her attitude of prayer in the presence of God. Because if she would do this, she would not discover the word of comfort to take to those who are wearied. This is the true service which God is asking from all.

Broadening the information:

A broader context of the Acts of the Apostles

After the death and resurrection of Jesus the communities will be born. They will have to face new problems, for which they did not have solutions already foreseen. In order to orientate themselves in the solutions to the problems, the communities tried to remember the words and gestures of Jesus which could bring them some light. Thus, the episode of the visit of Jesus to the house of Martha and Mary was recalled and narrated in order to help clarify the problem described in Acts 6: 1-6.

The rapid growth in the number of Christians created divisions in the community. The faithful of Greek origin began to complain of those of Hebrew origin and said that their widows were set aside, neglected, in the daily life. There was discrimination in the environment of the community and persons were lacking for the various services. Up to that moment the need had not arisen to involve other persons in the coordination of the community and in the fulfilment of the services. Like Moses, after leaving Egypt (Ex 18: 14; Num 11: 14-15), the Apostles also did everything alone. But Moses, obliged by the facts, shared the power and convoked other seventy leaders for the necessary services among the People of God (Ex 18: 17-23; Num 11: 16-17). Jesus had done the same thing: he convoked other seventy-two disciples (Lk 10: 1). Now, in the face of new problems, the Apostles did the same. They convoked the community and exposed the problem before everyone. Without doubt, the word of Jesus to Martha helped them to reach a solution. The Apostles find themselves between two real needs, both of them very important, defined as service (*diaconia*): the service of the Word and the service of the tables. What to do? Which of the two is more important? The response of Jesus to Martha helped to discern the problem. Jesus said that Mary could not abandon the conversation with Him in order to go and help in the kitchen. Thus, Peter concludes: It would not be right for us to neglect the Word of God so as to give out food! And Peter defines the service of the Apostolate: "to devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word."

It is not said that one service is better than the other. What cannot happen is that the service of the Word be hindered by the unforeseen demands of the service at the table. The community was obliged to face the problem, be concerned to have enough people for all the services, so as to be able, to converse, thus, the service of the Word in its integrity. The service of the word proper of the Apostles (and of Mary at the feet of Jesus) had two dimensions: on the one side the listening to the Word, receiving it, incarnating it, announcing it, diffusing it through the active work of evangelization and, on the other side, in the name of the community, respond to God in prayer, represent the community in a prayerful attitude before God. It is not a question of an opposition between the two services: word and table. Both are important and necessary for the life of the community. It is necessary to have persons available for both of them. In the economy of the Kingdom, besides, the service of the Word (Evangelization) is the root, the source. It is the better part which Mary has chosen. The service of the table is the result, the fruit, it is its revelation. For Luke and for the first Christians, "the better part" of which Jesus speaks to Martha, is the service of evangelization, source of all the rest.

Mestre Eckhart, the great Dominican mystic of the Middle Ages interprets this episode in a very amusing way. He says that Martha already knew how to work and to live in the presence of God. Mary did not know and was learning. This is why she could not be interrupted. The great mystics are the proof that this text cannot be interpreted like a

confirmation on the part of Jesus that contemplative life is better and more sublime than active life. It is not well to make a distinction of these two words, because one is completed, is founded and is made explicit in the other. The Carmelite Saint John of the Cross in a little more than ten years he travelled 27,000 kilometres going through Spain. Saint Teresa of Avila was always on the move, very busy as she was with the foundation of so many monasteries. Jesus himself lived the profound unity of contemplative and active life.

Recitation of a Psalm

Psalm 145 (144): God Deserves Praise

I shall praise you to the heights, God my King, I shall bless your name for ever and ever.
Day after day I shall bless you,
I shall praise your name for ever and ever.
Great is Yahweh and worthy of all praise, his greatness beyond all reckoning.
Each age will praise your deeds to the next, proclaiming your mighty works.
Your renown is the splendor of your glory, I will ponder the story of your wonders.
They will speak of your awesome power, and I shall recount your greatness.
They will bring out the memory of your great generosity, and joyfully acclaim your saving justice.
Yahweh is tenderness and pity, slow to anger, full of faithful love. Yahweh is generous to all,
his tenderness embraces all his creatures. All your creatures shall thank you, Yahweh, and your faithful shall bless you.
They shall speak of the glory of your kingship and tell of your might, making known your mighty deeds to the children of Adam, the glory and majesty of your kingship.
Your kingship is a kingship forever, your reign lasts from age to age.
Yahweh is trustworthy in all his words, and upright in all his deeds.
Yahweh supports all who stumble,
lifts up those who are bowed down.
All look to you in hope
and you feed them with the food of the season. And, with generous hand,
you satisfy the desires of every living creature. Upright in all that he does,
Yahweh acts only in faithful love. He is close to all who call upon him, all who call on him from the heart.
He fulfils the desires of all who fear him, he hears their cry and he saves them.
Yahweh guards all who love him, but all the wicked he destroys.
My mouth shall always praise Yahweh,
let every creature bless his holy name for ever and ever.

Final Prayer

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

Monday, July 18, 2022

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 12: 38-42

Some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." He said to them in reply, "An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here. At the judgment the queen of the south will arise with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here."

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents to us a discussion between Jesus and the religious authority of the time. This time, the doctors of the law and the Pharisees are those who ask Jesus for a sign. Jesus had given many signs: He had cured the leper (Mt 8: 1-4), the servant of the centurion (Mt 8: 5-13), Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8: 14-15), the sick and the possessed of the city (Mt 8: 16), He had calmed down the storm (Mt 8: 23-27), had cast out devils (Mt 8: 28-34) and had worked many other miracles. The people seeing all these signs recognize in Jesus the Servant of Yahweh (Mt 8: 17; 12: 17-21). But the doctors and the Pharisees are not able to perceive the significance of so many signs which Jesus had given. They wanted something different.

- Matthew 12: 38: The request for a sign made by the Pharisees and the doctors. The Pharisees arrived and said to Jesus, "Master, we should like to see a sign from You." They want Jesus to make a sign for them, a miracle, and thus they will be able to verify and examine if Jesus is or is not the one who is sent by God according to what they imagined and expected. They wanted to be sure. They wanted to submit Jesus to their own criteria in such a way as to be able to place Him into their own Messianic frame. There is no openness in them for a possible conversation. They had understood nothing of all that Jesus had done.
- Matthew 12: 39: Jesus' response: the sign of Jonah. Jesus does not submit Himself to the request of the religious authority, because it is not sincere: "An evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign that will be given them is the sign of the prophet Jonah." These words constitute a very strong judgment regarding the doctors and the Pharisees. They evoke the oracle of Hosea who denounced the people, accusing them of being an unfaithful and adulterous spouse (Hos 2:4). The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus, upon hearing the request of the Pharisees, sighed profoundly (Mk 8: 12), probably out of indignation and of sadness before such a great blindness: because it is not worthwhile to place a beautiful picture before people who

do not want to open their eyes. Anyone who closes his eyes cannot see! The only sign which will be given to them is the sign of Jonah.

- Matthew 12: 41: There is something greater than Jonah here. Jesus looks toward the future: “For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.” Therefore, the only sign will be Jesus’ resurrection, which will be prolonged in the resurrection of His followers. This is the sign which will be given to the doctors and the Pharisees in the future. They will be placed before the fact that Jesus, condemned to death by them and to death on the cross, will be raised from the dead, and He will continue, in many ways, to raise those who believe in Him. For example, He will raise them in the witness of the apostles, “persons without instruction” who will have had the courage to face authority announcing the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 4: 13). What converts is witness, not miracles: “On Judgment day the men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and they will be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented.” The people of Nineveh converted because of the witness of the preaching of Jonah, and they denounced the unbelief of the doctors and the Pharisees, because “Look, there is something greater than Jonah here.”
- Matthew 12: 42: There is something greater than Solomon here. The reference to the conversion of the people of Nineveh is associated and makes one recall the episode of the Queen of the South. “On Judgment Day the Queen of the South will appear against this generation and be its condemnation, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and look, there is something greater than Solomon here!” This reminder of the episode of the Queen of the South, who recognizes the wisdom of Solomon, indicates how the Bible was used at that time. By association, the principal rule of interpretation was the following: “The Bible is explained through the Bible.” Even now, this is one of the more important norms for the interpretation of the Bible, especially for the prayerful reading of the Word of God.

Personal Questions

- To be converted means to be completely changed morally, but also to change one’s ideas and way of thinking. A moralist is one who changes behavior but keeps his way of thinking unaltered. Which one am I?
- In the on-going renewal of the Church today, am I a Pharisee who asks for a sign or am I like the people who recognize that this is the way wanted by God?
- Certain religions today see God in a different light and use it to justify killing and other injustices. Still others re-envision God and His Church as anything they want. In what ways can we discern the truth in terms of on-going renewal?
- Today, we use several types of analysis to interpret the bible, such as literary analysis, historical-criticism, contextual analysis, etc. How familiar are you with these methods and how do you feel they add to understanding the bible?

For Further Study

The encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, talks about methods of biblical interpretation in modern times and promotes biblical studies. Take time to read this to begin an exploration of the diverse ways we can learn from the bible. Papal documents are available at www.vatican.va

Concluding Prayer

Better Your faithful love than life itself; my lips will praise You.
Thus I will bless You all my life,
in Your name lift up my hands. (Ps 63: 3-4)

Tuesday, July 19, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 12: 46-50

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

Reflection

- The family of Jesus. The relatives reached the house where Jesus was. They have probably come from Nazareth. From there up to Capernaum there is a distance of forty kilometers. His mother also comes with them. They do not enter, but they send a messenger: "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with You." Jesus' reaction is clear: "Who is My mother? Who are My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My heavenly Father is My brother, and sister, and mother." To understand the meaning of this response it is helpful to look at the situation of the family in the time of Jesus.
- In the old Israel, the clan, that is, the large family (the community), was the basis for social living together. It was the protection of families and of the people, the guarantee of possession of the land, the principal vehicle of the tradition, and the defense of identity. It was the concrete way on the part of the people of that time to incarnate the love of God and love toward neighbor. To defend the clan was the same as to defend the Covenant.
- In Galilee at the time of Jesus, because of the system established during the long periods of government of Herod the Great (37 BC to 4 BC) and of his son Herod Antipas (4 BC to 39 AD), the clan (the community) was becoming weaker. The taxes to be paid, both to the government and to the Temple, the debts which were increasing, the individualistic mentality of the Hellenistic ideology, the frequent threats of violent

repression on the part of the Romans and the obligation to accept the soldiers and give them hospitality, the ever-growing problem of survival, all this impelled the families to block things out and to think only of their own needs. This closing up was strengthened by the religion of the time. For example: one who gave his inheritance to the Temple could leave his parents without any help. This weakened the fourth commandment which was the backbone of the clan (Mk 7: 8-13). Besides this, the observance of the norms of purity was a factor of marginalization for many people: women, children, Samaritans, foreigners, lepers, possessed people, tax collectors or publicans, the sick, the mutilated and paraplegics.

- Thus, concern with the problems of one's own family prevented the people from meeting in community. Now, in order that the Kingdom of God manifest itself in community living, the people had to overcome the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves again to the large family, to the community. Jesus gave the example. When His own family tried to take possession of Him, He reacted and extended the family: "Who is My mother? Who are My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My heavenly Father is My brother, and sister, and mother." He created a community.
- Jesus asked the same thing of those who wanted to follow Him. Families could not close themselves off from the larger community. The excluded and the marginalized had to be accepted in life with others, and in this way feel accepted by God (Lk 14: 12-14). This was the way to attain the objective of the Law, which said "There must, then, be no poor among you" (Dt 15: 4). Like the great Prophets of the past, Jesus tried to consolidate community life in the villages of Galilee. He restored the profound meaning of the clan, of the family, of the community, as an expression of the incarnation of the love toward God and toward neighbor.

Personal Questions

- To live faith in the community. What place and what influence does family and community have in my way of living my faith?
- Today, in large cities, overcrowding promotes individualism which is contrary to life in community. What am I doing to counteract this evil?
- There are many forms of community today, and some of these are dysfunctional. We have online communities, gangs (which are a form of community), lobbies, clubs, social and business societies, and so on. How do I bring the attitude of Jesus to these other communities I might be a member of?
- How broadly do I define what is my community? Why?

Concluding Prayer

I waited, I waited for Yahweh, then He stooped to me
and heard my cry for help.
He put a fresh song in my mouth, praise of our God. (Ps 40: 1.3)

Wednesday, July 20, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading – Matthew 13: 1-9

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

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

As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up at once, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Anyone who has ears should listen!'

Reflection

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

Introduction: Birth and Preparation of the Messiah (Mt 1 to 4)

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

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

the presence of the mystery of God in our life. To speak in parables means to reveal the mystery of the Kingdom present in life.

- Matthew 13: 1-3: *Sitting in the boat, Jesus taught the people.* As it happened in the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5: 1-2), here also Matthew makes a brief introduction to the *discourse of the Parables*, describing Jesus who teaches in the boat, on the shore, and many people around him who listen. Jesus was not a person who was instructed (Jn 7: 15). He had not been to a higher school in Jerusalem. He came from inside the country, from Nazareth. He was unknown, a farmer and craftsman or artisan at the same time. Without asking permission from the religious authority, he began to teach the people. People liked to listen to him. Jesus taught especially by means of parables. We have already heard some of them: fishermen of men (Mt 4: 19), the salt (Mt 5: 13), the lamp (Mt 5: 15), the birds of the sky and the lilies of the field (Mt 6: 26.28), the house constructed on the rock (Mt 7: 24). And now, in chapter 13, the parables begin to have a particular meaning: they serve to reveal the mystery of the Kingdom of God present in the midst of people and the activity of Jesus.
- Matthew 13: 4-8: *The parable of the seed taken from the life of the farmer.* At that time, it was not easy to live from farming. The land was full of stones. There was little rain, too much sun. Besides, many times, people in order to shorten the way, passed through the fields and destroyed the plants (Mt 12: 1). But in spite of all that, every year, the farmer would sow and plant, with trust in the force of the seed, in the generosity of nature. The parable of the sower describes that which we all know and do: the seed thrown by the farmer falls on the ground along the road, another part falls among the stones and thistles; still another part falls on good earth, where, according to the quality of the land, will produce thirty, sixty and even up to one hundred. A parable is a comparison. It uses things known by the people and which are visible, to explain that the Kingdom of God is an invisible and unknown thing. The people of Galilee understood about seeds, ground, rain, sun, and harvest. And so now Jesus uses exactly these things that were known to people to explain the mystery of the Kingdom.
- Matthew 13: 9: *He, who has ears to hear, let him listen.* The expression "*He, who has ears, let him listen*" means: "*It is this! You have heard. Now try to understand!*" The way to be able to understand the parable is to search: "To try to understand!" The parable does not give everything immediately but pushes one to think and to make one discover starting from the experience which the auditors have of the seed. It opens to creativity and to participation. It is not a doctrine which comes ready to be taught. The parable does not give water in bottles, but the source. The farmer who listens to the parable says: "Seed in the round, I know what that means! But Jesus says that it has something to do with the Kingdom of God. What would that be?" And it is easy to imagine the long conversations of the people! The parable leads to listen to nature and to think of life. Once a person asked in a community: "Jesus says that we have to be salt. For what is salt good?" There was discussion and then at the end, ten different purposes that salt can have, were discovered. Then all this was applied to the life of the community and it was discovered that to be salt is difficult and demanding. The parable worked well!

Personal Questions

- When you were a child how was catechism taught to you? How do you compare some parts of life? Do you remember some important comparison that the catechist told you? How is the catechesis today in your community?

- Sometimes we are the roadside, sometimes the rock; other times the thorns or thistles, and other times good earth. What am I? What are we in our community? Which are the fruits which the Word of God is producing in my life, in my family, and in our community: thirty, sixty, one hundred?

Concluding Prayer

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

Thursday, July 21, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 10-17

The disciples approached Jesus and said, "Why do you speak to the crowd in parables?" He said to them in reply, "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: You shall indeed hear but not understand, you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted and I heal them. "But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

Reflection

- Chapter 13 speaks to us about the discourse on the parables. Following the text of Mark (Mk 4: 1-34), Matthew omits the parable of the seed which germinates alone (Mk 4: 26-29), and he stops at the discussion of the reason for the parable (Mt 13: 10-17), adding the parable of the wheat and the darnel (Mt 13:24-30), of the yeast (Mt 13: 33), of the treasure (Mt 13:4 4), of the pearl (Mt 13:4 5-46) and of the dragnet (Mt 13: 47-50). Together with the parable of the sower (Mt 13: 4-11) and of the mustard seed (Mt 13: 31-32), there are seven parables in the Discourse on the Parables (Mt 13: 1-50).
- Matthew 13: 10: The question. In the Gospel of Mark, the disciples ask for an explanation of the parables (Mk 4: 10). Here in Matthew, the perspective is different.

They want to know why Jesus, when He speaks to the people, speaks only in parables: "Why do You talk to them in parables?" What is the reason for this difference?

- Matthew 13: 11-13: "Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted. Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. The reason I speak to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. Jesus answers: "Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has." Why is it granted to the Apostles to know and not to others? Here is a comparison to help us understand. Two people listen to the mother who teaches: A person must not cut and sew." One of them is the daughter and the other is not. The daughter understands and the other one understands nothing. Why? Because in the mother's house the expression "cut and sew" means to slander. Thus, the mother's teaching helps the daughter to understand how to put love into practice, helping her so that what she already knows may grow, develop. Anyone who has will be given more. The other person understands nothing and loses even the little that she knew regarding love and slander. She remains confused and does not understand what love has to do with cutting and sewing! Anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. A parable reveals and hides at the same time! It reveals for "those who are inside," who accept Jesus as the Messiah Servant. It hides from those who insist on saying that the Messiah will be and should be a glorious King. These understand the image presented by the parable, but they do not understand the significance. The disciples, instead, grow in what they already know concerning the Messiah. The others do not understand anything and lose even the little that they thought they knew about the Kingdom and the Messiah.
- Matthew 13: 14-15: The fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Just as at another time (Mt 12: 18-21), in this different reaction of the people and the Pharisees to the teaching of the parables, Matthew again sees here the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He even quotes at length the text of Isaiah which says, "Listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive! This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by Me."
- Matthew 13: 16-17: "But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear." All this explains the last sentence: "But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear. In truth I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see and never saw it, to hear what you hear and never heard it!"
- The Parables: a new way of speaking to the people about God. People remained impressed by the way in which Jesus taught. "A new way of teaching! Given with authority! Different from that of the scribes!" (Mk 7: 28). Jesus had a great capacity for finding very simple images to compare the things of God with the things of life which people knew and experienced in the daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: to be in touch with the things of the life of the people, and to be in touch with the things of God, of the Kingdom of God. In some parables there are things that happen and that seldom take place in life. For example, when has it ever happened that a shepherd, who has one hundred sheep, abandons the flock with 99 to go and look for the lost sheep? (Lk 15: 4). Where have we ever seen a father who accepts with joy and a feast his son who had squandered all his goods, without saying a word of reproach to him? (Lk 15: 20-24). When has it been seen that a Samaritan man is better than a Levite, than a priest? (Lk 10: 29-37). The parable makes one think. It leads the

person to enter into the story beginning from the experience of life. And through our experience it urges us to discover that God is present in our daily life. The parable is a participative form of teaching and educating. It does not change everything in one minute. It does not make one know; it makes one discover. The parable changes our perspective; it makes the person who listens a contemplative; it helps her to observe reality. This is the novelty of the teaching of the parables of Jesus, different from that of the doctors who taught that God manifests Himself only in the observance of the law. "The Kingdom is present in your midst" (Lk 17: 21). But those who listened did not always understand.

Personal Questions

- Jesus says, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom." When I read the Gospels, am I like those who understand nothing or like those to whom it has been granted to know the Kingdom?
- What role does the Father's gratuitous grace have in understanding these parables?
- Which is the parable of Jesus with which I most identify ? Why?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, Your faithful love is in the heavens; Your constancy reaches to the clouds; Your saving justice is like towering mountains, Your judgments like the mighty deep. (Ps 36: 5-6)

Friday, July 22, 2022

St. Mary Magdalene

Opening Prayer

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

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

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,

"*Rabbouni*," which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and then reported what he told her.

Reflection

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

- John 20: 1: Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb. There was a profound love between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. She was one of the few people who had the courage to remain with Jesus until the hour of His death on the Cross. After the obligatory rest of the Sabbath, she returned to the tomb, to be in the place where she had met the Beloved for the last time, but to her great surprise, the tomb was empty!
- John 20: 11-13: Mary Magdalene weeps but seeks. As she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. The angels asked, "Why are you weeping?" Her response: "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put Him!" Mary Magdalene looks for the Jesus she had known, the same one with whom she had lived for three years.
- John 20: 14-15: Mary Magdalene speaks with Jesus without recognizing Him; the disciples on the way to Emmaus saw Jesus, but they did not recognize Him (Lk 24: 15- 16). The same thing happens to Mary Magdalene. She sees Jesus but does not recognize Him. She thinks that He is the gardener. Jesus also asks, as the angels had done, "Why are you weeping?" And He adds, "Whom are you looking for?" Response: "If you have taken Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will go and remove Him!" She is still looking for the Jesus of the past, the same one of three days before. The image of the past prevents her from recognizing the living Jesus, who is standing in front of her.
- John 20: 16: Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus. Jesus pronounces the name "Mary!" (Miriam). This is the sign of recognition: the same voice, the same way of pronouncing the name. She answers "Master!" (*Rabbouni*). Jesus turns. The first impression is that death has been only a painful accident on the way, but that now everything has turned back as it was in the beginning. Mary embraces Jesus intensely. He was the same Jesus who had died on the cross, the same one whom she had known and loved. Here takes place what Jesus had said in the parable of the Good Shepherd: "He calls His by name and they know His voice". "I know My sheep and My sheep know Me!" (Jn 10: 2, 4, 14).
- John 20: 17: Mary Magdalene receives the mission to announce the resurrection to the Apostles. In fact, it is the same Jesus, but the way of being with her is not the

same. Jesus tells her, "Do not cling to Me because I have not yet ascended to the Father!" Jesus is going to be together with the Father. Mary Magdalene should not cling to Him, but rather, she has to assume her mission: "But go and find My brothers and tell them: I am ascending to My Father and your Father". He calls the disciples "My brothers". Ascending to the Father Jesus opens the way for us so that we can be close to God. "I want them to be with Me where I am" (Jn 17: 24; 14: 3).

- John 20: 18: The dignity and the mission of Magdalene and of the women. Mary Magdalene is called the disciple of Jesus (Lk 8:1-2); witness of His crucifixion (Mk 15: 40-41; Mt 27: 55-56; Jn 19: 25), of His burial (Mk 15: 47; Lk 23: 55; Mt 27: 61), and of His resurrection (Mk 16: 1-8; Mt 28: 1-10; Jn 20: 1, 11-18). Now she receives the order, she is ordered to go to the Twelve and to announce to them that Jesus is alive. Without this Good News of the Resurrection, the seven lamps of the Sacraments would extinguish (Mt 28: 10; Jn 20: 17-18).

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Saturday, July 23, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 24-30

Jesus put another parable before them, 'The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off.

When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, then the darnel appeared as well. The owner's laborers went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?"

He said to them, "Some enemy has done this." And the laborers said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall

say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn." '1

Reflection

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

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

- *Matthews 13: 24-26: The situation: the darnel and the wheat grain grow together.* The Word of God causes communities to be formed and this is good seed, but within the communities there are always things which are contrary to the Word of God. From where do these come? This was the discussion, or mystery which led to keep the parable of the darnel and the wheat.
- *Matthew 13: 27-28a: The origin of the mixture which exists in life.* The laborers asked the owner, the sower: "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" The owner responded: Some enemy has done this. Who is this enemy? The enemy, the adversary, Satan or the Devil (Mt 13: 39), is the one who divides, who takes away from the right path. The tendency to division exists in the community and in each one of us. The desire to dominate, to take advantage of the community in order to be more important and so many other interested desires divide, they are the enemy which sleeps in each one of us.
- *Matthew 13: 28b-30: The diverse reaction before ambiguity.* In the face of this mixture of good and of evil, the laborers want to eliminate the darnel. They thought: "If we leave everything in the community, we lose our reason for being! We lose our identity!" They wanted to send away those whom they thought were diverse. But this is not the decision of the owner of the land. He says: "Let both the darnel and the wheat grow together till the harvest!" What is decisive is not what each one says, but that which each one lives and does. God will judge us according to the fruit which we will produce (Mt 12: 33). The force and the dynamism of the Kingdom will manifest themselves in the community. Even if it is small and full of contradictions, it is a sign of the Kingdom. But it is not the master or the owner of the Kingdom, neither can it consider itself totally just. The parable of the seed and of the darnel explains the way in which the force of the Kingdom acts in history. It is necessary to make a clear option for the justice of the Kingdom, and at the same time, together fight for justice, have patience and learn to live and to dialogue with differences and with contradictions. When harvest comes then there will be the division, the separation.

- *The teaching in Parables.* The parable is a pedagogical instrument which uses the daily life to indicate that life speaks to us of God. It becomes a reality and renders the look of people contemplative. A parable tends towards the things of life, and because of this it is an open teaching, because we all have some experience of things of life. The teaching in parables makes the person start from the experience that she has: seed, light, sheep, flowers, birds, father, net, little children, fish, etc. In this way daily life becomes transparent, revealing the presence and the action of God. Jesus did not usually explain the parables. He left the sense open; he did not determine it. This was a sign that he believed in the capacity of the people to discover the sense of the parable beginning from the experience of life. Sometimes, at the request from the disciples, he would explain the sense (Mt 13: 10, 36). For example, this is what he did with the parable of the seed and the darnel (Mt 13: 36-43).

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, July 24, 2022

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all mercies,
in the Name of Christ your Son, we implore you, send us the Gift,
pour into us your Spirit! Spirit, Paraclete,
teach us to pray in truth in the new Temple
who is the Christ.
Spirit, faithful to the Father and to us, as the dove has its nest,
plead within us incessantly with the Father, because we do not know how to pray.
Spirit of Christ,
first gift to us believers,
pray within us tirelessly to the Father, as the Son taught us. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 11: 1-13

To help us understand the passage:

The Gospel passage is divided into three sections:

- vv. 1-4: the prayer that Jesus taught

- vv. 5-8: the parable of the insistent friend
- vv. 9-13: the teaching on the efficacy of prayer.

The text:

1 He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." 2 And he said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread; 4 and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation."

5 And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything? 8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs. 9 And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 11 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

- Like the disciples, we too come together around Jesus who prays alone. We gather around Him and in Him all our energies, every thought, every commitment and preoccupation, our hopes, and pains ...
- Today it is we who are those disciples who see the Master praying and allow themselves to be involved in his prayer, which, evidently, was quite special.
- Today his words are addressed to us, the invitation to trust in the love of the Father is addressed to us, We are so taken up with material things, so much seeking "all and immediately," so spellbound by a thousand things, that then (and only "then", after some event that shakes us) we discover that they are all really superfluous ...
- Today it is up to us to give voice to the prayer of the Master: *Father, hallowed be your name...*

Some Questions

Let us use this occasion to examine our way of praying:

- What does praying mean for me: An obligation? A pause in the search of myself? Presenting God with a list of requests? A pause in the company of the Father? A simple and trusting dialogue with the One who loves me?
- How much time do I give to prayer: some every day? Or once a week or once a month? Occasionally? Systematically? Do I wait until I "feel the need" to pray?
- What is the starting point of my prayer: is it the Word of God? Is it the saint or the liturgical feast of the day? Is it devotion to our Lady? Is it an illustration or icon? Is it the events of my life or those of the history of the world?

- Whom do I meet when I pray: looking deep into myself, when I pray do I speak to one whom I feel to be a judge or to a friend? Do I feel Him to be an “equal” or someone who is “holy,” infinite or unattainable? Is He near to me or far and indifferent? Is He my Father or my master? Does He care for me or “is He busy with His own affairs”?
- How do I pray: do I pray a little mechanically, using set formulae? Do I pray using passages from the Psalms or other Biblical texts? Liturgical texts? Do I choose to pray spontaneously? Do I look for texts using beautiful words or do I prefer to repeat a short phrase? How do I use “the Lord’s prayer”? Do I more often find myself invoking God for some need or to praise Him in the liturgy or to contemplate Him in silence? Am I able to pray while I am working or in any place or only when I am in church? Am I able to make liturgical prayer my own? What place does the Mother of God have in my prayer?

A Key to the Reading

This passage presents prayer as one of the fundamental requirements and a key point in the life of a disciple of Jesus and of the community of disciples.

vv. 1-4: Jesus, like other great religious masters of his time, teaches his followers a prayer that will define them: the “Our Father”.

- *Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished one of his disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray”:* Jesus goes aside to pray. In Luke’s Gospel he does this often (5: 16), above all just before important events: before choosing the Twelve (6: 12-13), before soliciting Peter’s confession of faith (9: 18-20), before the transfiguration (9: 28-29) and, finally, before the passion (22: 40-45).

As Jesus prays, he arouses in his disciples the desire to pray like him. Clearly, it is a prayer that shows itself externally in a very special way and that certainly affects his preaching. The disciples understand that such a prayer is quite different from that taught by other spiritual masters in Israel or even by the precursor of Jesus. That is why they ask him to teach them to pray. Thus, the prayer that Jesus passes on to his disciples becomes the characteristic expression of their ideal and identity, of their way of relating to God and among themselves.

- *Father.* The first thing that Jesus teaches on prayer is to call God “Father”. Matthew, unlike Luke, does not add the adjective “our”, stressing less the community aspect of the Christian prayer. On the other hand, the fact of invoking the Father, constitutes the best adhesive element of the community of disciples.

For a Jew of the first century, relationship with one’s father was one of intimacy, but also a recognition of the father’s authority over every member of the family. This is reflected in the Christian custom of calling God “Father”, whereas there is no certain evidence that the Jews of the time used to call God with the intimate term of “*abba*”. This term is none other than the emphatic form of the Aramaic “*’ab*”, the familiar and respectful term used for earthly fathers.

The fact that Jesus used to turn to God and called him *abba*, shows the new kind of relationship that He, and therefore his disciples, establish with God: a relationship of closeness, familiarity, and trust.

In the classical scheme of Biblical prayer, the first part of the “our Father” deals directly with God, whereas the second part refers to the needs of humankind in its earthly existence.

- *Father, hallowed be your name:* in the message of the prophets of Israel, it is God who “sanctifies His own Name” (that is, himself: “the name is the person”) intervening

with power in human history, notwithstanding that Israel and the other peoples have dishonored Him.. In Ezekiel we read: *"But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that men said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of his land.' But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel caused to be profaned among the nations to which they came. "Therefore, say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations will know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land."* (36: 20- 24). On the same subject we may also read: *Dt 32: 51; Is 29: 22; Ez 28: 22. 25).*

The subject of the verb "to hallow", in *Lk 11: 2*, is God Himself: we are faced with a "theological passive". This means that the first petition of this prayer does not concern human beings and their unquestionable duty to honor and respect God, but God the Father Himself who must make Himself known as such to all. Thus, we petition God to reveal Himself in His sovereign greatness: this is an invocation with eschatological connotations, closely connected with the following petition.

- *Your Kingdom come*: the great event proclaimed by Jesus is the definitive coming of the Kingdom of God among us: *"Be sure of this: the kingdom of God is very near"* (*Lk 10: 11*; cfr also *Mt 10: 7*). The prayer of Jesus and of the Christian, then, is in close harmony with this proclamation. Asking in this prayer that this Kingdom be ever more visibly present, has, in fact, two effects: the person praying has to come face to face with the eschatological design of God, but also with the obligation of a radical willingness to serve His will of salvation. Thus, if it is true that we may and must present our needs to God the Father, it is also true that Christian prayer never has man and woman for its end, it is never a selfish petition, but its ultimate end is to glorify God, implore his full closeness, his complete manifestation: *"Set your hearts on his kingdom, and these other things will be given you as well"* (*Lk 12: 31*).
- *Give us this day our daily bread*: we have come to the second part of the Lord's prayer. The person praying has now put into place the correct and intimate relationship with God, and now lives in the logic of closeness to God who is Father and his/her petitions flow from this way of life.

In Jesus' time as in ours (almost!), bread is the most necessary food, the primary nourishment. In this case, however, "bread" stands for food in general and, more, all kinds of material needs of the disciples.

The English term "bread" is a translation of the Greek "*epiousion*", found also in Matthew but not in any other Greek biblical or profane text. This makes it difficult to give a really reliable version, so much so that we are constrained to translate it according to the context.

What is clear, however, is that the disciple who is praying in this way, is aware of not having much material security for the future, not even for his/her daily food: he/she has really "left everything behind" to follow Christ (cfr *Lk 5: 11*). Here we are dealing with a situation characteristic of the early generations of Christians. This is not to say that the prayer for "bread" may not be very useful for Christians of today: we are all called to receive all things from Providence, as a free gift from God, even if these things come from the labor of our hands. The Eucharistic offertory reminds us of this all the time: we offer to God that which we know well we have received from Him so that we may receive it back from His hands. This also means that the Christian of

every age must not be preoccupied with his/her material situation, because the Father will take care of him/: “*That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are to clothe it. For life means more than food, and the body more than clothing*” (Lk 12: 22-23).

- *Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us.* The Christian, immersed in the salvation given by the Father with the coming of His kingdom, know that all his/her sins are already forgiven. This places him/her in the condition and obligation of having to forgive others, thus allowing God to render definitive the pardon of the Christian capable of pardoning (cfr Mt 18: 23-35).
- We are always hovering between the kingdom “already” present and kingdom “not yet” attained. A Christian who behaved contrary to the salvation already received from God in Christ, renders useless the forgiveness he/she has already received. That is why Luke says: “for we ourselves forgive”: Luke does not wish to place us humans on the same level as God, but only to make us aware that we can frustrate the saving work of God, within which the Father has willed to include us as an active element, to extend His every free pardon to all.

vv. 5-8: more than a parable, this is a similitude, because it illustrates a typical behavior that arouses in listeners a univocal and spontaneous reply. In this case, it would be difficult to find anyone who would spontaneously reply “no one!” to the question “Which of you... ?” (v. 5) Thus, this passage wishes to show us how God acts through the filter of human behavior, which is a poor copy of the behavior of the Father.

- The scene takes place in a Palestinian situation. Usually, anyone going on a journey would start at sunset in order to avoid the very high temperatures of daytime. In Palestinian houses at that time, there was only one room and the whole family used it for all the activities during the day as well as for sleeping at night by just spreading straw mats on the floor.

The request of the man who suddenly has to receive an unexpected guest in the middle of the night, reflects a typical sense of hospitality in ancient peoples, and the explanation of the request for “three loaves” (v. 5) is that this was the normal meal for an adult.

The man who has recourse to his friend at night is the image of a disciple of Christ, called to pray to God always and everywhere, full of trust that he/she will be heard, not because he/she has worn Him out, but because He is a merciful Father who is faithful to His promises. Thus the parable shows us how a disciple should pray the “our Father”: with complete trust in God, loving and just Father, a trust that goes even to cheekiness, that is to “disturbing Him” at any time and to insist with Him in every way, certain of being answered.

Prayer, as a basic attitude of every Christian who wishes to really be a disciple of Jesus, is well expressed by the apostle Paul: «*Pray always, in all things give thanks; this indeed is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*» (1Ts 5: 17-18) ; «*Pray all the time, asking for what you need, praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion. Never get tired of staying awake to pray for all the saints*» (Ef 6: 18).

vv. 9-13: the last part of our Gospel is that properly called didactic. It resumes the theme of the previous verses, emphasizing the trust that must characterize Christian prayer, founded on the solid rock of faith. It is the faith of the praying person that opens wide the doors of the Father’s heart, and it is the very identity of the Father who loves to carry in his arms his children and to console them with the tenderness of a mother (cfr Is 66: 12-13) that which must nourish the faith of Christians.

- God is a Father who loves to receive requests from his children, because this shows that they put their trust in Him, for to ask they have to approach Him with open

hearts, for asking urges them to look at His kind and loving face, for by asking (even indirectly) they show that they believe that He is really the Lord of history and of the world, and, above all, because their asking allows Him to show openly His delicate, attentive and free love, solely directed for the good of His children. What displeases the Father is not the insistence or indiscretion of His children in asking, but that they do not ask sufficiently, remaining silent and almost indifferent to Him, that they stay away with a thousand respectful excuses, such as “He already knows everything”, etc. God is certainly a Father who provides all thing and takes care of the daily life of His children, but, at the same time, He also knows what is best for them, even better than they do. That is why He pours out on Christians so many good things and, above all, the gift *par excellence*: the Spirit, the only truly indispensable gift for their life, the gift who, if allowed to act, will make them authentic children in the Son.

A Time of Prayer: Psalm 104

To the merciful and provident God, who created the marvelous harmony of the cosmos and who placed in it humankind as His “vicar”, let us sing the psalm:

Bless Yahweh, my soul, Yahweh, my God, how great you are!
Clothed in majesty and splendour, wearing the light as a robe!
You stretch out the heavens like a tent, build your palace on the waters above, making the clouds your chariot, gliding on the wings of the wind, appointing the winds your messengers, flames of fire your servants.
You fixed the earth on its foundations, for ever and ever it shall not be shaken; you covered it with the deep like a garment, the waters overtopping the mountains. At your reproof the waters fled, at the voice of your thunder they sped away, flowing over mountains, down valleys, to the place you had fixed for them; you made a limit they were not to cross, they were not to return and cover the earth. In the ravines you opened up springs, running down between the mountains, supplying water for all the wild beasts; the wild asses quench their thirst, on their banks the birds of the air make their nests, they sing among the leaves. From your high halls you water the mountains, satisfying the earth with the fruit of your works: for cattle you make the grass grow, and for people the plants they need, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to cheer people's hearts, oil to make their faces glow, food to make them sturdy of heart. The trees of Yahweh drink their fill, the cedars of Lebanon which he sowed; there the birds build their nests, on the highest branches the stork makes its home; for the wild goats there are the mountains, in the crags the coney find refuge. He made the moon to mark the seasons, the sun knows when to set. You bring on darkness, and night falls, when all the forest beasts roam around; young lions roar for their prey, asking God for their food. The sun rises and away they steal, back to their lairs to lie down, and man goes out to work, to labor till evening falls. How countless are your works, Yahweh, all of them made so wisely! The earth is full of your creatures. Then there is the sea, with its vast expanses teeming with countless creatures, creatures both great and small; there ships pass to and fro, and Leviathan whom you made to sport with. They all depend upon you,

to feed them when they need it. You provide the food they gather,
your open hand gives them their fill. Turn away your face and they panic;
take back their breath and they die and revert to dust.

Send out your breath and life begins; you renew the face of the earth.

Glory to Yahweh forever!

May Yahweh find joy in his creatures! At his glance the earth trembles,
at his touch the mountains pour forth smoke. I shall sing to Yahweh all my life,
make music for my God as long as I live. May my musings be pleasing to him,
for Yahweh gives me joy.

May sinners vanish from the earth, and the wicked exist no more!

Bless Yahweh, my soul.

Closing Prayer

Good and holy Father, your love makes us brothers and sisters and urges us to come together in your holy Church to celebrate with life the mystery of communion. You call us to share the one bread, living and eternal, given to us from heaven. Help us also to know how to break, in the love of Christ, our earthly bread, so that our bodily and spiritual hunger may be satisfied. Amen.

Monday, July 25, 2022

St. James, Apostle

Opening Prayer

Lord,

be merciful to your people.

Fill us with your gifts

and make us always eager to serve

you in faith, hope and love.

You live and reign with the Father and the Holy

Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 20: 20-28

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came with her sons to make a request of him, and bowed low; and he said to her, 'What is it you want?' She said to him, 'Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom.'

Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' They replied, 'We can.' He said to them, 'Very well; you shall drink my cup, but as for seats at my right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted by my Father.'

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

Reflection

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

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

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

- Matthew 20: 22-23: The response of Jesus. Jesus reacts firmly. He responds to the sons and not to the mother: "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink? It is a question of the chalice of suffering. Jesus wants to know if they, instead of the place of honor, accept to give their own life up to death. Both answer: "We can!" This was a sincere response and Jesus confirms it: "You shall drink my cup". At the same time, it seems to be a hasty response, because a few days later, they abandon Jesus and leave him alone at the hour of suffering (Mt 26: 51). They do not have a strong critical conscience, and they are not even aware of their own personal reality. And Jesus completes the phrase saying: "But it is not mine to grant that you sit at my right hand and my left, these seats belong to those to whom they have been allotted by my Father". What Jesus can offer is the chalice of the suffering of the cross.
- Matthew 20: 24-27: "Among you this is not to happen". "When the other ten heard this, they were indignant with the two brothers". The request made by the mother in the name of the sons, causes a heated discussion in the group. Jesus calls the disciples and speaks to them about the exercise of power: "The rulers of nations, you know, dominate over them and the great exercise their power over them. Among you this is not to happen: anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave". At that time, those who held power had no interest for the people. They acted according to their own interests (cf. Mc 14: 3-12). The Roman Empire controlled the world submitting it with the force of arms and, in this way, through taxes, customs, etc., succeeded to concentrate the riches through repression and the abuse of power. Jesus had another response. He teaches against privileges and against rivalry. He overthrows the system and insists on the attitude of service which is the remedy against personal ambition. The community has to prepare an alternative. When the Roman Empire disintegrates, victim of its own internal contradictions, the communities should be prepared to offer to the people an alternative model of social living together.
- Matthew 20: 28: The summary of the life of Jesus. Jesus defines his life and his mission: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." In this definition of self-given by Jesus are implied three titles which define him and which were for the first Christians the beginning of Christology: Son of Man,

Servant of Yahweh and older brother (close relative or Joel). Jesus is the Messiah, Servant, announced by the Prophet Isaiah (cf. Is 42: 1-9; 49: 1-6; 50: 4-9; 52: 13-53: 12). He learned from his mother who said: "Behold the servant of the Lord!" (Lk 1: 38). This was a totally new proposal for the society of that time.

Personal Questions

- James and John ask for favors. Jesus promises suffering. And I, what do I seek in my relationship with God and what do I ask for in prayer? How do I accept the suffering that comes to my life and which is the contrary of what we ask in prayer?
- Jesus says: "May it not be like that among you!" Do our way of living in the Church and in the community agree with this advice of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

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

Tuesday, July 26, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 36-43

Jesus dismissed the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He said in reply, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the Kingdom. The weeds are the children of the Evil One, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his Kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

Reflection

The Gospel today presents Jesus' explanation, at the petition of the disciples, of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. Some experts think that this explanation,

which Jesus gives to His disciples, is not Jesus' but the community's. This is possible and probable, because a parable, by its nature, requires the involvement and the participation of people in the discovery of its significance. Just as the plant is already contained within the seed, in the same way, certainly, the explanation of the community is in the parable. And it is precisely this objective that Jesus wanted and wants to attain with the parable. The meaning which we are discovering today in the parable which Jesus told two thousand years ago was already enclosed, or contained, in the story that Jesus told, just as the flower is already contained in its seed.

- Matthew 13: 36: The request of the disciples to Jesus: the explanation of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. The disciples, in the house, speak and ask for an explanation of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. (Mt 13: 24-30). It has been said many times that Jesus, in the house, continued to teach His disciples (Mk 7: 17; 9: 28, 33; 10: 10). At that time, there was no television, and people spent the long winter evenings together, speaking about the facts and events of life. On these occasions Jesus completed the teaching and the formation of His disciples.
- Matthew 13: 38-39: The meaning of each one of the elements of the parable. Jesus responds taking again each one of these elements of the parable and giving them significance: the field is the world; the good seed are the members of the Kingdom; the darnel is the members of the adversary (the evil one); the enemy is the devil; the harvest is the end of time; the reapers are the angels. And now reread the parable (Mt 13: 24-30) giving to each one of these six elements: field, good seed, darnel, enemy, harvest and reapers, the right significance. In this way the story assumes a completely new sense and it is possible to attain the objective that Jesus had in mind when He told the parable of the darnel and the good seed. Some think that this parable should be understood as an allegory and not as a parable properly so-called.
- Matthew 13: 40-43: The application of the parable or of the allegory. With the information given by Jesus, you will better understand its application: Just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of Man will send His angels and they will gather from His kingdom all causes of failing and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father."

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

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

darnel, enemy, harvest, reapers. Generally the parables are also allegories, and a mixture of both.

Personal Questions

- In the field everything is mixed up: darnel and grain. In the field of my life, what prevails: darnel or grain?
- Notice that this parable includes “all who cause others to sin” as well as “all evildoers”. We often just focus on our own sins. Do I focus on what effect I have on others and whether I cause others to sin by what I say or do? Will I think about that, now and during my self-examinations now?
- Have you tried to talk with other people to discover the meaning of some parable?

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, July 27, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Gospel Reading: Matthew 13: 44-46

Jesus said to his disciples: 'The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.

Reflection

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

- Matthew 13: 44: The parable of the treasure hidden in the field. Jesus tells a very simple and brief story which could happen in the life of any person. He says: The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field; someone finds it and hides it again, then he goes off with great joy, he sells everything he owns and buys the field”. Jesus does not explain, he only says: “The Kingdom of Heaven is similar to a treasure

hidden in a field". In this way he urges the auditors to share with others what this story has aroused in them. I share some points that are discovered:

- (a) The treasure, the Kingdom, is already found in the field, in life. It is hidden. We go through the field and step over the plants without being aware.
- (b) The man finds the treasure, just out of chance. He did not expect to find it, because he was not looking for it.
- (c) Seeing that it is a question of a very important treasure, what does he do? He does what we all would do in order to take possession of the treasure. He goes and he sells everything that he has and he buys the field. And, thus, together with the field he obtains the treasure also, the Kingdom. The condition is to sell everything!
- (d) If the treasure, the Kingdom, is already in my life, then an important aspect of life begins to have a new value.
- (e) In this story, what dominates is gratuity. The treasure is found by chance, independently of our programs. The Kingdom comes! And we must draw the consequences and not allow this moment of grace to go by without bearing fruit.
- Matthew 13: 45-46: *The parable of the merchant of fine pearls*. The second parable is similar to the first one, but with an important difference. Let us try to discover it. The story is the following: *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value, he goes off and sells everything he owns and buys it"*. I share some points that I have discovered:
 - (a) it is the story of a merchant of pearls. His profession is to look for pearls. This is the only thing that he does in his life: to look for and to find pearls. Looking, he finds a pearl of great value. Here the discovery of the Kingdom is not just by chance, but it is the fruit of a long search.
 - (b) The merchant of pearls knows the value of the pearls, because many persons would like to sell him the pearls that they find. But the merchant does not allow himself to be deceived. He knows the value of his merchandise.
 - (c) When he finds a pearl of great value, he goes and sells everything which he owns and buys the pearl. The Kingdom is the greatest value.
- Summarizing the teaching of the two parables. Both of them have the same objective: to reveal the presence of the Kingdom, but each one reveals it in a diverse way: through the discovery of the gratuity of God's action in us, and through the effort and the search which each human being makes to discover always better, the sense of his/her life.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

I will sing of your strength,
in the morning acclaim your faithful love; you have been a stronghold for me,
a refuge when I was in trouble. (Ps 59: 16)

Thursday, July 28, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 47-53

Jesus said to the disciples: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full, they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus, it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." "Do you understand all these things?" They answered, "Yes." And he replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old." When Jesus finished these parables, he went away from there.

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents the last parable of the discourse on the parables, the story of the net thrown into the sea. This parable is found only in the Gospel of Matthew without any parallel in the other three Gospels.

- Matthew 13: 47-48: The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net that is cast into the sea and brings in all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore; then sitting down; they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are of no use." This story is well known by the people of Galilee who live around the lake. This is their work. The story clearly shows the end of a day of work. The fishermen go fishing with only one purpose: to cast the net and to catch a great number of fish, to haul the net ashore and to choose the good fish to take home and to throw away those that are no good. Describe the satisfaction of the fishermen, at the end of a day, being very tired after having worked hard. This story must have brought a smile of satisfaction to the faces of the fishermen who listened to Jesus. The worst thing is to arrive at the shore at the end of the day without having caught anything (Jn 21: 3).
- Matthew 13: 49-50: The application of the parable. Jesus applies the parable, or better still, gives a suggestion in order that people can discuss and apply the parable to their life: "This is how it will be at the end of time, the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the righteous, to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth." How are we to understand this blazing furnace? These are very strong images to describe the destiny of those who separate themselves from God or who do not want to know anything about God. In every city there is a place to throw away the garbage every day. There is a permanent furnace nourished every day by the daily garbage. The garbage place in Jerusalem was located in a valley called Gehenna, where, at the time of the kings, there was a

furnace even to sacrifice to the false gods of Molok. For this reason, the furnace of Gehenna becomes the symbol of exclusion and of condemnation. God is not the one who excludes. God does not want the exclusion and the condemnation of anyone; He wants that all may have life and life in abundance. Each one of us excludes himself/herself.

- Matthew 13: 51-53: The end of the discourse on the Parables. At the end of the discourse on the parables, Jesus concludes with the following question: "Have you understood these things?" They answered: "Yes.". And Jesus finishes the explanation with another comparison which describes the result He wants to achieve through the parables: "Well, then every Scribe who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old."

Two points to clarify:

- Jesus compares the doctor of the law to the father in the family. What does the father of the family do? "*He brings out from his treasure new things and old things.*" Education at home takes place through the transmission to the sons and daughters of what the parents have received and learned over time. It is the treasure of the family wisdom where the richness of faith is enclosed, the customs of life, and many other things that the children learn with time. Now Jesus wants that in the community, that the people who are responsible for the transmission of faith be as a father within the family. Just like the parents are responsible for the life of the family, in the same way, these people who are responsible for the teaching should understand the things of the Kingdom and transmit it to the brothers and sisters in the community.
- *Here there is the question of a doctor of the law who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom.* Therefore, there were doctors of the law who accepted Jesus, and saw in Him the one who revealed the Kingdom. Is this what happened to a doctor when he discovers the Messiah in Jesus, the Son of God? Everything he has studied to be able to be a doctor of the law continues to be valid, but it receives a deeper dimension and a broader purpose. A comparison can clarify what has just been said. In a group of friends one shows a photo, where one sees a man with an angry face, with his finger up, almost attacking the public. Everybody thinks that it is a question of an inflexible person, demanding, who does not allow for any intimacy. At that moment a young boy arrives, he sees the photo and exclaims, "He is my father!" The others look at him and comment, "A severe father, right?" He answers, "No! He is very affectionate. My father is a lawyer. That photo was taken in the tribunal, while he was denouncing the crime of a great landowner who wanted a poor family to abandon their home where they had lived for many years! My father won the case, and the poor family remained in the house!" All looked at him again and said, "What a pleasant person!" Almost like a miracle the photo lit up from within and assumed a different aspect. That very severe face acquired the features of great tenderness! The words of the son, the result of his experience of being the son, changed everything, without changing anything! The words and the gestures of Jesus, result of His experience as a Son, without changing a letter or a comma, illuminated from within the wisdom accumulated by the doctor of the law. And thus, God, who seemed to be so far away and so severe, acquired the features of a good Father and of enormous tenderness!

Personal Questions

- Has the experience of Son entered in you and changed your perspective, making you discover the things of God in a different way?
- What has the discourse on the parables revealed to you about the Kingdom?

Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, my soul!
I will praise Yahweh all my life,
I will make music to my God as long as I live. (Ps 146: 1-2)

Friday, July 29, 2022

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Luke 10: 38-42

In the course of their journey Jesus came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.'

But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.'

Reflection

- The dynamics of the account. The condition of Jesus as an itinerant Teacher offers Martha the possibility to receive him in her house. This account presents the attitude of both sisters: Mary sitting down at Jesus' feet is all taken up listening to his Word; Martha, instead, is taken up completely by many services and she gets close to Jesus to protest about her sister's behavior. The dialogue between Jesus and Martha occupies a long space in the account (vv.40b-42): Martha begins with a rhetorical question, "Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself?"; then she asks for the intervention of Jesus so that he can call the sister back to the domestic work which she has abandoned: «Tell her to help me». Jesus answers in an affectionate tone; this is the sense of the repetition of the name, "Martha,

Martha”: he reminds her that she is concerned about “many things”, and in reality she needs “only one” and he concludes recalling that the sister has chosen the best part, and will not be taken away from her. Luke has built up this account on a contrast: the two different personalities of Martha and Mary; the first one is all taken up by “many things”, the second one does not do even one, she is all taken up with listening to the Master. The purpose of this contrast is to underline the attitude of Mary who dedicates herself to listen fully and totally to the Master, thus becoming the model of every believer.

- The person of Martha. She is the one who takes the initiative to receive Jesus in her house. In dedicating herself to receive the Master she is full of anxiety for the multiplicity of things to be prepared and by the tension of seeing herself alone to do it all. She is taken up by so much work, she is anxious, and experiences a great tension. Therefore, Martha “goes to Jesus” and addresses him a legitimate question for help: why should she be left alone by the sister. Jesus answers seeing that she is only worried, she is divided in the heart between the desire of serving Jesus with a meal worthy of his person and the desire to dedicate herself to listen to him. Jesus, therefore, does not disapprove the service of Martha, but only the anxiety with which she does it. But before, Jesus had explained in the parable of the sower that the seed that fell among the thorns recalls the situation of those who listen to the Word, but allow themselves to be taken up by other concerns (Lk 8, 14). Therefore, Jesus does not disapprove the work of Martha, the value of acceptance and welcoming concerning his person but he warns the woman about the risks in which she may fall: the anxiety and agitation. Jesus had already said something about these risks: “Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and everything else will be given to you as well” (Lk 12: 31).
- The person of Mary. She is the one who accepts the Word: she is described with the imperfect form: “she listened”, a continuing action in listening to the Word of Jesus. Mary’s attitude is in contrast with that full of anxiety and tension of her sister. Jesus says that Mary has preferred “the best part” that corresponds to the listening of his Word. From the Word of Jesus the reader learns that there are not two parts of which one is qualitatively better than the other, but there is only the good one: to accept His Word. This attitude does not mean the evasion from one’s own tasks or daily responsibilities, but only the knowledge that listening to the Word precedes every service, every activity.
- Balance between action and contemplation. Luke is particularly attentive to link listening to the Word, to relationship with the Lord. It is not a question of dividing the day in times dedicated to prayer and others to service, but attention to the Word precedes and accompanies the service. The desire to listen to God cannot be substituted by other activity: it is necessary to dedicate a certain time and place to seek the Lord. The commitment to cultivate listening to the Word comes from the attention to God: everything can contribute: the environment of the place, the time. However, the desire to encounter God should come from within one’s own heart. There is no technical element which automatically leads one to encounter God. It is a problem of love: it is necessary to listen to Jesus, to be with Him, and then the gift is communicated, and falling in love begins. The balance between listening and service involves all believers; in family life as well as in professional and social life: What can we do so that baptized persons persevere and attain the maturity of faith? We should educate ourselves to listen to the Word of God. This is the most difficult but surest way to attain maturity of faith.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, who can find a home in your tent,
 who can dwell on your holy mountain?
 Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly,
 who speaks the truth from the heart. (Ps 15: 1-2)

Saturday, July 30, 2022

Opening Prayer

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 14: 1-12

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the reputation of Jesus and said to his court, 'This is John the Baptist himself; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.' Now it was Herod who had arrested John, chained him up and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For John had told him, 'It is against the Law for you to have her.' He had wanted to kill him but was afraid of the people, who regarded John as a prophet. Then, during the celebrations for Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and so delighted Herod that he promised on oath to give her anything she asked. Prompted by her mother she said, 'Give me John the Baptist's head, here, on a dish.' The king was distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he ordered it to be given her, and sent and had John beheaded in the prison. The head was brought in on a dish and given to the girl, who took it to her mother.

John's disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went off to tell Jesus.

Reflection

Today's Gospel describes the way in which John the Baptist was the victim of corruption and of the arrogance of the government of Herod. He was killed without a process, during a banquet of the king with the great of the kingdom. The text gives us much information on the time in which Jesus lived and on the manner in which power was used by the powerful of that time.

- Matthew 14: 1-2. Who is Jesus for Herod. The text begins by informing about the opinion which Herod had of Jesus: "This is John the Baptist himself, he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him". Herod tries to understand Jesus starting from the fear which assailed him after murdering John.

Herod was very superstitious and hid his fear behind the ostentation of his riches and of his power.

- Matthew 14: 3-5: The hidden cause of the murdering of John. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod, the Great, from the year 4 BC until the year 38 AD, after Christ. Forty-three years in all! During the time of the life of Jesus, there were no changes of government in Galilee! Herod was the absolute Lord of everything, he did not render an account to anyone, he did whatever passed through his mind. Arrogance, lack of ethics, absolute power, without control from the people! But the one, who commanded in Palestine since the year 63 before Christ, was the Roman Empire. Herod, in Galilee, so as not to be dismissed, tried to please Rome in everything. Above all, he insisted on an efficient administration which would bring riches to the Empire. His concern was his own promotion and his security. For this reason, he refrained from any type of subversion. Matthew says that the reason for murdering John was because he had denounced Herod, because he had married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Flavio Joseph, a Jewish writer of that time, says that the true reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was the fear of Herod that there would be a popular revolt. Herod like to be called the benefactor of the people, but in reality he was a tyrant (Lk 22, 25). The denunciation of John against Herod was the drop that caused the glass to overflow: "It is against the Law for you to have her". And John was put in prison.
- Matthew 14: 6-12: The plot of the murderer. An anniversary and a festive banquet, with dances and orgy! Mark says that in the feast were "the great of the court, the officials and the important people of Galilee" (Mk 6: 21). This is the environment in which the murdering of John the Baptist is planned. John, the prophet, was a living denunciation of that corrupt system. This is why, he was eliminated with the pretext of a problem of personal revenge. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of one man incapable to control himself! In the enthusiasm of the feast and of the wine, Herod makes a promise by oath to Salome, the young dancer, daughter of Herodias. Superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to maintain this oath, and respond to the caprice of the girl; and because of this he ordered the soldier to bring the head of John on a tray and give it to the dancer, who then gave it to her mother. For Herod, the life of his subjects was worthless. He disposes of them as he disposes of the staircases in his house!
The three characteristics of the government of Herod: the new Capital, large estates, and the class of functionaries:
 - The New Capital. Tiberiade was inaugurated when Jesus was only 20 years old. It was called like that in order to please Tiberius, the emperor of Rome. It was inhabited by the lords of the earth, the soldiers, the policemen, the unscrupulous judges (Lk 18: 1-4). The taxes and the products of the people were channelled toward it. It was there that Herod made his orgy of death (Mk 6: 21-29). Tiberiades was the city of the palaces of the King, where those who wore soft, delicate dresses lived (cf. Mt 11: 8). It is not known by the Gospels that Jesus entered this city.
 - The large estates. Scholars say that during the long government of Herod, the large estates grew causing harm to community property. The Book of Henoch denounces the lords of the land and expresses the hope of the little ones: "And then the powerful and the great will no longer be the lords of the land". (Hen 38: 4). The ideal of ancient times was the following: "Each one will peacefully sit under his vine and nobody will frighten them" (1 Mac 14: 12; Mi 4: 4; Zc 3: 10). But the politics of the government of Herod made this ideal impossible.
 - The class of functionaries. Herod created a whole class of functionaries faithful to the project of the King: the Scribes, the merchants, the lords of the land, the officers of

the market, the tax collectors, the militia, the policemen, the judges, the local heads,. In every village there was a group of persons which supported the government. In the Gospels, some Pharisees appear together with the Herodians (Mk 3: 6; 8: 15; 12: 13), and that shows the alliance between the religious power and the civil power. The life of the people in the villages was very controlled, both by the government and by the religion. Much courage was necessary to begin anything new, as John and Jesus did! It was the same thing as attracting to self the anger of the privileged ones, both from the religious and the civil powers.

Personal Questions

- Do you know any persons who died victims of corruption and domination of the powerful? And here among us, in our community and in the Church, are there victims of authoritarianism and of the abuse of power?
- Herod, the powerful, who thought he was the lord of life and death of people, was a coward before the great and a corrupt flatterer before the girl who danced. Cowardice and corruption marked the exercise of the power of Herod. Compare all this with the exercise of religious power and civil orgy, in the different levels of society and of the Church.

Concluding Prayer

The humble have seen and are glad.

Let your courage revive, you who seek God. For God listens to the poor, he has never scorned his captive people. (Ps 69: 32-33)

Sunday, July 31, 2022

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Let Us Recollect Ourselves in Prayer – Statio

We are here before You Oh Holy Spirit; we feel the weight of our weakness, but we have all gathered here in your name; come to us, help us, come to our hearts; teach us what we should do, show us the path that we should follow, fulfil what You ask of us. You alone be the one to suggest and to guide our decisions, because You alone, with God the Father and with your Son, have a holy and glorious name; do not allow justice to be hurt by us, you who love order and peace; may ignorance not cause us to deviate; may human sympathy not render us partial, nor charges or persons influence us; keep us close to You so that we may not drift away from truth in anything; help us, we who are meeting in your name, to know how to contemplate goodness and tenderness together, so as to do everything in harmony with you, in the hope that by the faithful fulfilment of our duty we may be given the eternal reward in the future. Amen.

Prayerful Reading of the Word

Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 13-21:

13 A man in the crowd said to him, 'Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance.' 14 He said to him, 'My friend, who appointed me your judge, or the arbitrator

of your claims?' 15 Then he said to them, 'Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life does not consist in possessions, even when someone has more than he needs.' 16 Then he told them a parable, 'There was once a rich man who, having had a good harvest from his land, 17 thought to himself, "What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops." 18 Then he said, "This is what I will do: I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and store all my grain and my goods in them, 19 and I will say to my soul: My soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time." 20 But God said to him, "Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?" 21 So it is when someone stores up treasure for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God.'

To Ponder the Word – Meditatio

Key to the Reading:

The text proposed by the Liturgy for the 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time forms part of a quite long discourse of Jesus on trust in God which drives away every fear (Lk 12: 6-7) and on abandonment to God's Providence (Lk 12: 22-23). The passage for today in fact, is precisely, in the middle of these two texts. Here are some of the teachings given by Jesus, before he was interrupted by that "one of the crowd" (Lk 12: 13), about this trust and abandonment:

- **Lk 12: 4-7:** 'To you my friends I say: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. I will tell you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has the power to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, he is the one to fear. Can you not buy five sparrows for two pennies? And yet not one is forgotten in God's sight. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. There is no need to be afraid: you are worth more than many sparrows.'
- **Lk 12: 11-12:** 'When they take you before synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say, because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say.'

It is precisely at this point that the man interrupts Jesus' discourse, showing his concern about the question of inheritance (Lk 12: 13). Jesus preaches and says not to have "fear of those who kill the body and then can do nothing else" (Lk 12: 4) and this man does not perceive the meaning of the words of Jesus addressed to those whom he recognizes as "my friends" (Lk 12: 4). From the Gospel of John, we know that a friend of Jesus is the one who knows Jesus. In other words, knows everything that he has heard from the Father (Jn 15: 15). The friend of Jesus should know that his Master is deeply rooted in God (Jn 1: 1) and that his only concern is to seek to do the Will of the one who has sent him (Jn 4: 34). The advice and the example of Jesus given to his friends is not to worry or be troubled for material things because "life is worth more than food and the body worth more than the dress" (Mt 6: 25). In an eschatological context Jesus admonishes: "Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened by debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life" (Lk 21: 34).

This is why the question of the man who asks Jesus to tell "his brother to give me a share of our inheritance (Lk 12: 13) is superfluous before the Lord. Jesus refuses to act as judge between the parties (Lk 12: 14) like in the case of the adulterous woman (Jn 8: 2-11). We can see that for Jesus it is not important whom of these two is right. He remains neutral before the question between the two brothers because his Kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18: 36). This behavior of Jesus reflects the image which Luke gives us of the Lord, meek and humble. The accumulation of material goods, the inheritance, fame, power, do not form part of the hierarchy of values of Jesus. In fact, he uses the question of the two

brothers to repeat and confirm that “life does not depend on goods” (Lk 12: 15) even if they are abundant.

As usual, here too Jesus teaches by means of a parable, in which he presents “a rich man” (Lk 12: 16) we would say an insatiable, never satisfied rich man who does not know what to do with his goods which are so abundant. (Lk 12: 17). This man reminds us of the rich man who closes himself in self and is not aware of the misery of the poor Lazarus (Lk 16: 1-31). It is certain that we cannot define this rich man as just. Just is the one who like Job shares with the poor the goods received from God’s Providence: “because I helped the poor who asked for help, the orphan who had no helper. The dying man’s blessing rested on me and I gave the widow’s heart cause to rejoice” (Jb 29: 12-13). The rich of the parable is a foolish man (Lk 12: 20) who has his heart full of goods received, forgetting God, the Supreme and only One who is good. He “accumulates treasures for himself, but is not enriched before God” (Lk 12: 21). In his foolishness he is not aware that everything is bestowed freely from God’s Providence, not only his goods but also his life. The terminology used in the parable makes us remark this:

- The harvest: “The land [...] had given a good harvest” (Lk 12: 16)
- The life: “This very night the *demand* will be made for your soul” (Lk 12: 20).

It is not wealth in itself which constitutes the foolishness of this man but it is his avarice and greed which reveal his foolishness. In fact, he says: “My soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time” (Lk 12: 19).

The attitude of the wise man instead is very diverse. We see this for example embodied in the person of Job who with great detachment, exclaims: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, naked I shall return again. Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh!” (Jb 1: 21). The wisdom tradition has handed down or transmitted to us some teachings on the right attitude to have before riches: Pr 27: 1; Si 11: 19; Qo 2: 17-23; 5: 17-6, 2. The New Testament also admonishes on this point: Mt 6: 19-34; I Co 15: 32; Jm 4: 13-15; Rev. 3: 17-18.

Questions:

- What struck you most in this passage and in the reflection?
- What does it mean for you that Jesus remains neutral before the question of the rich man?
- Do you believe that avarice has something to do which is strictly linked to the social condition in which one finds himself?
- Do we believe in God’s Providence?
- Are you conscious or aware that what you possess has been given to you by God, or rather do you feel that you are the absolute master of your goods?

Oratio

1 Chronicles 29: 10-19

'May you be blessed, Yahweh, God of Israel our ancestor, forever and forever!
Yours, Yahweh, is the greatness, the power, the splendor, length of days and glory, everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Yours is the sovereignty, Yahweh; you are exalted, supreme overall.

Wealth and riches come from you, you are ruler of all, in your hand lie strength and power, and you bestow greatness and might on whomsoever you please.

So now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your majestic name, for who am I and what is my people, for us to be able to volunteer offerings like this? - since everything has come from you and we have given you only what you bestowed in the first place, and we are guests before you, and passing visitors as were all our ancestors, our days on earth fleeting as a shadow and without hope.

Yahweh our God, all this wealth, which we have provided to build a house for your holy name, has come from you and all belongs to you.

'Knowing, my God, how you examine our motives and how you delight in integrity, with integrity of motive I have willingly given all this and have been overjoyed to see your people, now present here, willingly offering their gifts to you.

Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel our ancestors, watch over this forever, shape the purpose of your people's heart and direct their hearts to you, and give an undivided heart to Solomon my son to keep your commandments, your decrees and your statutes, to put them all into effect and to build the palace for which I have made provision.'

Contemplatio

Psalm 119: 36-37

Bend my heart to your instructions, not to selfish gain.

Avert my eyes from pointless images, by your word give me life.