



Lectio Divina

English | April 2022 | ocarm.org

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Friday, April 1, 2022

Season of Lent

Opening Prayer

Our God and Father,
we claim to be your sons and daughters, who know that you love us,
and that you call us to live the life of Jesus, your Son.
Give us the courage
to live this life consistently
not to show off, not to reprove others, but simply because we know
that you are our Father
and we your sons and daughters,
brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 7: 1-2, 10, 25-30

After this Jesus travelled round Galilee; he could not travel round Judaea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. As the Jewish feast of Shelters drew near, his brothers had left for the festival, he went up as well, not publicly but secretly.

Meanwhile some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Isn't this the man they want to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they have nothing to say to him! Can it be true the authorities have recognized that he is the Christ? Yet we all know where he comes from, but when the Christ appears no one will know where he comes from.' Then, as Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he cried out: You know me and you know where I came from. Yet I have not come of my own accord: but he who sent me is true; You do not know him, but I know him because I have my being from him and it was he who sent me.

They wanted to arrest him then, but because his hour had not yet come no one laid a hand on him.

Reflection

- Throughout the chapters from 1 to 12 of the Gospel of John, one discovers the progressive revelation which Jesus makes of himself to the disciples and to the people. At the same time and in the same proportion, the closing up and the opposition of the authority against Jesus increases, up to the point of deciding to condemn him to death (Jn 11: 45-54). Chapter 7, on which we are meditating in today's Gospel, is a type of evaluation in the middle of the journey. It helps to foresee what will be the implication at the end.
- John 7: 1-2, 10: *Jesus decides to go to the feast of the Tabernacles in Jerusalem.* The geography of the life of Jesus in the Gospel of John is different from the geography in the other three Gospels. It is more complete. According to the other Gospels, Jesus went only once to Jerusalem, the time when he was taken and condemned to death. According to the Gospel of John he went there at least two or three times to

Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. This is why we know that the public life of Jesus lasted approximately three years. Today's Gospel informs us that Jesus directed himself more than once to Jerusalem, but not publicly; hidden because in Judah the Jews wanted to kill him.

- In this chapter 7 as well as in the other chapters, John speaks about the "Jews" and of "you Jews," as if he and Jesus were not Jews. This way of speaking shows the situation of a tragic breaking which took place at the end of the first century between the Jews (Synagogue) and the Christians (*Ecclesia*). Throughout the centuries, this way of speaking in the Gospel of John contributes to make anti-Semitism grow. Today, it is very important to keep away from this type of polemics so as not to foster anti-Semitism. We can never forget that Jesus is a Jew. He was born a Jew, lives as a Jew and dies as a Jew. He received all his formation from the Jewish religion and culture.
- John 7: 25-27: *Doubts of the people of Jerusalem regarding Jesus*. Jesus is in Jerusalem and he speaks publicly to those who want to listen to him. People remain confused. They know that the authorities want to kill Jesus and he does not hide from them. Would it be that the authorities have come to believe in him and recognize that he is the Messiah? But how could Jesus be the Messiah? Everybody knows that he comes from Nazareth, but nobody knows the origin of the Messiah, from where he comes.
- John 7, 28-29: *Clarification on the part of Jesus*. Jesus speaks about his origin. "You know me and you know where I come from." But what people do not know is the vocation and the mission which Jesus received from God. He did not come on his own accord, but like any prophet he has come to obey a vocation, which is the secret of his life. "Yet, I have not come of my own accord but he who sent me is true, and you do not know him. But I know him, because I have my being from him and it was he who sent me."
- John 7: 30: His hour had not yet come. They wanted to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, "because his hour had not yet come." In John's Gospel the one who determines the hour and the events which will take place are not those who have the power, but it is Jesus. He is the one who determines the hour (cf. Jn 2: 4; 4: 23; 8: 20; 12: 23, 27; 13: 1; 17: 1). Even up to the time when he was nailed to the Cross, it is Jesus who determines the hour of his death (Jn 19: 29-30).

Personal Questions

- How do I live my relationship with the Jews? Have I discovered sometimes some anti-Semitism in me? Have I succeeded in eliminating it?
- Like in the time of Jesus, today also, there are many new ideas and opinions on things which refer to faith. What do I do? Am I attached firmly to the old ideas and close myself up in them, or do I try to understand the why, the reason for the novelty?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh ransoms the lives of those who serve him, and there will be no penalty for those who take refuge in him. (Ps 34,24)

Saturday, April 2, 2022

Season of Lent

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

when people encountered your Son, he became a source of division: he affected their lives one way or another. May we accept him fully and empty ourselves to make room for him in our everyday life, even when it hurts.

Help us, that with him we may always seek and do your will. We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 7: 40-53

Some of the crowd who had been listening Jesus said, 'He is indeed the prophet,' and some said, 'He is the Christ,' but others said, 'Would the Christ come from Galilee? Does not scripture say that the Christ must be descended from David and come from Bethlehem, the village where David was?' So the people could not agree about him.

Some wanted to arrest him, but no one actually laid a hand on him. The guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, 'Why haven't you brought him?' The guards replied, 'No one has ever spoken like this man.' 'So,' the Pharisees answered, 'you, too, have been led astray? Have any of the authorities come to believe in him? Any of the Pharisees? This rabble knows nothing about the Law -- they are damned.'

One of them, Nicodemus -- the same man who had come to Jesus earlier -- said to them, 'But surely our Law does not allow us to pass judgement on anyone without first giving him a hearing and discovering what he is doing?' To this they answered, 'Are you a Galilean too? Go into the matter, and see for yourself: prophets do not arise in Galilee.' They all went home.

Reflection

In chapter 7, John confirms that there were diverse opinions and much confusion among the people regarding Jesus. The relatives thought something (Jn 7: 2-5), people thought something different (Jn 7: 12). Some said: "He is a prophet!" (Jn 7: 40). Others said: "He leads the people astray!" (Jn 7: 12). Some praised him: "He is a good man!" (Jn 7: 12). Others criticized him: "He has not been educated, has not studied!" (Jn 7: 15). Many opinions. Each one had his own arguments, taken from the Bible or from Tradition. But nobody remembered the Messiah Servant, announced by Isaiah (Is 42: 1-9; 49: 1-6; 50: 4-9; 52: 13-53, 12; 61: 1-2). Today, also, there is much discussion on religion, and all take their arguments from the Bible. As in the past, the same thing today, it happens many times that little ones are deceived by the discourses of the great ones and, sometimes, even by the discourses of those who belong to the Church.

- John 7: 40-44: The confusion among the people. The reaction of the people is very diverse. Some say: he is the prophet. Others: he is the Messiah; the Christ. Others claim: He cannot be because the Messiah will come from Bethlehem, and he comes from Galilee! These diverse ideas on the Messiah produce division and confrontation. There were some who wanted to take him, to arrest him, but they did not do it. Perhaps because they were afraid of the people (cf. Mt 14: 2).

- John 7: 45-49: The arguments of the authority. Previously, before the reaction of the people who were in favor of Jesus, the Pharisees had sent some guards to arrest him (Jn 7: 32). But the guards returned without Jesus. They had been greatly impressed in hearing people speak so well: "No one has ever spoken like this man!" The Pharisees reacted: "Have you also been led astray?" According to the Pharisees who said: "This rabble knows nothing about the Law" and allows itself to be deceived by Jesus. It is as if they said: "No, we the chief priests know things better and we do not allow ourselves to be led astray!" and they say that the people are "damned"! The religious authority of that time treated people with great contempt.
- John 7: 50-52: The defense of Jesus by Nicodemus. Before this stupid argument, the honesty of Nicodemus revolts and he raises his voice to defend Jesus: "But surely our Law does not allow us to pass judgment on anyone without first giving him a hearing and discovering what he is doing?" The reaction of the others is that Nicodemus is mocking them: "Nicodemus are you also from Galilee? Look at the Bible and you will see for yourself that prophets do not arise in Galilee!" They are sure! Holding the book of the past, they defend themselves against the future which arrives and disturbs them. Today, many people continue to do the same thing. They only accept the novelty if it agrees with their own ideas which belong to the past.

Personal Questions

- Today, which are the diverse opinions that people have about Jesus? And in your community, are there different opinions which cause confusion? Which? Say them, describe them.
- There are persons who accept only the novelty which agrees with their own ideas and which belongs to the past. And you?

Concluding Prayer

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

Sunday, April 3, 2022

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Opening Prayer

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

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

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

Reading

A Key to the Reading:

Today's text leads us to a meditation on the conflict between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees. Because of his preaching and his manner of acting, the doctors of the law and the Pharisees do not like Jesus. So they seek every possible way to accuse and eliminate him. They bring before him a woman caught in adultery to ask him whether they should observe the law that said that such a woman was to be stoned. They wanted to provoke Jesus. By posing as people concerned for the law, they were using the woman to argue with Jesus. The same story happens time and time again. Under the pretense of concern for the law of God, the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have condemned and massacred many people. This goes on today too. Under the guise of concern for the law of God, many people are deprived of communion and even excluded from the community. Laws and customs are created to exclude and marginalize certain categories of people.

As we read John 8: 1-11, it is good to consider the text as it were a mirror reflecting our own likeness. As we read, let us try to note well the attitudes, words and action of those who appear in the story: the Scribes, the Pharisees, the woman. Jesus and the people.

A division of the text as a help to the reader:

- Jn 8: 1-2: Jesus goes to the temple to teach the crowd
- Jn 8: 3-6a: His adversaries provoke him
- Jn 8: 6b: Jesus' reaction, he writes on the ground
- Jn 8: 7-8: Second provocation, and same reaction from Jesus
- Jn 8: 9-11: Final epilogue

Text:

1 and Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in the middle 4 they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, 5 and in the Law Moses has ordered us to stone women of this kind. What have you got to say?' 6 They asked him this as a test, looking for an accusation to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. 7 As they persisted with their question, he straightened up and said, 'Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her.' 8 Then he bent down and continued writing on the ground. 9 When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until the last one had gone and Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained in the middle. 10 Jesus again straightened up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 11 'No one, sir,' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus. 'Go away, and from this moment sin no more.'

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 struck or pleased you most in this text? Why?
- Several persons and groups appear in this episode. What do they say and do?
- Try to step into the woman's shoes: how did she feel?
- Why did Jesus begin to write with this finger on the ground?
- What can and must our community do to welcome those excluded?

To Go Deeper Into the Theme

Literary Context:

Scholars say that John's Gospel grew gradually, that is, that it was written bit by bit. Over some time, up to the end of the first century, members of John's community in Asia Minor, recalled and added details to events in Jesus' life. One of these events, to which some details were added, is our text, the episode concerning the woman about to be stoned (Jn 8:1-11). A little before our text, Jesus had said: "If any man is thirsty, let him come to me! Let the man come and drink who believes in me!" (Jn 7:37). This statement provoked much discussion (Jn 7:40-53). The Pharisees even ridiculed the people, considering them ignorant for believing in Jesus. Nicodemus reacted saying: "Surely the law does not allow us to pass judgement on a man without giving him a hearing and discovering what he is about?" (Jn 7:51-52). After our text we come across another statement by Jesus: "I am the light of the world!" (Jn 8:12), which again provoked discussion among the Jews. The episode of the woman whom the law would have condemned, but who is pardoned by Jesus (Jn 8:1-11), is inserted between these two statements and their subsequent discussions. These statements before and after, suggest that the episode was inserted here to shed light on the fact that Jesus, light of the world, enlightens the life of people and applies the law better than the Pharisees.

A Commentary on the Text:

- John 8:1-2: Jesus and the crowd
After the discussion reported at the end of chapter 7 (Jn 7: 37-52), all go home (Jn 7: 53). Jesus has no home in Jerusalem, so he goes to the Mount of Olives. There he finds a garden where he can spend the night in prayer (Jn 18: 1). The next day, before sunrise, Jesus is once more in the temple. The crowd draws near to listen. Usually, the crowd sat in a circle around Jesus when he taught. What would Jesus have been teaching? Whatever it was, it must have been great because the crowd went there before dawn to listen to him!
- John 8: 3-6a: His enemies' provocation
Suddenly, the Scribes and Pharisees arrive and bring with them a woman caught in flagrant adultery. They place her in the middle of the circle between Jesus and the crowd. According to the law, this woman had to be stoned (Lv 20: 10; Dt 22: 22, 24). They ask: "Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and in the Law Moses has ordered us to stone women of this kind. What have you got to say?" This was a provocation, a trap. If Jesus said: "Apply the law," the Scribes would have said to the crowd: he is not as good as he appears to be because he

orders the woman to be killed. If Jesus said: "Do not kill her," they would have said: "He is not as good as he appears to be since he does not observe the law!" Under the appearance of fidelity to God, they manipulate the law and use a woman to accuse Jesus.

- John 8: 6b: Jesus' reaction: he writes on the ground

This situation looked like a sure trap. But Jesus is neither frightened nor nervous. Rather the opposite. Quietly, like one in control of the situation, he bends down and begins to write on the ground with his finger. What does writing on the ground mean? Some think that Jesus is writing the sins of his accusers. Others say that it was just the sign of one who is in control of the situation and pays no attention to the accusations made by others. But it is possible that this may have been a symbolic action, an allusion to something much more common. If you write a word on the ground, the next morning it will be gone, swept away by wind or rain, gone! We find a similar allusion in Jeremiah where we read that the names of the attributes of God are written on the ground, that is, that they have no future. The wind and the rain carry them away (cf Jr 17: 13). Perhaps Jesus is saying to those around him: the sin of which you accuse this woman, has been forgiven by God as I write these letters on the ground. From now on these sins will not be remembered!

- John 8: 7-8: Second provocation and the same reaction from Jesus

Faced with this quiet attitude of Jesus, it is the adversaries who become nervous. They insist and want to know Jesus' opinion. Jesus, then, stands up and says: "Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her!" And bending down he again starts to write on the ground. He does not engage in a sterile and useless discussion concerning the law, because, in reality, the problem lies elsewhere. Jesus shifts the centre of the discussion. Instead of allowing the light of the law to be focussed on the woman so as to condemn her, he asks that his adversaries examine themselves in the light of what the law demands of them. Jesus does not discuss the letter of the law. He discusses and condemns the evil attitude of those who manipulate people and the law to defend their own interests that are contrary to God, the author of the law.

- John 8: 9-11: Final epilogue: Jesus and the woman

Jesus' reply upsets the adversaries. The Pharisees and the Scribes retreat shamefaced one by one "beginning with the eldest." The opposite of what they had planned happened. The one condemned by the law was not the woman but those who believed themselves to be faithful to the law. Finally, Jesus is left alone with the woman. Jesus stands up, goes to her and says: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you!" She answers: "No one, sir!" Then Jesus says: "Neither do I condemn you. Go away, and from this moment sin no more!" Jesus will not allow anyone to use the law of God to condemn a brother or sister, when that person is also a sinner. Anyone who has a plank in his eye cannot accuse the one who only has a splinter in his. "Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly to take out the splinter that is in your brother's eye" (Lk 6: 42).

This episode, better than any other teaching, shows that Jesus is the light of the world (Jn 11: 12) who reveals the truth. It brings to light the hidden and most intimate things within a person. In the light of Jesus' words, those who seemed to be defenders of the law are revealed to be full of sin. They recognize this and go away beginning with the eldest. And the woman, thought to be guilty and meriting the death sentence, stands before Jesus, absolved, redeemed, dignified (cf. Jn 3: 19-21).

Jesus' action gives her new life and restores her dignity as woman and daughter of God.

Further Information:ñ

- Laws concerning women in the Old Testament and people's reactions

From the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the official tendency was to exclude women from any public activity and to consider them unsuitable to carry out any function in society, except that of spouse and mother. What contributed greatly to the marginalization of the woman was precisely the law on purity. A woman was declared impure for being mother, spouse and daughter, for being a woman. For being mother: in giving birth she became unclean (Lv 12: 1-5). For being daughter: a son born made her unclean for forty days (Lv 12: 2-4); and worse, a daughter born made her unclean for 80 days! (Lv 12: 5). For being spouse: sexual relationship made both the woman and the man unclean for a whole day (Lv 15: 18). For being woman: menstruation made a woman unclean for a whole week and rendered others unclean. Anyone who touched a woman during menstruation had to go through a ritual of purification (Lv 15: 19-30). It was not possible for a woman to hide her uncleanness, because the law obliged other people to denounce her (Lv 5: 3). This legislation made daily life at home unbearable. For seven days every month, the mother of a family could not rest in bed or sit on a chair, much less touch her children or husband so as not to contaminate them! This legislation was the result of a mentality, according to which a woman was inferior to a man. There are some sayings that reveal this discrimination against women (Eccl 42: 9-11; 22: 3). Marginalization became such that women were considered to be the origin of sin and of death and the cause of all evils (Eccl 25: 24; 42: 13-14). Thus the privilege and dominion of man over woman kept on being preserved.

In the context of the times, the situation of women in the world of the Bible was neither better nor worse than that of other people. It was a general culture. Even today, there are many who continue in this same way of thinking. But like today, so also previously, from the beginning of the Bible history, there have always been those who opposed this exclusion of women, especially after the exile, when foreign women, considered dangerous, were expelled (cfr. Ez 9: 1-3 and 10: 1-3). Women's resistance grew at times when their marginalization was worst. In several wisdom books we discover the voice of such resistance: the Canticle of Canticles, Ruth, Judith, Esther. In these books, women appear not so much as mothers or spouses, but as persons who could use their beauty and femininity to fight for the rights of the poor and thus defend the Covenant of the people. These were fights not so much for the temple, nor for abstract law, but for the life of the people.

The resistance of women against their exclusion finds an echo and a response in Jesus. Here are some episodes of Jesus' response towards women:

- *The prostitute*: Jesus welcomes and defends her against the Pharisee (Lk 7: 36-50).
- Jesus defends the woman *bent double* against the chief of the synagogue (Lk 13:10-17).
- The woman considered *impure* is welcomed without criticism and is healed (Mk 5: 25-34).
- The Samaritan woman, considered a *heretic*, is the first to receive Jesus' secret that he is the Messiah (Jn 4: 26).

- The *pagan* woman is helped by Jesus and she helps him to discover his mission (Mk 7: 24- 30).
- The *mothers with children*, rejected by the disciples, are welcomed by Jesus (Mt 19: 13-15).
- Women are the first persons to experience the risen Jesus (Mt 28: 9-10; Jn 20: 16-18).

Praying Psalm 36 (35)

God's Goodness Will Unmask Hypocrisy

Sin is the oracle of the wicked in the depths of his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.

He sees himself with too flattering an eye to detect and detest his guilt; all he says is malicious and deceitful, he has turned his back on wisdom.

To get his way he hatches malicious plots even in his bed; once set on his evil course no wickedness is too much for him.

Yahweh, your faithful love is in the heavens, your constancy reaches to the clouds, your saving justice is like towering mountains, your judgements like the mighty deep.

Yahweh, you support both man and beast; 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; in you is the source of life, by your light we see the light.

Maintain your faithful love to those who acknowledge you, and your saving justice to the honest of heart.

Do not let the foot of the arrogant overtake me or wicked hands drive me away. There they have fallen, the evildoers, flung down, never to rise again.

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, April 4, 2022

Season of Lent

Opening Prayer

O God, by whose wondrous grace
we are enriched with every blessing,
grant us so to pass from former ways to newness of life,
that we may be made ready for the glory of the heavenly Kingdom.

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.

Gospel Reading - John 8: 12-20

Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

Then they asked him, "Where is your father?"

"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come.

Reflection

Anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark

The Lord Jesus, the glorious presence, that fills the temple of God, in Jerusalem, is offering to his listeners his great and mysterious teaching about the Way that is to be followed, the road that has to be travelled towards salvation. This passage, we note, opens with the verb, "to follow", and the whole of Chapter 8 is marked by the verb "to go out", referring to Jesus.

Thus, we can understand that the Word of the Lord wishes to invite us to travel the road of salvation towards the Light, following in the footsteps of Jesus, who, like the *Shekinah*, leaves the temple, (Jn 8: 59 and Ez 10: 18), to go and live in a tent along with the refugees of all time, to live in the bosom of the Father.

This is precisely the route of the pathway of light that Jesus invites to take, along with him, from the temple to the Father.

Let us see, what steps the Word of the Gospels indicates to us.

You are testifying on your own behalf ...

This is just the first in a long series of seven occurrences of the word "testimony" along with the corresponding verb, "to testify": a strong and very important key word

which brings up a fundamental aspect of Hebrew law, given that a witness is a central and indispensable figure in the law of the people of Israel. There is something more: The word witness, in Hebrew, *'ed*, is underlined in that bible passage, which constitutes Israel's most essential and vital profession of faith as we find it in the *Shemah*, in Dt 6: 4. It is underlined because in the Hebrew bibles this verse is written in a particular way, i.e., the final syllable of the first word, the verb, *shemah*, listen, and the final syllable of the last word, the adjective *echad*, one, written in bigger letters than the rest. These two final letters, the *'ayin* and the *dalet*, united together form the word "witness", *'ed*.

In this passage of the Gospel, we find ourselves facing a unique and unmistakable starting point: our journey towards the Father, together with Jesus, can only begin from our witness, from our believing lovingly and firmly in God, as the one God, and the one and only Lord. This is the witness given by Jesus. This is Jesus' cry, right there in the temple of Jerusalem, a cry that will tear through our night, through our unbelief.

I know where I came from and where I am going ...

Jesus clearly knows the point of departure and the point of arrival of this journey of ours, through the night and towards the light. The two points, in fact, coincide, because both of them are in the Father, but for us, we have to look for them, identify them and make them ours.

Many times in the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus make the statement that the Father sent him (Jn 5: 37; 6: 44; 7: 28; 12: 49, as well as what we find in this chapter 8). The Father is his beginning, the secret place of his movement towards the world.

This very striking question concerning the origin of Christ stays alive always, always open, and apparently with no answer: Where do you come from? (Jn 19: 9), as we hear it on the lips of Pilate.

Jesus revealed to us where he came from, but our hearts continue to seek, to want to find this beginning, this place in which we can too can be truly reborn, have our own beginning.

In the same way Jesus reveals the mystery of his own exodus. He tells us about the point of arrival of his journey in this world. He says, "I am going to the Father" (Jn 16: 10).

Thus we have all the necessary coordinates for our journey: from the Father to the Father, in the same way that it was for Jesus.

Where is your Father?

This prayer, this searching of the heart, has to remain alive in us: it must never be quenched, and never be wanting. This is the thirst that has to guide us, drive us on our journey, make our hearts burn, in communion with the Lord Jesus. He is the living face of the Father.

Personal Questions

- Do I have a desire to follow Jesus? Do I want to begin it now?
- Am I ready to give myself to bear witness like Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

(Psalm 41)

Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God.

My soul is thirsting for God, the God of my life, when can I enter and see the face of God?

My tears have become my bread, by night, by day: as I hear it said all day long, "Where is your God?"

These things will I remember as I pour out my soul: how I would lead the rejoicing crowd into the house of God, amid cries of gladness and thanksgiving, the throng wild with joy.

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Season of Lent

Opening Prayer

Our saving, merciful God, wandering in our deserts

of injustice and lack of love, we cry out with fear or are stunned into silence, some into doubt or despair. Give us enough trusting faith to look up to him who took our evil and doubts upon himself, suffered for them on a cross, and rose from them, Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 8: 21-30

Jesus said to them: I am going away; you will look for me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come. So the Jews said to one another, 'Is he going to kill himself, that he says, "Where I am going, you cannot come?"'

Jesus went on: You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I have told you already: You will die in your sins. Yes, if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.

So they said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus answered: What I have told you from the outset. About you I have much to say and much to judge; but the one who sent me is true, and what I declare to the world I have learnt from him. They did not recognize that he was talking to them about the Father.

So Jesus said: When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of my own accord. What I say is what the Father has taught me; he who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him. As he was saying this, many came to believe in him.

Reflection

Last week, the Liturgy led us to meditate on chapter five of the Gospel of John. This week it confronts us with chapter 8 of the same Gospel. Like chapter 5, chapter 8 also contains profound reflections on the mystery of God which surrounds the person of Jesus. Apparently, it is a question of dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees (Jn 8, 13). The Pharisees want to know who Jesus is. They criticize him because he gives testimony of himself without any proof or witness to legitimize himself before the people (Jn 8, 13). Jesus responds by saying that he does not speak in his own name, but always for the Father and in the name of the Father (Jn 8, 14-19).

In reality, the dialogues are also an expression of how the faith was transmitted in the catechesis in the communities of the beloved disciple toward the end of the first century. They show the prayerful reading of the word of Jesus that the Christians did, considering it Word of God. The method of question and answer helped to find the response to the problems which toward the end of the first century, the Jews raised to the Christians. It was a concrete way to help the community to deepen its faith in Jesus and in his message.

- John 8, 21-22: Where I am going, you cannot come. Here John presents a new theme or another aspect which surrounds the person of Jesus. Jesus speaks about his departure and says that where he is going the Pharisees cannot follow him. "I am going away; you will look for me and you will die in your sin." They will look for Jesus, but will not find him, because they do not know him and will look for him with mistaken criteria. They live in sin and will die in sin. To live in sin is to live far away from God. They imagine God in a certain way, but God is different from what they imagine. This is why they are not capable to recognize the presence of God in Jesus. The Pharisees do not understand what Jesus wants to say and they take everything just literally: "Is he going to kill himself?"
- John 8, 23-24: You are from here below; I am from above. The Pharisees consider everything according to the criteria of this world. "You are from this world; I am not from this world!" The framework of reference which guides Jesus in everything which he says and does is the world above, that is, God, Father, and the mission which he has received from the Father. The framework of reference of the Pharisees is the world below, without openness, closed up in its own criteria. This is why they live in sin. To live in sin is not to have the gaze of Jesus on their life. The look of Jesus is totally open toward God up to the point that God himself is in him in all his fullness (cf. Col 1, 19). We say: "Jesus is God." John invites us to say: "God is Jesus!" This is why Jesus says: "If you do not believe that I AM HE, you will die in your sins." I AM is the affirmation with which God presents himself to Moses at the moment of liberating his people from the oppression of Egypt (Ex 3, 13-14). This is the maximum expression of the absolute certainty of the fact that God is in our midst in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the definitive proof of the fact that God is with us. Emmanuel.
- John 8, 25-26: Who are you? The mystery of God in Jesus does not fit in the criteria with which the Pharisees look toward Jesus. Once again, they ask: "who are you?" They did not understand because they do not understand Jesus' language. Jesus was very careful to speak to them according to all that he experienced and lived in union with the Father and for the knowledge and awareness of his mission. Jesus does not promote himself. He only says and expresses what he hears from the Father. He is the pure revelation because he is pure and total obedience.
- John 8, 27-30: When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I AM HE. The Pharisees did not understand that Jesus, in everything he says and does, is the expression of the Father. They will understand it only after the Son of man will be lifted up. "Then you will know that I AM HE." The word lifted up has a double sense,

to be lifted up on the Cross and to be lifted up to the right hand of the Father. The Good News of the death and resurrection reveals who Jesus is, and they will know that Jesus is the presence of God in our midst. The foundation of this certainty of our faith is twofold: on the one side, the certainty that the Father is always with Jesus and he never remains alone and, on the other side, the radical and total obedience of Jesus to the Father, which becomes total openness and total transparency of the Father for us.

Personal Questions

- The one who closes up in his own criteria and thinks that he already knows everything, will never be capable to understand others. This is the way the Pharisees were before Jesus. And I, how do I behave before others?
- Jesus is radical obedience to the Father and because of this he is total revelation of the Father. And which is the image of God which I show, which comes from me?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, hear my prayer,

let my cry for help reach you.

Do not turn away your face from me when I am in trouble;

bend down and listen to me, when I call, be quick to answer me! (Ps 102,1-2)

Wednesday, April 6, 2022

Season of Lent

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

you call us to be free people. Help us to give you always a response of freedom.

Set free by Christ's liberating word and death, may we never again

shackle ourselves with self-made chains, of selfish sin and false attachments.

We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 8: 31-42

To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said: If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free. They answered, 'We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean, "You will be set free?"'

Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now a slave has no permanent standing in the household, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free. I know that you are descended from Abraham; but you want to kill me because my word finds no place in you. What I speak of is what I have seen at my Father's side, and you too put into action the lessons you have learnt

from your father. They repeated, 'Our father is Abraham.'

Jesus said to them: If you are Abraham's children, do as Abraham did. As it is, you want to kill me, a man who has told you the truth as I have learnt it from God; that is not what Abraham did.

You are doing your father's work. They replied, 'We were not born illegitimate, the only father we have is God.'

Jesus answered: If God were your father, you would love me, since I have my origin in God and have come from him; I did not come of my own accord, but he sent me.

Reflection

The reflection on chapter 8 of the Gospel of John continues today. In the form of concentric circles, John deepens the mystery of God which envelopes the person of Jesus. It seems like a repetition, because he always goes back to speak of the same point. In reality, it is the same point, but every time at a more profound level. Today's Gospel treats the theme of the relationship of Jesus with Abraham, the Father of the People of God. John tries to help the communities to understand how Jesus places himself within the whole history of the People of God. He helps them to perceive the difference that existed between Jesus and the Jews, and also the Jews and the others, all of us are sons and daughters of Abraham.

- John 8, 31-32: The liberty which comes from fidelity to the word of Jesus. Jesus affirms to the Jews: "If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; 32 you will come to know the truth and the truth will set you free." To be a disciple of Jesus is the same as opening oneself to God. The words of Jesus are in reality words of God. They communicate the truth, because they make things known as they are in the eyes of God and not in the eyes of the Pharisees. Later, during the Last Supper, Jesus will teach the same thing to the disciples.
- John 8, 33-38: What is it to be a son or a daughter of Abraham? The reaction of the Jews is immediate: "We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone: what do you mean: You will be set free?" Jesus repeats and confirms making a distinction between son and slave and says: "Everyone who commits sin is a slave. The slave has no permanent standing in the household, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free." Jesus is the son and remains in the house of the Father. The slave does not live in the house of the Father. To live outside the house, outside of God means to live in sin. If they would accept the word of Jesus they could become sons and attain liberty. They would no longer be slaves. And Jesus continues: "I know that you are descended from Abraham; but you want to kill me, because my word finds no place in you." The distinction is immediately very clear: "What I speak of is what I have seen at my Father's side, and you too put into action the lessons you have learnt from your father." Jesus denies to them the right to say that they are sons of Abraham, because their works affirm the contrary.
- John 8, 39-41^a: A son of Abraham fulfils the works of Abraham. They insist in affirming: "Our father is Abraham!" as if they wanted to present to Jesus a document of their identity. Jesus repeats: "If you are sons of Abraham do the works of Abraham! 40 Now, instead you are seeking to kill me, because I have told you the truth heard from God; Abraham has not done this. 41 You do the works of your father." Between the lines, he suggests that their father is Satan (Jn 8, 44). He suggests that they are sons of prostitution.

- John 8, 41b-42: If God was your Father, certainly, you would love me, because I have my origin in God and I come from Him; I did not come of my own accord, but he sent me." Jesus repeats the same truth using diverse words: "Whoever comes from God listens to the word of God." The origin of this affirmation is from Jeremiah who says: "Within them I shall plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I shall be their God and they will be my people. There will be no further need for everyone to teach neighbor or brother, saying: 'Learn to know Yahweh!' No, they will all know me, from the least to the greatest, Yahweh declares, since I shall forgive their guilt and never more call their sin to mind" (Jr 31, 33-34). But they will not open themselves to this new experience of God, and because of this they will not recognize Jesus as the one sent by the Father.

Personal Questions

- Liberty which submits itself totally to the Father. Does something of this type exist in you? Do you know persons who are like that?
- Which is the deepest experience in me which leads me to recognize Jesus as the one sent by God?

Concluding Prayer

May you be blessed, Lord, God of our ancestors, be praised and extolled for ever.

Blessed be your glorious and holy name, praised and extolled forever.

Blessed on the throne of your kingdom, exalted above all, glorified forever. (Dn 3, 52.54)

Thursday, April 7, 2022

Season of Lent

Opening Prayer

Lord God,

in your son Jesus Christ

you have given us a new name, the name of your Son himself.

May we live up to our new destiny, to be people-for-others

who serve and commit ourselves together with Jesus, your Son and our Lord forever.

Gospel Reading - John 8, 51-59

In all truth I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.

The Jews said, 'Now we know that you are possessed. Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead, and yet you say, "Whoever keeps my word will never know the taste of death." Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? The prophets are dead too. Who are you claiming to be?'

Jesus answered: If I were to seek my own glory my glory would be worth nothing; in fact, my glory is conferred by the Father, by the one of whom you say, 'He is our God,'

although you do not know him. But I know him, and if I were to say, 'I do not know him,' I should be a liar, as you yourselves are. But I do know him, and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to think that he would see my Day; he saw it and was glad.

The Jews then said, 'You are not fifty yet, and you have seen Abraham!' Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, before Abraham ever was, I am.

At this they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself and left the Temple.

Reflection

Chapter 8 seems an exhibition of works of art, where it is possible to admire and contemplate famous paintings, next to one another. Today's Gospel presents us a painting, and a dialogue between Jesus and the Jews. There is not too much connection between one and the other painting. It is the spectator who, thanks to his/her attentive and prayerful observation, succeeds to discover the invisible thread that binds the paintings, the dialogues among themselves. Thus, we penetrate into the divine mystery which envelops the person of Jesus.

- John 8, 51: Whoever keeps the word of Jesus will not see death. Jesus makes a solemn affirmation; the prophets said: Oracle of the Lord! Jesus says: "Truly, I say to you!" And the solemn affirmation is the following: "Whoever keeps my word will not see death!" This sametheme appears and reappears many times in the Gospel of John. These are words of a great depth.
- John 8, 52-53: Abraham and the prophets died. The reaction of the Jews is immediate: "Now we know that you are out of your mind. Abraham died and the prophets also died. And you say: "Whoever keeps my word will never see death." Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who are you claiming to be?" They did not understand the importance and significance of the affirmation of Jesus. It was a dialogue of the deaf.
- John, 8, 54-56: I am glorified by my Father. Once again and as always Jesus hits on the same key: He is so united to the Father that everything that he says or does is his. Everything is the Father's. And he says: "The one who glorifies me is my Father, the one whom you say, 'He is our God!'" and you do not know him. But I know him. And if I were to say, 'I do not know him', I should be a liar, as you yourselves are. But I do know him and I observe his word. Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to think that he would see my Day; he saw it and was glad." These words of Jesus must have been like a spade which wounded the self-esteem of the Jews. To tell the religious authority: "You do not know the God whom you say you know. I know him and you do not know him!" It is like accusing them of total ignorance exactly regarding the theme on which they think they are specialized doctors. And the final word increases the measure: "Abraham, your father, rejoiced in the hope of seeing my Day, he saw it and was glad."
- John 8, 57-59: "You are not fifty yet, and you have seen Abraham! They took everything literally, thus showing that they did not understand anything of what Jesus was saying. And Jesus makes another solemn affirmation: "In all truth I tell you: before Abraham ever was, I AM."

For those who believe in Jesus, here we reach the heart of the mystery of the story. Once again they pick up stones to kill Jesus. But neither this time will they succeed, because his hour has not as yet come. The one who determines the hour is Jesus himself.

Personal Questions

- It is a dialogue with the deaf between Jesus and the Jews. Have you sometimes had the experience of speaking with a person who thinks exactly the opposite of what you think and is not aware of it?
- How can we understand this phrase: "Abraham, your father, rejoiced in the hope of seeing my Day, he saw it and was glad"?

Concluding Prayer

Seek Yahweh and his strength, tirelessly seek his presence!

Remember the marvels he has done,

his wonders, the judgements he has spoken. (Ps 105,4-5)

Friday, April 8, 2022

Season of Lent

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

you are a loyal God, ever faithful to your promises. Strengthen our faith, that with Jesus we may always keep trusting in you in spite of prejudices, ridicule or contradiction.

Give us the firm conviction that you are irrevocably committed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 10: 31-42

The Jews fetched stones to stone him, so Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many good works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?'

The Jews answered him, 'We are stoning you, not for doing a good work, but for blasphemy; though you are only a man, you claim to be God.' Jesus answered: Is it not written in your Law: I said, you are gods? So it uses the word 'gods' of those people to whom the word of God was addressed -- and scripture cannot be set aside. Yet to someone whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world you say, 'You are blaspheming' because I said, 'I am Son of God.' If I am not doing my Father's work, there is no need to believe me; but if I am doing it, then even if you refuse to believe in me, at least believe in the work I do; then you will know for certain that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.

They again wanted to arrest him then, but he eluded their clutches.

He went back again to the far side of the Jordan to the district where John had been baptizing at first and he stayed there. Many people who came to him said, 'John gave no signs, but all he said about this man was true'; and many of them believed in him.

Reflection

We are close to Holy Week, during which we commemorate and update the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. Beginning with the fourth week of Lent, the texts of the Gospel of every day are texts taken almost exclusively from the Gospel of John, two chapters which stress the dramatic tension between the progressive revelation, on the one side, which Jesus makes of the mystery of the Father which fills him completely, and on the other side, the progressive closing up of the Jews who always become more impenetrable to the message of Jesus. The tragic aspect of this closing up is that they claim it is in fidelity to God. They refuse Jesus in the name of God.

This way in which John presents the conflict between Jesus and the religious authority is not only something which has taken place in the far past. It is also a mirror which reflects what happens today. In the name of God, some persons transform themselves into bombs and kill other persons. In the name of God, we, members of the three religions of the God of Abraham, Jews, Christians and Muslims, mutually condemn one another, fight among ourselves, throughout history. Ecumenism is difficult among us, and at the same time it is necessary. In the name of God, many horrible things have been committed and we continue to commit them every day. Lent is an important period of time to stop and to ask ourselves: Which is the image of God which I have within me?

- John 10, 31-33: The Jews want to stone Jesus. The Jews prepare stone to kill Jesus and Jesus asks: "I have shown you many good works from my Father, for which of these are you stoning me?" The answer: "We are stoning you, not for doing a good work, but for blasphemy; though you are only man, you claim to be God." They want to kill Jesus because he blasphemes. The law ordered that such persons should be stoned.
- John 10, 34-36: The Bible calls all sons of God. They want to kill Jesus because he says he is God. Jesus responds in the name of the law of God itself. "Is it not perhaps written in your Law: I said you are gods? Now, if the Law has called gods those to whom the Word of God was addressed (and Scripture cannot be set aside), to those whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, and you say: You blaspheme, because I have said: I am the Son of God?"

Strangely, Jesus says "your law." He could have said: "our Law." Why does he speak in this way? Here appears again the tragic division between Jews and Christians, brothers, sons of the same father Abraham, who became irreconcilable enemies to the point that the Christians say "your law," as if it were not our law.

- John 10, 37-38: At least believe in the works. Jesus again speaks of the works that he does and which are the revelation of the Father. If I do not do the works of the Father, there is no need to believe in me. But if I do them, even if you do not believe in me, at least believe in the works I do, so that you will believe that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. These are the same words that he said at the Last Supper (Jn 14, 10-11).
- John 10, 39-42: Once again they want to kill him, but he flees from their clutches. There was no sign of conversion. They continue to say that Jesus blasphemes and insist in killing him. There is no future for Jesus. His death has been decided, but as yet his hour has not arrived. Jesus goes out and crosses the Jordan going toward the place where John had baptized. In this way he indicates the continuity of his mission with the mission of John. He helped people to become aware of how God acts in history. The people recognize in Jesus the one whom John had announced.

Personal Questions

- The Jews condemn Jesus in the name of God, in the name of the image that they have of God. Sometimes, have I condemned someone in the name of God and then I have discovered that I was mistaken?
- Jesus calls himself "Son of God." When in the Creed I say that Jesus is the Son of God, which is the content that I give to my profession of faith?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my rock and my fortress, my deliverer is my God.

I take refuge in him, my rock, my shield, my saving strength, my stronghold,
my place of refuge. (Ps 18,2)

Saturday, April 9, 2022

Season of Lent

Opening Prayer

Lord God, creator and Father of all,
Your sons and daughters
are still scattered and divided: Christians and non-Christians,
various Churches and sects
claiming exclusive rights on Your Son,
and each of them full of factions.
Make us dream again the dream
which You alone can make possible:
that we can all be one
if we believe and follow Him
who died to unite all that is scattered,
Jesus Christ, our Lord forever.

Gospel reading – John 11: 45-56

Many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what Jesus had done began to believe in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said, "What are we going to do? This man is performing many signs. If we leave him alone, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our land and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish." He did not say this on his own, but since he was high priest for that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to kill him. So Jesus no longer walked about in public among the Jews, but he left for the region near the desert, to a town called Ephraim, and there he remained with his disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before Passover to purify themselves. They looked for Jesus and said to one another as they were in the temple area, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?"

Reflection

The Gospel today gives the last part of the long episode of the resurrection of Lazarus in Bethany, in the house of Martha and Mary (Jn 11: 1-56). The resurrection of Lazarus is the seventh sign (miracle) of Jesus in John's Gospel and is also the high and decisive point of the revelation which He made of God and of himself.

The small community of Bethany, where Jesus liked to go, mirrors the situation and the lifestyle of the small community of the Beloved Disciple at the end of the first century in Asia Minor. Bethany means "The House of the Poor." They were poor communities and a poor people. Martha means "Lady" (coordinator): a woman coordinated the community. Lazarus means "God helps". The community which was poor expected everything from God. Mary means "loved by Yahweh: she was the beloved disciple, image of the community. The episode of the resurrection of Lazarus communicated this certainty: Jesus is the source of life for the community of the poor. Jesus is the source of life for all those who believe in Him.

- John 11:45-46: The repercussion of the Seventh Sign among the people. After the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44), there is the description of the repercussion of this sign among the people. The people were divided; "many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what He did, believed in Him". But some of them went to the Pharisees to tell them what Jesus had done.

The latter denounced Him. In order to be able to understand this reaction of one part of the population it is necessary to become aware that half of the population of Jerusalem depended completely on the Temple so as to be able to live and to survive. Because of this, it would have been difficult for them to support an unknown prophet from Galilee who criticized the Temple and the authority. This also explains why some even were ready to inform the authority.

- John 11:47-53: The repercussion of the Seventh Sign among those in authority. The news of the resurrection of Lazarus increased the popularity of Jesus. This is why the religious leaders convoked a council meeting, the Sanhedrin, the maximum authority, to discern getting rid of Him; because "this man works many signs. If we let Him go on this way everybody will believe in Him and the Romans will come and suppress the Holy Place and our nation". They were afraid of the Romans, because in the past it had been shown many times, by the Roman invasions in the year 64 before Christ until the time of Jesus, that the Romans repressed with great violence any attempt of popular rebellion. (Cf. Ac 5:35-37). In the case of Jesus, the Roman reaction could have lead to the loss of everything, even of the Temple and of the privileged position of the priests. Because of this, Caiaphas, the High Priest, decides: "It is better that one man should die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish". And the Evangelist comments: "He did not speak this in His own person, but as high priest of that year, he was prophesying that Jesus was to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather together into one the scattered children of God". Thus, beginning at that moment, because the chief priests were concerned Jesus' authority was growing, and being motivated by the fear of the Romans, they decided to kill Jesus.

- John 11:54-56: The repercussion of the seventh sign in the life of Jesus. The final result is that Jesus had to live apart. "So Jesus no longer went about openly among the Jews; He left the district and went to a region near the desert, to a city called Ephraim and stayed there with His disciples". The Jewish Passover was drawing near. At this time of the year, the population of Jerusalem tripled because of the great number of pilgrims. The conversation was all around Jesus: "What do you think, will He come to the festival

or not?" In the same way, at the time that the Gospel was written at the end of the first century, the time of the persecution of the Emperor Domitian (from 81 to 96), the Christian communities who lived in the service of others were obliged to live clandestinely.

• A key to understand the seventh sign of the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus was sick. His sisters Martha and Mary sent someone to call Jesus: "The one whom you love is sick!" (Jn 11:3. 5). Jesus responds to the request and explains to the disciples: "This sickness will not end in death, but it is for God's glory so that through it the Son of God may be glorified" (Jn 11:4). In John's Gospel, the glorification of Jesus comes through His death (Jn 12:23; 17:1). One of the causes of His condemnation to death was the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:50; 12:10). Many Jews were in the house of Martha and Mary to console them because of the loss of their brother. The Jews, representatives of the Ancient Covenant, only know how to console. They do not give new life.....Jesus is the one who brings new life! Thus, on one side, the threat of death against Jesus! On the other, Jesus who overcomes death! In this context of conflict between life and death the seventh sign of the resurrection of Lazarus takes place. Martha says that she believes in the resurrection. The Pharisees and the majority of the people say that they believe in the Resurrection (Ac 23:6-10; Mk 12:18). They believed, but they did not reveal it. It was only faith in the resurrection at the end of time and not in the present resurrection in history, here and now. This ancient faith did not renew life. It is not enough to believe in the resurrection which will come at the end of time, but it is necessary to believe in the Resurrection already present here and now in the person of Jesus and in those who believe in Jesus. On these people, death no longer has any power, because Jesus "is the resurrection and the life". Even without seeing the concrete sign of the resurrection of Lazarus, Martha confesses her faith: "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God who was to come into the world" (Jn 11:27).

Jesus orders that the stone be removed. Martha reacts: "Lord, by now He will smell! This is the fourth day since He died!" (Jn 11:39). Once again Jesus presents the challenge asking to believe in the resurrection, here and now, as a sign of the glory of God: "Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" (Jn 11:40). They removed the stone. Before the open tomb and before the unbelief of the persons, Jesus addresses himself to the Father. In His prayer, first of all, He gives thanks: "Father, I thank you for hearing My prayer. I myself know that you hear me always!" (Jn 11:41-42). Jesus knows the Father and trusts Him. But now He asks for a sign because of the multitude which is around Him, so that the people can believe that He, Jesus, has been sent by the Father. Then He cried out in a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus came out (Jn 11:43-44). This is the triumph of life over death, of faith over unbelief. A farmer once commented: "It is up to us to remove the stone. And it is up to God to resurrect the community. There are people who do not know how to remove the stone, and because of this their community has no life!"

Personal Questions

- What does it mean for me to believe in the resurrection?
- Have I ever "sacrificed" someone rather than protect them in order to preserve the status quo?

Concluding Prayer

For You are my hope, Lord, my trust, Yahweh, since my youth.

On You I have relied since my birth, since my mother's womb You have been my portion, the constant theme of my praise. (Ps 71: 5-6)

Sunday, April 10, 2022

Palm Sunday

Opening Prayer

Holy Spirit,

poured out on the world by the divine Dying, guide us to contemplate and understand the way of the cross of our Savior and the love with which He walked this way. Grant us eyes and hearts of true believers, so that we may perceive the glorious mystery of the cross.

«Thanks to the cross we no longer wander through the desert, because we know the true path; we no longer live outside the house of God, our King, because we have found the entrance to it; we no longer fear the fiery spears of the devil, because we have found a spring of water.

Through him we are no longer alone, because we have found the spouse again; we do not fear the world, because now we have found the Good Shepherd. Thanks to the cross the injustice of the powerful does not frighten us, because we sit at table with the King» (cfr John Chrisostome).

Gospel Reading – Luke 22: 14-23: 56

A Key to the Reading:

The liturgical context: the ancient tradition of proclaiming the Gospel of the passion and death of Jesus Christ during the celebration of the Sunday before Easter, goes back to the time when the celebrations of Holy Week were reduced to a minimum. The aim of the reading is to lead the hearers to contemplate the mystery of the death that prepares for the resurrection of the Lord and that, therefore, is the condition by which the believer enters into the “new life” in Christ. The custom of reading this long Gospel passage in parts, not only helps to make the reading less monotonous so as to facilitate an attentive listening, but also in order to involve emotionally the participation of the listeners, almost making them feel present and taking part in the narrative.

The two readings before the Gospel of this Sunday help us with an interpretation that gives a certain perspective to the text: the Servant of JHWH is Jesus, the Christ, a divine Person who, through his ignominious death, comes into the glory of God the Father and communicates his own life to those who listen to him and welcome him.

The Gospel context: it is well known that the literary nucleus around which the Gospels were written was the Pasch of the Lord: his passion, death and resurrection. We have here, therefore, a text that is ancient and homogeneous in its literary composition, even though it was written through a gradual process. However, its importance is paramount: in it we are told the fundamental event of the Christian faith, that which every believer must face and conform to (even though the text of the liturgy of this Sunday ends with the burial of Jesus).

As usual, Luke comes through as an efficient and delicate narrator who pays attention

to details and is capable of letting the reader glimpse something of the feelings and inner motivations of the main characters, above all of Jesus. The terrible and unjust suffering Jesus undergoes is filtered through his unalterable attitude of mercy towards all, even his persecutors and murderers. Some of these are touched by the way he faces suffering and death, so much so that they show signs of faith in him: the torment of the passion is rendered soft by the power of the divine love of Jesus.

In the context of the third Gospel, Jesus goes to the Holy City only once: that decisive moment for the human history of the Christ and for the history of salvation. The whole of Luke's Gospel is like a long preparation for the events of the last days that Jesus passes in Jerusalem, preaching and acting at times even grandiosely (esp. the driving of the merchants from the Temple 19: 45-48), at other times mysteriously or in a provoking manner (esp. the reply concerning the tribute to Caesar, 20: 19-26). It is not by chance that the Evangelist puts together in these last days many events and words that the other Synoptic Gospels place elsewhere in the public life of Jesus. All this takes place while the plot of the chiefs of the nation thickens and becomes ever more concrete, until Judas offers them a perfect and unexpected chance (22: 2-6).

In this last and definitive stage of the life of the Lord, the third Evangelist uses various terms such as a "passing" or an "exodus" (9: 31), a "taking up" (9: 51) and an "attaining of the end" (13: 32). Thus, Luke leads us to understand, before the fact, how to interpret the terrible and scandalous death of the Christ to whom they had entrusted their life: He accomplishes a painful and difficult stage to understand, but one "necessary" in the economy of salvation (9: 22; 13: 33; 17: 35; 22: 37) in order to bring to success ("fulfilment") his journey towards glory (cfr 24: 26; 17: 25). This journey of Jesus is the paradigm of the journey to be achieved by each of his disciples (Acts 14: 22).

A Division of the Text to Help in Its Reading:

- The story of the last supper: from 22: 7 to 22: 38;
- The prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemani: from 22: 39 to 22: 46;
- The arresting and the Jewish process: from 22: 47 to 22: 71
- The civil process before Pilate and Herod: from 23: 1 to 23: 25
- The sentence, crucifixion, and death: from 23: 26 to 23: 49
- Events after the death: from 23: 50 to 23: 56.

The Text:

- The Story of the Last Supper

14 And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. 15 And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 20 And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. 21 But behold the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. 22 For the Son of man goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" 23 And they began to question one another, which of them it was that would do this.

24 A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. 25 And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26 But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. 27 For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves.

28 "You are those who have continued with me in my trials; 29 and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, 30 that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." 33 And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." 34 He said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me."

35 And he said to them, "When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing." 36 He said to them, "But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. 37 For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfilment." 38 And they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords." And he said to them, "It is enough."

- The Prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemani

39 And he came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. 40 And when he came to the place he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." 45 And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, 46 and he said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

- The Arresting and the Jewish Process

47 While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him; 48 but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" 49 And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" 50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? 53 When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

54 Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. Peter followed at a distance; 55 and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. 56 Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said, "This man also was with him." 57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." 58 And a little later some one else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." 59 And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know

what you are saying." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. 61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly. 63 Now the men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him; 64 they also blindfolded him and asked him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" 65 And they spoke many other words against him, reviling him

66 When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away to their council, and they said, 67 "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; 68 and if I ask you, you will not answer. 69 But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." 70 And they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." 71 And they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

- The Civil Process before Pilate and Herod

1 Then the whole company of them arose, and brought him before Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king." 3 And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." 4 And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no crime in this man." 5 But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."

6 When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. 7 And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. 8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. 9 So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer. 10 The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. 11 And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then, arraying him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate. 12 And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

13 Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; 15 neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; 16 I will therefore chastise him and release him."

18 But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"-
- 19 a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city, and for murder. 20 Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; 21 but they shouted out, "Crucify, crucify him!" 22 A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him." 23 But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. 24 So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.

- The Sentence, Crucifixion and Death

26 And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. 27 And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. 28 But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' 31 For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33 And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. 34 And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. 35 And the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar, 37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. 47 Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, "Certainly this man was innocent!" 48 And all the multitudes who assembled to see the sight, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. 49 And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance and saw these things.

- Events after the Death

50 Now there was a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, 51 who had not consented to their purpose and deed, and he was looking for the kingdom of God. 52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever yet been laid. 54 It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. 55 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid; 56 then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may enter into our hearts and shed light on our lives.

A Few Questions

to help us in our meditation and prayer.

- At the end of this long reading, what feeling prevails in me: is it relief for having come to the end, admiration for Jesus, pain for his pain, joy for the salvation achieved, or something else?
- I re-read the text and pay special attention to the way the many “powerful” acted: the priests, the Scribes and Pharisees, Pilate, Herod. What do I think of them? How would I have thought, acted, spoken, and decided in their place?
- I read the passion once more and, this time, pay attention to the action of the “little ones”: the disciples, the people, individuals, the women, the soldiers and others. What do I think of them? How would I have acted, thought and spoken in their place?
- Finally, I look at my way of acting in my daily life. With which of the main or lesser characters can I identify myself? With which character would I like to identify myself?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the theme.

A Commentary on the Text with Special Emphasis on Some Key Points:

- 22: 14: *When the hour came he took his place at table, and the apostles with him*: Although Luke is writing for a Christian community mostly of pagan origin, yet he stresses that the last supper of Jesus is part of the Jewish rite of pesah. Just before the supper he describes the preparations (vv. 7-13).
- 22: 15: *I have longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*: this recalls the words in 12: 50: “There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over! (cfr also Jn 12: 32). Luke gives us a ray of light on the interior dimension of Jesus as he prepares to suffer and die: what urges him is, as always for him, the radical choice of conforming to the will of the Father (cfr 2: 49), but in these words we glimpse a very human desire for fraternity, for sharing and for friendship.
- 22: 17: *Then, taking a cup, he gave thanks*: we have not yet come to the eucharistic chalice strictly speaking, but only to the first of four cups of wine that are drunk at a paschal meal.
- 22: 18: *From now on, I tell you, I shall not drink wine until the kingdom of God comes*: this is the second explicit reference to his nearing death. It is a repetition of the proclamations concerning the passion (9: 22, 44; 12: 50; 18: 31-32) and, like those, it refers implicitly to the resurrection. However, the proclamation, even in all the seriousness of the moment, contains intimations of hope and of the eschatological expectation, together with the certainty that the Father will not abandon him to death. Jesus is aware of what he has to face, but is quite serene, interiorly free, certain of his final destiny and of the final results of what he is about to experience.

- 22: 19-20: the story of the Eucharistic institution is quite similar to the one mentioned in Paul (1Cor 11: 23-25) and has a pronounced sacrificial character: Jesus offers himself, not things, as an oblation for those who believe in him.
- 22: 21: *Here with me on the table is the hand of the man who betrays me*: eating with him, Jesus allows even Judas to enter into communion with him, and yet he knows well that this disciple is about to betray him definitively. The contrast is strident and made so on purpose by the Evangelist, as is true also elsewhere in this passage.
- 22: 28: *You are the men who have stood by me faithfully in my trials*: unlike Judas, the other disciples have “stood by Jesus in his trials,” because they have stayed with him at least up to the present moment. The Lord, then, acknowledges that they have reached a high level of communion with him so that they deserve special honor in the glory of the Father (v. 29).

It is Jesus himself, then, who creates a close parallel between the constant communion of his disciples (those of then and those of today) with his suffering and the final and eternal sharing in his glory (“eat and drink,” v. 30).

- 22: 31-37: Simon, Simon! Satan, you must know, has got his wish to sift you all like wheat; but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail: this passage seems to come from another context. Jesus’ reference to Satan and his actions against the disciples recalls what the Evangelist had said concerning the cause of the betrayal of Judas (22: 3) and is almost parallel with Luke’s view of the passion as the final assault of Satan against Jesus (cfr 4: 13; 22: 53).

Peter is protected from the snares of the tempter by the prayers of Jesus himself and because he chose firmly to be a disciple of the Lord, also because he has a special mission towards his brothers and sisters in the faith (v. 32b). Jesus hastens to warn him: for him, as for the other disciples too, the terrible passion of Jesus will cost them a hard fight against Satan and many ambushes that, in various forms, will assail the disciples who will be close to Jesus during the various stages of the passion (vv. 35-36) on account of the terrible trial that he will have to endure (v. 37); these last words explicitly refer to the text in Isaiah concerning the “suffering Servant” (Is 53: 12), with whom Jesus is clearly identified.

- 22: 33-34: Lord... I would be ready to go to prison with you, and to death... I tell you, Peter, by the time the cock crows today you will have denied three times that you know me: Peter is a generous man, also a little impatient, as we see from his words, which seem to force Jesus to tell him about the denials. As in verses 24-27 the chiefs of the Christian community were faced with their responsibility as “servants” of the faith of the brothers and sisters entrusted to them, so now they are reminded of their duty is to be prudent and vigilant towards themselves and towards their weakness.
- 22: 39-46: the story of the moral-spiritual agony in the garden of Gethsemani follows closely the text of Mark (14: 32-42), except for some details, especially those referring to the consoling appearance of the angel (v. 43).

As the most difficult and insidious moment of his life approaches, Jesus intensifies his prayer. As Luke says, Gethsemani was the “usual” (v. 37) place where Jesus often spent nights in (21: 37).

- 22: 47-53: The real passion begins with the seizure of Jesus. This passage presents the following events as “the reign of darkness” (v. 53) and shows Jesus as he who overcomes and will overcome violence by patience and the ability to love even his persecutors (v. 51); that is why the sad but loving words he addresses to Judas stand out: “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? (v. 48).

- 22: 54-71: The Jewish process does not evolve that night. Nothing is said of Jesus as prisoner until morning. This lack of news concerning Jesus immediately after his arrest and until the beginning of the case is typical of Luke.
- 22: 60-62: "My friend," said Peter, "I do not know what you are talking about"... the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter and Peter remembered what the Lord had said... And he went outside and wept bitterly: the two looks meeting each other, who knows how they happened in the confusion of that interminable night, mark the moment when Peter becomes aware: notwithstanding his gallant declarations of fidelity, he realizes what Jesus had told him a little earlier. In that look, Peter experiences first-hand the mercy of the Lord of which he had heard Jesus talking: it does not hide the reality of sin, but heals it and brings men and women back to a full awareness of their own condition and of the personal love of God for them.
- 22: 70-71: So you are the Son of God then? ... It is you who say I am... What need of witness have we now? We have heard it for ourselves from his own lips: the Jewish process begins officially at first dawn of that day (v. 66) and concentrates on seeking proofs (some true, in Luke, but cfr Mk 14: 55-59) to sentence Jesus to death. According to Luke, then, the chiefs of the Jews did not bring forth false witnesses, but – even in their savage aversion towards Jesus – they behaved towards him in a somewhat correct juridical manner.

In replying positively to the question "You are the Son of God then?" Jesus shows that he is fully aware of his divine dignity. Through this awareness, his suffering, death and resurrection are eloquent witness of the benign will of the Father towards humanity. Thus, however, he "signs" his own sentence of death: it is a blasphemy that profanes the Name and the very being of JHWH since he declares himself explicitly to be "son."

23:3-5: Are you the king of the Jews? ... It is you who say it... He is inflaming the people with his teaching: we are passing from a Jewish juridical process to a Roman one: the Jewish chiefs hand over the condemned person to the governor so that he may carry out their sentence and, to give him an acceptable reason, they "domesticate" the movements of their sentence, presenting them in a political light. Thus, Jesus is presented as subverting the people and usurping the royal title of Israel (which by then was but a memory and a purely honorific title).

The means used by Jesus to carry out his crime, as chance would have it, is his preaching: the words of peace and mercy that he spread freely are now used against him!

Jesus confirms the accusation, but it is certain that he is not accused of seeking royal status, only one of the reflections of his divine nature. This, however, neither Pilate nor the others are able to understand.

- 23:6-12: He passed him over to Herod: Perhaps Pilate intuited that they were trying to play a "dirty trick" on him, so he probably tries to distance himself from the prisoner by invoking respect for jurisdiction: Jesus comes from a district, which at that historical time, did not come under Roman responsibility but that of Herod Antipas.

The latter is presented in the Gospels as someone quite ambiguous: he admires and at the same time is averse to John the Baptist, because the prophet had taken him to task over his matrimonial position, which was irregular and almost incestuous, and finally has him arrested and then put to death so as not to cut a poor figure before his guests (3: 19-20; Mk 6: 17-29). Then he tries to get to know Jesus just out of curiosity, because he had heard of his fame as a worker of miracles, and he concocts a case against him (v. 10), He questions Jesus personally, but then – before the obstinate

silence of Jesus (v. 9) – leaves him to the mockery of the soldiers, as had happened at the end of the religious process (22: 63-65) and as will happen when Jesus is crucified (vv. 35-38). He ends up sending Jesus back to Pilate.

Luke concludes this episode with an interesting footnote: Pilate's gesture begins a new friendship between him and Herod. The circumstances speak clearly as to the purity of the motivation of this friendship.

- 23: 13-25: You brought this man before me... as a political agitator; ...I have found no case against the man in respect of the charges you bring against him: as he suspected from the first meeting with Jesus (v. 4) and as he will repeat later (v. 22), Pilate pronounces him innocent. He tries to convince the chiefs of the people to let Jesus go, but they have already decided that he should die (vv. 18, 21, 23) and insist on a sentence of death.

What is the substance of the interrogation of the governor? Not much, according to the few phrases that Luke reports (v. 3). And yet, Jesus replied positively to Pilate, declaring himself "king of the Jews"! At this point, it is clear that Pilate does not consider Jesus a dangerous man on the political level, nor for public order, perhaps because the tone of Jesus' declaration left no doubt on these scores.

The intention of the Evangelist is quite clear in that he seeks to attenuate the responsibility of the Roman governor. The latter, however, is known from historical sources as a "man of inflexible nature and, on top of his arrogance, hard, capable only of extortion, violence, robbery, brutality, torture, executions without trial and fearful and unlimited cruelty" (Philo of Alexandria) and that "he liked to provoke the nations entrusted to him, sometimes by being rude and at other times by hard repression (Josephus Flavius).

- 23:16.22: *I shall have him punished and then let him go...*: the fact that Jesus was held to be innocent would not have spared him a hard "punishment," inflicted solely so as not to let down the expectations of the chiefs of the Jews.
- 23:16.18.25: *Away with him! Give us Barabbas!* He released the man they asked for, who had been imprisoned for rioting and murder, and handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they pleased: in the end, Pilate gives in completely to the insistent demands of the chiefs of the people, even though he does not pronounce any formal sentence on Jesus.

Barabbas, a real delinquent and political agitator, thus becomes the first person saved (at least at that moment) by the sacrifice of Jesus.

- 23:26-27: They seized on a man, Simon from Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus. Large numbers of people followed him, and of women too, who mourned and lamented for him: Simon and the women were not only privileged witnesses of the passion, but, in Luke, they are models of discipleship, people who show in action to the reader how to follow the Lord. Besides, thanks to them and to the crowd Jesus is not alone as he approaches death, but is surrounded by men and women who are deeply and emotionally close to him, even though they need conversion, a matter that he recalls to them in spite of his terrible condition (vv. 28-31).

Simon of Cyrene is "seized," but Luke does not say that he was reluctant to help the Lord (cfr Mk 15: 20-21).

The "large numbers of people" is also quite involved in what is happening to Jesus. This is in strident contrast with the crowd that, a little earlier, was demanding the sentence of death from Pilate.

- 23: 34: *Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing*: Luke brings out the main concern of the crucified Lord who, in spite of being in atrocious physical pain from the process of crucifixion, prays for them to the Father: he is not concerned with his own condition nor with the historical causes that produced it, but only with the salvation of all humankind. Stephen the martyr will act like Him (Acts 7: 60), to show the paradigmatic character of the life and death of Jesus for the existence of every Christian.

To emphasize this strong orientation of Jesus, Luke omits the anguished cry reported by the other Synoptic Gospels: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

- 23: 33, 39-43: They crucified him there and the two criminals... Jesus... remember me when you come into your kingdom... Indeed, I promise you... today you will be with me in paradise: the episode of the dialogue with one of his condemned companions is emblematic of the way Luke understands the death of Jesus: an act of self-giving made for love and in love to bring salvation to the greatest number of people in whatever condition or situation they may find themselves.

"Today" (v. 43): the thief had spoken in the future, but Jesus replies using a verb in the present: the salvation He gives is immediate, the "final days" begin with this saving event.

"You will be with me" (v. 43): this expression indicates the full communion in force between God and those he welcomes to himself in eternity (cfr 1 Thes 4: 17). According to some apocryphal writings of the late Judaic period, the Messiah himself had "to open the gates of paradise."

- 23: 44-46: It was now about the sixth hour... Jesus cried out in a loud voice, he said, Father into your hands I commit my spirit. With these words he breathed his last: Jesus' last words, by their good nature, seem to contrast with the preceding declaration that he cried aloud.

Having come to the end of his human life, Jesus, makes a supreme act of trust in the Father, for whose will He had suffered so much. In these words we can glimpse a hint at the resurrection: the Father will hand him back this life that Jesus now entrusts to him (cfr Ps 16: 10; Acts 2: 27; 13: 35).

Luke writes very concisely of the last moments of Jesus: he is not interested in dwelling on details that would offer satisfaction to some macabre curiosity, like the one that drew and still draws so many spectators at a capital sentence in many squares of the world.

- 23: 47-48: When the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God: "This was a great and good man." So too the crowds went home beating their breasts: the saving efficacy of the sacrifice of Jesus acts almost immediately simply on the evidence of what had happened: pagans (such as the centurion who commanded the platoon in charge of the execution) the Jews (the people) begin to change. The centurion "glorifies God" and seems to be just a step from becoming a Christian believer. The Jewish people, perhaps without being aware, go back using gestures of repentance as Jesus had asked of the women of Jerusalem (v. 38).
- 23: 49: *All those who knew him watched from afar*: at a prudent distance, knowing the Roman attitude that forbade excessive gestures of mourning for those condemned to be crucified (on pain of being crucified themselves), the group of disciples is present dumbfounded by the whole scene. Luke gives no hint as to their emotions or attitudes: perhaps the pain and violence dazed them to the point of making them incapable of any outward reaction.

Similarly, the women disciples do not take part in any way in the work done by Joseph of Arimathea for the burial of Jesus: they just watch (v. 55).

- 23: 53: Joseph took him down from the cross, wrapped him in a sheet and placed him in a tomb dug in the rock: Jesus has really undergone torture. He is really dead, like so many others before and after him, on the cross, in a common body of flesh. This event, without which there would be no salvation or eternal life for anyone, is verified by the fact that it is necessary to bury him. This is so true that Luke expands on some details concerning the speed with which the rite of burial was carried out by Joseph (vv. 52-54).
- 23: 56: On the Sabbath they observed the day of rest, according to the commandment: as the Creator rested on the seventh day of creation, thus consecrating the Sabbath (Gn 2: 2-3), so now the Lord observes the Sabbath in the tomb.

None of his people, now, seem to be able to hope for anything: Jesus' words concerning the resurrection seem to have been forgotten. The women limit themselves to preparing some oil to make the burial of the Master a little more dignified.

The Gospel of this "Passion Sunday" concludes here, leaving out the story of the discovery of the empty tomb (24: 1-12) and allowing us to savor the bitter sweet sacrifice of the lamb of God, we are left in a sad and suspended state where we remain immersed, even though we know the final result of the Gospel story. This terrible death of the young Rabbi of Nazareth does not lose its significance in his resurrection, but acquires an entirely new and unexpected value, which does not take away anything from the dimension of having been killed in sacrifice freely accepted because of the "excessively" high respect for our human powers of understanding: it is pure mystery.

Isaiah 50: 4-10

"The Lord God Helps Me"

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he awakens, he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

For the Lord God helps me;

therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary?

Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant, who walks in darkness and has no light,

yet trusts in the name of the Lord and relies upon his God?

Closing Prayer

of the Eucharistic prayer for this Sunday

Almighty and eternal God, you have given the human race Jesus Christ our Savior as a model of humility. He fulfilled your will by becoming man and giving his life on the cross. Help us to bear witness to you by following his example of suffering and make us worthy to share in his resurrection.

Monday, April 11, 2022

Monday of Holy Week

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

you have called your people to be the servant of one another in the cause of justice and mercy. You showed us in Jesus, your Son, what it means to serve and how much this may cost us. Fill us with the Spirit of Jesus, that we too may not break those who are weak nor repel those groping in the dark.

Let him teach us to serve and to love with compassion for the helpless and respect for the least and the poorest, together with Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 12: 1-11

Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there; Martha waited on them and Lazarus was among those at table. Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was filled with the scent of the ointment.

Then Judas Iscariot -- one of his disciples, the man who was to betray him -- said, 'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?'

He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contents. So Jesus said, 'Leave her alone; let her keep it for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me.'

Meanwhile a large number of Jews heard that he was there and came not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. Then the chief priests decided to kill Lazarus as well, since it was on his account that many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus.

Reflection

We have entered into Holy Week, the week of the Passover of Jesus, of his passing from this world to the Father (Jn 13: 1). Liturgy today places before us the beginning of chapter 12 of the Gospel of John, which serves as a link between the Book of the Signs (cc 1-11) and the Book of the Glorification (cc 13-21). At the end of the "Book of Signs"

there appears, very clearly the tension between Jesus and the religious authority of the time (Jn 10: 19-21, 39) and the danger which Jesus was facing. Several times they had tried to kill him (Jn 10: 31; 11: 8, 53; 12: 10). So much it was like this that Jesus was obliged to lead a clandestine life, because he could be arrested at any moment (Jn 10: 40; 11: 54).

- John 12: 1-2: Jesus persecuted by the Jews, goes to Bethany. Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany to the house of his friends Martha and Mary and of Lazarus. Bethany means, House of Poverty. The police was looking for him (Jn 11: 57). They wanted to kill him (Jn 11: 50). But even now that the police was looking for Jesus, Mary, Martha and Lazarus received him in their house and offered him something to eat. Because love overcomes fear.
- John 12: 3: Mary anoints Jesus. During the meal, Mary anoints the feet of Jesus with a pound of perfume of pure spikenard (cf. Lk 7: 36-50). It was a very costly perfume, so very expensive that it cost three hundred denarii. Then she dried his feet with her hair. The whole house was filled with the scent of the ointment. Mary does not speak during this whole episode. She only acts. The gesture filled with symbolism speaks for itself. In washing the feet, Mary becomes a servant. Jesus will repeat the gesture at the Last Supper (Jn 13: 5).
- John 12: 4-6: Reaction of Judas. Judas criticizes the gesture of Mary. He thinks that it is a waste. In fact, three hundred denarii were the wages of three hundred days! The wages of almost a whole year spent in one time alone! Judas thinks that the money should have been given to the poor. The Evangelist comments and says that Judas had no concern at all for the poor, but that he was a thief. They had a common fund and he stole the money. A strong judgment which condemns Judas. It does not condemn the concern for the poor, but the hypocrisy which uses the poor for self-promotion and to enrich oneself. Judas, in his own egoistic interests, thought only about money. This is why he was not aware of what Mary kept in her heart. Jesus reads in the heart and defends Mary.
- John 12: 7-8: Jesus defends the woman, Judas thinks only of the waste and criticizes the woman. Jesus thinks of the gesture and defends the woman: "Leave her alone; so that she can keep it for the day of my burial!" And immediately Jesus says: "You have the poor with you always; you will not always have me!" Which of the two lived closer to Jesus: Judas or Mary? Judas, the disciple, lived together with Jesus for almost three years, twenty-four hours a day. He was part of the group. Mary saw him once or twice a year, on the occasion of some feast, when Jesus went to Jerusalem and visited her in her house. But to live together with, not having any love does not help us to know others. Rather it blinds people. Judas was blind. Many people live together with Jesus and praise him even with many hymns, but do not truly know him and do not reveal him (cf. Mt 7: 21). Two affirmations of Jesus merit a more detailed comment: (a) "You have the poor with you always" and (b) let her keep it for the day of my burial."
 - "You have the poor with you always." Is it perhaps that Jesus wants to say that we should not be concerned about the poor, given the fact that there will always be poor? Or does he want to say that poverty is the destiny imposed by God? How is this phrase to be understood? At that time, persons knew the Old Testament by heart. It sufficed for Jesus to begin quoting a phrase of the Old Testament and persons already knew the rest. The beginning of the phrase said: "There will never cease to be poor people in the country" (Dt 15, 11^a). The rest of the phrase which people already knew and which Jesus wants to remind is the

following: "And this is why I am giving you this command: always be open handed with your brother, and with anyone in your country who is in need and is poor!" (Dt 15, 11b).

- "Let her keep it for the day of my burial" According to this Law, the community should accept the poor and share its goods with them. But, Judas instead of "opening his hand to help the poor" and to share his goods with them, wanted to do charity with the money of others! He wanted to sell the perfume of Mary for three hundred denarii and use it to help the poor. Jesus quotes the Law of God which taught the contrary. Anyone who, like Judas, carries out a campaign with the money of the sale of the goods of other does not disturb or trouble. But, the one who, like Jesus, insists on the obligation to accept the poor and to share with them one's own goods, this one disturbs, troubles, and runs the risk of being condemned.
- John 12, 9-11: The crowds and the authority. To be the friend of Jesus could be dangerous. Lazarus is in danger of death because of the new life received from Jesus. The Jews had decided to kill him. Lazarus alive was a living proof that Jesus was the Messiah. This is why the crowd was looking for him, because people wanted to experience closely the living proof of the power of Jesus. A living community runs the risk of its life because it is the living proof of the Good News of God!

Personal Questions

- Mary was misinterpreted by Judas. Have you been misinterpreted sometimes?
- What does this text of Mary teach us? What does the reaction of Judas say to us?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my light and my salvation,whom should I fear?

Yahweh is the fortress of my life,whom should I dread? (Ps 27: 1)

Tuesday, April 12, 2022

Tuesday of Holy Week

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

your Son Jesus Christ had to undergo the humiliationof being betrayed and denied by those he called his friends. But he made his suffering and deathinto instruments of love and reconciliation.

Make us with him people-for-others, who accept difficulties, even betrayals and misunderstanding of our best intentions, and turn them into sources of life and joy for those around us.

Keep us faithful to you and to one another through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 13: 21-33, 36-38

Having said this, Jesus was deeply disturbed and declared, 'In all truth I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.' The disciples looked at each other, wondering whom he meant. The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus; Simon Peter signed to him and said, 'Ask who it is he means,' so leaning back close to Jesus' chest he said, 'Who is it, Lord?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give the piece of bread that I dip in the dish.' And when he had dipped the piece of bread he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. At that instant, after Judas had taken the bread, Satan entered him. Jesus then said, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.'

None of the others at table understood why he said this. Since Judas had charge of the common fund, some of them thought Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival,' or telling him to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the piece of bread he went out. It was night. When he had gone, Jesus said: Now has the Son of man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon. Little children, I shall be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and, as I told the Jews, where I am going, you cannot come.

Simon Peter said, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus replied, 'Now you cannot follow me where I am going, but later you shall follow me.' Peter said to him, 'Why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' 'Lay down your life for me?' answered Jesus. 'In all truth I tell you, before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.'

Reflection

This is the third day of Holy Week. The texts of the Gospel of these days place before us the terrible facts which will lead to the imprisonment and condemnation of Jesus. The texts not only present the decisions of the religious and civil authority against Jesus, but also the betrayal and the negotiations of the disciples which rendered possible for the authority to arrest Jesus and contributed enormously to increase the suffering of Jesus.

- John 13: 21: The announcement of the betrayal. After having washed the feet of the disciples (Jn 13: 2-11) and having spoken about the obligation that we have of washing each other's feet (Jn 13: 12-16), Jesus is profoundly touched. And it is no wonder. He was fulfilling that gesture of service and total gift of self, while at his side one of the disciples was planning how to betray him that same night. Jesus expresses his emotion saying: "In all truth I tell you one of you is going to betray me!" He does not say: "Judas will betray me," but "one of you." It is one of his group who will betray him.
- John 13: 22-25: The reaction of the disciples. The disciples are frightened. They did not expect that declaration, that is, that one of them would be the traitor. Peter makes a sign to John to ask Jesus which of the twelve would be the traitor. This is a sign that they did not know one another well, they could not succeed in understanding who could be the traitor. A sign, that is, that the friendship among them had not as yet reached the same transparency that Jesus had with them (cf. Jn 15: 15). John reclined near Jesus and asked him: "Who is it?"
- John 13: 26-30: Jesus indicates Judas. Jesus says: It is the one to whom I give the piece of bread that I dip in the dish. He took a piece of bread, dips it in the cup and hands it over to Judas. This was a common and normal gesture which the participants at a supper used to do among themselves. And Jesus tells Judas: "What you are going to do, do quickly!" Judas had charge of the common fund. He was in charge of buying things and of giving the alms to the poor. This is why no one perceived anything

special in the gesture and in the words of Jesus. In this description of the announcement of the betrayal is evoked the Psalm in which the psalmist complains about the friend who betrays him: "Even my trusted friend on whom I relied, who shared my table takes advantage of me" (Ps 41: 10; cf. Ps 55: 13-15). Judas becomes aware that Jesus knew everything (cf. Jn 13: 18). But even knowing it, he does not change his mind but keeps the decision to betray Jesus. This is the moment in which the separation between Judas and Jesus takes place. John says at this moment Satan entered him. Judas rises and leaves. He places himself at the side of the enemy (Satan). John comments: "It was night." It was dark.

- John 13: 31-33: The glorification of Jesus begins. It is as if history had waited for this moment of separation between light and darkness. Satan (the enemy) and darkness entered into Judas when he decides to carry out what he was planning. In that moment the light was made in Jesus who declares: "Now the son of man has been glorified, and in him God has been glorified also. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon!" Everything which will happen from now on will be in the regressive way. The decisions had already been taken by Jesus (Jn 12: 27-28) and now by Judas. The facts follow one another hastily. And, Jesus announces it: "Little children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and, as I told the Jews, where I am going you cannot come." There is little time left before the Passover.
- John 13: 34-35: The new commandment. Today's Gospel omits these two verses on the new commandment of love and begins to speak about the announcement of the denial of Peter.
- John 13: 36-38: Announcement of the denial of Peter. Together with the betrayal of Judas, the Gospel also speaks of the denial of Peter. These are the two facts which contribute the most to Jesus' suffering and pain. Peter says that he is ready to give his life for Jesus. Jesus recalls and reminds him of reality: "You are ready to lay down your life for me? In all truth I tell you, before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times." Mark had written: "Before the cock crows twice, you will have disowned me three times" (Mk 14: 30). Everybody knows that the cock crows rapidly. When in the morning the first cock begins to sing, almost at the same time all the cocks crow together. Peter is more rapid in his denial than the cock in crowing.

Personal Questions

- Judas, the friend, becomes the traitor. Peter, the friend, denies Jesus. And I?
- I place myself in Jesus' situation and I think: how does he face the denial and the betrayal, the contempt and the exclusion?

Concluding Prayer

You are my hope, Lord,

my trust, Yahweh, since boyhood. On you I have relied since my birth, since my mother's womb you have been my portion, the constant theme of my praise. (Ps 71: 5-6)

Wednesday, April 13, 2022

Wednesday of Holy Week

Opening Prayer

God our Father,

when the hour of your Son Jesus had come to accept suffering and death out of love of you and his saving love for us, he did not refuse that suffering and deep pain.

In the hour of trial that we may have to pass through, do not let us become rebellious but keep us trusting in you, for you save us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 26: 14-25

One of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you?' They paid him thirty silver pieces, and from then onwards he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus to say, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' He said, 'Go to a certain man in the city and say to him, "The Master says: My time is near. It is at your house that I am keeping Passover with my disciples."' The disciples did what Jesus told them and prepared the Passover. When evening came he was at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating he said, 'In truth I tell you, one of you is about to betray me.' They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn, 'Not me, Lord, surely?' He answered, 'Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with me will betray me. The Son of man is going to his fate, as the scriptures say he will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born!' Judas, who was to betray him, asked in his turn, 'Not me, Rabbi, surely?' Jesus answered, 'It is you who say it.'

Reflection

Yesterday the Gospel spoke of the betrayal of Judas and of the denial of Peter. Today, it speaks once again of the betrayal of Judas. In the description of the Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, the failure of the disciples is strongly stressed. In spite of having lived three years together with Jesus, not one of them defends Jesus. Judas betrays him, Peter denies him, and the others flee. Matthew narrates everything, not to criticize or to condemn, neither to discourage the readers, but in order to underline that acceptance and the love of Jesus exceed the defeat and the failure of the disciples! This way of describing the attitude of Jesus was a help for the Communities at the time of Matthew. Because of the frequent persecutions, many were discouraged and had abandoned the community and asked themselves: "Will it be possible to return? Will God accept and forgive us?" Matthew responds by suggesting that we can break the relationship with Jesus, but Jesus never breaks it with us. His love is greater than our infidelity. This is a very important message which we get from the Gospel during Holy Week.

- Matthew 26: 14-16: The Decision of Judas to betray Jesus. Judas took the decision after Jesus did not accept the criticism of the disciples concerning the woman who wastes a very expensive perfume only to anoint Jesus (Mt 26: 6-13). He went to the chief priest and asked: "What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you?" They agreed on the sum of thirty silver pieces. Matthew recalls the words of the Prophet Zechariah to describe the price agreed upon (Zc 11: 12). At the same time, the betrayal of Jesus for thirty silver coins recalls the sale of Joseph by his brothers,

decided by the buyers for twenty coins (Gn 37: 28). It also reminds the price of thirty coins to be paid for the wounding of a slave (Ex 21: 32).

- Matthew 26: 17-19: The preparation for the Passover. Jesus was coming from Galilee. He did not have a house in Jerusalem. He spent the night in the Garden of Olives (cf. Jn 8: 1). In the days of the feast of the Passover the people of Jerusalem increased three times in number because of the enormous number of pilgrims who went there from all parts. For Jesus it was not easy to find a big room where to celebrate the Passover together with the pilgrims coming from Galilee, as himself. He ordered his disciples to find a person in whose house he had decided to celebrate the Passover. The Gospel does not offer any other information and allows the imagination to complete what is missing in the information. Was this a person known by Jesus? A relative? A disciple? Throughout the centuries the imagination of the Apocrypha has known how to complete this information, but with little credibility.
- Matthew 26: 20-25: The announcement of the betrayal of Judas. Jesus knew that he will be betrayed. In spite of the fact that Judas did things secretly. Jesus knew. But in spite of that, he wants to act fraternally with the group of friends to which Judas belongs. When all were together for the last time, Jesus announces who is the traitor "Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with me will betray me." This way of announcing the betrayal renders even clearer the contrast. For the Jews, the communion around the table, to dip the hand together in the same dish, was the maximum expression of intimacy and trust. In this way, Matthew suggests that in spite of the betrayal made by someone who was a friend, the love of Jesus is greater than the betrayal!

What strikes in the way in which Matthew describes these facts? Between the denial and the betrayal there is the institution of the Eucharist (Mt 26: 26-29): the betrayal of Judas first (Mt 26: 20-25); the denial of Peter and the flight of the disciples, afterwards (Mt 25: 30-35). Thus, he stressed for us the incredible gratuitousness of the love of Jesus, which exceeds the betrayal, the denial and the flight of the friends. His love does not depend on what others do for him.

Personal Questions

- Am I capable of being like Judas and to deny and betray God, Jesus, the friends?
- In Holy Week it is important to reserve some moments to become aware of the unbelievablegratuity of God's love for me.

Concluding Prayer

Sing to God, play music to his name, build a road for the Rider of the Clouds, rejoice in Yahweh, dance before him.

Father of orphans, defender of widows, such is God in his holy dwelling. (Ps 68: 4-5)

Thursday, April 14, 2022

Holy Thursday

LECTIO

Initial Prayer

"When you speak, Lord, the nothingness beats in life: the dry bones become living persons, the desert flourishes... When I get ready to pray I feel dry, I do not know what to say. Evidently, I am not in harmony with your will, my lips are not in tune with my heart, my heart does not make an effort to get in tune with yours. Renew my heart, purify my lips so that I can speak with you as you want me to do it, so that I can speak with others as you wish, so that I can speak with myself, with my interior world, as you wish." (*L. Renna*)

The Reading of the Gospel: John 13: 1-15

1 Before the festival of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end. 2 They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, 4 and he got up from table, removed his outer garments and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; 5 he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' 7 Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 8 'Never!' said Peter. 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have no share with me.' Simon Peter said, 9 'Well then, Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' 10 Jesus said, 'No one who has had a bath needs washing, such a person is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' 11 He knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said, 'though not all of you are'. 12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand', he said, 'what I have done to you?' 13 You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. 14 If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. 15 I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.

Moments of Prayerful Silence

In a loving listening, words are not necessary, because silence also speaks and communicates love.

MEDITATIO

Preamble to the Passover of Jesus

The passage of the Gospel of today is inserted in a literary whole which includes chapters 13-17. At the beginning we have the account of the Last Supper which Jesus shares with his disciples, during which he fulfils the gesture of the washing of the feet (13: 1-30). Then Jesus interweaves a long dialogue of farewell with his disciples (13: 31 – 14: 31). Chapters 15-17 have the function to deepen further the previous discourse of the Master. Immediately, after this, Jesus is arrested (18: 1-11). In any case, these events narrated in 13: 17, 26 are joined already in 13: 1 with the Passover of Jesus. It is interesting to note this last annotation: from 12: 1 the Passover is no longer called the Passover of the Jews, but of Jesus. From now on, it is He, the Lamb of God who will liberate man from sin. The Passover of Jesus is one that aims to liberate man: a new exodus which permits to go from darkness to light (8: 12), and which will bear life and feast in humanity (7: 37).

Jesus is aware that he is about to conclude his journey toward the Father and,

therefore he is about to bring to an end his personal and definitive exodus. Such a passage, going to the Father, takes place through the Cross, the central moment in which Jesus will surrender his life for the good of man.

It strikes the reader when he becomes aware how the Evangelist John knows how to present the person of Jesus well, while he is aware of the last events of his life and therefore, of his mission. So as to affirm that Jesus is not crushed or overcome by the events which threaten his life, but that he is ready to give his life. Before, the Evangelist has remarked that his hour had not arrived; but now in the account of the washing of the feet he says that he is aware that his hour is close at hand. Such a conscience is at the basis of the expression of John: "After having loved those who were his in the world, he loved them to the end" (v. 1). Love for "his own," for those who form the new community, has been evident while he was with them, but it will shine in an eminent way in his death. Jesus shows such a love in the gesture of the washing of the feet, which in its symbolical value, shows the continuous love which is expressed in service.

The Washing of the Feet

Jesus is at an ordinary supper with his disciples. He is fully conscious of the mission which the Father has entrusted to him: the salvation of humanity depends on him. With such an awareness he wishes to show "to his own," through the washing of the feet, how the work of salvation of the Father is fulfilled and to indicate in such a gesture the surrender of his life for the salvation of man. It is the will of Jesus that man be saved, and a longing desire leads him to give up his life and to surrender. He is aware that the Father gives Jesus complete freedom of action.

Besides, Jesus knows that his true provenance and the goal of his itinerary is God; he knows that his death on the Cross, the maximum expression of his love, is the last moment of his journey of salvation. His death is an "exodus"; it is the climax of his victory over death, in his surrender (giving his life) Jesus reveals to us the presence of God as the fullness of life and exemption from death.

With this full consciousness of his identity and of his complete liberty Jesus is prepared to fulfil the great and humble gesture of the washing of the feet. Such a gesture of love is described with a great number of verbs (eight) which render the scene absorbing, enthralling and full of significance. The Evangelist in presenting the last action of Jesus toward his own, uses this rhetorical figure of the accumulation of verbs without repeating himself in order that such a gesture remains impressed in the heart and mind of his disciples and of every reader and in order that a commandment may always be remembered, not forgotten. The gesture fulfilled by Jesus intends to show that true love is expressed in tangible actions of service. Jesus despoils himself of his garments and ties around his waist a towel or apron, symbol of service. More precisely, Jesus takes off his garments is an expression which expresses the significance of the gift of life. Which is the teaching which Jesus transmits to his disciples through this gesture? He shows them that love is expressed in service, in giving one's life for others as he has done.

At the time of Jesus the washing of the feet was a gesture which expressed hospitality and welcome towards the guests. In an ordinary way it was done by a slave or also by the wife, concerning the wife and also the daughters toward their father. Besides, it was the custom that such a rite of the washing of the feet should be done before they sat at table and not during the meal. Such an insertion of Jesus' action intends to stress or underline how singular or significant his gesture was.

And thus, Jesus gets down to wash the feet of his disciples. The repeated use of the apron which Jesus tied around his waist underlines the attitude of service which is a permanent attribute of the person of Jesus. In fact, when he will have finished the

washing of the feet, Jesus does not take off the towel which he used as an apron. Such a detail intends to underline that the service-love does not end with his death. This minute detail shows the intention of the Evangelist to wish to underline the significance and importance of the gesture of Jesus. By washing the feet of his disciples Jesus intends to show them his love, which is one with that of the Father (10: 30, 38). This image with which Jesus reveals God is really shocking: he is not a Sovereign who resides exclusively in Heaven, but he presents himself as the servant of humanity in order to raise it to the divine level. From this divine service flows, for the community of believers, that liberty which comes from the love which renders all its members as "lords" (*free*) because they are servants. It is like saying that only liberty creates the true love. From now on, service which the believers will render to man will have as its purpose that of restoring the relationship among men in whom equality and liberty are a consequence of the practice of reciprocal service. Jesus, with his gesture intends to show that any domination or tentative to prevail over man is contrary to the attitude of God who, instead, serves man to raise him to himself. Besides, the pretensions of superiority of one man over another, no longer have any sense, because the community founded by Jesus does not have any pyramidal characteristics, but horizontal dimensions, in which each one is at the service of others, following the example of God and of Jesus.

In synthesis, the gesture which Jesus fulfilled expresses the following values: the love toward the brothers demands to be expressed in fraternal acceptance, hospitality, that is, in permanent service.

- Peter's Resistance

The reaction of Peter before the gesture of Jesus is expressed in attitudes of surprise and protest. There is also a change in the way in which he related to Jesus: Peter calls him "Lord" (13: 6). In such a title Jesus is recognized as having a level of superiority which is in conflict with the "washing" of the feet, an action which belongs, instead, to an inferior subject. The protest is expressed energetically by the words: "Are you going to wash my feet?" In Peter's eyes this humiliating gesture of the washing of the feet seemed to him as an inversion of values which regulate the relationship between Jesus and men: the first one is the Master, Peter is a subject. Peter disapproves the equality which Jesus wants to create among men.

To such misunderstanding Jesus responds inviting Peter to accept the sense of washing his feet as a witness of his love toward him. More precisely, he wants to offer him a concrete proof of how he and the Father love him.

But Peter in his reaction does not give in: he categorically refuses that Jesus should get down at his feet. According to Peter each one should carry out his own role, it is not possible to have a community or a society based on equality. It is not acceptable that Jesus abandons his position of superiority to render himself equal to his disciples. Such an idea of the Master disorients Peter and leads him to protest. Not accepting the service of love of his Master, he neither accepts that he dies on the cross for him (12: 34; 13: 37). It is as to say that Peter is far away from understanding what is true love, and such an obstacle is an impediment so that Jesus can show it to him by his action.

In the meantime, if Peter is not ready to share the dynamics of love which manifests itself in reciprocal service he cannot share the friendship with Jesus and runs the risk, truly, to exclude himself.

Following the admonition of Jesus "If I do not wash you, you can have no share with me" (v. 8), Peter adheres to the threatening words of the Master, but without accepting the profound sense of the action of Jesus. He shows himself open, ready

to let Jesus wash his feet, not only the feet, but also his hands and head. It seems that it is easier for Peter to accept Jesus' gesture as an action of purification or ablution rather than as a service. But Jesus responds that the disciples have become pure ("clean") at the moment when they accepted to allow themselves to be guided by the Word of the Master, rejecting that of the world. Peter and the disciples no longer need the Jewish rite of the purification but to allow themselves to have their feet washed by Jesus; or rather to allow themselves to be loved by him, conferring them dignity and liberty.

- The Memorial of Love

At the end of the washing of the feet Jesus intends to give his action a permanent validity for his community and at the same time to leave to it a memorial or commandment which should always regulate the fraternal relationships.

Jesus is the Lord, not in the dimension of domination, but in so far as he communicates the love of the Father (his Spirit) which makes us children of God and qualified to imitate Jesus who freely gives his love to his own. Jesus intended to communicate such an interior attitude to his own, a love which does not exclude anyone, not even Judas who is about to betray him. Therefore, if the disciples call him Lord, they have to imitate him; if they consider him Master, they have to listen to him.

Some Questions to Meditate On

- He got up from the table: How do you live the Eucharist? In a sedentary way or do you allow yourself to be moved to action by the fire of the love which you receive? Do you run the risk that the Eucharist in which you participate is lost in contemplative Narcissism, without leading to the commitment of solidarity and sharing? Your commitment in favor of justice, of the poor, does it come from the habit of encountering Christ in the Eucharist, from the familiarity with him?
- He removed his outer garments: when from the Eucharist you go to daily life, do you know how to remove the garments of your own benefit, your calculations, personal interests to allow yourself to be guided by an authentic love toward others? Or rather, after the Eucharist you are not capable of removing your garments of domination and of arrogance to put on those of simplicity, of poverty?
- Taking a towel he wrapped it around his waist: this is the image of the "Church of the apron." In the life of your family, of your ecclesial community, do you walk on the street of service, of sharing? Are you directly involved in the service to the poor and to the least? Do you know how to see the face of Christ who asks to be served, loved in the poor?

ORATIO

Psalm 116 (114-115), 12-13; 15-16; 17-18

The Psalmist who finds himself in the time and in the presence of the liturgical assembly sings his sacrifice of thanksgiving. Voltaire who had a special predilection for v. 12 expressed himself as follows:

"What can I offer to the Lord for all the gifts which he has given me?"

What return can I make to Yahweh for his generosity to me?

I shall take up the cup of salvation and call on the name of Yahweh.

Costly in Yahweh's sight is the death of his faithful. I beg you, Yahweh!
I am your servant,
I am your servant and my mother was your servant; you have undone my fetters.
I shall offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of Yahweh.
I shall fulfil my vows to Yahweh, witnessed by all his people

Final Prayer

Fascinated with the way in which God expressed his love toward his own, Origen prayed as follows:

Jesus, come, my feet are dirty.
Become a servant for me, pour the water in the basin; come, wash my feet.
I know it, what I am saying is daring, but I fear the threat of your words:
"If I do not wash you,
you can have no share with me." Wash then my feet,
so that I may have a share with you. (*Homily 5 on Isaiah*)

And Saint Ambrose having an ardent desire to correspond to the love of Jesus, expresses himself as follows:

Oh, my Lord Jesus,
allow me to wash your sacred feet;
you got them dirty when you walked in my soul... But where will I take the water
from the fountain to wash your feet?
In lacking that
I only have the eyes to weep:
bathing your feet with my tears,
do in such a way that I myself remain purified. (*Treatise on penance*).

Friday, April 15, 2022

Good Friday

Recollection in prayer – *Statio*

Come, you who refresh us,
the soul's delightful guest, come take away all that is mine, and pour into me all that is yours. Come, you who are the nourishment of every chaste thought, source of all mercies, sum of all purity. Come and burn away all that in me is cause of my not being able to be consumed by you.

Come, Spirit, who are ever with the Father and the Bridegroom, and rest over the brides of the Bridegroom. (St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi, O. Carm., in *La Probatione* ii, 193-194.)

A Prayerful Reading of the Word – *Lectio*

From the Gospel according to John (18: 1-19: 42)

1 After he had said all this, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron valley where there was a garden into which he went with his disciples. 2 Judas the traitor knew the place also, since Jesus had often met his disciples there, 3 so Judas brought the cohort to this place together with guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees, all with lanterns and torches and weapons. 4 Knowing everything that was to happen to him, Jesus came forward and said, 'Who are you looking for?' 5 They answered, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' He said, 'I am he.' Now Judas the traitor was standing among them. 6 When Jesus said to them, 'I am he,' they moved back and fell on the ground. 7 He asked them a second time, 'Who are you looking for?' They said, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' 8 Jesus replied, 'I have told you that I am he. If I am the one you are looking for, let these others go.' 9 This was to fulfill the words he had spoken, 'Not one of those you gave me have I lost.' 10 Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. 11 Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back in its scabbard; am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

12 The cohort and its tribune and the Jewish guards seized Jesus and bound him. 13 They took him first to Annas, because Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. 14 It was Caiaphas who had counselled the Jews, 'It is better for one man to die for the people.'

15 Simon Peter, with another disciple, followed Jesus. This disciple, who was known to the high priest, went with Jesus into the high priest's palace, 16 but Peter stayed outside the door. So the other disciple, the one known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the door-keeper and brought Peter in. 17 The girl on duty at the door said to Peter, 'Aren't you another of that man's disciples?' He answered, 'I am not.' 18 Now it was cold, and the servants and guards had lit a charcoal fire and were standing there warming themselves; so Peter stood there too, warming himself with the others.

19 The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. 20 Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly for all the world to hear; I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple where all the Jews meet together; I have said nothing in secret. 21 Why ask me? Ask my hearers what I taught; they know what I said.' 22 At these words, one of the guards standing by gave Jesus a slap in the face, saying, 'Is that the way you answer the high priest?' 23 Jesus replied, 'If there is some offence in what I said, point it out; but if not, why do you strike me?' 24 Then Annas sent him, bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.

25 As Simon Peter stood there warming himself, someone said to him, 'Aren't you another of his disciples?' He denied it saying, 'I am not.' 26 One of the high priest's servants, a relation of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, 'Didn't I see you in the garden with him?' 27 Again Peter denied it; and at once a cock crowed.

28 They then led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium. It was now morning. They did not go into the Praetorium themselves to avoid becoming defiled and unable to eat the Passover. 29 So Pilate came outside to them and said, 'What charge do you bring against this man?' They replied, 30 'If he were not a criminal, we should not have handed him over to you.' 31 Pilate said, 'Take him yourselves, and try him by your own Law.' The Jews answered, 'We are not allowed to put anyone to death.' 32 This was to fulfil the words Jesus had spoken indicating the way he was going to die.

33 So Pilate went back into the Praetorium and called Jesus to him and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 34 Jesus replied, 'Do you ask this of your own accord, or have others said it to you about me?' 35 Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? It is your own people

and the chiefpriests who have handed you over to me: what have you done?' 36 Jesus replied, 'Mine is nota kingdom of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought to prevent my being surrendered to the Jews. As it is, my kingdom does not belong here.' 37 Pilate said, 'So, then you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'It is you who say that I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.' 38 'Truth?' said Pilate. 'What is that?' And so saying hewent out again to the Jews and said, 'I find no case against him. 39 But according to a custom of yours I should release one prisoner at the Passover; would you like me, then, to release for you the king of the Jews?' 40 At this they shouted, 'Not this man,' they said, 'but Barabbas.' Barabbas was a bandit.

19:1 Pilate then had Jesus taken away and scourged; 2 and after this, the soldiers twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on his head and dressed him in a purple robe. 3 They kept coming up to him and saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' and slapping him in the face. 4 Pilate came outside again and said to them, 'Look, I am going to bring him out to you to let you see that I find no case against him.' 5 Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said, 'Here is the man.' 6 When they saw him, the chief priests and the guards shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him: I find no case against him.' 7 The Jews replied, 'We have a Law, and according to that Law he ought to be put to death, because he has claimed to be Son of God.'

8 When Pilate heard them say this his fears increased. 9 Re-entering the Praetorium, he saidto Jesus, 'Where do you come from?' But Jesus made no answer. 10 Pilate then said to him, 'Are you refusing to speak to me? Surely you know I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?' 11 Jesus replied, 'You would have no power over me at all if it had notbeen given you from above; that is why the man who handed me over to you has the greater guilt.'

12 From that moment Pilate was anxious to set him free, but the Jews shouted, 'If you set himfree you are no friend of Caesar's; anyone who makes himself king is defying Caesar.' 13 Hearing these words, Pilate had Jesus brought out, and seated him on the chair of judgement at a place called the Pavement, in Aramaic *Gabbatha*. 14 It was the Day of Preparation, about the sixth hour. 'Here is your king,' said Pilate to the Jews. 15 But they shouted, 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him.' Pilate said, 'Shall I crucify your king?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king except Caesar.' 16 So at that Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. They then took charge of Jesus,

17 and carrying his own cross he went out to the Place of the Skull or, as it is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, 18 where they crucified him with two others, one on either side, Jesus being in the middle. 19 Pilate wrote out a notice and had it fixed to the cross; it ran: 'Jesus theNazarene, King of the Jews'. 20 This notice was read by many of the Jews, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the writing was in Hebrew, Latin and Greek.21 So the Jewish chief priests said to Pilate, 'You should not write "King of the Jews," but that the man said, "I am King of the Jews."' 22 Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written.'

23 When the soldiers had finished crucifying Jesus they took his clothing and divided it into four shares, one for each soldier. His undergarment was seamless, woven in one piece from neck to hem; 24 so they said to one another, 'Instead of tearing it, let's throw dice to decide who is to have it.' In this way the words of scripture were fulfilled: They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothes. That is what the soldiers did.

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. 26 Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved

standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' 27 Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

28 After this, Jesus knew that everything had now been completed and, so that the scripture should be completely fulfilled, he said: I am thirsty. 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there; so, putting a sponge soaked in the wine on a hyssop stick, they held it up to his mouth. 30 After Jesus had taken the wine he said, 'It is fulfilled'; and bowing his head he gave up his spirit.

31 It was the Day of Preparation, and to avoid the bodies' remaining on the cross during the Sabbath -- since that Sabbath was a day of special solemnity -- the Jews asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away. 32 Consequently the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with him and then of the other. 33 When they came to Jesus, they saw he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs 34 one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water.

35 This is the evidence of one who saw it -- true evidence, and he knows that what he says is true -- and he gives it so that you may believe as well. 36 Because all this happened to fulfil the words of scripture: Not one bone of his will be broken; 37 and again, in another place scripture says: They will look to the one whom they have pierced.

38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus -- though a secret one because he was afraid of the Jews -- asked Pilate to let him remove the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission, so they came and took it away. 39 Nicodemus came as well -- the same one who had first come to Jesus at night-time -- and he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. 40 They took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, following the Jewish burial custom. 41 At the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in this garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been buried. 42 Since it was the Jewish Day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Reflecting on the Word – *Meditatio*

A Key to the Reading:

- Jesus master of his fate

I would like to suggest that we meditate in the spirit of Mary, at the foot of the cross of Jesus. She, the strong woman who understood the full meaning of this event of the passion and death of the Lord, will help us cast a contemplative glance at the crucified (Jn 19: 25–27). We are looking at chapter 19 of John's Gospel, which begins with the scene of the scourging and the crowning with thorns. Pilate presents "Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews" to the chief priests and to the guards who call for his death on the cross (Jn 19: 6). Thus begins for Jesus the way of the cross towards Golgotha, where he will be crucified. In the story of the Passion according to John, Jesus reveals himself as master of himself and in control of all that is happening to him. John's text is full of phrases that point to this theological fact, that Jesus offers his life. He actively, not passively, endures the events of the passion. Here are just some examples putting the stress on some phrases and words. The reader may find other examples:

Knowing everything that was to happen to him, Jesus came forward and said: "Who are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said, "I am he!" Now

Judas the traitor was standing among them. When Jesus said to them "I am he," they moved back and fell on the ground. He asked them a second time, "Who are you looking for?" They said, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus replied, "I have told you that I am he. If I am the one you are looking for, let these others go." This was to fulfil the words he had spoken, "Not one of those you gave me have I lost." (Jn 18: 4-9)

"Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe" (Jn 19: 5), Jesus replied, "You would have no power over me at all, if it had not been given you from above." (Jn 19: 11)

On the cross too, Jesus takes an active part in his death, he does not allow himself to be killed like the thieves whose legs were broken (Jn 19: 31-33), but commits his spirit (Jn 19: 30). The details recalled by the Evangelist are very important: Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' (Jn 19: 26-27). These simple words of Jesus bear the weight of revelation, words that reveal to us his will: "this is your son" (v. 26); "this is your mother" (v. 27). These words also recall those pronounced by Pilate on the Lithostrotos: "This is the man" (Jn 19: 5). With these words, Jesus on the cross, his throne, reveals his will and his love for us. He is the lamb of God, the shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. At that moment, by the cross, he gives birth to the Church, represented by Mary, his sister Mary of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene together with the beloved disciple (Jn 19: 25).

- Beloved and faithful disciples

The fourth Gospel specifies that these disciples "stood by the cross" (Jn 19: 25-26). This detail has a deep meaning. Only the fourth Gospel tells us that these five persons stood by the cross. The other Evangelists do not say so. Luke, for instance, says that all those who knew him followed the events from a distance (Lk 23: 49). Matthew also says that many women followed these events from afar. These women had followed Jesus from Galilee and served him. But now they followed him from afar (Mt 27: 55-56). Like Matthew, Mark gives us the names of those who followed the death of Jesus from afar (Mk 15: 40-41). Thus only the fourth Gospel says that the mother of Jesus and the other women and the beloved disciple "stood by the cross." They stood there like servants before their king. They are present courageously at a time when Jesus has already declared that "it is fulfilled" (Jn 19: 30). The mother of Jesus is present at the hour that finally "has come." That hour foretold at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2: 1ff). The fourth Gospel had remarked then that "the mother of Jesus was there" (Jn 2: 1). Thus the person that remains faithful to the Lord in his destiny, he/she is a beloved disciple. The Evangelist keeps this disciple anonymous so that each one of us may see him/herself mirrored in the one who knew the mysteries of the Lord, who laid his head on Jesus' chest at the last supper (Jn 13: 25).

Questions and Suggestions for Meditation and Practice

- Read once more the passage of the Gospel and look in the Bible for the texts mentioned in the key to the reading. Look for other parallel texts that may help us penetrate deeper into the text presented for our meditation.
- In spirit, and with the help of the prayerful reading of John's text, visit the places of the Passion, stop on Calvary to witness with Mary and the beloved disciple the events of the Passion.
- What struck you most?
- What feelings does this story of the Passion arouse in you?

- What does the fact that Jesus actively bears his passion mean for you?

Oratio

O Eternal Wisdom, Infinite Goodness, Ineffable Truth, You who probe hearts, Eternal God, help us to understand that you can, know and want to! O Loving and Bleeding Lamb, crucified Christ, fulfil in us that which you said: "Anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8: 12). O perfect light, from whom all lights proceed! O light for whom light was created, without whom all is darkness and with whom all is light. Light up, light up, do light up! Let your whole will penetrate all the authors and collaborators you have chosen in this work of renewal. Jesus, Jesus love, Jesus, transform us and make us conform to you. Uncreated Wisdom, Eternal Word, sweet Truth, silent Love, Jesus, Jesus Love! (St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi, O. Carm., in *The Renewal of the Church*, 90-91)

Contemplatio

Repeat frequently and calmly these words of Jesus when he offered himself:

"Father into your hands I commend my spirit"

Sunday, April 17, 2022

Easter Sunday

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit

Lord Jesus Christ, today your light shines in us, source of life and joy. Send the Spirit of love and truth, so that, like Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John, we too may discover and interpret in the light of the Word, the signs of your divine presence in our world. May we welcome these signs in faith that we may always live in the joy of your presence among us, even when all seems to be shrouded in the darkness of sadness and evil.

The Gospel: John 20: 1-9

A Key to the Reading:

For John, the Evangelist, the resurrection of Jesus is the decisive moment in the process of his glorification, indissolubly linked with the first phase of this glorification, namely his passion and death.

The event of the resurrection is not described in the spectacular and apocalyptic details of the synoptic Gospels. For John, the life of the Risen One is a reality that asserts itself silently, in the discreet and irresistible power of the Spirit.

The fact of the faith of the disciples is announced, "While it was still dark" and begins through the vision of the material signs that recall the Word of God. Jesus is the great protagonist of the story, but he does not appear personally.

The Text:

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. 4 They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; 5 and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, 7 and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.

8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

A Subdivision of the Text for a Better Understanding:

- Verse 1: introduction and events prior to the description of the situation;
- Verse 2: Mary's reaction and the first announcement of the newly discovered fact;
- Verses 3-5: the immediate reaction of the disciples and the interaction among them.
- Verses 6-7: verification of the event announced by Mary;
- Verses 8-9: the faith of the other disciple and its relationship with the Sacred Scriptures.

A Moment of Interior and Exterior Silence

to open our hearts and make room within for the Word of God:

A Slow Re-reading of the Whole Passage;

- I too am in the garden: the empty sepulchre is before my eyes;
- I allow Mary Magdalene's words to echo within me;
- I too run with her, Peter and the other disciple;
- I allow myself to be immersed in the joyful wonder of the faith in Jesus Christ, even though, like them, I do not see him with my bodily eyes.

The Gift of the Word to Us

- *Chapter 20 in John*: this is quite a fragmented text where it is clear that the editor has intervened several times to put the stress on some themes and to unify the various texts received previously from preceding sources, at least three sources.
- *The day after the Sabbath*: it is "the first day of the week" and, in Christian circles, inherits the sacredness of the Jewish Sabbath. For Christians it is the first day of the new week, the beginning of the new time, the memorial day of the resurrection called "the day of the Lord" (*dies Domini*).
- Here and in verse 19, the Evangelist adopts an expression that is already traditional for Christians (e.g.: *Mk* 16: 2, 9; *Acts* 20: 7) and is older than the expression that later became characteristic of the first evangelization: "the third day" (e.g.: *Lk* 24: 7, 46; *Acts* 10: 40; *1Cor* 15: 4).

- *Mary Magdalene*: This is the same woman as the one present at the foot of the cross with other women (19: 25). Here she seems to be alone, but the words in verse 2 ("we do not know") show that the original story, worked on by the Evangelist, told of more women, as is true of the other Gospels (cfr Mk 16: 1-3; Mt 28: 1; Lk 23: 55-24: 1).
- However the synoptics (cfr Mk 16: 1; Lk 24: 1), do not specify the reason for her visit to the sepulchre, seeing that it is inferred that the rite of burial had already been carried out (19: 40); perhaps, the only thing missing is the funereal lamentation (cfr Mk 5: 38). In any case, the fourth Evangelist reduces to a minimum the story of the discovery of the empty sepulchre so as to focus the attention of the reader on what comes after.
- *Early, while it was still dark*: Mark (16: 2) says something different, but from both we understand that it was the very early hours of the morning, when the light is very weak and still pale. Perhaps John stresses the lack of light in order to contrast symbolically the *darkness-lack* of faith and *light*-welcoming of the Gospel of the resurrection.
- *The stone had been taken away from the tomb*: the Greek work is generic: the stone had been "taken away" or "removed" (different from: Mk 16: 3-4).

The verb to "take away" recalls Jn 1: 29: the Baptist points Jesus out as "Lamb who takes away the sin of the world." Perhaps the Evangelist wishes to recall the fact that this stone "taken away," flung away from the sepulchre is the material sign that death and sin have been "taken away" by the resurrection of Jesus?

- *So she ran and went to Peter and the other disciple*: Mary Magdalene runs to those who share her love for Jesus and her suffering for his atrocious death, now made worse by this new discovery. She turns to them, perhaps because they were the only ones who had not run away with the others and remained in contact with each other (cfr 19: 15 e 26 - 27). She wants to share at least with them this final pain of the outrage committed against the body.

We see how Peter and the "beloved disciple" and Magdalene are characterized by a special love that unites them with Jesus: it is indeed reciprocal love that makes them capable of sensing the presence of the loved person.

- *The other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved*: is someone who appears only in this Gospel and only beginning with chapter 13, when he exhibits great intimacy with Jesus and deep understanding with Peter (13: 23-25). He appears at every decisive moment of the passion and of the resurrection of Jesus, but remains anonymous and many theories have been advanced on his identity. He is probably the anonymous disciple of the Baptist who follows Jesus together with Andrew (1: 35.40). Since the fourth Gospel never speaks of John the apostle and keeping in mind that this Gospel recounts details clearly known to an eyewitness, the "disciple" has been identified with John the apostle. The fourth Gospel has always been attributed to him even though he may not have materially written it, yet the origin of this particular tradition is that this Gospel and other writings are attributed to John. This also explains why he is someone who is somewhat idealized.
- *"The one whom Jesus loved"*: It is clear that this is an addition not from the apostle, who would not have dared boast of having such a close relationship with the Lord, but from his disciples who wrote most of the Gospel and who coined this expression after reflection on the clearly privileged love between Jesus and this (cfr 13: 25; 21: 4. 7). Where we read the simpler expression "the other disciple" or "the disciple," obviously the editors did not make the addition.

- *They have taken the Lord out of the tomb:* these words, which recur in verses 13 e 15, show that Mary was afraid that body-snatchers had taken the body, a thing common then, so much so that the Roman Emperor had to promulgate severe decrees to check this phenomenon. In Matthew (28:11—15), the chief priests use this possibility to discredit the fact of the resurrection of Jesus and, eventually, to justify the lack of intervention on the part of the soldiers who guarded the tomb.

The Lord: the title "Lord" implies an acknowledgement of divinity and evokes divine omnipotence. That is why this term was used by Christians for the risen Jesus. Indeed, the fourth Evangelist uses this term only in Paschal stories (see also 20: 13).

- *We do not know where they have laid him:* these words recall what happened to Moses, whose place of burial was unknown (Dt 34: 10). Another implicit reference is to the words of Jesus himself when he says that it is impossible to know where he was going (7: 11, 22; 8: 14, 28, 42; 13: 33; 14: 1-5; 16: 5).
- *They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter...but he did not go in:* This passage shows the anxiety that these disciples were living through.

The fact that the "other disciple" stopped, is more than just a gesture of politeness or respect towards someone older, it is the tacit acknowledgement that Peter, within the apostolic group, held a place of pre-eminence, even though this is not stressed. It is, therefore, a sign of communion. This gesture could also be a literary device to move from the event in terms of faith in the resurrection to the following and peak moment in the story.

- *The linen cloths lying and the napkin...rolled up in a place by itself:* although the other disciple did not go in, he had already seen something. Peter, crossing the entrance of the sepulchre, discovers the proof that no theft of the body took place: no thief would have wasted time to unfold the body, spread the cloths in an orderly fashion (*on the ground* would be translated better by "spread out" or "laid carefully on the floor") and then to roll up the napkin in a place by itself. Such an operation would have been complicated also because the oils with which the body had been anointed (especially myrrh) acted like glue, causing the cloths to stick perfectly and solidly to the body, almost as what happened to mummies. Besides, the napkin is folded; the Greek verb can also mean "rolled," or it could indicate that that piece of light cloth had, in large part, preserved the form of the face over which it had been placed, almost like a mortuary mask. The cloths are the same as those cited in Jn 19: 40.

Everything is in order in the sepulchre, even though the body of Jesus is not there, and Peter was well able to see inside the sepulchre because the day was breaking. Different from Lazarus (11: 44), then, Christ rises abandoning completely his funerary trappings. Ancient commentators note that, in fact, Lazarus had to use the cloths again for his definitive burial, while Christ had no further use of them because he was not to die again (cfr Rm 6: 9).

- *Peter...saw...the other disciple...saw and believed:* at the beginning of the story, Mary also "saw." Although some translations use the same verb, the original text uses three different verbs (*theorein* for Peter; *blepein* for the other disciple and Mary Magdalene; *idein*, here, for the other disciple), allowing us to understand that there is a growth in the spiritual depth of this "seeing" that, in fact, culminates in the faith of the other disciple.

The anonymous disciple had certainly not seen anything other than that which Peter had observed. Perhaps he interprets what he sees differently from others because of

the special relationship of love he had with Jesus (Thomas' experience is emblematic, 29: 24-29). In any case, as indicated by the tense of the Greek verb, his is still an initial faith, so much so that he cannot find ways of sharing this experience with Mary or Peter or any of the other disciples (there is no further reference to this).

However, for the fourth Evangelist the double "see and believe" is quite meaningful and refers exclusively to faith in the resurrection of the (cfr 20: 29), Because it was impossible to believe truly before the Lord had died and rose (cfr 14: 25-26; 16: 12-15). The double vision- faith, then, characterizes the whole of this chapter and "the beloved disciple" is presented as a model of faith who succeeds in understanding the truth about God through material (cfr also 21: 7).

- *As yet they did not know the Scripture*: this obviously refers to all the other disciples. Even for those who had lived close to Jesus, then, it was difficult to believe in Him, and for them, as for us also, the only gateway that allows us to cross the threshold of authentic faith is knowledge of the Scriptures (cfr *Lk* 24: 26-27; *1Cor* 15: 34; *Acts* 2: 27-31) in the light of the events of the resurrection.

A Few Questions

- What, in the concrete, does it mean for us "to believe in Jesus the Risen One"? What difficulties do we encounter? Does the resurrection solely concern Jesus or is it really the foundation of our faith?
- The relationship that we see between Peter, the other disciple and Mary Magdalene is clearly one of great communion in Jesus. In what persons, realities, institutions do we today find this same understanding of love and the same "common union" founded on Jesus? Where can we read the concrete signs of the great love for the Lord and "his own" that inspired all the disciples?
- When we look at our lives and the reality that surrounds them, both near and far, do we see as Peter saw (he saw reality, but holds on to them, that is, to the death and burial of Jesus) or do we see as the other disciple saw (he sees facts and discovers in them signs of new life).

Let us Pray

with a hymn taken from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians (paraphrase of 1: 17-23).

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,
may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,
having the eyes of your hearts enlightened,
that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power
in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places,
far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named,

not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet
and has made him the head over all things for the church,
which is his body,
the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Closing Prayer

The liturgical context is of great importance in praying this Gospel and the event of the resurrection of Jesus, which is the hub of our faith and of our Christian life. The sequence that characterizes the Eucharistic liturgy of today and of the whole week leads us to praise the Father and the Lord Jesus.

Christians, to the Paschal Victim offer sacrifice and praise.
The sheep are ransomed by the Lamb; and Christ, the undefiled
has sinners to his Father reconciled. Death with life contended:
Combat strangely ended!
Life's own Champion, slain, Yet lives to reign.
Tell us Mary:
say what you see upon the way. The tomb the living did enclose; I saw Christ's
glory as he rose! The angels there attesting;
Shroud with grave-clothes resting. Christ, my hope, has risen:
He goes before you into Galilee.
That Christ is truly risen from the dead we know.
Victorious king,
your mercy show.

We may conclude our prayer also with this lively invocation by a contemporary poet, Marco Guzzi:

Love, Love, Love!
I wish to feel, live and express all this Love,
Which is a joyful commitment in the world and a happy contact with the others.
Only you free me, only you release me.
And the snows fall to water
the greenest of valleys in creation.

Monday, April 18, 2022

Monday with the Octave of Easter

Opening Prayer

Our living God,

our heart is glad and rejoices and we feel secure in our faith that we have a living person to believe in, Jesus Christ, who is risen from the dead.

Let him show us the path of life, let us live in the joy of his presence and give us the grace to make us witnesses, so that we can proclaim with our whole life that Jesus is our risen, living Lord now and forever.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 28: 8-15

Filled with awe and great joy the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples. And suddenly, coming to meet them, was Jesus. 'Greetings,' he said. And the women came up to him and, clasping his feet, they did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers that they must leave for Galilee; there they will see me.' Now while they were on their way, some of the guards went off into the city to tell the chief priests all that had happened. These held a meeting with the elders and, after some discussion, handed a considerable sum of money to the soldiers with these instructions, 'This is what you must say, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep." And should the governor come to hear of this, we undertake to put things right with him ourselves and to see that you do not get into trouble.' So they took the money and carried out their instructions, and to this day that is the story among the Jews.

Reflection

Easter! Today's Gospel describes the experience of the Resurrection which the disciples of Jesus had. At the beginning of his Gospel, in presenting Jesus, Matthew had said that Jesus is the Emmanuel, God with us (Mt 1: 23). Now, at the end, he communicates and increases this certainty of faith, because he proclaims that Jesus is risen (Mt 28: 6) and that he will be with us always, up to the end of time! (Mt 28: 20). In the contradictions of life, this truth is questioned, contested very much. Opposition is not lacking. The enemies, the chief priests of the Jews, defended themselves against the Good News of the Resurrection and sent word to say that the body had been stolen by the disciples (Mt 28: 11-13). This also happens today. On the one side, the effort of many persons to live and to witness to the resurrection. On the other side, so many evil people who fight against the resurrection and against life.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus is told through a symbolic language, which reveals the hidden sense of the events. Matthew speaks about the earthquake, of lightening and of the angels who announce the victory of Jesus over death (Mt 2-4). It is an apocalyptic language, very common at that time, to announce that finally the world had been transformed by the power of God! The hope of the poor, who reaffirmed their faith, was fulfilled: "He is alive in our midst!"

- Matthew 28: 8 - The joy of the Resurrection overcomes fear. On Sunday morning, the first day of the week, two women went to the tomb, Mary of Magdala and Mary of James, also called the other Mary. All of a sudden the earth trembled and an angel appeared as lightening. The guards who were guarding the tomb were so shaken up with fear that they were like deadmen. The women were frightened but the angel encouraged them, announcing the victory of Jesus over death and sending them to go join the disciples of Jesus in Galilee. And in Galilee they would be able to see him again. Everything began there; they received the great revelation of the Risen Lord. The joy of the Resurrection began to overcome fear. Thus the announcement of life and resurrection begins in this way.

- Matthew 28: 9-10 - Jesus appears to the women. The women left quickly. In them there is a mixture of fear and of joy. These are sentiments typical of those who have a profound experience of the Mystery of God. Suddenly, Jesus himself went to meet them and said to them: "Rejoice!" And they fell on their knees and adored him. It is the attitude of the one who believes and accepts the presence of God, even if it surprises and goes beyond the human capacity of understanding. Now, Jesus himself orders them to go and join the brothers in Galilee: "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me."
- Matthew 28: 11-15 - The astuteness or guile of the enemies of the Good News. The opposition itself which Jesus had to face during his life, springs up again now after his Resurrection. The chief priests meet and give money to the guards. They should spread the news that the disciples have robbed the body of Jesus, and this in order to avoid everything which is said about the resurrection. The chief priests do not accept the Good News of the Resurrection. They prefer to believe that it is an invention on the part of the disciples – men and women – of Jesus.

The significance of the testimony of the women. The presence of the women at the death, at the burial and at the resurrection of Jesus is significant. They are witnesses of the death of Jesus (Mt 27: 54-56). At the moment of the burial, they remain sitting before the tomb and, therefore, they can render witness of the place where Jesus was buried (Mt 27: 61). Now, on Sunday morning, they are there once again. They know that the empty tomb is truly the tomb of Jesus! The profound experience of death and resurrection which they had, transformed their lives. They themselves become qualified witnesses of the Resurrection in the Christian Communities. This is why they receive the order to announce: "Jesus is alive! He has risen from the dead!"

Personal Questions

- Which is the experience of resurrection that I have in my life? Is there in me some force which tries to oppose the experience of the resurrection? How do I react?
- Today, which is the mission of our community, of us, disciples of Jesus? From where can we draw force and strength and courage to fulfil our mission?

Concluding Prayer

I bless Yahweh who is my counsellor, even at night my heart instructs me.

I keep Yahweh before me always, for with him at my right hand, nothing can shake me.
(Ps 16: 7-8)

Tuesday, April 19, 2022

Tuesday within the Octave of Easter

Opening Prayer

Our God of life,

we profess our faith in Jesus and recognize him as our Lord and Savior. Make us listen

to him when he speaks his good news to us for it is a message of life.

May we also hear his voice when he cries out to us in people in need or simply when he speaks to us in people who express to us their joys and hopes, their love and their faith. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 20: 11-18

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

As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him.' Jesus said, 'Mary!' She turned round then and said to him in Hebrew, '*Rabbuni!*' -- which means *Master*. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'

So Mary of Magdala told the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and that he had said these things to her.

Reflection

Today's Gospel describes the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. The death of her great friend urges Mary to lose the sense of life. But she does not give up her search. She goes to the tomb in order to meet again the one whom death has taken away. There are moments in our life in which everything crumbles. It seems that everything is finished. Death, disasters, pain and suffering, disillusion, betrayals! So many things which may cause us to feel in the air, without standing on firm ground and which can lead us to fall into a deep crisis. But other things also happen. For example, that suddenly we meet a friend again and that can give us hope anew and can make us discover that love is stronger than death and defeat.

- Chapter 20 in John's Gospel, besides the apparitions of Jesus to Magdalene, it also speaks about diverse episodes which reveal the richness, indicate the richness of the experience of the Resurrection: (a) to the beloved disciple and to Peter (Jn 20: 1-10); (b) to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20: 11-18); (c) to the community of disciples (Jn 20: 19-23) and (d) to the Apostle Thomas (Jn 20: 24-29). The purpose of the writing of the Gospel is that of leading persons to believe in Jesus, and believing in him, to have life (Jn 20: 30-3).

In the way of describing the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene one perceives, one is aware of the different stages of the road that she had to follow, of the sorrowful search up to the time of the encounter at Easter. These are also the stages through which we all have to pass, throughout our life, seeking God and living the Gospel.

- John 20: 11-13: Mary Magdalene weeps, but she seeks. There was a very strong love between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. She was one of the few persons who had the courage to remain with Jesus up to the moment of his death on the Cross. After the obligatory rest on Saturday, she goes back to the tomb to be in the place where she had met her Beloved for the last time. But, surprisingly, the tomb is empty! The angels ask her: "Woman, why are you weeping?" and her response is: "They have

taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have put him!" Mary Magdalene looked for Jesus, that Jesus whom she had known during three years.

- John 20: 14-15: Mary Magdalene speaks with Jesus without knowing him. The Disciples of Emmaus saw Jesus but they did not recognize him. She thinks that he is the gardener. And just as the angels had done, Jesus also asks: "Why are you weeping?" and he adds: "Who are you looking for?" The response: "If you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him and I will go and get him." She was still looking for the Jesus of the past, the same one of three days before. And it is precisely the image of the Jesus of the past which prevents her to recognize the living Jesus, who is present before her.
- John 20: 16: Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus. Jesus pronounces the name: "Mary!" This was the sign to recognize him: the same voice, the same way of pronouncing the name. She answers: "Master!" Jesus had returned the same, as the one who had died on the cross. The first impression was that death was only a painful incident on the journey, but now everything has again become as before. Mary embraces Jesus strongly. He was the same Jesus whom she had known and loved. And thus, is fulfilled what the Parable of the Good Shepherd said: "He calls them by name and they recognize his voice." "I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (Jn 10: 3, 4, 14).
- John 20: 17-18: Mary Magdalene receives the mission to announce the resurrection to the Apostles. In fact, it is the same Jesus, but the way of being together with her is not the same as before. Jesus tells her: "Do not cling to me, because I have not as yet ascended to the Father!" He goes toward the Father. Mary Magdalene has to let Jesus go and assume her mission: to announce to the brothers that he, Jesus, has ascended to the Father. Jesus has opened up the way for us and thus, once more, God is close to us.

Personal Questions

- Have you ever had an experience which has given you the impression of loss and of death? How was it? What is it that gave you new life and gave you the hope and the joy of living?
- Which is the change that took place in Mary Magdalene throughout the dialogue? Mary Magdalene was looking for Jesus in a certain way and found him in a different way. How does this take place in our life?

Concluding Prayer

We are waiting for Yahweh;
he is our help and our shield, for in him our heart rejoices, in his holy name we trust.
Yahweh, let your faithful love rest on us,
as our hope has rested in you. (Ps 33: 20-22)

Wednesday, April 20, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,

you are a God not of the dead nor of those paralyzed by their fears and limitations but the God of the living. Raise us up and make us walk forward in joy and hope as companions on the road of him whom you raised from the dead, Jesus Christ, our risen Lord forever.

Gospel Reading - Luke 24: 13-35

That very same day, two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened.

And it happened that as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He said to them, 'What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?' They stopped; their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.' He asked, 'What things?' They answered, 'All about Jesus of Nazareth, who showed himself a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have now gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.'

Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them saying, 'It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?' They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognized him at the breaking of bread.

Reflection

Today's Gospel speaks to us of a very well known episode, that of the apparition of Jesus to the Disciples of Emmaus. Luke writes in the year 80 for the communities of Greece which in their great majority were formed by converted pagans. The years 60's and 70's had been the most difficult ones. There had been the great persecution of Nero in the year 64. Six years later, in the year 70, Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Romans. In the year 72, in Masada, in the desert of Judah, there was the massacre of

the last rebellious Jews. In those years, the Apostles, witnesses of the Resurrection, disappeared gradually. People began to feel tired on the journey. From where could they draw the courage so as not to get discouraged? How to discover the presence of Jesus in such a difficult situation? The story of the apparition of Jesus to the Disciples of Emmaus tries to give a response to all these anguishing questions. Luke wants to teach the communities how to interpret Scripture in order to be able to rediscover the presence of Jesus in life.

Luke 24: 13-24: 1st Step: to get away from reality. Jesus meets the two friends in a situation of fear and of lack of faith. The force of death, the cross, had killed in them their hope. This was the situation of many people at the time of Luke, and is also the situation of many persons today. Jesus gets close to them and walks by their side; he listens to their conversation and asks: "What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?" The dominating ideology, that is, the propaganda of the government and of the official religion of the time, prevent them from seeing. "Our hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free." Which is today the conversation of people who suffer? The first step is this one: get close to the persons, listen to their reality, feel their problems: be capable to ask questions which will help the persons to look at reality with a more critical look.

Luke 24: 25-27: 2nd step: use the Bible to enlighten life. Jesus uses the Bible and the history of people to enlighten the problem which made the two friends suffer, and to clarify the situation which they are living. He also uses it to place them in the whole project of God which came from Moses and the prophets. Thus, he indicates that history had not escaped from God's hand. Jesus uses the Bible not as a doctor who knows everything, but rather like a companion who comes to help the friends and to remind them what they had forgotten. Jesus does not set off to the disciples the complex of ignorance, but tries to awaken their memory: "Foolish and slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?"

This is the second step: With the Bible help persons to discover the wisdom which already exists in them, and transform the cross, a sign of death, into a sign of life and of hope. What prevented them from walking, now becomes for them force and light on the journey. How can we do this today?

Luke 24: 28-32: 3rd step: to share in community. The Bible, in itself, does not open the eyes. It only makes their heart burn, what opens the eyes and makes them see, is the breaking of the bread, the community gesture of sharing, and the celebration of the Supper. In the moment in which both recognize Jesus, they are born anew and Jesus disappears. Jesus does not take possession of the road of his friends. He is not paternalistic. Risen, the disciples are capable to walk alone.

The third step is the following: to know how to create a fraternal environment of faith, of celebration and of sharing, where the Holy Spirit can act. It is he who makes us discover and experience the Word of God in life and which leads us to understand the sense of the words of Jesus (Jn 14: 26; 16: 13).

Luke 24: 33-35: 4th step: The result: To resurrect means to go back to Jerusalem. The two of them, courageously, get back on the road to go to Jerusalem, where the same forces of death, which had killed Jesus and, had killed their hope, continue to be active. But, now everything has changed. If Jesus is alive, then there is in him and with him a stronger power than that which killed him. This experience makes them resurrect! Truly, everything has changed. There is the return and not the flight! Faith and not unbelief! Hope and not despair! Critical conscience and not fatalism in the face of power! Liberty and not oppression! In one word: life and not death! Instead of the bad news of the death of Jesus, the Good News of his Resurrection! Both of them

experience life and life in abundance! (Jn 10: 10). This is a sign that the Spirit of Jesus acts in them!

Personal Questions

- Both of them say: "We were hoping, but...!" Have you ever seen a situation of discouragement which has led you to say: "I was hoping, but...!"?
- How do you read, use and interpret the Bible? Have you ever felt your heart burning when reading and meditating on the Word of God? Do you read the Bible alone or are you part of a Bible group?

Concluding Prayer

Give thanks to Yahweh, call on his name, proclaim his deeds to the peoples!
Sing to him, make music for him, recount all his wonders! (Ps 105: 1-2)

Thursday, April 21, 2022

Thursday within the Octave of Easter

Opening prayer

Almighty God and Father,

Jesus died for us on the cross and you raised him from the dead. We have not seen the marks of the nails in his hands nor touched the wound in his side, but we believe that he is alive and present here among us.

Open our hearts to his word and let us touch him in the bread of the eucharist, that he may raise us above our sins and change us into new people.

May we thus bear witness to your risen Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - Luke 24: 35-48

Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognized him at the breaking of bread.

They were still talking about all this when he himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!' In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, 'Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts stirring in your hearts? See by my hands and my feet that it is I myself. Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.' And as he said this he showed them his hands and his feet. Their joy was so great that they still could not believe it, as they were dumbfounded; so he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes. Then he told them, 'This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms, was destined to be fulfilled.'

He then opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, '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.

Reflection

In these days after Easter, the texts of the Gospel narrate the apparitions of Jesus. At the beginning, in the first years after the death and the Resurrection of Jesus, the Christians were concerned in defending the Resurrection through the apparitions. They themselves, the living community, were a great apparition of the Risen Jesus. But in the measure in which the criticism of the enemies against the faith in the Resurrection increased, and that internally, there arose criticism and doubts concerning diverse functions in the community (cf. 1 Co 1: 12), they began to recall the apparitions of Jesus. There are two types of apparitions:

- (a) those which stress the doubts and the resistance of the disciples in believing in the Resurrection, and
- (b) those who call the attention toward the orders of Jesus to the disciples – men and women – conferring some mission to them.

The first respond to the criticism which come from outside. These show that Christians are not naïve and credulous persons who accept everything and anything, rather all the contrary. They themselves had many doubts in believing in the Resurrection. The others respond to the criticism from within and found the community functions and tasks, not on human qualities which are always debatable, but on the authority and orders received from the Risen Jesus. The apparitions of Jesus in today's Gospel put together two different aspects: the doubts of the disciples and the mission to announce and to forgive received from Jesus.

- Luke 24: 35: The summary of the story of Emmaus. Returning to Jerusalem, the two disciples found the community together and they shared with them the experience that they had lived. They told them what had happened along the road and how they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. The community gathered together, in turn, shared the apparition of Jesus to Peter. This was a reciprocal sharing of the experience of the Resurrection, as it also happens today when the communities gather together to share and celebrate their faith, their hope and their love.
- Luke 24, 36-37: The apparition of Jesus causes great fright in the disciples. At this moment, Jesus becomes present among them and says: "Peace be with you!" This is the most frequent greeting of Jesus: "Peace be with you!" (Jn 14: 27; 16: 33; 20: 19, 21, 26). But the disciples in seeing Jesus were frightened and did not recognize him. Before them is Jesus in person, but they think that they are seeing a ghost, a phantasm. They cannot believe it. It is not the encounter between Jesus of Nazareth and the Risen Jesus.
- Luke 24, 38-40: Jesus helps them to overcome fear and unbelief. Jesus does two things to help the disciples overcome the fear and the unbelief. He shows them his hands and his feet, saying: "It is I myself!" and tells them to touch his body saying: "A ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have!" Jesus shows his hands and feet because in them is the sign of the nails (cf. Jn 20, 25-27). The Risen Christ is Jesus of Nazareth, the same one who was nailed on the Cross and not a phantasm Christ as the disciples imagined, when they saw him. He orders them to touch his body, because the Resurrection is the Resurrection of the whole person, body and soul. The Resurrection has nothing to do with the theory of the immortality of the soul, which the Greeks taught.

- Luke 24: 41-43: The other gesture to help them overcome unbelief. But it does not suffice! Luke said that they could not believe because their joy was so great that they became dumbfounded. Jesus asks them to give him something to eat. They offered him some fish and he eats before them, to help them to overcome the doubt.
- Luke 24: 44-47: A key for the reading to understand the new significance of the Scripture. One of the greatest difficulties of the first Christians was that of accepting the crucified as the promised Messiah, because the Law taught that a crucified person was a “person cursed by God” (Dt 21: 22-23). For this reason, it was important to know that Scripture had already announced that “Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that in his name, conversion and forgiveness of sins would be preached to all peoples.” Jesus shows them that which had already been written in the Law of Moses, in the prophets and in the Psalms. Jesus risen from the dead, alive in their midst, becomes the key to open to them the total significance of Sacred Scripture.
- Luke 24: 48: You are witnesses of this. In this last order is enclosed the whole mission of the Christian communities: to be witnesses of the Resurrection, in such a way that the love of God which accepts us and forgives us will be manifested, and which wants us to live in community as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters with one another.

Personal Questions

- Sometimes, unbelief and doubt set in the heart and weaken the certainty that faith gives us concerning the presence of God in our life. Have you ever lived this sometimes? How have you overcome it?
- Our mission and also my mission, is that of being a witness of the love of God revealed in Jesus. Am I a witness of this love?

Concluding Prayer

What are human beings that you spare a thought for them, or the child of Adam that you care for him? (Ps 8: 4)

Friday, April 22, 2022

Friday within the Octave of Easter

Opening Prayer

Our God and Father,

through our risen Lord, your Son Jesus Christ, you have given us a message of hope and a person to live for. Free our faith from triviality and routine and fill us with his Spirit of courage, that we may learn to live with the insecurities of the change of renewal ever demanded by the gospel and by the needs of the times.

May our Christian living bear witness to the name of him by whom we are saved, Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 21: 1-14

Later on, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples. It was by the Sea of Tiberias, and it happened like this: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael from Canain Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two more of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said, 'I'm going fishing.' They replied, 'We'll come with you.' They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night. When it was already light, there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus called out, 'Haven't you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered, 'No,' he said, 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something.' So they threw the net out and could not haul it in because of the quantity of fish.

The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' At these words, 'It is the Lord,' Simon Peter tied his outer garment round him (for he had nothing on) and jumped into the water. The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net with the fish; they were only about a hundred yards from land.

As soon as they came ashore they saw that there was some bread there and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it. Jesus said, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.'

Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net ashore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and in spite of there being so many the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, 'Who are you?'. They knew quite well it was the Lord.

Jesus then stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus revealed himself to the disciples after rising from the dead.

Reflection

Chapter 21 of the Gospel of Saint John seems like an appendix which was added later after the Gospel had already been written. The conclusion of the previous chapter (Jn 20: 30-31) makes one perceive that it is an addition. However, whether it is an addition or not, it is the Word of God which presents us the beautiful message of the Resurrection on this fifth day of Easter week.

- John 21: 1-3: The fisherman of men returns to be a fisherman of fish. Jesus has died and has risen. At the end of three years of life together with Jesus, the disciples returned toward Galilee. A group of them find themselves together before the lake. Peter goes back to the past and says: "I am going fishing!" The others answer: "We will come with you!" Thus, Thomas, Nathanael, John and James together with Peter go to the boat to go fishing. They go back to the life of the past as if nothing had happened. But something did happen. Something was taking place! The past did not return! "We have caught nothing!" They go back to the shore, tired. This had been a night filled with frustration.
- John 21: 4-5: The context of the new apparition of Jesus. Jesus was on the shore, but they did not recognize him. Jesus asks: "Little children, have you anything to eat?" They answered: "No!" In the negative response they realize that the night had been deceiving because they had caught nothing, no fish. They had been called to be fishermen of men (Mk 1: 17; Lk 5: 10), and they go back to be fishermen of fish. But something had changed in their life! The experience of three years with Jesus produces in them an irreversible change. It was no longer possible to return to the past as if nothing had happened, as if nothing had changed.
- John 21: 6-8: "Throw the net out to the right of the boat and you will find something" They did something which perhaps they had never done in their life. Five

experienced fishermen obey a foreigner who orders them to do something which is in contrast to their experience. Jesus, that unknown person, who is on the shore, orders them to throw the net on the right side of the boat. They obey; they throw the net and behold the unexpected result. The net was full of fish! How was this possible! How to explain this surprise so unexpected, unforeseen! Love makes one discover. The beloved disciple says: "It is the Lord." This intuition clarifies everything. Peter jumped into the water to get close to Jesus very quickly. The other disciples follow him, pulling the boat, and dragging the net full of fish.

- John 21: 9-14: The kindness of Jesus. Coming ashore, they saw a charcoal fire which had been lit by Jesus, where he was roasting fish and bread. He asked them to take some of the fish they had caught and immediately Peter went to the boat and towed the net containing one hundred and fifty fish. A great number of fish and the net did not break. Jesus calls the multitude: "Come and eat!" He had the kindness to prepare something to eat after a deceiving night during which they had caught nothing. A very simple gesture which reveals something of God's love for us. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14: 9). None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, Who are you, because they knew he was the Lord. And recalling the Eucharist, John, the Evangelist contemplates: "Jesus stepping forward took the bread and gave it to them." Thus, he suggests that the Eucharist is the privileged place for the encounter with the Risen Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Has it ever happened to you that someone has told you to throw the net to the right side of your life, to do something contrary to your experience? Have you obeyed? Have you thrown in the net?
- The kindness of Jesus. How is your kindness in the small things of life?

Concluding Prayer

Give thanks to Yahweh for he is good, for his faithful love endures forever. Let those who fear Yahweh say, 'His faithful love endures forever.' (Ps 118)

Saturday, April 23, 2022

Saturday within the Octave of Easter

Opening Prayer

Our God and Father,

your Son Jesus lived among us, flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood. He died for our sake and you raised him back to life.

May we experience his love and his presence to such an extent that we can never stop proclaiming what we have seen and heard, and that people may give glory to you, our God. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Gospel Reading - Mark 16: 9-15

Having risen in the morning on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary of Magdala from whom he had cast out seven devils. She then went to those who had been his companions, and who were mourning and in tears, and told them. But they did not believe her when they heard her say that he was alive and that she had seen him.

After this, he showed himself under another form to two of them as they were on their way into the country. These went back and told the others, who did not believe them either.

Lastly, he showed himself to the Eleven themselves while they were at table. He reproached them for their incredulity and obstinacy, because they had refused to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. And he said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.

Reflection

Today's Gospel forms part of a broader literary unit (Mk 16: 9-20) which places us before a list or summary of diverse apparitions of Jesus:

- (a) Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, but the disciples do not accept her testimony (Mk 16: 9-11);
- (b) Jesus appears to the disciples, but the others do not accept their testimony (Mk 16: 12-13);

Jesus appears to the eleven, he criticizes their lack of faith and orders them to announce the Good News to all (Mk 16: 14-18); (d) Jesus ascends to Heaven and continues to cooperate with the disciples (Mk 16: 19-20).

Besides this list of apparitions in the Gospel of Mark, there are other lists of apparitions which do not always coincide among themselves. For example, the list kept by Paul in the Letter to the Corinthians is very different (1 Co 15: 3-8). This variety shows that at the beginning the Christians were not concerned to prove the Resurrection by means of the apparitions. For them faith in the Resurrection was so evident and alive that there was no need to prove it. A person who takes sun on the shore is not concerned in showing that the sun exists, because she herself, sun burnt, is the evident proof of the existence of the sun. The communities, existing in the midst of the immense Empire, were a living proof of the Resurrection. The list of the apparitions began to appear later, in the second generation in order to refute the criticism of the enemies.

- Mark 16: 9-11: Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, but the other disciples do not believe her. Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene. She goes to announce this to the others. To come into the world, God wanted to depend on the womb of a young girl 15 or 16 years old, called Mary of Nazareth (Lk 1: 38). To be recognized alive in our midst, he wants to depend on the announcement of a woman who had been liberated from seven devils, also called Mary, of Magdala! (This is why she was called Mary Magdalene). But the others did not believe her. Mark says that Jesus appeared first to Magdalene. In the list of apparitions, transmitted in the letter to the Corinthians (1 Co 15: 3-8), the apparitions of Jesus to the women are not mentioned. The first Christians had difficulty to believe in the testimony of women. It is a sin!
- Mark 16: 12-13: Jesus appears to the disciples, but the others do not believe them. Without too many details, Mark refers to an apparition of Jesus to two disciples, "while they were on their way into the country." This is perhaps a summary of the apparition of Jesus to the disciples of Emmaus, narrated by Luke (Lk 24: 13-35). Mark insists in saying that "the others did not believe them either."

- Mark 16: 14-15: Jesus criticizes the unbelief and orders them to announce the Good News to all creatures. For this reason, Jesus appears to the Eleven and reproaches them because they had not believed the persons who had seen him resurrected. Once again, Mark refers to the resistance of the disciples in believing to believe the testimony of those who have experienced the Resurrection of Jesus. Why? Probably to teach three things. In the first place that faith in Jesus passes through the faith in the persons who give witness. In the second place, that nobody should be discouraged, when the doubt or the unbelief arises in the heart. In the third place, in order to refute the criticism of those who said that the Christian is naïve and accepts without criticism any news, because the Eleven had great difficulty to accept the truth of the Resurrection!
- Today's Gospel ends with the sending out: "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Gospel to all creation!" Jesus confers to them the mission to announce the Good News to all creatures.

Personal Questions

- Mary Magdalene, the two disciples of Emmaus and the eleven disciples: who had the greatest difficulty to believe in the Resurrection? Why? With whom do I identify myself?
- Which are the signs which can convince persons of the presence of Jesus in our midst?

Concluding Prayer

May God show kindness and bless us and make his face shine on us. Then the earth will acknowledge your ways, and all nations your power to save. (Ps 67: 1-2)

Sunday, April 24, 2022

Second Sunday of Easter

Opening Prayer

Father, who on the Lord's Day gather your people to celebrate the One who is the First and the Last, the living One who conquered death, grant us the strength of your Spirit so that, having broken the chains of evil, calmed our fears and indecisions, we may render the free service of our obedience and love, to reign in glory with Christ

LECTIO

A Key to the Reading

We are in the so-called "book of the resurrection" where we are told, in a not-so-logical sequence, several matters concerning the risen Christ and the facts that prove it. In the fourth Gospel, these facts take place in the morning (20: 1-18) and evening of the first day after the Saturday and eight days later, in the same place and on the same day of the week. We are before an event that is the most important in the history of humanity, an event that challenges us personally. "If Christ has not been raised then

our preaching is useless and your believing it is useless... and you are still in your sins" (1Cor 15: 14, 17) says Paul the apostle who had not known Jesus before his resurrection, but who zealously preached him all his life. Jesus is the sent of the Father. He also sends us. Our willingness to "go" comes from the depth of the faith we have in the Risen One. Are we prepared to accept his "mandate" and to give our lives for his Kingdom? This passage is not just about the faith of those who have not seen (the witness of Thomas), but also about the mission entrusted to the Church by Christ.

A Suggested Division of the Text:

- John 20: 19-20: appearance to the disciples and showing of the wounds
- John 20: 21-23: gift of the Spirit for the mission
- John 20: 24-26: special appearance to Thomas eight days later
- John 20: 27-29: dialogue with Thomas
- John 20: 30-31: the aim of the Gospel according to John

The Text – John 20: 19-31

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

A Moment of Silence

to allow the Word to enter into our hearts

MEDITATIO

A Few Questions:

- Who or what drew my interest and wonder in the reading?

- Is it possible for someone to profess being Christian and yet not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus? Is it so important to believe in the resurrection? What would be different if we stopped at his teaching and witness of life?
- What does the gift of the Spirit for the mission mean to me?
- How does Jesus' mission in the world continue after the Resurrection? What is the content of the missionary proclamation?
- What value has Thomas' witness for me? What are, if any, my doubts concerning the faith? How do I meet them and still carry on?
- Am I able to give reasons for my faith?

Comment:

- In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week: the disciples are living through an extraordinary day. For the community, at the time of the writing of the fourth Gospel, the day after the Sabbath is already "the Lord's Day" (Ap 1: 10), *Dies Domini* (Sunday) and is more important than the Sabbath was in the tradition of the Jews.
- The doors were closed: a detail which shows that the body of the risen Jesus, even though recognizable, is not subject to the ordinary laws of human life.
- Peace be with you: this is not just a wish, but the actual peace promised to them when they were saddened by his departure (Jn 14: 27; 2Thes 3: 16; Rom 5: 3), the messianic peace, the fulfilment of the promises made by God, freedom from all fear, victory over sin and death, reconciliation with God, fruit of his passion, free gift of God. This peace is repeated three times in this passage as well as in the introduction (20: 19) further on (20: 26) in the exact same way.
- He showed them his hands and his side: Jesus provides evident and tangible proof that he is the one who was crucified. Only John records the detail of the wound in the side caused by the spear of a Roman soldier, whereas Luke mentions the wound of the feet (Lk 24: 39). In showing his wounds, Jesus wants to say that the peace he gives comes from the cross (2Tim 2: 1-13). They are part of his identity as the risen One (Ap 5: 6).
- The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord: This is the same joy expressed by the prophet Isaiah when he describes the divine banquet (Is 25: 8-9), the eschatological joy foreshadowed in the farewell speech and that no one can take away (Jn 16: 22; 20: 27). Cfr. also Lk 24: 39-40; Mt 28: 8; Lk 24: 41.
- As the Father sent me, so am I sending you: Jesus is the first missionary, "the apostle and high priest of the faith we profess" (Ap 3: 1). After the experience of the cross and the resurrection, Jesus' prayer to the Father comes true (Jn 13: 20; 17: 18; 21: 15, 17). This is not a new mission, but the mission of Jesus extended to those who are his disciples, bound to him like branches are bound to the vine (15: 9), so also, they are bound to his Church (Mt 28: 18-20; Mk 16: 15-18; Lk 24: 47-49). The eternal Son of God was sent so that "the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3: 17) and the whole of his earthly existence, fully identified with the saving will of the Father, is a constant manifestation of that divine will that all may be saved. He leaves as an inheritance this historical project to the whole Church and, especially to ordained ministers within that Church.

- He breathed on them: this action recalling the life-giving breath of God on man (Gen 2: 7), does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. It marks the beginning of a new creation.
- Receive the Holy Spirit: after Jesus was glorified, the Holy Spirit was bestowed (Jn 7: 39). Here the Spirit is transmitted for a special mission, whereas at Pentecost (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit comes down on the whole people of God.
- For those whose sins you forgive they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained: we find the power to forgive or not forgive sins also in Matthew in a more juridical form (Mt 16: 19; 18: 18). According to the Scribes and Pharisees (Mk 2: 7), and according to tradition (Is 43: 25), God has the power to forgive sins. Jesus gives this power (Lk 5: 24) and passes it on to his Church. In our meditation, it is better not to dwell on this text's theological development in church tradition and the consequent theological controversies. In the fourth Gospel the expression may be taken in a wide sense. Here it is a matter of the power of forgiving sins in the Church as salvation community and those especially endowed with this power are those who share in the apostolic charism by succession and mission. In this general power is included the power to forgive sins also after baptism, what we call "the sacrament of reconciliation" expressed in various forms throughout the history of the Church.
- Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve: Thomas is one of the main characters of the fourth Gospel and his doubting character, easily discouraged, is emphasised (11: 16; 14: 5). "One of the twelve" is by now a stereotyped expression (6: 71), because in fact they were only eleven. "Didimus" means "the Twin," and we could be his "twins" through our difficulty in believing in Jesus, Son of God who died and rose again.
- We have seen the Lord! When Andrew, John and Philip had found the Messiah, they had already run to announce the news to others (Jn 1: 41-45). Now there is the official proclamation by eyewitnesses (Jn 20: 18).
- Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe: Thomas cannot believe the eyewitnesses. He wants to experience the event himself. The fourth Gospel is aware of the difficulty that some may have in believing in the Resurrection (Lk 24; 34-40; Mk 16: 11; 1Cor 15: 5-8), especially those who have not seen the risen One. Thomas is their (and our) interpreter. He is willing to believe, but he wants to resolve personally any doubt, for fear of being wrong. Jesus does not see in Thomas an indifferent sceptic, but a man in search of truth and satisfies him fully. This is, however, an occasion to express an appreciation of future believers (verse 29).
- Put your finger here, look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe! Jesus repeats the words of Thomas and enters into a dialogue with him. He understands Thomas' doubts and wishes to help him. Jesus knows that Thomas loves him and therefore has compassion for him because Thomas does not yet enjoy the peace that comes from faith. Jesus helps him to grow in faith. In order to enter deeper into this theme, see the parallels in: 1Jn 1-2; Ps 78: 38; 103: 13-14; Rom 5: 20; 1Tim 1: 14-16.
- My Lord and my God! This is a profession of faith in the risen One and in his divinity as is also proclaimed in the beginning of John's Gospel (1: 1). In the Old Testament "Lord" and "God" correspond respectively to "Yahweh" and "Elohim" (Ps 35: 23-24; Ap 4: 11). It is the fullest and most direct paschal profession of faith in the divinity of Jesus. In Jewish circles these terms had greater value because they applied to Jesus texts

concerning God. Jesus does not correct the words of Thomas as he corrected the words of the Jews who accused him of wanting to be "equal to God" (Jn 5: 18ff) thus approving the acknowledgement of his divinity.

- You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe! Jesus cannot stand those who look for signs and miracles in order to believe (Jn 4: 48) and he seems to take Thomas to task. Here we must remember another passage concerning a more authentic faith, a "way of perfection" towards a faith to which we must aspire without the demands of Thomas, a faith received as gift and as an act of trust, like the exemplary faith of our ancestors (Ap 11) and of Mary (Lk 1: 45). We, who are two thousand years after the coming of Jesus, are told that, although we have not seen him, yet we can love him and believing in him we can exult with "an indescribable and glorious joy" (1Pt 1: 8).

These (signs) are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name. The fourth Gospel, like the other Gospels, does not mean to write a complete biography of Jesus, but only to show that Jesus was the Christ, the awaited Messiah, the Liberator, and that he was the Son of God. Believing in him means that we possess eternal life. If Jesus is not God, then our faith is in vain!

ORATIO

Psalm 118 (117)

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!

Let Israel say,

"His steadfast love endures forever." Let the house of Aaron say,

"His steadfast love endures forever." Let those who fear the LORD say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me.

The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.

Hark, glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.

This is the Lord's doing;

it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech thee, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech thee, give us success!

CONTEMPLATIO

Closing Prayer

I thank you Jesus, my Lord and my God, that you have loved me and called me, made me worthy to be your disciple, that you have given me the Spirit, the One sent to proclaim and witness to your resurrection, to the mercy of the Father, to salvation and pardon for all men and women in the world. You truly are the way, the truth and the life, the dawn without a setting, the sun of justice and peace. Grant that I may dwell in your love, bound to you like a branch to its vine. Grant me your peace so that I may

overcome my weaknesses, face my doubts and respond to your call and live fully the mission you entrusted to me, praising you forever. You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Monday, April 25, 2022

Feast of St. Mark, evangelist

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,

there is much in us that obscures your word and keeps us from being truly your Church. We pray you today: Call us, as once you called Mark, to speak and live your word. Inspire us through your Spirit and teach us to live in the hope that your kingdom will come and remain among us through Jesus Christ, our Lord, now and forever.

Gospel Reading - Mark 16: 15-20

Jesus said to the Eleven, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.' And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven; there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.

Reflection

Today's Gospel forms part of the appendix of the Gospel of Mark (Mk 16: 9-20) which presents the list of some apparitions of Jesus: to Magdalene (Mk 16: 9-11), to the two disciples who were walking out in the country (Mk 16: 12-13) and to the twelve apostles (Mk 16: 14-18). This last apparition together with the description of the Ascension into Heaven (Mk 16: 19-20) forms the Gospel for today.

- Mark 16: 14: The signs which accompany the announcement of the Good News. Jesus appears to the eleven disciples and reproaches them for not believing the persons who had seen him resurrected. They did not believe Mary Magdalene (Mk 16: 11), neither the two disciples on the road out in the country (Mk 16: 13). Several times, Mark refers to the resistance of the disciples in believing the witness of those who experienced the Resurrection of Jesus. Why does Mark insist so much on the lack of faith of the disciples? Probably, to teach two things: First, that faith in Jesus goes through faith in persons who give witness. Second, that no one should be discouraged when there is incredulity in the heart. Even the eleven disciples doubted!
- Mark 16: 15-18: The mission to announce the Good News to the whole world. After having criticized the lack of faith of the disciples, Jesus confers the mission to them: "Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned." To those

who had the courage to believe in the Good News and who are baptized, Jesus promises the following signs: they will cast out devils, they will have the gift of tongues, they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed if they drink deadly poison, they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover. This happens even today:

- to cast out devils: it is to fight against the force of evil which destroys life. The life of many persons improves because they entered into the community and have begun to live the Good News of the presence of God in their life.
 - to speak new tongues: it means to begin to communicate with others in a new way. Sometimes we meet a person whom we have never seen before, but it seems to us that we have known her for some time. This happens because we speak the same language, the language of love.
 - deadly poison will not harm them: there are many things that poison life together, community. There is much gossiping which destroys the relationship between persons. The one who lives in the presence of God does not pay attention to these things and is able not to be disturbed by this terrible poison.
 - they cure the sick. Wherever there is a clearer and livelier conscience of God's presence, there is also a special care given to the excluded and marginalized persons, especially the sick. What can help the cure is that the person feels accepted and loved.
- Mark 16: 19-20: Through the community Jesus continues his mission. Jesus himself who lives in Palestine, and accepts the poor of his time, revealing the love of the Father to them, and this same Jesus continues to be alive in our midst, in our community. Through us, he wants to continue his mission to reveal the Good News of God's love to the poor. Even up to this time the resurrection takes place. And it impels us to sing: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ, who will separate us?" No power of this world is capable to neutralize the force that comes from faith in the Resurrection (Rm 8: 35-39). A community which wants to be a witness of the Resurrection should be a sign of life, should struggle against the forces of death, in such a way that the world may be a favorable place for life, where to believe that another world is possible. Above all, in Latin America, where the life of people is in danger because of the system of death which has been imposed, the communities should be a living proof of the hope which overcomes the world, without fear of being happy!

Personal Questions

- How do these signs of God's presence take place in my life?
- Today, which are the signs of the presence of Jesus in our midst that convince persons the most?

Concluding Prayer

I shall sing the faithful love of Yahweh forever, from age to age my lips shall declare your constancy, for you have said: love is built to last forever, you have fixed your constancy firm in the heavens. (Ps 89: 1-2)

Tuesday, April 26, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

All praise and thanks be to You,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
You have given us Your risen Son
to be alive in our communities.
Make us see Him with eyes of faith,
that He may unite us, heart and soul.
May His dynamic presence among us
move us to become with Him,
each other's bread of life,
that no one among us may hunger
for food or help when in need.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Gospel Reading - John 3: 7b-15

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to him, 'How can this happen?' Jesus answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this? Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

Reflection

Today's Gospel speaks about the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus had heard people speak about the things Jesus did, and he was struck, surprised. He wishes to speak with Jesus in order to be able to understand better. He thought he knew the things of God. He lived with the booklet of the past in his hand to see if this agreed with the newness announced by Jesus. In the conversation, Jesus says that the only way in which Nicodemus could understand the things of God was to be born again! Sometimes we are like Nicodemus: we only accept as something new what is in agreement with our old ideas. Other times, we allow ourselves to be surprised by facts and we are not afraid to say, "I am born anew!"

When the Evangelists recall the last words of Jesus, they have in mind the problems of the communities for which they write. Nicodemus' questions to Jesus are a reflection of the questions of the communities of Asia Minor at the end of the first century. For this reason, Jesus' answers to Nicodemus were, at the same time, a response to the problems of those communities. At that time, the Christians followed the catechesis in this way. Most probably, the account of the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus formed part of the baptismal catechesis, because He says that the people have to be reborn of water and the Spirit (Jn 3: 6).

- John 3: 7b-8: Born from above, born anew, again, and born of the Spirit. In Greek, the same word means anew, again and from above. Jesus had said, “No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3: 5). And He adds, “What is born of human nature, is human (flesh); what is born of the Spirit is Spirit” (Jn 3: 6). Here “flesh” means that which is born only from our own ideas. What is born from us has our own mark, our own measure. To be born of the Spirit is another thing! And Jesus once again reaffirms what He had said before: “One has to be born from above (born again).” That is, one must be reborn of the Spirit who comes from above. And He explains that the Spirit is like the wind. Both in Hebrew and in Greek, the same word is used to say spirit and wind. Jesus says, “The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” The wind has within it a direction. We are aware of the direction of the wind, for example, the wind of the North and the wind of the South, but we do not know nor do we control the cause why the wind moves in one direction or another. The Spirit is like this. “No one is the master of the Spirit” (Eccl 8: 8). That which best characterizes the wind, the Spirit, is liberty. The wind, the Spirit, is free; it cannot be controlled. It acts on others, and nobody can act on it. Its origin is the mystery; its destiny is the mystery. The fisherman has, in the first place, to discover the direction of the wind. Then he should place the sails according to that direction. This is what Nicodemus should do and what all of us should do.
- John 3: 9: Question of Nicodemus: How is that possible? Jesus does nothing more than summarize what the Old Testament taught concerning the action of the Spirit, of the holy wind, in the life of the People of God and which Nicodemus, Teacher and Doctor, should know. And just the same, Nicodemus is frightened in hearing Jesus’ response and acts as if he was ignorant: “How is that possible?”
- John 3: 10-15: Jesus’ answer: Faith comes from witness and not from miracle. Jesus changes the question: “You are the Teacher of Israel and you do not know these things?” For Jesus, if people believe only when things are according to their own arguments and ideas, then faith is not perfect. Faith is perfect when it is the faith of one who believes because of the witness. He leaves aside his own arguments and gives himself, because he believes in the one giving witness.

Personal Questions

- Have you had some experience in which you have had the impression of being born again? What did it consist of?
- Jesus compares the action of the Holy Spirit with the wind. What does this comparison of the action of the Spirit of God reveal in our life? Have you already set the sails of your life in sync with the wind of the Spirit?
- The action of the Holy Spirit, like the wind, is often not like a hurricane, but rather like a small voice (1Kgs 19: 11) – a whisper of the wind. Am I attentive enough to hear when the Holy Spirit speaks to me so softly?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is near to the broken-hearted;
He helps those whose spirit is crushed.
Though hardships without number beset the upright,

Yahweh brings rescue from them all. (Ps 34: 18-19)

Wednesday, April 27, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, you loved the world - that is us - so much that you gave us your only Son to save us from ourselves and to give us eternal life. Do not condemn us, Lord, do not leave us to ourselves and to our little schemes but give us your Son now to stay with us and to make love and justice and peace ever new realities among us, your people reborn in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 3: 16-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.

No one who believes in him will be judged; but whoever does not believe is judged already, because that person does not believe in the Name of God's only Son. And the judgement is this: though the light has come into the world people have preferred darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, to prevent his actions from being shown up; but whoever does the truth comes out into the light, so that what he is doing may plainly appear as done in God.'

Reflection

John's Gospel is like a fabric or cloth made of three different threads, but similar. The three of them are so well combined with one another that, sometimes, it is not possible to understand when one goes from one thread to the other.

- The first thread are the facts and words of Jesus during the thirty years, preserved by the eyewitnesses who kept the things which Jesus did and taught.
- The second thread are the facts of the life of the community. Because of their faith in Jesus and convinced of his presence among them, the communities enlightened their path with the words and the gestures of Jesus. This has some incidence or impact on the description of the facts. For example, the conflict of the communities with the Pharisees at the end of the first century marks the way of describing the conflicts of Jesus with the Pharisees.
- The comments made by the Evangelist are the third thread. In some passages it is difficult to perceive when Jesus ceases to speak and the Evangelist begins to weave his own comments. The text of today's Gospel, for example, is a beautiful and profound reflection of the Evangelist on the action of Jesus. The people can hardly perceive the difference between when Jesus speaks and when the Evangelist does. In any case, both of them are Word of God.
- John 3: 16: God loved the world. The word world is one of those words used more frequently in the Gospel of John: 78 times! It has several meanings. In the first-place

world may signify the earth, the space inhabited by human beings (Jn 11: 9; 21: 25) or also the created universe (Jn 17: 5, 24) World can also mean the persons who inhabit this earth, all of humanity (Jn 1: 9; 3: 16; 4: 42; 6: 14; 8: 12). It can also mean a large group, a numerous group of persons, as when we speak of "the whole world" (Jn 12: 19; 14: 27). Here, in our text the word world also has the sense of humanity, all the human beings. God so loves humanity that he gave his only Son. The one who accepts that God reaches down to us in Jesus, has already passed through death and has eternal life.

- John 3: 17-19: The true sense of judgment. The image of God which appears in the three verses is that of a Father full of tenderness and not of a severe judgment. God sends his Son not to judge and condemn the world, but in order that the world may be saved through him. The one who believes in Jesus and accepts him as the revelation of God is not judged, because he is already accepted by God. And the one who does not believe in Jesus has already been judged. He excludes himself. And the Evangelist repeats what he had already said in the Prologue: many persons do not want to accept Jesus, because his light reveals the evil which exists in them (cf. Jn 1: 5, 10-11). • John 3: 20-21: To practice truth: In every human being, there is a divine seed, a trait of the Creator. Jesus, the revelation of the Father, is a response to this deepest desire of the human being. The one, who wants to be faithful to what he has deepest in him, accepts Jesus. It is difficult to find a broader ecumenical vision than the one expressed in these three verses in the Gospel of John. • To complete the significance of the word world in the Fourth Gospel. Other times the word world means that part of humanity opposed to Jesus and to his message. There the word world assumes the meaning of "enemies" or "opponents" (Jn 7: 4, 7; 8: 23, 26; 9: 39; 12: 25). This world which is contrary to the practice of the liberty of Jesus, is directed by the enemy or Satan, also called the "prince of this world" (Jn 14: 30; 16: 11). It represents the Roman Empire and, at the same time, also those responsible of the Jews who driving out the followers of Jesus from the Synagogue. This world persecutes and kills the communities causing tribulations to the faithful (Jn 16: 33). Jesus will liberate them, conquering the prince of this world (Jn 12: 31). Therefore, world means a situation of injustice, of oppression, which generates hatred and persecution against the communities of the Beloved Disciple. The persecutors are those persons who have the power, the leaders, both of the Empire and of the Synagogue. Lastly, all those who practice injustice using for this the name of God (Jn 16: 2). The hope which the Gospel gives to the persecuted communities is that Jesus is stronger than the world. This is why he says: "In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous, I have conquered the world!" (Jn 16: 33).

Personal Questions

- God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Has this truth penetrated in the depth of your heart, of your conscience?
- The more ecumenical truth that exists is the life which God has given us and for which he has given his only Son. How do I live Ecumenism in my daily life?

Concluding Prayer

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

Thursday, April 28, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, your Son Jesus Christ came from you and bore witness to the things he had heard and seen. He could not but bear witness to you. Give us the Spirit of your Son, we pray you, to speak your word and to live it, that we may show Christ, your living Word, to those who have not seen him. We ask you this through Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading - John 3: 31-36

John the Baptist said to his disciples: "He who comes from above is above all others; he who is of the earth is earthly himself and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven bears witness to the things he has seen and heard, but his testimony is not accepted by anybody; though anyone who does accept his testimony is attesting that God is true, since he whom God has sent speaks God's own words, for God gives him the Spirit without reserve. The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to his hands. Anyone who believes in the Son has eternal life, but anyone who refuses to believe in the Son will never see life: God's retribution hangs over him."

Reflection

During the month of January we meditated on John 3: 22-30, which shows us the last witness of John the Baptist concerning Jesus. It was a response given by him to his disciples, in which he reaffirms that he, John, is not the Messiah, but rather his precursor (Jn 3: 28). On that occasion, John says that beautiful phrase which summarizes his witness: "It is necessary that he grows greater, and I grow less!" This phrase is the program for all those who want to follow Jesus.

The verses of today's Gospel are, again, a comment of the Evangelist in order to help the communities to understand better all the importance of the things that Jesus

did and taught. Here, we have another indication of those three threads of which we spoke about before. • John 3: 31-33: A refrain which is always repeated. Throughout the Gospel of John, many times there appears the conflict between Jesus and the Jews who contest the words of Jesus. Jesus speaks of what he hears from the Father. He is total transparency. His enemies, not opening themselves to God and because they cling to their own ideas here on earth, are not capable to understand the deep significance of the things that Jesus lives, does and says. In last instance, this is the evil one which pushes the Jews to arrest and condemn Jesus. • John 3: 34: Jesus gives us the Spirit without reserve. John's Gospel uses many images and symbols to signify the action of the Spirit. Like in the Creation (Gen 1: 1), in the same way the Spirit descends on Jesus "like a dove, come from Heaven" (Jn 1: 32). It is the beginning of the new creation! Jesus repeats the words of God and communicates the Spirit to us without reserve (Jn 3: 34). His words are Spirit and life (Jn 6: 63). When Jesus is about to leave this earth, he says that he will send another Consoler, another defender, to be with us forever (Jn 14: 16-17). By his Passion, Death and Resurrection, Jesus obtains for us the gift of the Spirit. Through Baptism all of us have received this same Spirit of Jesus (Jn 1: 33). When he appears to the apostles, he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit!" (Jn 20: 22). The Spirit is like the water which springs from the persons who believe in Jesus (Jn 7: 37-39; 4: 14). The first effect of the action of the Spirit in us is

reconciliation: "If you forgive anyone's sins they will be forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained!" (Jn 20: 23). The Spirit is given to us to recall and understand the full significance of the words of Jesus (Jn 14: 26; 16: 12-13). Animated by the Spirit of Jesus we can adore God in any place (Jn 4: 23-24). Here is fulfilled the liberty of the Spirit of which Saint Paul speaks: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Co 3: 17). · John 3: 35-36: The Father loves the Son. He reaffirms the identity between the Father and Jesus. The Father loves the Son and places all things in his hand. Saint Paul will say that the fullness of the divinity dwells in Jesus (Col 1: 19; 2: 9). This is why the one who accepts Jesus and believes in Jesus has eternal life, because God is life. The one who does not accept to believe in Jesus, places himself outside.

Personal Questions

- Jesus communicates the Spirit to us, without reserve. Have you had some experience of this action of the Spirit in your life?
- He who believes in Jesus has eternal life. How does this take place today in the life of the families and of the communities?

Concluding Prayer

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, let us acclaim his name together. Taste and see that Yahweh is good. How blessed are those who take refuge in him. (Ps 34: 3, 8)

Friday, April 29, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, your Son Jesus fed those who followed him in the desert and they received as much as they wanted. May we know and be convinced that he can fill our own emptiness not just with gifts that fill our need of the moment but with himself, and may we accept him eagerly, for he is our Lord forever.

Gospel Reading - John 6: 1-15

After this, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee - or of Tiberias - and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he had done in curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside and sat down there with his disciples. The time of the Jewish Passover was near. Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, 'Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?' He said this only to put Philip to the test; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. Philip answered, 'Two hundred denarii would not buy enough to give them a little piece each.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, 'Here is a small boy with five barley loaves and two fish; but what is that among so many?' Jesus said to them, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass there, and as many as five thousand men sat down.

Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were sitting there; he then did the same with the fish, distributing as much as they wanted.

When they had eaten enough he said to the disciples, 'Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing is wasted.' So they picked them up and filled twelve large baskets with scraps left over from the meal of five barley loaves. Seeing the sign that he had done, the people said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, as he realized they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, fled back to the hills alone.

Reflection

The reading of the IV Chapter of John begins today which places before us two signs or miracles: the multiplication of the loaves (Jn 6: 1-15) and walking on the water (Jn 6: 16-21). Then the long dialogue on the Bread of Life is mentioned (Jn 6: 22-71). John places this fact close to the feast of the Passover (Jn 6: 4). The central approach is the confrontation between the old Passover of the Exodus and the new Passover which takes place in Jesus. The dialogue on the bread of life will clarify the new Passover which takes place in Jesus.

- John 6: 1-4: The situation. In the ancient Passover, the multitude crossed the Red Sea. In the new Passover, Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee. A great crowd follows Moses. A great crowd follows Jesus in this new exodus. In the first exodus, Moses goes up to the Mountain. Jesus, the new Moses, also goes up to the mountain. The crowds followed Moses who presents great signs. The crowds follow Jesus because they had seen the signs that he worked in favor of the sick. • John 6: 5-7: Jesus and Philip. Seeing the multitude, Jesus confronts the disciples with the hunger of the people and asks Philip: "Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?" In the first exodus, Moses had obtained food for the hungry people. Jesus, the new Moses, will do the same thing. But Philip, instead of looking at the situation in the light of the Scripture, he looked at it according to the system and replies: "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough!" One denarius was the minimum salary for one day. Philip is aware of the problem and recognizes his total incapacity to solve it. He complains but presents no solution.
- John 6: 8-9: Andrew and the boy. Andrew, instead of complaining, seeks a solution. He finds a boy who has five loaves of bread and two fish: Five barley loaves and two fish were the daily ration of the meal of the poor. The boy hands over his daily ration of food! He could have said: "Five loaves of bread and two fish, what is this for all these people? It will serve nothing! Let us divide all this among ourselves, between two or three persons," but instead, he has the courage to give the five loaves of bread and the two fish to feed 5000 persons (Jn 6: 10! One who does this, either he is a fool or has much faith, believing that out of love for Jesus, all are ready to divide their food as the boy did!
- John 6: 10-11: The multiplication. Jesus asks the people to sit down on the ground. Then he multiplies the food, the ration of the poor. The text says: "Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were sitting there; he then did the same with the fish, distributing as much as they wanted." With this phrase, written in the year 100 after Christ, John recalls the gesture of the Last Supper (1 Co 11: 23-24). The Eucharist, when it is celebrated as it should be, will lead the persons to share as it impelled the boy to give all his ration of food to be shared. • John 6: 12-13: The twelve baskets of what was left over. Number twelve evokes the totality of the people with their twelve tribes. John does not say if fish were also left over. He is interested in recalling the bread as a symbol of the Eucharist. The Gospel of John does not have the description of the Eucharistic Supper, but describes the

multiplication of the loaves, symbol of what would happen in the communities through the celebration of the Eucharistic Supper. If among the Christian people there was a true and proper sharing, there would be abundant food and twelve baskets would be left over for many other people! • John 6: 14-15: They want to make him king. The people interpret the gesture of Jesus saying: "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!" The peoples' intuition is just. Jesus in fact, is the new Moses, the Messiah, the one whom the people were expecting (Dt 18: 15-19). But this intuition had been deviated by the ideology of the time which wanted a great king who would be strong and a dominator. This is why, seeing the sign, the people proclaim Jesus the Messiah and ask to make him King! Jesus perceived what could happen, and he withdraws and goes to the mountain alone. He does not accept this way of being Messiah and waits for the opportune moment to help the people to advance a step farther.

Personal Questions

- In the face of the problem of hunger in the world, do you act as Philip, as Andrew or like the boy?
- The people wanted a Messiah who would be a strong and powerful king. Today, many follow populist leaders. What does today's Gospel tell us about this?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my light and my salvation, whom should I fear? Yahweh is the fortress of my life, whom should I dread? (Ps 27:1)

Saturday, April 30, 2022

Easter Time

Opening Prayer

Lord God, also in our day we need men and women filled with the Spirit of love and service who are attentive to the needs of people. Let them listen even to the unspoken cries of people too timid to voice their poverty and distress and help without condescension their brothers and sisters of Christ, for he is our Lord forever.

Gospel Reading - John 6: 16-21

That evening the disciples went down to the shore of the sea and got into a boat to make for Capernaum on the other side of the sea. It was getting dark by now and Jesus had still not rejoined them. The wind was strong, and the sea was getting rough. They had rowed three or four miles when they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming towards the boat. They were afraid, but he said, 'It's me. Don't be afraid.' They were ready to take him into the boat, and immediately it reached the shore at the place they were making for.

Reflection

Today's Gospel narrates the episode of the boat on the agitated sea. Jesus is on the *mountain*, the disciples in the *sea* and the people on the *land*. In the way of describing the facts, John tries to help the communities to discover the mystery which envelopes the person of Jesus. He does it by recalling texts from the Old Testament which refer to the Exodus.

At the time when John wrote, the small boat of the communities had to face a contrary wind both on the part of the converted Jews who wanted to reduce the mystery of Jesus to prophecies and figures of the Old Testament, and on the part of some converted Pagans who thought that it was possible to have an alliance between Jesus and the Empire.

- John 6: 15: *Jesus on the mountain*. In the face of the multiplication of the loaves, the people conclude that Jesus is the awaited Messiah, because according to the hope of the people of the time, the Messiah would have repeated the gesture of Moses: feeding the people in the desert. For this reason, according to the official ideology, the crowds thought that Jesus was the Messiah, and, because of this, they wanted to make him King (cf. Jn 6: 14-15). This request of the people was a temptation for Jesus as well as for the disciples. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus obliges the disciples to get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side of the lake (Mk 6: 45). He wanted to avoid that they get contaminated with the dominating ideology. This is a sign that the "yeast of Herod and of the Pharisees," was very strong (Mk 8: 15). Jesus faces the temptation with prayer on the mountain.
- John 6: 16-18: *The situation of the disciples*. It was already night. The disciples went down near the sea; they got into the boat and directed themselves toward Capernaum, on the other side of the sea. John says that it was already dark and that Jesus had not arrived as yet. On the one hand he recalls the Exodus: to cross the sea in the midst of difficulties. On the other, he recalls the situation of the communities in the Roman Empire: with the disciples, they were living in the dark, with a contrary wind and the sea was agitated and Jesus seemed to be absent!
- John 6: 19-20. *Change of the situation*. Jesus reaches them walking on the water of the sea of life. The disciples are afraid. As it happens in the account of the story of Emmaus, they did not recognize him (Lk 24: 28). Jesus gets close to them and says: "*It is me! Do not be afraid!*" For those who know the story of the Old Testament, here again he recalls some very important facts:
 - (a) He recalls the crowd, protected by God, crossed the Red Sea without fear.
 - (b) He recalls that God, when calling Moses, he declares his name saying: "*I am!*" (cf. Ex 3: 15).
 - (c) He recalls also the Book of Isaiah which presents the return from exile as a new Exodus, in which God appears repeating many times: "*I am!*" (cf. Is 42: 8; 43: 5, 11-13; 44: 6, 25; 45: 5-7).

For the People of the Bible, the sea was the symbol of the abyss, of chaos, of evil (Ap 13, 1). In Exodus the People goes across toward liberty, facing and conquering the sea. God divides the sea with his breath and the crowds cross the sea which is dry land. (Ex 14: 22). In other passages the Bible shows God who conquers the sea (Gen 1: 6-10; Ps 104: 6-9; Pro 8: 27). To conquer the sea means to impose one's own limits and to prevent that it swallows all the earth with its waves. In this passage Jesus reveals his divinity by dominating and conquering the sea, preventing the boat and his disciples to be carried away by the waves. This way of evoking or recalling the Old Testament,

of using the Bible, helped the communities to perceive better the presence of God in Jesus and in the facts of life. *Do not be afraid!*

- John 6: 22. *They reached the desired port.* They want to take Jesus into the boat, but it was not necessary, because the boat touched the shore to which they had directed themselves. They reached the desired port. The Psalm says: "He reduced the storm to calm, and all the waters subsided. He brought them overjoyed at the stillness, to the port where they were bound." (Ps 107: 29-30).

Personal Questions

- On the mountain: Why does Jesus seek to be alone to pray after the multiplication of the loaves? Which is the result of his prayer?
- Is it possible today to walk on the water of the sea of life? How?

Concluding Prayer

Shout for joy, you upright; praise comes well from the honest. Give thanks to Yahweh on the lyre, play for him on the ten-stringed lyre. (Ps 33: 1-2)