



Lectio Divina

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Lectio Divina August 2023

Lectio Divina August 2023	2
Tuesday, August 1, 2023	3
Wednesday, August 2, 2023	4
Thursday, August 3, 2023	6
Friday, August 4, 2023	9
Saturday, August 5, 2023	10
Sunday, August 6, 2023	13
Monday, August 7, 2023	15
Tuesday, August 8, 2023	17
Wednesday, August 9, 2023	19
Wednesday, August 9, 2023	21
Thursday, August 10, 2023	23
Friday, August 11, 2023	25
Saturday, August 12, 2023	27
Sunday, August 13, 2023	28
Monday, August 14, 2023	32
Tuesday, August 15, 2023	33
Wednesday, August 16, 2023	37
Thursday, August 17, 2023	39
Friday, August 18, 2023	42
Saturday, August 19, 2023	44
Sunday, August 20, 2023	46
Monday, August 21, 2023	50
Tuesday, August 22, 2023	52
Wednesday, August 23, 2023	55
Thursday, August 24, 2023	57
Friday, August 25, 2023	59
Saturday, August 26, 2023	60
Sunday, August 27, 2023	62
Monday, August 28, 2023	68
Tuesday, August 29, 2023	70
Wednesday, August 30, 2023	72
Thursday, August 31, 2023	73

Tuesday, August 1, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value.

Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 36-43

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

Reflection

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

- Matthew 13: 36: The request of the disciples to Jesus: the explanation of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. The disciples, in the house, speak and ask for an explanation of the parable of the wheat grain and the darnel. (Mt 13: 24-30). It has been said many times that Jesus, in the house, continued to teach his disciples (Mk 7: 17; 9: 28, 33; 10: 10). At that time, there was no television and people spent together the long winter evenings to speak about the facts and events of life. On these occasions, Jesus completed the teaching and the formation of his disciples.
- Matthew 13: 38-39: The meaning of each one of the elements of the parable. Jesus responds taking again each one of these elements of the parable and giving them significance: the field is the world; the good seed are the members of the Kingdom; the darnel is the members of the adversary (the evil one); the enemy is the devil; the harvest is the end of time; the reapers are the angels. And now reread the parable (Mt 13: 24-30) giving to each one of these six elements: field, good seed, darnel, enemy,

harvest and reapers, the right significance. In this way the story assumes a completely new sense and it is possible to attain the objective that Jesus had in mind when he told people the parable of the darnel and the good seed. Some think that this parable should be understood as an allegory and not as a parable properly so called.

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

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

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

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Wednesday, August 2, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value.

Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world.

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

Gospel Reading

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

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

Reflection

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

- Matthew 13,44: The parable of the treasure hidden in the field. Jesus tells a very simple and brief story which could happen in the life of any person. He says: The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field; someone finds it and hides it again, then he goes off with great joy, he sells everything he owns and buys the field". Jesus does not explain, he only says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is similar to a treasure hidden in a field". In this way he urges the listeners to share with others what this story has aroused in them. I share some points that are discovered:
 - (a) The treasure, the Kingdom, is already found in the field, in life. It is hidden. We go through the field and step over the plants without being aware.
 - (b) The man finds the treasure, just out of chance. He did not expect to find it, because he was not looking for it.
 - (c) Seeing that it is a question of a very important treasure, what does he do? He does what we all would do in order to take possession of the treasure. He goes and he sells everything that he has and he buys the field. And, thus, together with the field he obtains the treasure also, the Kingdom. The condition is to sell everything!
 - (d) If the treasure, the Kingdom, is already in my life, then an important aspect of life begins to have a new value.
 - (e) In this story, what dominates is gratuity. The treasure is found by chance, independently of our programmes. The Kingdom comes! And we must draw the consequences and not allow this moment of grace to go by without bearing fruit.
- Matthew 13: 45-46: The parable of the merchant of fine pearls. The second parable is similar to the first one, but with an important difference. Let us try to discover it. The story is the following: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine

pearls; when he finds one of great value, he goes off and sells everything he owns and buys it". I share some points that I have discovered:

- (a) it is the story of a merchant of pearls. His profession is to look for pearls. This is the only thing that he does in his life: to look for and to find pearls. Looking, he finds a pearl of great value. Here the discovery of the Kingdom is not just by chance, but it is the fruit of a long search.
- (b) The merchant of pearls knows the value of the pearls, because many persons would like to sell him the pearls that they find. But the merchant does not allow himself to be deceived. He knows the value of his merchandise.
- (c) When he finds a pearl of great value, he goes and sells everything which he owns and buys the pearl. The Kingdom is the greatest value.
- Summarizing the teaching of the two parables. Both of them have the same objective: to reveal the presence of the Kingdom, but each one reveals it in a diverse way: through the discovery of the gratuity of God's action in us, and through the effort and the search which each human being makes to discover always better, the sense of his/her life.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

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

Thursday, August 3, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value.

Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 47-53

Jesus said to the people: 'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast in the sea and brings in a haul of all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen bring it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those

that are no use. This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, to throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. 'Have you understood all these?' They said, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old.' When Jesus had finished these parables he left the district.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the last parable of the Discourse of the Parables, the story of the dragnet thrown into the sea. This parable is found only in the Gospel of Matthew without any parallel in the other three Gospels.

- Matthew 13: 47-48: The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast into the sea and brings in a whole haul of all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore; then sitting down; they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are no use". This story is well known by the people of Galilee who live around the lake. This is their work. The story shows clearly the end of a day of work. The fishermen go fishing with only one purpose: to cast the net and to catch a great number of fish, to haul the net ashore and to choose the good fish to take home and to throw away those that are no good. Describe the satisfaction of the fishermen, at the end of the day of a day, being very tired having worked hard. This story must have brought a smile of satisfaction on the face of the fishermen who listened to Jesus. The worse thing is to arrive to the shore at the end of the day without having caught anything (Jn 21: 3).
- Matthew 13: 49-50: The application of the parable. Jesus applies the parable, or better still gives a suggestion in order that persons can discuss and apply the parable to their life: "This is how it will be at the end of time, the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth". How are we to understand this blazing furnace? These are very strong images to describe the destiny of those who separate themselves from God or who do not want to know anything about God. In every city there is a place where to throw the garbage every day. There is a permanent furnace nourished every day by the garbage of every day. The garbage place in Jerusalem was located in a valley called geena, where, at the time of the kings, there was a furnace even to sacrifice to the false gods of Molok. For this reason, the furnace of geena becomes the symbol of exclusion and of condemnation. God is not the one who excludes. God does not want the exclusion and the condemnation of anyone; he wants that all may have life and life in abundance. Each one of us excludes himself/herself.
- Matthew 13: 51-53: The end of the discourse of the Parables. At the end of the discourse of the Parables, Jesus concludes with the following question: "Have you understood these things?" They answered: "Yes". And Jesus finishes the explanation with another comparison which describes the result which he wants to obtain through the parables: "Well, then, every Scribe who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old".
- Two points to clarify:
 - Jesus compares the doctor of the law to the father in the family. What does the father of the family do? "He brings out from his treasure new things and

old things". Education at home takes place through the transmission to the sons and daughters of what the parents have received and learnt along the time. It is the treasure of the family wisdom where the richness of faith is enclosed, the customs of life and many other things that the children learn with time. Now Jesus wants that in the community the persons who are responsible for the transmission of faith be as the father in the family. Just like the parents are responsible for the life of the family, in the same way, these persons who are responsible for the teaching should understand the things of the Kingdom and transmit it to the brothers and sisters in the community.

- Here there is the question of a doctor of the law who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom. Therefore, there were doctors of the law who accepted Jesus, and saw in him the one who revealed the Kingdom. Is this what happened to a doctor when he discovers the Messiah in Jesus, the Son of God? Everything which he has studied to be able to be a doctor of the law continues to be valid, but it receives a deeper dimension and a broader purpose. A comparison can clarify what has just been said. In a group of friends one shows a photo, where one sees a man with a severe face, with his finger up, almost attacking the public. Everybody thinks that it is a question of an inflexible person, demanding, who does not allow for any intimacy. At that moment a young boy arrives, he sees the photo and exclaims: "He is my father!" The others look at him and comment: "A severe Father, true?" He answers: "No, and no! He is very affectionate. My father is a lawyer. That photo was taken in the tribunal, while he was denouncing the crime of a great landowner who wanted a poor family to abandon their home where they had lived for many years! My father won the cause. And the poor family remained in the house!" All looked at him again and said: "What a pleasant person!" Almost like a miracle the photo enlightened from within and assumed a different aspect. That very severe face acquired the features of great tenderness! The words of the son, the result of his experience of being the son, changed everything, without changing anything! The words and the gestures of Jesus, result of his experience as a Son, without changing a letter or a comma, enlightened from within the wisdom accumulated by the doctor of the law. And thus, God who seemed to be so far away and so severe acquired the features of a good Father and of enormous tenderness!

Personal Question

- Has the experience of Son entered in you and changed your look, making you discover the things of God in a different way?
- What has the Discourse of the Parables revealed to you about the Kingdom?

Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, my soul!

I will praise Yahweh all my life,

I will make music to my God as long as I live. (Ps 146: 1-2)

Friday, August 4, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value.

Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 13: 54-58

Coming to his hometown, Jesus taught the people in their synagogue in such a way that they were astonished and said, 'Where did the man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? This is the carpenter's son, surely? Is not his mother the woman called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? His sisters, too, are they not all here with us? So where did the man get it all?' And they would not accept him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is despised only in his own country and in his own house,' and he did not work many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Reflection

The Gospel today tells us the visit of Jesus to Nazareth, his native community. Passing through Nazareth was painful for Jesus. What was his community at the beginning, now it is no longer so. Something has changed. Where there is no faith, Jesus can work no miracles.

- Matthew 13: 53-57^a: The reaction of the people of Nazareth before Jesus. It is always good for people to go back to their land. After a long absence, Jesus also returns, as usual, on a Saturday, and he goes to the meeting of the community. Jesus was not the head of the group, but just the same he speaks. This is a sign that persons could participate and express their own opinion. People were astonished. They did not understand Jesus' attitude: "Where did the man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" Jesus, son of that place, whom they knew since he was a child, how is that now he is so different? The people of Nazareth were scandalized and do not accept him: "This is the carpenter's son, surely? The people do not accept the mystery of God present in a common man as they are, as they had known Jesus. In order to speak about God he should be different. As one can see, not everything was positive. The persons, who should have been the first ones to accept the Good News, are the first ones to refuse to accept it. The conflict is not only with foreigners, but also with his relatives and with the people of Nazareth. They do not accept because they cannot understand the mystery envelops Jesus: "Is not his mother, the woman called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? And his sisters too, are they not all here with us? So where did the man get it all?" They are not able to believe.
- Matthew 13: 57b-58: Reaction of Jesus before the attitude of the people of Nazareth. Jesus knows very well that "no one is a prophet in his own country". And he says: A

prophet is despised only in his own country and in his own house". In fact, where there is neither acceptance nor faith, people can do nothing. The prejudice prevents it. Jesus himself, even wanting, can do nothing. He was astonished before their lack of faith.

- The brothers and sisters of Jesus. The expression "brothers of Jesus" causes much polemics between Catholics and Protestants. Basing themselves in this and in other texts, the Protestants say that Jesus had many brothers and sisters, and that Mary had more children! Catholics say that Mary did not have any other children. What can we think about this? In the first place, both positions, that of Catholics as well as that of Protestants, contain arguments taken from the Bible and from the Tradition of their respective Churches. For this reason, it is not convenient to discuss this question with arguments which are only intellectual, because it is a question of profound convictions, which have something to do with faith and with the sentiments of both and of each one. The argument which is only intellectual cannot change a conviction of the heart! It only irritates and draws away! Even if I do not agree with the opinion of others, I must respect it. In the second place, instead of discussing around texts, all of us, Catholics, and Protestants, should unite ourselves much more to fight for the defense of life, created by God, a life so disfigured by poverty, injustice, lack of faith. We should recall some other phrases of Jesus. "I have come so that they may have life and life to the full" (Jn 10: 10). "That all may be one, so that the world may believe that you, Father, has sent me" (Jn 17: 21). "Do not prevent them! Anyone who is not against us is for us" (Mk 10: 39, 40)

Personal Questions

- In Jesus something changed in his relationship with the Community of Nazareth. Since you began to participate in the community, has something changed in your relationship with the family? Why?
- Has participation in the community helped you to accept and to trust persons, especially the more simple and the poorest?

Concluding Prayer

For myself, wounded wretch that I am, by your saving power raise me up!
I will praise God's name in song, I will extol him by thanksgiving. (Ps 69: 29-30)

Saturday, August 5, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value.

Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 14: 1-12

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

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

Reflection

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

- Matthew 14: 1-2. Who is Jesus for Herod. The text begins by informing about the opinion which Herod had of Jesus: "This is John the Baptist himself, he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him". Herod tries to understand Jesus starting from the fear which assailed him after murdering John. Herod was very superstitious and hid his fear behind the ostentation of his riches and of his power.
- Matthew 14: 3-5: The hidden cause of the murdering of John. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod, the Great, from the year 4 BC until the year 38 AD, after Christ. Forty-three years in all! During the time of the life of Jesus, there were no changes of government in Galilee! Herod was the absolute Lord of everything, he did not render an account to anyone, he did whatever passed through his mind. Arrogance, lack of ethics, absolute power, without control from the people! But the one, who commanded in Palestine since the year 63 before Christ, was the Roman Empire. Herod, in Galilee, so as not to be dismissed, tried to please Rome in everything. Above all, he insisted on an efficient administration which would bring riches to the Empire. His concern was his own promotion and his security. For this reason, he refrained from any type of subversion. Matthew says that the reason for murdering John was because he had denounced Herod, because he had married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Flavio Joseph, a Jewish writer of that time, says that the true reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was the fear of Herod that there would be a popular revolt. Herod like to be called the benefactor of the people, but in reality, he was a tyrant (Lk 22: 25). The denunciation of John against Herod was the drop that caused the glass to overflow: "It is against the Law for you to have her". And John was put in prison.
- Matthew 14: 6-12: The plot of the murderer. An anniversary and a festive banquet, with dances and orgy! Mark says that in the feast were "the great of the court, the

officials and the important people of Galilee" (Mk 6: 21). This is the environment in which the murdering of John the Baptist is planned. John, the prophet, was a living denunciation of that corrupt system. This is why, he was eliminated with the pretext of a problem of personal revenge. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of one-man incapable to control himself! In the enthusiasm of the feast and of the wine, Herod makes a promise by oath to Salome, the young dancer, daughter of Herodias. Superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to maintain this oath, and respond to the caprice of the girl; and because of this he ordered the soldier to bring the head of John on a tray and give it to the dancer, who then gave it to her mother. For Herod, the life of his subjects was worthless. He disposes of them as he disposes of the staircases in his house!

The three characteristics of the government of Herod: the new Capital, large estates, and the class of functionaries:

- The New Capital. Tiberiade was inaugurated when Jesus was only 20 years old. It was called like that in order to please Tiberius, the emperor of Rome. It was inhabited by the lords of the earth, the soldiers, the policemen, the unscrupulous judges (Lk 18: 1-4). The taxes and the products of the people were channeled toward it. It was there that Herod made his orgy of death (Mk 6: 21-29). Tiberiades was the city of the palaces of the King, where those who wore soft, delicate dresses lived (cf. Mt 11: 8). It is not known by the Gospels that Jesus entered this city.
- The large estates. Scholars say that during the long government of Herod, the large estates grew causing harm to community property. The Book of Henoch denounces the lords of the land and expresses the hope of the little ones: "And then the powerful and the great will no longer be the lords of the land". (Hen 38: 4). The ideal of ancient times was the following: "Each one will peacefully sit under his vine and nobody will frighten them" (1 Mac 14: 12; Mi 4: 4; Zc 3: 10). But the politics of the government of Herod made this ideal impossible.
- The class of functionaries. Herod created a whole class of functionaries faithful to the project of the King: the Scribes, the merchants, the lords of the land, the officers of the market, the tax collectors, the militia, the policemen, the judges, the local heads. In every village there was a group of persons which supported the government. In the Gospels, some Pharisees appear together with the Herodians (Mk 3: 6; 8: 15; 12: 13), and that shows the alliance between the religious power and the civil power. The life of the people in the villages was very controlled, both by the government and by the religion. Much courage was necessary to begin anything new, as John and Jesus did! It was the same thing as attracting to self the anger of the privileged ones, both from the religious and the civil powers.

Personal Questions

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

Concluding Prayer

The humble have seen and are glad.

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

Sunday, August 6, 2023

Transfiguration of the Lord

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide, be close to us and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life. Keep us safe in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 17: 1-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as dazzling as light. And suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him.

Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you want me to, I will make three shelters here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and suddenly from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favor. Listen to him.'

When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them, saying, 'Stand up, do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but Jesus. As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, 'Tell no one about this vision until the Son of man has risen from the dead.'

Reflection

Today is the Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus. The Transfiguration takes place after the first announcement of the Death of Jesus (Mt 16: 21). This announcement disturbs the head of the Disciples, especially Peter (Mt 16: 22-23). They were living among the poor, but the head was lost in the dominating ideology of that time. They were expecting a glorious Messiah. The cross was an impediment to believe in Jesus. The Transfiguration, where Jesus appears glorious on the top of the mountain, was for them a help to overcome the trauma of the Cross and to discover the true Messiah in Jesus. But even with this, many years afterwards, when the Good News was already diffused in Asia Minor and in Greece, the Cross continued to be for the Jews and for the gentiles a great impediment to accept Jesus as Messiah. "The Cross is foolishness and scandal!", as it was said (1Co 1: 23). One of the greatest efforts of the first Christians was to help

people to become aware that the cross was not a scandal, nor foolishness, but rather the most beautiful and strongest expression of the wisdom of God (1Co 1: 22-31). Today's Gospel contributes to this effort. It shows that Jesus saw realized the prophecy and that the Cross was the way to Glory. There is no other way.

- Matthew 17: 1-3: *Jesus changes aspect.* Jesus goes up to the top of the mountain. Luke adds that he goes there to pray (Lk 9: 28). There, on the top of the mountain, Jesus appears in the glory, before Peter, James and John. Together with Jesus Moses and Elijah also appear. The high mountain evokes Mount Sinai, where, in the past, God had manifested his will to the people, giving them the Tables of the Law. The white clothes recall Moses who was radiant with light when he was speaking with God on the Mountain and received the Law from God, (Ex 34: 29-35). Elijah and Moses, the two maximum authorities of the Old Testament, speak with Jesus. Moses represents the Law, Elijah, the prophecy. Luke tells us that the conversation was on the "Exodus" (the death) of Jesus in Jerusalem (Lk 9: 31). Thus, it is clear that the Old Testament, that is the Law as well as the Prophets, already taught that for the Messiah, the way to Glory had to go through the Cross. There is no other way.
- Matthew 17: 4: *It pleases Peter, but he does not understand.* It pleases Peter and he wants to stop that pleasant moment on the Mountain. He offers himself to build three tents. Mark says that Peter was afraid and did not know what he was saying (Mk 9: 6), and Luke adds that the Disciples were sleepy (Lk 9: 32). They were like we are: it is difficult for them to understand the Cross!
- Matthew 17: 5-8: *The voice from Heaven clarifies the facts.* When Jesus is enveloped by the glory, there was a voice from Heaven which said: "*This is my Son, the Beloved, he enjoys my favour. Listen to Him.*" The expression "Beloved son" evokes the person of the Messiah Servant, announced by the Prophet Isaiah (cf. Is 42: 1). The expression "*Listen to Him*" evokes the prophecy which promised the coming of a new Moses (cf. Dt 18: 15). In Jesus the prophecies of the Old Testament are being fulfilled, the disciples can no longer doubt. Jesus is truly the *glorious* Messiah and the way to arrive to the glory passes through the cross, according to everything announced in the prophecy of the Messiah Servant (Is 53: 3-9). The glory of the Transfiguration proves this. Moses and Elijah confirm it. The Father guarantees it. Jesus accepts it. Before everything which was taking place the Disciples are afraid and fall on their faces. Jesus gets close to them, touches them and says: "*Stand up, do not be afraid.*" The Disciples raised their eyes and saw only Jesus and nobody else. From now on, Jesus is the only revelation of God for us! Jesus, and he alone, is the key to be able to understand Scripture and Life.
- Matthew 17: 9: *To know how to keep silence.* Jesus asks the disciples to tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. Mark says that they did not know what it meant to rise from the dead (Mk 9: 10). In fact, the one who does not join suffering to the resurrection will not understand the significance of the Cross. The Cross of Jesus is the proof that life is stronger than death. The full understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained by theoretical instruction, but by practical commitment, *walking with him along the road of service, of Galilee until Jerusalem.*

Personal Questions

- Has your faith in Jesus given you some moment of transfiguration and of profound joy? How have these moments of joy given you strength in difficult moments?

- Today, how can you transfigure both your personal and your family life, and the community life of your neighborhood?

Concluding Prayer

The mountains melt like wax, before the Lord of all the earth.

The heavens proclaim his saving justice, all nations see his glory. (Ps 97: 5-6)

Monday, August 7, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide, be close to us and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life. Keep us safe in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 14: 13-21

When Jesus received this news of John beheading, he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the crowds heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick.

When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' But they answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' So he said, 'Bring them here to me.'

He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples, who gave them to the crowds.

They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps left over, twelve baskets full. Now about five thousand men had eaten, to say nothing of women and children.

Reflection

- Context. Chapter 14 of Matthew which contains the account of the multiplication of the loaves, proposes an itinerary that guides the reader in a progressive discovery of faith in Jesus: from the lack of faith on the part of his fellow countrymen to the acknowledgment of the Son of God, passing through the gift of bread. The fellow citizens of Jesus marveled at his wisdom but do not understand that this is what acts behind his works. Besides, having a direct knowledge of Jesus' family, of his mother, of his brothers, and of his sisters, they only succeed in seeing in him his human condition alone: he is the son of the carpenter. Not being understood in his own

hometown, from now on, Jesus will live in the midst of his people, to whom he will give all his attention and his solidarity. Healing and feeding the crowds.

- The dynamic of the account. Matthew has carefully narrated the episode of the multiplication of the loaves. The episode is enclosed between two expressions of transition in which he tells us that Jesus withdrew "separated himself" from the crowds, from the disciples, from the boat (vv. 13-14; vv. 22-23). Verse 13 does not only serve as transition but offers us the reason why Jesus went to a desert place. Such a device serves to create the environment in which the miracle takes place. The evangelist concentrates the account on the crowd and on the attitude of Jesus in regard to the crowd.
- Jesus was moved deeply to pity. At the moment when Jesus arrives, he finds himself before a crowd awaiting him; in seeing the crowd he took pity on them and healed their sick. This is a "tired and depressed crowd for they were like sheep without a shepherd" (9: 36; 20: 34). The verb that expresses the compassion of Jesus is really meaningful: "Jesus' heart was broken"; and this corresponds to the Hebrew verb that expresses the maternal visceral love. This is the same sentiment experienced by Jesus before the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11: 38). Compassion is the subjective aspect of the experience of Jesus that becomes effective with the gift of the bread.
- The gift of the bread. The account of the multiplication of the loaves is opened with the expression, "when evening came" (v. 15) that will introduce the account of the Last Supper (Mt 26: 20) and also that of the burial of Jesus (Mt 27: 57). In the evening, then, Jesus invites the Apostles to feed the crowd. In the middle of the desert, far away from the villages and from the cities, Jesus and the disciples find themselves before a very big human problem; to feed that the big crowd that follows Jesus. But they cannot take care of this task to provide for the material needs of the crowd without the power of Jesus. Their immediate response is that of sending the crowd back home. In the face of human limitations Jesus intervenes and works the miracle satisfying the hunger of all the people who follow him. To feed the crowd is the response of Jesus, from his heart which breaks in the face of a very concrete human need. The gift of the bread is not only sufficient to satisfy the crowd, but it is so superabundant that it becomes necessary to gather what was left over. In v. 19b we can see that Matthew gave a Eucharistic significance to the episode of the multiplication of the loaves: "he raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing, and breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples"; the role of the disciples is also made evident in their function of mediation between Jesus and the crowd: "and the disciples distributed to the crowd" (v. 19c). The gestures that accompany the miracle are identical to those that Jesus will fulfil later on the "night when he was betrayed": he raised his eyes, blessed the bread and breaks it. From here comes the symbolical value of the miracle: it can be considered an anticipation of the Eucharist. Besides, on the part of Jesus, feeding the crowds is "a sign" that he is the Messiah and that he prepares a banquet of joy for the whole humanity. The disciples learn from Jesus, who distributes the bread to them, the value of sharing. A symbolical gesture that contains a real fact that goes beyond the episode itself and is projected on the future: in our daily Eucharistic celebration, where we relive that gesture of the broken bread, it is necessary that it be multiplied throughout the whole day.

Personal Questions

- Do you try to fulfil gestures of solidarity toward those who are close to you or who share close to you the journey of life? In the face of very concrete problems of your

friends or relatives, do you know how to offer your help and your availability to collaborate to find a solution?

- Before breaking the bread, Jesus raised his eyes to heaven: do you know how to thank the Lord for the daily gift of bread? Do you know how to share your goods with others, especially with the poorest?

Concluding Prayer

Keep me far from the way of deceit, grant me the grace of your Law.

Do not deprive me of that faithful word, since my hope lies in your judgements. (Ps 119: 29, 43)

Tuesday, August 8, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide, be close to us and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life. Keep us safe in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 14: 22-36

At once Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he sent the crowds away. After sending the crowds away he went up into the hills by himself to pray.

When evening came, he was there alone, while the boat, by now some furlongs from land, was hard pressed by rough waves, for there was a headwind. In the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the sea, and when the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. 'It is a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.

But at once Jesus called out to them, saying, 'Courage! It's me! Don't be afraid.'

It was Peter who answered. 'Lord,' he said, 'if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.' Jesus said, 'Come.' Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord,' he cried, 'save me!' Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'You have so little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' 32 And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. 33 The men in the boat bowed down before him and said, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.'

Having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When the local people recognized him they spread the news through the whole neighbourhood and took all that were sick to him, begging him just to let them touch the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched it were saved.

Reflection

The Gospel today describes the difficult and tiresome crossing of the sea of Galilee in a fragile boat, pushed by a contrary wind. Between the discourse of the Parables (Mt 13) and of the Community (Mt 18), there is once again, the narrative part (Mt 14 to 17). The discourse of the Parables calls our attention again on the presence of the Kingdom. Now, the narrative part shows the reactions in favor and against Jesus provoked by that presence. In Nazareth, he was not accepted (Mt 13: 53-58) and King Herod thought that Jesus was a sort or reincarnation of John the Baptist, whom he had murdered (Mt 14: 1-12). The poor people, though, recognized in Jesus the one who had been sent by God and they followed him to the desert, where the multiplication of the loaves took place (Mt 14: 13-21). After the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus takes leave of the crowd and ordered the disciples to cross the lake, as it is described in today's Gospel (Mt 14: 22-36).

- Matthew 14: 22-24: To begin the crossing asked by Jesus. Jesus obliges the Disciples to go into the boat and to go toward the other side of the sea, where the land of the pagans was. He goes up to the mountain to pray. The boat symbolizes the community. It has the mission to direct itself toward the pagans and to announce among them the Good News of the Kingdom also, which was the new way of living in community. But the crossing was very tiring and long. The boat is agitated by the wave because the wind is contrary. Despite having rowed the whole night, there is still a great distance left before reaching the land. Much was still lacking in the community to be able to cross and go toward the pagans. Jesus did not go with his disciples. They had to learn to face together the difficulties, united and strengthened by faith in Jesus who had sent them. The contrast is very great: Jesus is in peace together with God, praying on the top of the mountain, and the Disciples are almost lost there below, in the agitated sea.
- The crossing to the other side of the lake also symbolizes the difficult crossing of the community at the end of the first century. They should get out of the closed world of the ancient observance of the law toward the new manner of observing the Law of love., taught by Jesus; they should abandon the knowledge of belonging to the Chosen People, privileged by God among all other peoples, for the certainty that in Christ all peoples would be united into one Only People before God; they should get out from isolation and intolerance toward the open world of acceptance and of gratitude. Today also, we are going through a difficult crossing toward a new time and a new way of being Church. A difficult crossing, but which is necessary. There are moments in life in which we are attacked by fear. Good will is not lacking, but this is not sufficient. We are like a boat faced with the contrary wind.
- Matthew 14: 25-27: Jesus comes close to them but they do not recognize him. Toward the end of the night, that is between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus goes to meet the Disciples. Walking on the water, he gets close to them, but they did not recognize him. They cried out in fear, thinking that it was a ghost. Jesus calms them down saying: "Courage! It is me! Do not be afraid!" The expression "It is me!" is the same one with which God tried to overcome the fear of Moses when he sent him to liberate the people from Egypt (Ex 3: 14). For the communities, of today as well as for those of yesterday, it was and it is very important to be always open to novelty: "Courage. It is me! Do not be afraid!"
- Matthew 14: 28-31: Enthusiasm and weakness of Peter. Knowing that it is Jesus, Peter asks that he also can walk on the water. He wants to experience the power which dominates the fury of the sea. This is a power which in the bible belongs only to God (Gn 1: 6; Ps 104: 6-9). Jesus allows him to participate in this power. But Peter is afraid. He thinks that he will sink and he cries out: "Lord, save me!" Jesus assures him and takes hold of him and reproaches him: "You have so little faith! Why did you doubt?"

Peter has more strength than he imagined but is afraid before the contrary waves and does not believe in the power of God which dwells within him. The communities do not believe in the force of the Spirit which is within them and which acts through faith. It is the force of the Resurrection (Eph 1: 19-20).

- Matthew 14: 32-33: Jesus is the Son of God. Before the waves that come toward them, Peter begins to sink in the sea because of lack of faith. After he is saved, he and Jesus, both of them, go into the boat and the wind calms down. The other Disciples, who are in the boat, are astonished and bowed before Jesus, recognizing that he is the Son of God: "Truly, you are the Son of God". Later on, Peter also professes the same faith in Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (Mt 16: 16). In this way Matthew suggests that it is not only Peter who sustains the faith of the Disciples, but also that the faith of the Disciples sustains Peter's faith.
- Matthew 14: 34-36: They brought all the sick to him. The episode of the crossing ends with something beautiful: "Having made the crossing they came to Gennesaret. When the local people recognized him they spread the news through the whole neighborhood and took all who were sick to him, begging him just to let them touch the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched it were saved".

Personal Questions

- Has there been a contrary wind in your life? What have you done to overcome it? Has this happened sometimes in the community? How was it overcome?
- Which is the crossing which the communities are doing today? From where to where? How does all this help us to recognize today the presence of Jesus in the contrary waves of life?

Concluding Prayer

Keep me far from the way of deceit, grant me the grace of your Law.

I have chosen the way of constancy, I have moulded myself to your judgements. (Ps 119: 29-30)

Wednesday, August 9, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide,

be close to us and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life. Keep us safe in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 15: 21-28

Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Lord, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he said not a word in answer to her.

And his disciples went and pleaded with him, saying, 'Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.'

But the woman had come up and was bowing low before him. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.'

She retorted, 'Ah yes, Lord; but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table.'

Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your desire be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

Reflection

- Context. The bread of the children and the great faith of a Canaanite woman is the theme presented in the liturgical passage taken from chapter 15 of Matthew who proposes to the reader of his Gospel a further deepening of faith in Christ. The episode is preceded by an initiative of the Pharisees and Scribes who go down to Jerusalem and cause a dispute to take place with Jesus, but which did not last long, because he, together with his disciples withdrew to go to the region of Tyre and Sidon. While he is on the way, a woman from the pagan places comes to him. This woman is presented by Matthew by the name of a "Canaanite woman" who in the light of the Old Testament, she is presented with great harshness. In the Book of Deuteronomy the inhabitants of Canaan were considered people full of sins, evil and idolatrous people.
- The dynamic of the account. While Jesus carries out his activity in Galilee and is on the way toward Tyre and Sidon, a woman came up to him and began to bother him with a petition for help for her sick daughter. The woman addresses Jesus using the title "Son of David"; a title which sounds strange pronounced by a pagan and that could be justified because of the extreme situation in which the woman lives. It could be thought that this woman already believes in some way, in the person of Jesus as final Saviour, but this is excluded because it is only in v. 28 that her act of faith is recognized, precisely by Jesus. In the dialogue with the woman Jesus seems to show that distance and diffidence which reigned between the people of Israel and the pagans. On one side Jesus confirms to the woman the priority for Israel to have access to salvation, and before the insistent prayer of her interlocutor Jesus seems to withdraw, to be at a distance; an incomprehensible attitude for the reader, but in the intention of Jesus it expresses an act of pedagogical value. To the first invocation "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David" (v. 22) Jesus does not respond. To the second intervention this time on the part of the disciples who invite him to listen to the prayer of the woman, he only expresses rejection that stresses that secular distance between the chosen people and the pagan people (vv. 23b-24) But at the insistence of the prayer of the woman who bows before Jesus, a harsh and mysterious response follows: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs" (v. 26). The woman goes beyond the harsh response of the words of Jesus and gets a small sign of hope: the woman recognizes that the plan of God being carried out by Jesus initially concerns the chosen people and Jesus asks the woman to recognize that priority; the woman takes advantage of that priority to present a strong reason to

obtain the miracle: "Ah yes, Lord, but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table" (v. 27). The woman has exceeded the test of faith: "Woman, you have great faith" (v. 28); in fact, to the humble insistence of her faith corresponds a gesture of salvation.

This episode addresses an invitation to every reader of the Gospel to have that interior attitude of "openness" toward everyone, believers or not, that is to say, availability and acceptance without distinction toward all men.

Personal Questions

- The disturbing word of God invites you to break open your closeness and all your small plans. Are you capable to accept all the brothers and sisters who come to you?
- Are you aware of your poverty to be capable like the Canaanite woman to entrust yourself to the word of salvation of Jesus.

Concluding Prayer

Lord, do not thrust me away from your presence, do not take away from me your spirit of holiness. Give me back the joy of your salvation, sustain in me a generous spirit. (Ps 51: 11-12)

Wednesday, August 9, 2023

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

Opening Prayer

Lord, God of our fathers, you brought Saint Teresa Benedicta to the fullness of the science of the cross at the hour of her martyrdom.

Fill us with that same knowledge; and, through her intercession, allow us always to seek after you, the supreme truth, and to remain faithful until death to the covenant of love ratified in the blood of your Son for the salvation of all men and women. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 25: 1-13

Jesus said to his disciples: "Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like this: Ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones, though they took their lamps, took no oil with them, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him". Then all those wedding attendants woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out." But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves." They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other attendants arrived later. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us." But He replied,

"In truth I tell you I do not know you." So, stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.

Reflection

Today is the Feast of Saint Edith Stein who in Carmel took the name of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. For this reason, the Gospel today narrates the parable of the ten virgins who had to welcome the bridegroom when he arrived to the wedding.

- Matthew 25: 1^a: The beginning: "At that time". The parable begins with these two words: "At that time". It is a question of the coming of the Son of Man (cfr. Mt 24: 37). Nobody knows when this day, this time will come, "not even the angels in Heaven nor the Son himself, but only the Father" (Mt 24: 36). The fortune tellers will not succeed in giving an estimate. The Son of Man will come as a surprise, when people less expect him (Mt 24: 44). It can be today, it can be tomorrow, that is why the last warning of the parable of the ten Virgins is: "Keep watch!" The ten girls should be prepared for anything which may happen.
- When the Nazi Policemen knocked at the door of the Monastery of the Carmelite Sisters of Echt in the Province of Limburgia, in the Netherlands, Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was prepared. She took on the Cross and followed the way to martyrdom in the extermination camp out of love for God and for her people. She was one of the prudent virgins of the parable.
- Matthew 25: 1b-4: The ten virgins ready to wait for the bridegroom. The parable begins like this: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like this: ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom". It is a question of the girls who have to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding feast. Because of this, they have to take the lamps with them, to light the way, and also to render the feast more joyful with more light. Five of them were prudent and five were foolish. This difference is seen in the way in which they prepare themselves for the role that they have to carry out. Together with the lighted lamps, the prudent ones had taken some oil in reserve, preparing themselves in this way for anything which could happen. The foolish ones took only the lamps and they did not think to take some oil in reserve with them.
- Matthew 25: 5-7: The unforeseen delay of the arrival of the bridegroom. The bridegroom was late. He had not precisely indicated the hour of his arrival. While waiting the attendants went to sleep. But the lamps continue to burn and use the oil until gradually they turned off. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, there was a cry: "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him!" All the attendants woke up, and began to prepare their lamps which were burning out. They had to put in some of the oil they had brought in reserve so that the lamps would not burn out.
- Matthew 25: 8-9: The different reactions before the delay of the bridegroom. It is only now that the foolish attendants become aware that they should have brought some oil in reserve with them. They went to ask the prudent ones: "Give us some of your oil, our lamps are going out". The prudent ones could not respond to this request, because at that moment what was important was not for the prudent ones to share their oil with the foolish ones, but that they would be ready to accompany the bridegroom to the place of the feast. For this reason, they advised them: "You had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves".
- Matthew 25: 10-12: The fate of the prudent attendants and that of the foolish ones. The foolish ones followed the advice of the prudent ones and went to buy some oil. During their brief absence the bridegroom arrived, and the prudent ones were able

to accompany him and to enter together with him to the wedding feast. But the door was closed behind them. When the others arrived, they knocked at the door and said: "Lord, Lord, open the door for us!" and they received the response: "In truth I tell you, I do not know you".

- Matthew 25: 13: The final recommendation of Jesus for all of us. The story of this parable is very simple, and the lesson is evident: "So stay awake and watch, because you do not know either the day or the hour". The moral of the story: do not be superficial, look beyond the present moment, and try to discover the call of God even in the smallest things of life, even the oil which may be lacking in the small light or lamp.

Personal Questions

- Has it happened to you sometimes in your life to think about having oil in reserve for your lamp?
- Do you know the life of Saint Edith Stein, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross?

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, August 10, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading - John 12: 24-26

Jesus said to his disciples: In all truth I tell you, unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest.

Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Whoever serves me, must follow me, and my servant will be with me wherever I am. If anyone serves me, my Father will honor him.

Reflection

- This passage contains solemn and crucial words concerning the modality with which the mission of Jesus and of his disciples “produces much fruit”. But in this solemn and central declaration of Jesus; “unless a wheat grain falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a large harvest” (v. 24), it is inserted in that narrative context of 12: 12-36 where the encounter of Jesus as Messiah with Israel is narrated and the rejection of the Jews of his Messianic proposal. Which are the principal themes that describe the Messianism of Jesus? The Jews expected a Messiah who would be a powerful king, who would continue with the royal style of David and would restore to Israel its glorious past. Instead, Jesus, places in the centre of his Messianism the gift of his life and the possibility given to man to be able to accept God’s project on his life.
- The story of a seed. The gift of his life, as a crucial characteristic of his Messianism, Jesus outlines it with a mini parable. He describes a central and decisive event of his life drawing from the agricultural environment from where he takes the images to render his parables interesting and immediate. It is the story of a seed: a small parable to communicate with the people in a simple and transparent way: a seed begins its course or journey in the dark meander of the earth, where it is suffocated and withers but in the Spring it becomes a green stalk and in the Summer a spike charged with grain. The focal points of the parable are two: the production of much fruit; the finding of eternal life. The seed that breaks through the darkness of earth has been interpreted by the First Fathers of the Church as a symbolical reference to the Incarnation of the Son of God. In the ground it seems that the vital force of the seed is destined to get lost because the seed withers and dies. But then the surprise of nature: in the summer when the spikes turn golden, the profound secret of that death is revealed. Jesus knows that death is becoming imminent, threatens on his person, even though he does not see it as a beast that devours. It is true that it has the characteristics of darkness and of being ripped, but for Jesus it contains the secret force typical of childbirth, a mystery of fecundity and of life. In the light of this vision one can understand another expression used by Jesus: “Anyone who loves his life will lose it and anyone who hates his own life in this world will preserve it for eternal life”. Anyone who considers his own life as a cold property to be lived in egoism is like a seed closed in itself and without any perspective of life. On the contrary who “hates his life”, a very sharp Semitic expression to indicate the renunciation of only fulfilling oneself applied to the axis of the meaning of an existence on the donation to others; it is only thus that life becomes creative: it is a source of peace, of happiness and of life. It is the reality of the seed that sprouts. But the reader can also get in the mini parable of Jesus another dimension, that of the “Passover”. Jesus knows that in order to lead humanity to the threshold of divine love he has to go through the dark way of death on the cross. On the trail of this life the disciple also faces his own “hour”, that of death, with the certainty that it will lead to eternal life, that is to say, to full communion with God.
- In synthesis. The story of the seed is that of dying in order to multiply itself; its function is that of a service to life. The annihilation of Jesus is comparable to the seed of life buried in the earth. In Jesus’ life to love is to serve and to serve is to lose oneself in the life of others, to die to oneself in order to allow others to live. While his “hour” is approaching, the conclusion of his mission, Jesus assures his own with the promise of a consolation and of a joy without end, accompanied, by every type of disturbance or trouble. He gives the example of the seed that has to wither and of the woman who has to give birth in the pangs of childbirth. Christ has chosen the cross for himself and for his own: anyone who wants to be his disciple is called to share his same itinerary. He has always spoken to his disciples in a radical way: «Anyone who

wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, will save it" (Lk 9: 24).

Personal Questions

- Does your life express the gift of yourself? Is it a seed of love that makes love be born? Are you aware that to be a seed of joy, so that there will be joy in the field of wheat grain the moment of sowing is necessary?
- Can you say that you have chosen the Lord if later you do not embrace the cross with him? When the hard struggle breaks out in you between "yes" or "no", between courage and fear, between faith and unbelief, between love and egoism, do you feel lost thinking that such temptations are not suitable to those who follow Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

All goes well for one who lends generously, who is honest in all his dealing; for all time to come he will not stumble, for all time to come the upright will be remembered. (Ps 112: 5-6)

Friday, August 11, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of everlasting goodness, our origin and guide, be close to us and hear the prayers of all who praise you. Forgive our sins and restore us to life. Keep us safe in your love.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 16: 24-28

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it.'

What, then, will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life? 'For the Son of man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his behaviour. In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming with his kingdom.'

Reflection

The five verses of today's Gospel continue with the words of Jesus to Peter which we meditated on yesterday. Jesus does not hide nor lessen the demands of discipleship. He does not allow Peter to take the initiative and puts him in his place: "*Far from me!*" Today's Gospel makes explicit these demands for all of us;

- Matthew 16: 24: "Take up his cross and follow me." Jesus draws the conclusions which are valid even until now: "If anyone wants to follow me, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me." At that time, the cross was the death sentence which the Roman Empire inflicted on marginalized persons and bandits. To take up the cross and carry it behind Jesus was the same as to accept to be marginalized by the unjust system which legitimized injustice. The Cross is not fatalism, nor exigency from the Father. The Cross is the consequence of the commitment freely taken up by Jesus to reveal the Good News that God is Father and that, therefore, we all have to be accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Because of this revolutionary announcement, Jesus was persecuted, and he was not afraid to give his life. Nobody has greater love than this: to give one's life for his friends (Jn 15: 13). The witness of Paul in the letter to the Galatians indicates the concrete significance and importance of all this: "But as for me, it is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world". (Ga 6: 14). And he ends by referring to the marks of the tortures which he suffered: "After this, let no one trouble me, I carry branded on my body the marks of Jesus" (Ga 6: 17).
- Matthew 16: 25-26: "Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it." These two verses make explicit universal human values which confirm the experience of many Christians and non-Christians. To save one's life, to lose one's life, to find one's life. The experience of many is the following: Anyone who is always seeking goods and riches is never satisfied. Anyone who gives himself to others, forgetting himself, experiences a great happiness. This is the experience of the mothers who give themselves, and of so many people who do not think of self but think of others. Many do this and live in this way almost out of instinct, as something which comes from the bottom of the heart. Others act in this way because they have had a painful experience of frustration which has led them to change attitude. Jesus is right in saying: "Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it". The reason is important: "For my sake", or like Mark says: "For the sake of the Gospel" (Mk 8: 35). And he ends saying: "What, then will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life?" This last phrase recalls the Psalm where it is said that no one can pay the ransom for his life: "But no one can ever redeem himself or pay his own ransom to God; the price for himself is too high, it can never be that he will live on forever and avoid the sight of the abyss" (Ps 49: 8-10).
- Matthew 16: 27-28: The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of the Father, and he will reward each one according to his behavior. These two verses refer to the hope regarding the coming of the Son of Man in the last times, as judge of humanity, as he is presented in the vision of the Prophet Daniel (Dn 7: 13-14). The first verse says: "The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels and will reward each one according to his behavior". (Mt 16: 27). This phrase speaks about the justice of the Judge. Each one will receive according to his own behavior. The second verse says: "There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom". (Mt 16: 28). This phrase is an advertisement to help to perceive the coming of Jesus, the Judge of the actions of life. Some thought that Jesus would have come afterwards (1 Th 4: 15-18). But in fact, Jesus was already present in persons, especially in the poor. But they did not perceive this, Jesus himself had said: "Every time that you have helped the poor, the sick, the homeless, the prisoner, the pilgrim, you helped me, it was me!" (cfr. Mt 25: 34-45).

Personal Questions

- Anyone who loses his life will find it. What experience do I have regarding this?
- The words of Paul: "As for me, instead, there is no other glory than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified for me and I for the world". Do I have the courage to repeat these words in my life?

Concluding Prayer

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, let us acclaim his name together.

I seek Yahweh and he answers me, frees me from all my fears. (Ps 34: 3-4)

Saturday, August 12, 2023

Ordinary Time

Prayer

Show us your continued kindness, Father, and watch over your people, as we acknowledge your guide and your lead. renew the work of your creation and guard what you have renewed. Through our Lord Jesus Christ ...

Gospel Reading – Matthew 17: 14-20

At that time, when they came to the crowd a man approached, knelt down before Jesus, and said, "Lord, have pity on my son, for he is a lunatic and suffers severely; often he falls into fire, and often into water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him." Jesus said in reply, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him here to me." Jesus rebuked him and the demon came out of him, and from that hour the boy was cured. Then the disciples approached Jesus in private and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. Amen, I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Reflection

- Context. Our passage has Jesus in his work of healing. After having stayed with the disciples alone in the region of Caesarea Philippi (16: 13 to 28) Jesus climbs a high mountain and is transfigured before three disciples (from 17: 1 to 10) and then reaches the crowd (17: 14 - 21) attempts a new approach to Galilee to regain (7: 22). What to think of these geographical shifts of Jesus? It is not excluded that they could have a value of geographical, but Matthew press submit their role of spiritual journey. In his journey of faith community is increasingly called upon to retrace that spiritual which marked the life of Jesus from Galilee of his public and that his resurrection by way of the cross. A spiritual journey in which the power of faith plays a crucial role.
- The power of faith. Jesus, after his transfiguration, with its small community of disciples returned from the crowd, before returning to Galilee (v. 22) and arrive in

Capernaum (v. 24). And while in the crowd a man approached him and begged him to urgently intervene in the evil that keeps his imprisoned son. The description preceding the intervention of Jesus really clear: this is a case of epilepsy with all its pathological consequences on the psychic level. At the time of Jesus, this type of illness was traced to evil forces and specifically the action of Satan, enemy of God and man, and therefore the origin of evil and all evil. Faced with such a situation arise in which evil forces far beyond human capabilities to the disciples find themselves powerless to heal the child (vv.16-19) and because of their lack of faith (V. 20). For the evangelist, this young epileptic is a symbol of those who devalue the power of faith (V. 20), not mindful of the presence of God in their midst (V. 17). The presence of God in Jesus, Emmanuel, is not recognized, the fact understand something of Jesus is not enough, we need the true faith. After Jesus rebuked the crowd, you bring the boy: "Bring him here" (V. 17), heals and frees it when rebuked the devil. Not simply the miracle of healing a single person "" you must also heal the weak and uncertain faith of the disciples. Jesus approaches them who are confused or dazed for their impotence: "Because we could not throw it out?" (V. 20). Jesus' answer is clear: "For your wavering faith". Jesus calls for faith that can move mountains of his heart to identify with his person, his mission, his divine power. It is true that the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus but have failed to heal the epileptic boy because of "little faith." It is not lack of faith, only that it is weak, vacillating for sure, with a predominance of mistrust and doubt. It is a faith that is rooted entirely in relationship with Christ. Jesus goes beyond the language when he says: "if you have faith like a mustard seed" can move mountains, is an exhortation to be guided by the power of faith in action, which becomes especially strong in times of trial and suffering and attains maturity when no offense most of the scandal of the cross. Faith can do anything, provided waivers to rely on their human capacity, can move mountains. The disciples, the early community have experienced that unbelief can not be won by prayer and fasting, but you must join the death and resurrection of Jesus

Personal Questions

- Through musical meditation we observed that the disciples are placed in relation to epileptic and Jesus himself. You also find your way relationship with Jesus and with others using the power of faith?
- On the cross Jesus gives witness to the Father and reveals completely. Jesus' words that you thought you asked the total membership: you feel every day committed to move the heart of the mountains that stand between your self-interest and the will of God?

Final Prayer

The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, stronghold in times of trouble. Those who honor your name trust in you; you never forsake those who seek you, LORD. (Psalm 9)

Sunday, August 13, 2023

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, my life is going through a storm, the egoistic winds impel me where I do not wish to go, I cannot resist their force. I am weak and deprived of strength. You are the energy which gives life. You are my comfort, my force and my cry of prayer. Come, Holy Spirit, reveal to me the sense of the Scriptures, give me peace anew, serenity and the joy of living.

Lectio

Key to the Gospel Reading - Matthew 14; 22-33

Jesus and his Disciples are on the side of the lake, at night fall, after the multiplication of the loaves. Part of the passage is also found in Mark (6: 45-52) and in John (6: 16-21). The episode of Peter (vv. 28-32) is found only in Matthew. Some commentators hold that it is a question of an apparition of Jesus after the Resurrection (Lk 24: 37). The difficulties of the Church and the need for a greater faith in the Risen Jesus are thus foreshadowed.

A Possible Division of the Text:

- Matthew 14: 22-23: related to the multiplication of the loaves
- Matthew 14: 24-27: Jesus walks on the sea
- Matthew 14: 28-32: the episode of Peter
- Matthew 14: 33: the profession of faith.

Text:

22 And at once he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he sent the crowds away. 23 After sending the crowds away he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 while the boat, by now some furlongs from land, was hard pressed by rough waves, for there was a head-wind. 25 In the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the sea, 26 and when the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. 'It is a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But at once Jesus called out to them, saying, 'Courage! It's me! Don't be afraid.' 28 It was Peter who answered. 'Lord,' he said, 'if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.'

29 Jesus said, 'Come.' Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, 30 but then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord,' he cried, 'save me!' 31 Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'You have so little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' 32 And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. 33 The men in the boat bowed down before him and said, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.'

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

A desire to keep silence and to listen to God's voice.

Some Questions:

In moments of darkness and interior storms, how do I react? How are the presence and absence of the Lord integrated in me? What place does personal prayer and dialogue with God have in me?

What do we ask the Lord in a dark night? A miracle, that he frees us from this? A greater faith? In which attitudes am I similar to Peter?

Meditatio

Brief Commentary

- *22. And at once he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side while he sent the crowds away.*
The multiplication of the loaves (14, 13-21) could have generated in the disciples triumphant expectations concerning the Kingdom of God. Therefore, Jesus orders them at once to get away. He ‘obliged’, usually a verb of strong significance. The people acclaim Jesus as a Prophet (Jn 6, 14-15) and wish to make him a political ruler. The disciples are easily drawn by this (Mk 6, 52; Mt 16, 5-12), there is the risk of allowing themselves to be drawn by the enthusiasm of the people. The disciples have to abandon this situation.
- *23. After sending the crowds away he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came he was there alone.*
Jesus finds himself in front a situation in which the Galilean crowd becomes enthusiastic because of the miracle and runs the risk of not understanding His mission. In this very important moment, Jesus withdraws alone in prayer, as in Gethsemane (Mt 26, 36-46).
- *24. While the boat, by now some furlongs from land, was hard pressed by rough waves, for there was a headwind.*
This verse where the boat is noticed, without Jesus, in danger, can be close to verse 32 where the danger ceases when Jesus and Peter get into the boat.
- *25. In the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the sea.*
Jesus appears to his disciples in an extraordinary way. He transcends the human limitations, he has authority on creation. He acts as God alone can do it (Job 9, 8; 38, 16).
- *26. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. ‘It is a ghost’, they said, and cried out in fear.*
The disciples were struggling with the contrary wind, they had lived a very impressing day and now a sleepless night. At night (between three and six), in the middle of the sea, they were really terrified in seeing one coming towards them. They did not think in the possibility that it could be Jesus. Their vision is too human, and they believe in ghosts (Lk 24, 37). The Risen Lord though, has overcome the force of chaos represented by the waves of the sea.
- *27. But at once Jesus called out to them, saying. ‘Courage! It is me! Do not be afraid!*
- The presence of Jesus drives away all fear (9, 2.22). In saying “It is me” he evokes his identity (Es 3, 14) and manifests the power of God (Mk 14, 62; Lk 24, 39; Jn 8, 58; 18, 5-6). Fear is overcome by faith.
- *28. It was Peter who answered: ‘Lord, he said, ‘If it is you, tell me to come to you across the water’.*
Peter seems to want still another confirmation of the presence of Jesus. He asks for a sign.

- 29. *Jesus said, 'Come'. Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water.*
Nevertheless, Peter is ready to run the risk, getting out of the boat and trying to walk on the agitated waves, in the midst of a strong wind (v. 24). He faces the risk of believing in the Word: 'Come'.
- 30. *But then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink: 'Lord', he cried, 'save me!'*
Perseverance is also necessary in the choice of faith. The contrary forces (the wind) are so many, that there is the risk of sinking. The prayer of petition saves him..
- 31. *Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'You have so little faith, he said, 'why did you doubt?'*
Peter is not left alone in his weakness. In the storms of Christian life we are not alone. God does not abandon us even if apparently is absent and does nothing.
- 32. *And as they got into the boat the wind dropped.*
As soon as Jesus got in the boat the forces of evil cease. The force of hell shall not prevail over it.
- 33. *The men in the boat bowed down before him and said: ;Truly, you are the Son of God.'*
Now comes that profession of faith which had been prepared in the preceding episode of the multiplication of the loaves, purified by the experience of getting away from the Bread of eternal life (Jn 6, 1-14). Now Peter can also confirm his brothers in faith, after the trial.

To Go Deeper Into The Text

Jesus, man of prayer

Jesus prays in solitude and at night (Mt 14: 23; Mk 1: 35; Lk 5: 16), during the time of meals (Mt 14: 19; 15: 36; 26: 26-27). On the occasion of important events: for Baptism (Lk 3: 21), before choosing the twelve (Lk 6: 12), before teaching how to pray (Lk 11: 1; Mt 6: 5); before the confession of Caesarea (Lk 9: 18); in the Transfiguration (Lk 9: 28-29), in Gethsemane (Mt 26: 36-44); on the Cross (Mt 27: 46; Lk 23: 46). He prays for his executioners (Lk 23: 34); for Peter (Lk 22: 32), for his disciples and for those who will follow him (Jn 17: 9-24). He also prays for himself (Mt 26: 39; Jn 17: 1-5; Heb 5: 7). He teaches to pray (Mt 6: 5), He manifests a permanent relationship with the Father (Mt 11: 25-27), sure that He never leaves him alone (Jn 8: 29), and always hears him (Jn 11: 22, 42; Mt 26: 53). He has promised (Jn 14: 16) to continue to intercede in heaven (Rm 8: 34; Heb 7: 25; I Jn 2: 1).

Oratio: Psalm 33

I will praise Yahweh from my heart; let the humble hear and rejoice.

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, let us acclaim his name together.

I seek Yahweh and he answers me, frees me from all my fears.

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

A pauper calls out and Yahweh hears, saves him from all his troubles.

The angel of Yahweh encamps around those who fear him, and rescues them.

Taste and see that Yahweh is good.

How blessed are those who take refuge in him.

Fear Yahweh, you his holy ones; those who fear him lack for nothing.

Contemplatio

Lord Jesus, sometimes we are full of enthusiasm and forget that You are the source of our joy: In the moments of sadness we do not seek you or we want your miraculous intervention. Now we know that you never abandon us, that we should not fear. Prayer is also our force. Increase our faith, we are ready to risk our life for your Kingdom.

Monday, August 14, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 17: 22-27

When they were together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, 'The Son of man is going to be delivered into the power of men; they will put him to death, and on the third day he will be raised up again.' And a great sadness came over them.

When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel came to Peter and said, 'Does your master not pay the half-shekel?' 'Yes,' he replied, and went into the house. But before he could speak, Jesus said, 'Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?' And when he replied, 'From foreigners,' Jesus said, 'Well then, the sons are exempt.'

However, so that we shall not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that rises, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for yourself.'

Reflection

The five verses of today's Gospel speak about two very different themes between them. (a) The second announcement of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus (Mt 17: 22-23); (b) they inform on the conversation of Jesus with Peter about paying the taxes and the dues to the temple (Mt 17: 24-27).

- Matthew 17: 22-23: The announcement of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The first announcement (Mt 16: 21) had produced a strong reaction on Peter who did not

want to know anything about suffering nor the cross. Jesus had answered just as strongly: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mt 16: 23). Here, in the second announcement, the reaction of the disciples is less strong, less aggressive. The announcement produces sadness. It seems that now they begin to understand that the cross forms part of the journey. The proximity of the death and the suffering weigh heavily on them, giving rise to a great discouragement. Even if Jesus tries to help them, the resistance of centuries against the idea of a crucified Messiah, was much greater.

- Matthew 17: 24-25a: The question which the tax collectors ask Peter concerning the taxes. When they reached Capernaum, the tax collector of the taxes of the Temple asks Peter: "Does your Master not pay the half-shekel for the Temple?" Peter answered: "Yes". From the time of Nehemias (5th Century BC), the Jews who had returned from the exile of Babylonia, committed themselves solemnly in the Assembly to pay the diverse taxes and dues in order to allow the Temple to continue to function and to take care of the maintenance both of the priestly service and of the building of the Temple. (Ne 10: 33-40). From what we can see from Peter's response, Jesus paid the taxes like any other Jew.
- Matthew 17: 25b-26: The question of Jesus to Peter concerning the taxes. The conversation between Jesus and Peter is very strange. When they reach home, Jesus asked: " Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?" Peter responds: "From foreigners." And Jesus says: "Therefore, the sons are exempt!" Probably, here we can see a discussion between the Christian Jews before the destruction of the Temple, in the year 70. They asked themselves if they had to continue or not to pay the taxes of the Temple, as they did before. By Jesus' response they discover that they are not obliged to pay this tax: "The sons are exempt!" The sons are the Christians, but even if they are not obliged to pay, the recommendation of Jesus is to pay in order not to cause scandal.
- Matthew 17: 27: The conclusion of the conversation on the paying of the tax. The solution which Jesus gives to this situation is even stranger. He tells Peter: "However, so that we shall not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook: take the first fish that rises, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for yourself." This was a strange miracle, strange like that of the 2000 pigs which threw themselves into the sea (Mk 5: 13). Whichever is the interpretation of this miraculous fact, this way of resolving the problem suggests that it is a question that is not too important for Jesus.

Personal Questions

- The suffering of the Cross discourages and saddens the disciples. Has this already happened in your life?
- How do you interpret the episode of the coin found in the mouth of the fish?

Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh from the heavens, praise him in the heights.

Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host! (Ps 148: 1-2)

Tuesday, August 15, 2023

Opening Prayer

Holy Spirit, Spirit of Wisdom, of Science, of Intelligence, of Counsel, fill us, we pray, with the knowledge of the Word of God, fill us with every kind of spiritual wisdom and intelligence, so as to be able to understand it at depth. May we, under your guidance be able to understand the Gospel of this Marian solemnity. Holy Spirit, we need you, you, the only one who continually moulds in us the figure and the form of Jesus. And we turn to you, Mary, Mother of Jesus and of the Church, you who have lived the inebriating and totalising Presence of the Holy Spirit, you who have experienced the power of his force in you, who has seen it operating in your Son Jesus from the time when he was in the maternal womb, open our heart and our mind, so that they may be docile to listen to the Word of God.

Reading of the Gospel:

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

And Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed,
for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him.

He has used the power of his arm, he has routed the arrogant of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly. He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love -according to the promise he made to our ancestors -- of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.

Mary stayed with her some three months and then went home.

Moments of Prayerful Silence:

Silence is a quality of the one who knows how to listen to God. Try to create in yourself an atmosphere of peace and of silent adoration. If you are capable to be in silence before God, you will be able to listen to his breath which is Life.

Meditatio

Key to the Reading:

Blessed are you among women

In the first part of today's Gospel, the words of Elizabeth resound: "Blessed are you among women", preceded by a spatial movement. Mary leaves Nazareth, situated in the North of Palestine, to go to the South, approximately fifty kilometers, to a place which tradition has identified as the present day Ain Karem, not too far from Jerusalem. The physical movement shows the interior sensibility of Mary, who is not closed on herself, to contemplate, in a private and intimate way, the mystery of the Divine Maternity which is being accomplished in her, but she is projected to the path of charity. She moves in order to go and help her elderly cousin. Mary's going to Elizabeth has the added connotation 'in haste' which Saint Ambrose interprets as follows: "Mary set out in haste to the hill country, not because she did not believe the prophecy or because she was uncertain of the announcement or doubted of the proof, but because she was pleased with the promise and desirous to devotedly fulfil a service, with the impulse that she received from her intimate joy... The grace of the Holy Spirit does not entail slowness". The reader, though, knows that the true reason of the trip is not indicated, but can get it through information deduced from the context. The angel had communicated to Mary the pregnancy of Elizabeth, already in the sixth month (cfr. v. 37). Besides the fact that she remained there three months (cfr. v. 56), just the time so that the child could be born, allows us to understand that Mary intended to help her cousin. Mary runs, and goes where there is an urgent need, the need for help, showing, in this way, a clear sensibility and concrete availability. Together with Mary, Jesus, in his mother's womb, moves with her. From here it is easy to deduce the Christological value of the episode of the visit of Mary to her cousin: above all, the attention is for Jesus. At first sight, it could seem to be a scene concentrated on the two women, in reality, what is important for the Evangelist is the prodigious fact present in their conceiving. Mary moving tends, in last instance, to have the encounter between the two women.

As soon as Mary enters into the house and greets Elizabeth, the small John leaped in her womb. According to some this leaping is not comparable to the changing place of the fetus, which is experienced by every pregnant woman. Luke uses a particular Greek verb which precisely means "jumping". Wishing to interpret the verb a bit literally, it could be indicated with "dancing", thus excluding a physical phenomenon only. Someone has thought that this 'dance' could be considered as a form of 'homage' which John renders to Jesus, inaugurating, though not yet born, that attitude of respect and of subjection which will characterize his life: "After me is coming someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals" (Mk 1: 7). One day, John himself will give witness: "it is the bridegroom who has the bride; and yet the bridegroom's friend, who stands there and listens to him, is filled with joy at the bridegroom's voice. This is the joy that I feel and it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow less" (Jn 3: 29-30). Thus Saint Ambrose comments: "Elizabeth was the first one to hear the voice, but John is first to perceive the grace". We find a confirmation of this interpretation in the words themselves of Elizabeth which, repeating the same Greek verb in v. 44. which was already employed in v. 41, says: "The child in my womb leapt for joy". Luke, with these particular details, has wished to evoke the prodigies which took place in the intimacy of Nazareth. It is only now, thanks to the dialogue with an interlocutor, the mystery of the divine maternity leaves aside its secrecy and its individual dimension, to become a notable fact, and object of appreciation and of praise.

The words of Elizabeth, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?" (vv. 42-43). With a Semitic expression which is equivalent to a superlative ("among women"), the Evangelist wishes to attract the attention of the reader on the function of Mary: to be the "Mother of the Lord". And, then, a blessing is reserved for her ("Blessed are you") and

a blessed Beatitude. In what does this one consist? It expresses Mary's adherence to the Divine Will. Mary is not only the receiver of a mysterious design which makes her blessed, but also a person who knows how to accept and adhere to God's will. Mary is a creature who believes, because she trusts in a plain, simple word and which she has vested with her "yes" of love. And Elizabeth acknowledges this service of love, identifying her as "blessed as mother and blessed as believer".

In the meantime, John perceives the presence of his Lord and exults, expressing with that interior movement the joy which springs from that contact of salvation. Mary will be the interpreter of that event in the hymn of the Magnificat.

A Song of Love:

In this song Mary considers herself part of the *anawim*, of the "poor of God", of those who "fear God" placing in Him all their trust and hope and who, on the human level, do not enjoy any right or prestige. The spirituality of the *anawim* can be synthesized with the words of Psalm 37: 79: "In silence he is before God and hopes in him", because "those who hope in the Lord will possess the earth".

In Psalm 86: 6 the one who prays, turning to God says: Give your servant your force": Here the term 'servant' expresses his being subjected, as well as the sentiment of belonging to God, of feeling secure with him.

The poor, in the strictly Biblical sense, are those who place their trust unconditionally in God; this is why they are to be considered, qualitatively, the best part, of the People of Israel.

The proud, instead, are those who place all their trust in themselves.

Now, according to the Magnificat, the poor have a thousand reasons to rejoice, because God glorifies the *anawim* (Psalm 149: 4) and humbles the proud. An image taken from the New Testament, which expresses very well the attitude of the poor of the Old Testament, is that of the Publican who with humility beats his breast, while the Pharisee being complacent of his merits is being consumed by his pride (Lk 18: 9-14). Definitively, Mary celebrates all that God has done in her and all that he works in every creature. Joy and gratitude characterize this hymn to salvation which recognizes the greatness of God, but which also makes great the one who sings it.

Some Question for Meditation:

- Is my prayer, above all, the expression of a sentiment or celebration and acknowledgement of God's action?
- Mary is presented as the believer in the Word of the Lord. How much time do I dedicate to listening to the Word of God?
- Is your prayer nourished from the Bible, as was that of Mary? Or rather am I dedicated to devotions which produce a continuous tasteless and dull prayer? Are you convinced that to return to Biblical prayer is the assurance to find a solid nourishment, chosen by Mary herself?
- Are you in the logics of the Magnificat which exalts the joy of giving, of losing in order to find, of accepting, the happiness of gratuity, of donation?

Oratio

Psalm 44 (45)

The Psalm in this second part, glorifies the Queen. In today's Liturgy these verses are applied to Mary and celebrate her greatness and beauty.

In your retinue are daughters of kings,
the consort at your right hand in gold of Ophir. Listen, my daughter,
attend to my words and hear; forget your own nation
and your ancestral home,
then the king will fall in love with your beauty; he is your lord, bow down before him.
Her companions are brought to her,
they enter the king's palace with joy and rejoicing.

Final Prayer

The prayer which follows is a brief meditation on the maternal role of Mary in the life of the believer:

“Mary, woman who knows how to rejoice, who knows how to exult, who allows herself to be invaded by the full consolation of the Holy Spirit, teach us to pray so that we may also discover the source of joy. In Elizabeth’s house, your cousin, feeling accepted and understood in your most intimate secret, you burst out in a hymn of exultation of the heart, speaking of God, of you about your relationship with him, and of the unprecedented adventure already begun of being the Mother of Christ and of all of us, holy people of God. Teach us to give our prayer a rhythm of hope and tremors of joy, sometimes worn out by bitter whining and soaked with melancholy almost as obliged. The Gospel speaks to us about you, Mary, and of Elizabeth: both of you kept in your heart something, which you did not dare or you did not wish to manifest to anyone. But each one of you, felt understood by the other, on that prophetic day of the Visitation and you pronounced words of prayer and of feast. Your encounter becomes Liturgy of thanksgiving and of praise to your ineffable God. You, woman of a profound joy, you sang the Magnificat, in rapture and amazed at all that the Lord was operating in his humble servant. Magnificat is the cry, the explosion of joy, which explodes within each one of us, when one feels accepted and understood.”

Contemplatio

The Virgin Mary, the temple of the Holy Spirit, accepted with faith the Word and surrendered herself completely to the power of Love. Because of this she became the Icon of interiority, that is all recollected under the look of God and abandoned to the power of the Most High. Mary keeps silence about herself, because everything in her can speak about the wonders of the Lord in her life.

Wednesday, August 16, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 18: 15-20

Jesus said to his disciples. 'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: whatever the misdemeanor, the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain the charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a gentile or a tax collector. 'In truth I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 'In truth I tell you once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.'

Reflection

In the Gospel of today and of tomorrow we read and meditate on the second half of the Discourse of the Community. Today's Gospel speaks about fraternal correction (Mt 18: 15-18) and of prayer in common (Mt 18: 19-20). The Gospel of tomorrow speaks about pardon (Mt 18: 21-22) and presents the parable of pardon without limitations (Mt 18: 23-35). The key word in this second part is "to forgive". The accent is on reconciliation. In order that there may be reconciliation which will allow the little ones to return, it is important to know how to dialogue and to forgive, because the foundation of fraternity is the gratuitous love of God. It is only in this way that the community will be a sign of the Kingdom. It is not easy to forgive. There is a certain grief which continues to strike the heart as with a hammer. There are persons who say: "I forgive, but I do not forget!" There is: resentment, tensions, clashes, diverse opinions, and offences, provocations which render pardon and reconciliation difficult.

The organization of the words of Jesus in the five Great Discourses of the Gospel of Matthew indicates that at the end of the first century, the communities had very concrete forms of catechesis. The Discourse of the Community (Mt 18: 1-35), for example gives updated instructions of how to proceed in case of any conflict among the members of the community and how to find criteria to solve the conflicts. Matthew gathers together those phrases of Jesus which can help the communities of the end of the first century to overcome the two more acute problems which they had to face at that moment, that is, the exodus of the little ones because of the scandal given by some and the need to dialogue in order to overcome the rigor of others in accepting the little ones, the poor, in the community.

- Matthew 18: 15-18: Fraternal correction and the power to forgive. These verses give simple norms of how to proceed in case of conflicts in the community. If a brother or a sister should sin, if they had behavior not in accordance to the life of the community, they should not be denounced immediately. First, it is necessary to try to speak with them alone. Then it is necessary to try to know the reasons of the other. If no results are obtained, then it is necessary to take two or three persons of the community to see if it is possible to obtain some result. Only in extreme cases, it is necessary to expose the problem to the whole community. And if the person refuses to listen to the community, then they should be considered by you as "a sinner or a pagan", that is, as someone who is not part of the community. Therefore, it is not you

who excludes, but it is the person himself/herself who excludes himself/herself. The community gathered together only verifies or ratifies the exclusion. The grace to be able to forgive and to reconcile in the name of God was given to Peter (Mt 16: 19), to the Apostles (Jn 20: 23) and, here in the Discourse of the Community, to the community itself (Mt 18: 18). This reveals the importance of the decisions which the community assumes in regard to its members.

- Matthew 18: 19: Prayer in common. The exclusion does not mean that the person is abandoned to his/her own fate. No! The person may be separated from the community, but will never be separated from God. In the case in which the conversation in the community does not produce any result, and the person does not want to be integrated in the life of the community, there still remains the last possibility to remain together with the Father to obtain reconciliation, and Jesus guarantees that the Father will listen: "If two of you agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in Heaven; for where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them".
- Matthew 18: 20: The presence of Jesus in the community. The reason of the certainty of being heard by the Father is the promise of Jesus: "Because where there are two or three who meet in my name, I am there among them!" Jesus is the center, the axis, of the community, and, as such, together with the Community, it will always be praying with us to the Father, in order that he may grant the gift of the return of the brother or the sister who have excluded themselves.

Personal Questions

- Why is it so difficult to forgive? In our community, is there some space for reconciliation? In which way?
- Jesus says: "For wherever there are two or three who meet in my name, I am also there among them." What does this mean for us today?

Concluding Prayer

Praise, servants of Yahweh, praise the name of Yahweh. Blessed be the name of Yahweh, henceforth and forever. (Ps 113: 1-2)

Thursday, August 17, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 18: 21-19: 1

Then Peter went up to Jesus and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?'

Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times.'

'And so the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet, with the words, "Be patient with me and I will pay the whole sum." And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him, saying, "Pay what you owe me." His fellow-servant fell at his feet and appealed to him, saying, "Be patient with me and I will pay you." But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt.

His fellow-servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him.

Then the master sent for the man and said to him, "You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you?" And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.' Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and he left Galilee and came into the territory of Judea on the far side of the Jordan.

Reflection

In yesterday's Gospel we have heard the words of Jesus concerning fraternal correction (Mt 18: 15-20). In the Gospel today (Mt 19: 21-39) the central theme is pardon and reconciliation.

- Matthew 18: 21-22: Forgive seventy times seven! Before the words of Jesus on fraternal correction and reconciliation, Peter asks: "How often must I forgive? Seven times?" Seven is a number which indicates perfection and, in the case of the proposal of Peter, seven is synonymous of always. But Jesus goes beyond. He eliminates all and whatever possible limitation there may be to pardon: "Not seven I tell you, but seventy-seven times." It is as if he would say "Always, NO! Peter. But seventy times seven always!". And this because there is no proportion between God's love for us and our love for our brother. Here we recall the episode of the Old Testament of Lamech: "Lamech says to his wives, Adah and Zollah, hear my voice; listen to what I say: I killed a man for wounding me, a boy for striking me. Sevenfold vengeance for Cain, but seventy-sevenfold for Lamech" (Gn 4: 23-24). The task of the communities is to invert the process of the spiral of violence. In order to clarify his response to Peter, Jesus tells them the parable of pardon without limits.
- Matthew 18: 23-27: The attitude of the master. This parable is an allegory, that is, Jesus speaks about a master, but thinks of God. This explains the enormous contrasts of the parable. As we will see, in spite that it is a question of daily ordinary things, there is something in this story which does not take place in daily life. In the story which Jesus tells, the master follows the norms of the law or rights of that time. It was his right to take a laborer with all his family and to keep him in prison until he would have paid his debt carrying out his work as a slave. But before the request of the

debtor servant, the master forgives the debt. What strikes us is the amount: ten thousand talents! One talent was equal to 35 kg, and so according to the estimate made, ten thousand talents were equal to 350 tons of gold. Even if the debtor and his family would have worked their whole life, they would never have been capable to earn 350 tons of gold. The extreme estimate is made on purpose. Our debt before God is countless and unpayable!

- Matthew 18: 28-31: The attitude of the laborer. As soon as he went out, that servant found a fellow servant as himself who owned him one hundred denarii and, he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him saying: Pay what you owe! This servant owed him one hundred denarii; that is the salary of one hundred days of work. Some have estimated that it was a question of 30 grams of gold. There was no comparison between the two! But this makes us understand the attitude of the labourer: God forgives him 350 tons of gold and he is not capable to forgive 30 grams of gold. Instead of forgiving, he does to the companion what the master could have done with him, but did not do it. He puts in prison his companion according to the norms of the law until he would have paid his debt. This is an inhuman attitude, which also strikes the other companions. Seeing what had happened, the other servants were sad and went to refer to their master everything which had happened. We also would have done the same; we would also have had the same attitude of disapproval.
- Matthew 18: 32-35: The attitude of God "Then the master called that man and said to him: "You wicked servant! I have forgiven you all your debt because you appealed to me. Were you not bound then to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you? And, angry, the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt." Before God's love who pardons gratuitously our debt of 350 tons of gold, it is more than fair, than just that we should forgive our brother who has a small debt of 30 grams of gold. God's forgiveness is without any limit. The only limit for the gratuity of God's mercy comes from ourselves, from our incapacity to forgive our brothers! (Mt 18: 34). This is what we say and ask for in the Our Father: "Forgive us our offences as we forgive those who offend us" (Mt 6: 12-15).
- The community: an alternative space of solidarity and fraternity. The society of the Roman Empire was hard and heartless, without any space for the little ones. They sought some refuge for the heart and did not find it. The Synagogues were very demanding and did not offer a place for them. In the Christian communities, the rigor of some concerning the observance of the Law in the daily life followed the same criteria as society and as the Synagogue. Thus, in the communities, the same divisions which existed in society and in the Synagogue, between rich and poor, dominion and submission, man and woman, race, and religion, began to appear. The community instead of being a place of acceptance became a place of condemnation. By uniting the words of Jesus, Matthew wants to enlighten the journey of the followers of Jesus, in order that the communities may be an alternative place of solidarity and of fraternity. They should be Good News for the poor.

Personal Questions

- To forgive. There are people who say: "I forgive but I do not forget!" And I? Am I able to imitate God?
- Jesus gives us the example. At the time of death he asks pardon for his murderers (Lk 13: 34). Am I capable to imitate Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

From the rising of the sun to its setting, praised be the name of Yahweh!
Supreme over all nations is Yahweh, supreme over the heavens his glory. (Ps 113: 3-4)

Friday, August 18, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 19: 3-12

Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and to put him to the test they said, 'Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?'

He answered, 'Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh? They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide.'

They said to him, 'Then why did Moses command that a writ of dismissal should be given in cases of divorce?'

He said to them, 'It was because you were so hard-hearted, that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning. Now I say this to you: anyone who divorces his wife -- I am not speaking of an illicit marriage -- and marries another, is guilty of adultery.'

The disciples said to him, 'If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry.'

But he replied, 'It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted. There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.'

Reflection

- Context. Up to chapter 18 Matthew has shown how the discourses of Jesus have marked the different phases of the progressive constitution and formation of the community of disciples around their Master. Now in chapter 19: 1 this small group withdraws from the territory of Galilee and arrives in the territories of Judaea. The call of Jesus that involves his disciples advances more until the decisive choice: the acceptance or rejection of the person of Jesus. Such a phase takes place along the road that leads to Jerusalem (chapters 19-20), and finally with the arrival in the city

and to the Temple (chapters 21-23). All the encounters that Jesus experiences in the course of these chapters take place along this journey from Galilee to Jerusalem.

- The encounter with the Pharisees. Passing through Trans-Jordanian (19: 1) the first encounter is with the Pharisees and the theme of the discussion of Jesus with them becomes a reason for reflection for the group of the disciples. The question of the Pharisees concerns divorce and places Jesus in difficulty, particularly, the more solid and stable reality for every Jewish community. The intervention of the Pharisees wants to accuse Jesus because of his teaching. It is a question of a true process: Matthew considers it as "testing him", "a way of tempting him". The question is really a crucial one: "Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatsoever?" (19: 3). The awkward malicious attempt of the Pharisees to interpret the text of DT 24, 1 to place Jesus in difficulty does not escape the attention of the reader: "Suppose a man has taken a wife and consummated the marriage, but she has not pleased him and he has found some impropriety of which to accuse her, he has, therefore, made out a writ of divorce for her and handed it to her and then dismissed her from his house". This text had given place, throughout the centuries, to innumerable discussions: to admit divorce for any reason whatsoever; to request a minimum of bad behavior, a true adultery.
- It is God who unites. Jesus responds to the Pharisees having recourse to Gn 1: 17: 2: 24, which presents the question about the primary will of God, the Creator. The love that unites man to woman, comes from God and because of its origin, it unifies and cannot be separated. If Jesus quotes Gn 2: 24: "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife and they become one flesh" (19: 5), it is because he wants to underline a particular and absolute principle: it is the creating will of God that unites man and woman. When a man and a woman unite together in marriage, it is God who unites them; the term "*coniugio*" - couple – comes from the verb joined together, to unite, that is to say, that the joining together of the two partners sexually is the effect of the creative word of God. The response of Jesus to the Pharisees reaches its summit: marriage is indissoluble from its original constitution. Jesus continues this time drawing from Ml 2: 13-16: to repudiate the wife is to break the covenant with God and according to the prophets this covenant has to be lived, above all, by the spouses in their conjugal union (Ho 1-3; Is 1: 21-26; Jr 2: 2; 3: 1, 6-12; Ez 16; 23; Is 54: 6-10, 60-62). The response of Jesus appears as a contradiction to the Law of Moses which grants the possibility to grant a writ of divorce. To motivate his response Jesus reminds the Pharisees: if Moses gave this possibility, it is because you were so hardhearted (v. 8), more concrete, because of your indocility to the Word of God. The Law of Gn 1: 26; 2: 24 had never been modified, but Moses was obliged to adapt it to an attitude of indocility. The first marriage was not annulled by adultery. To contemporary man and particularly, to the ecclesial community the word of Jesus clearly says that there should be no divorces; and, just the same, we see that there are; in pastoral life the divorced persons are accepted, to whom the possibility of entering into the Kingdom is always open. The reaction of the disciples is immediate: "If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry" (v. 10). The response of Jesus continues to sustain the indissolubility of matrimony, impossible for the human mentality but possible for God. The eunuch of whom Jesus speaks is not the one who is unable to generate but the one, who separated from his wife, continues to live in continence, he remains faithful to the first conjugal bond: he is an eunuch as regards all other women.

Personal Questions

- As regards marriage do we know how to accept the teaching of Jesus with simplicity, without adapting it to our own legitimate choices to be comfortable?
- The evangelical passage has reminded us that the design of the Father on man and on woman is a wonderful project of love. Are you aware that love has an essential law: it implies the total and full gift of one's own person to the other?

Concluding Prayer

God, create in me a clean heart, renew within me a resolute spirit, do not thrust me away from your presence, do not take away from me your spirit of holiness. (Ps 51: 10-11)

Saturday, August 19, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, your Spirit made us your children, confident to call you Father.

Increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

Gospel Reading – Mt 19: 13-15

The people brought little children to Jesus, for him to lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples scolded them, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of Heaven belongs.' Then he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

Reflection

The Gospel today is very brief; only three verses. The Gospel describes how Jesus accepts the children.

- Matthew 19: 13: The attitude of the disciples concerning the children. People brought little children to Jesus, for him to lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples scolded the mothers. Why? Perhaps because this was according to the severe norms of the Law of purity, the small children in the conditions in which they lived were considered unclean, impure. If they touched Jesus, he would become impure. Because of this, it was important to avoid that they should get close to him and that they touch him. Because it already had happened one time, when a leper touched Jesus. Jesus became unclean, impure and could no longer enter the city. He had to remain in deserted places (Mk 1: 4-45).
- Matthew 19: 14-15: The attitude of Jesus: he accepts and defends the life of the children. Jesus reproved the disciples and said: Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs." Jesus does not care about transgressing the norms which prevent

fraternity and acceptance to be given to the little ones. The new experience of God, the Father has marked the life of Jesus and gives him new eyes to perceive and to value the relationship between persons. Jesus gets on the side of the little ones, of the excluded and assumes their defense. It impresses when we see together everything which the Bible says regarding the attitudes of Jesus in defense of the life of the children, of the little ones:

- To give thanks for the Kingdom present in the little ones. Jesus' joy is great when he sees that the children, the little ones understand the things of the Kingdom which he announced to the people. "Father, I thank you!" (Mt 11: 25-26) Jesus recognizes that the little ones understand more about the things of the Kingdom, than the doctors!
- To defend the right to shout or cry out. When Jesus, entered the Temple, he upset the tables of the money changers, and the children were those who shouted: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Mt 21: 15). Criticized by the high priests and the Scribes, Jesus defends them and in his defense he recalls the Scriptures (Mt 21: 16).
- To identify oneself with the little ones. Jesus embraces the little ones and identifies himself with them. Anyone who accepts a little one accepts Jesus (Mk 9: 37). "In so far as you have done it to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25: 40).
- To accept and not to scandalize. One of the hardest words of Jesus is against those who are a cause of scandal for the little ones, that is, who are the cause why the little ones no longer believe in God. Because of this, it would have been better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around their neck (Lk 17: 1-2; Mt 18: 5-7). Jesus condemns the system, both the political one as well as the religious one, which is the reason why the little ones, the humble people, lose faith in God.
- To become like children. Jesus asks his disciples to become like children and to accept the Kingdom as children do. Without this, it is impossible to enter into the Kingdom (Lk 9: 46-48). It indicates that the children are professors of the adults. That was not normal. We are accustomed to the contrary.
- To accept and to touch. (Today's Gospel). The mothers with their children who get close to Jesus to ask him to bless the children. The Apostles react and drive them away. Jesus corrects the adults and accepts the mothers with the children. He touches the children and embraces them. "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them!" (Mk 10: 13-16; Mt 19: 13- 15). According to the norms of that time, both the mothers and their small children, practically, lived in a state of legal impurity. Jesus does not allow himself to be drawn by this.
- To accept and to take care. Many are the children and the young people whom he accepts, takes care of and rises from the dead: the daughter of Jairus, who was 12 years old (Mk 5: 41- 42), the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mk 7: 29-30), the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7: 14-15), the epileptic child (Mk 9: 25-26), the son of the Centurion (Lk 7: 9-10), the son of the public officer (Jn 4: 50), the boy with five loaves of bread and two fishes (Jn 6: 9).

Personal Questions

- Children: what have you learnt from children throughout the years of your life? And what do children learn about God, about Jesus and his life, from you?

- Which is the image of Jesus which I give to children? A sever God, a good God, distant or absent?

Concluding Prayer

Lord, give me back the joy of your salvation, sustain in me a generous spirit.

I shall teach the wicked your paths,
and sinners will return to you. (Ps 51: 12-13)

Sunday, August 20, 2023

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Gospel Reading Matthew 15: 21-28

A Key to Guide the Reading:

In today's text, Jesus meets a foreign woman, something forbidden by the religion of that time. At first Jesus would not pay attention to her, but the woman insisted and got what she wanted. This text helps us to understand how Jesus went about knowing and putting into practice the will of God.

A Division of the Text to Help With the Reading:

- Mt 15: 21-22: The pained cry of the woman
- Mt 15: 23-24: The strange silence of Jesus and the reaction of the disciples
- Mt 15: 25-26: The repeated request of the woman and Jesus' renewed refusal
- Mt 15: 27-28: The third try of the woman who obtains the healing of her daughter.

The Text:

21-22: Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Lord, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.'

23-24: But he said not a word in answer to her. And his disciples went and pleaded with him, saying, 'Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.'

25-26: But the woman had come up and was bowing low before him. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.'

27-28: She retorted, 'Ah yes, Lord; but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your desire be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What caught my attention most and pleased me most in this episode?
- Four characters appear in the text: the woman, the daughter, the disciples and Jesus. What does the text say about each one's attitude? With which of the four do you identify yourself most? Why?
- Jesus says that his mission does not permit him to listen to the woman's request. But soon after he grants her request. How do you explain this sudden change in Jesus' attitude?
- How did the woman's reply concerning the dogs and the scraps influence Jesus?
- Why do those words reveal the woman's great faith?
- How can Jesus' words help our community to grow in faith?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

The Context Within Which Matthew Preserves the Words of Jesus:

- Matthew's Gospel, written about 85 AD, is addressed to a community of pious and observant Jews, converted to faith in Jesus. After Jesus' example, they continued to live according to the traditions of the Jewish people, observing the Law of Moses in its fullness. But now in the 80s they find themselves in an ambivalent situation. After the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD), the Pharisees, their racial brothers, had started to reorganise Judaism, and, in the name of fidelity to that same Law of Moses, sought to block the ever increasing spread Christianity. They came to the point of expelling them from the synagogues. This unforeseen hostility brought the community of Christian Jews into deep crisis. Both the Pharisees and the Christians claimed to be

faithful to the law of God. Who was right? On whose side was God? To whom did the inheritance of the Jewish people belong, to the *synagogue* or to the *ecclesia*?

- It is precisely to encourage and support this group of Jewish-Christians that Matthew writes his Gospel. He writes to *confirm* them in the faith by showing that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the culmination of the whole history of the Old Testament. He writes to *strengthen* them in the midst of hostility, helping them to overcome the trauma of the break with the brothers. He writes to *call* them to a new practice of life, showing them the way to a new form of justice, better than that of the Pharisees.
- In this context, the episode of the Canaanite woman served to show the community how this same Jesus took concrete steps to go beyond the limitations of a religion turned in on itself and how he went about discerning the will of God beyond the traditional scheme.

A Commentary on the Words of Jesus as Preserved in Matthew:

- Matthew 15: 21: Jesus moves away from the Jewish territory.
In the discussion concerning what is pure and what is not, Jesus had taught that which was contrary to the tradition of the ancients, declaring all foods to be clean, and helped the people and the disciples free themselves of the chains of the laws on purity (Mt 15: 1-20). Now, in this episode of the Canaanite woman, he moves away from Galilee, goes beyond the frontiers of the national territory and welcomes a foreign woman who did not belong to the people and with whom it was forbidden to talk. The Gospel of Mark informs us that Jesus did not want to be known. He wanted to remain anonymous. But it is evident that his fame had already preceded him (Mk 7: 24). The people knew him and a woman begins to present him with a request.
- Matthew 15: 22: The anguished cry of the woman.
The woman was from another race and religion. She begins to beg for the healing of her daughter who was possessed by an unclean spirit. The pagans had no problem having recourse to Jesus. The Jews, however, had problems co-existing with the pagans! The Law forbade them to make contact with a person of another religion or race.
- Matthew 15: 23-24: The strange silence of Jesus and the reaction of the disciples.
The woman shouts, but Jesus does not respond. A strange attitude! Because, if there is one sure thing throughout the Bible, from beginning to end, it is that God always listens to the cry of the oppressed. But here Jesus does not listen. He does not want to listen. Why? Even the disciples are surprised by Jesus' attitude and ask him to say something to the woman. They want to get rid of that shouting: "Give her what she wants, they said, because she is shouting after us." Jesus explains his silence, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." His silence is connected with an awareness of his mission and his fidelity to the law of God. The passive form shows that the subject of the verb's action is the Father. It is as though he had said, "The Father does not want me to listen to this woman, because He has sent me only to the lost sheep of Israel!" For the same reason, at the time of Matthew's writing of the Gospel, the Pharisees were saying, "We cannot make contact with pagans!"
- Matthew 15: 25-26: The woman repeats her request and Jesus again refuses her.
The woman is not worried by the refusal of Jesus. The love of a mother for her sick daughter does not take notice of religious rules or the reaction of other people, but seeks healing wherever her intuition leads her to a solution, namely, in Jesus! She

draws closer, she throws herself at Jesus' feet and goes on begging, "Lord, help me". Faithful to the rules of his religion, Jesus answers with a parable and says that it is not right to take the bread of one's children and give it to dogs. The parallel is taken from everyday life. Even today, we find many children and dogs in the houses of the poor. Jesus says that no mother will take bread from the mouths of her children and give it to dogs. Concretely, the children are the Jewish people and the dogs are the pagans. End of story! Obedient to the Father and faithful to his mission, Jesus goes on his way and takes no notice of the pleading of the woman!

- Matthew 15: 27-28: At the third attempt, the woman obtains the healing of her daughter.

The woman will not yield. She agrees with Jesus, but she amplifies the parallel and applies it to her case, "Ah, yes, sir; but even housedogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table". She simply draws the conclusion from that image, showing that in the houses of the poor (and so also in the house of Jesus) the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of the children. Most probably, Jesus himself as a young boy would have given bits of bread to dogs that roamed under the table where he ate with his parents. And in "Jesus' house", that is, in the Christian community of Matthew's time, at the end of the first century, there were "twelve baskets full" left over (Mt 14: 20) for the "dogs", that is, for the pagans!

Jesus' reaction is immediate, "Woman, you have great faith!" The woman got what she asked for. From that moment her daughter was healed. The reason Jesus responded was that he understood that the Father wanted him to grant the woman's request. The meeting with the Canaanite woman freed him from the racial prison and opened him to the whole of humanity. This means that Jesus discovered the will of the Father by listening to the reactions of people. This pagan woman's attitude opened new horizons for Jesus and helped him take an important step in the fulfilment of the Father's plan. The gift of life and salvation is for all who seek life and who try to free themselves from the chains that bind vital energy. This episode helps us to perceive a little of the mystery that surrounded the person of Jesus, the manner in which he was in communion with the Father and how he discovered the will of the Father in the events of life.

Psalm 6

Let us unite ourselves to the shouts of all mothers for their sons and daughters

O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger, nor chasten me in thy wrath.

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.

My soul also is sorely troubled. But thou, O Lord--how long?

Turn, O Lord, save my life;

deliver me for the sake of thy steadfast love. For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?

I am weary with my moaning;

every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief, it grows weak because of all my foes. from me, all you workers of evil; for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer.

All my enemies shall be ashamed and sorely troubled; they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.

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 practise the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Monday, August 21, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,

may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 19: 16-22

A man came to Jesus and asked, 'Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one alone who is good. But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said, 'Which ones?' Jesus replied, 'These: You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. Honor your father and your mother. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these. What more do I need to do?' Jesus said, 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'

But when the young man heard these words, he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

Reflection

The Gospel today speaks to us about a young man who asks Jesus which is the way to eternal life. Jesus indicates to him the way of poverty. The young man does not accept the proposal of Jesus because he is very rich. A rich person is protected by the security of the riches which he possesses. He has difficulty to open the hand of his security. Attached to the advantages of his goods, he lives concerned to defend his own interests. A poor person does not have this concern. But there are some poor people who have the mentality of the rich. Many times, the desire for riches creates in them a great dependence and renders the poor, slaves of consumerism, because they seek riches everywhere. They no longer have time to dedicate themselves to the service of neighbor.

- Matthew 19: 16-19: The commandments and eternal life. A person approaches Jesus and asks him: "Master, what good deed should I do to possess eternal life?" Some manuscripts say that it was a young man. Jesus responds abruptly: "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one alone who is good!" Then he responds to the question and says: "If you wish to enter into life keep the commandments". The young rich man reacts and asks: "Which commandments?" Jesus very kindly enumerates the commandments which the young man already knew: "You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor father and mother, love your neighbor as yourself." The response of Jesus is very significant. The young man had asked what to do to obtain eternal life. He wanted to live close to God! But Jesus recalls only the commandments which refer to respect for the life close to others! He does not mention the first three commandments which define the relationship with God. According to Jesus, we will be well with God only if we are well with our neighbor. It is not worth it to deceive oneself. The door to reach God is our neighbor.
- In Mark, the question of the young man is different: "Good Master what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answers: "Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God alone." (Mk 10: 17-18). Jesus deviates the attention from himself toward God, because what is important is to do God's will, to reveal the project of the Father.
- Matthew 19, 20: What does it serve to observe the commandments? The young man responds: "I have always observed all these things. What more do I need to do?" What follows is strange. The young man wanted to know the way which leads to eternal life. Now, the way of eternal life was and continues to be: to do God's will, expressed in the commandments. In other words, the young man observed the commandments without knowing for what purpose. If he had known it he would not have asked the question. It is like for many Catholics who do not know why they are Catholics. "I was born a Catholic and this is why I am Catholic!" It is as if it was a custom!
- Matthew 19: 21-22: The proposal of Jesus and the response of the young man. Jesus answers: "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven; then come follow me". But on hearing these words the young man went away very sad because he was very rich. The observance of the commandments is only the first degree of a stairway that goes beyond, much farther and much higher. Jesus asks more! The observance of the commandments prepares the persons to be able to reach the point of giving oneself completely to the neighbor. Mark says that Jesus looked at the young man with love (Mk 10: 21). Jesus asks for very much, but he asks for it with much love. The young man did not accept the proposal of Jesus and goes away, "because he was very rich".
- Jesus and the option for the poor. A two-fold slavery marked the situation of the people at the time of Jesus: the slavery of the politics of Herod, supported by the Roman Empire and maintained by a whole system which was well organized for exploitation and repression, and the slavery of the official religion, maintained by the religious authority of the time. For this reason the clan, the families, the community, were disintegrating and the majority of the people were excluded, marginalized, homeless, without either a religion or a society. So, for this reason, there were diverse movements which, like Jesus, tried to build up life in the communities: Essens, Pharisees and later on, the Zelots. But in the community of Jesus, there was something new which made it different from the other groups. There was the attitude concerning the poor and the excluded. The communities of the Pharisees lived separated. The word "Pharisee" meant "separated". This was the attitude concerning the poor and the excluded. The communities of the Pharisees lived

separated from the impure people. Some Pharisees considered the people, ignorant and damned (Jn 7: 49), in sin (Jn 9: 34). They could learn nothing from the people (Jn 9: 34). On the contrary, Jesus and his community lived in the midst of persons who were excluded, considered impure; tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, lepers (Mt 2: 16; 1: 41; Lk 7: 37). Jesus recognizes the richness and the values which the poor possess (Mt 11: 25-26; Lk 21: 1-4). He proclaims them blessed, because the Kingdom is theirs, of the poor (Lk 6: 20; Mt 5: 3). He defines his mission in this way: "To announce the Good News to the poor" (Lk 4: 18). He himself lives poorly. He possesses nothing for himself, not even a stone where to recline his head (Lk 9: 58). And to anyone who wants to follow him, who wants to live like him, he orders that he choose either God or money! (Mt 6: 24). He orders to choose the poor, as he proposed it to the rich young man! (Mk 10: 21). This different way of accepting the poor and of living with them is a sign of the Kingdom of God.

Personal questions

- Can a person who lives concerned about his wealth or with acquiring the goods which the propaganda of consumerism offers, free himself from all this in order to follow Jesus and live in peace in a Christian community? Is this possible? What do you think?
- What does it mean for us today: "Go, sell all you possess and give it to the poor?" Is it possible to do this concretely? Do you know anybody who has succeeded to do this for the Kingdom?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing. In grassy meadows he lets me lie. By tranquil streams he leads me to restore my spirit. He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name. (Ps 23: 1-3)

Tuesday, August 22, 2023

The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Opening Prayer

God our Father,
may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.

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

Gospel Reading - Luke 1: 26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you!' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have

won God's favor. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.'

Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so, the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

Reflection

Today is the Feast of Mary Queen. The text of the Gospel on which we meditate describes the visit of the angel to Mary (Lk 1: 26-38). The word of God comes to Mary not through a Biblical text, but rather through a profound experience of God, manifested in the visit of the Angel. In the New Testament, many times, the Angel of God is God himself. It was thanks to the meditation on the written Word of God in the Bible that Mary was capable to perceive the living Word of God in the visit of the Angel. The same thing happens today with God's visits in our life. The visits of God are frequent. But because of lack of assimilation and meditation of the written Word of God in the Bible, we are not aware of God's visit in our life. The visit of God is so present and so continuous that, many times, we do not perceive it and, because of this, we lose a great occasion to live in peace and with joy.

- Luke 1: 26-27: The word enters into our life. Luke presents the persons and the places: a Virgin called Mary, betrothed to a man called Joseph, of the House of David. Nazareth was a small city in Galilee. Galilee was in the periphery. The center was Judah and Jerusalem. The Angel Gabriel was sent by God to this young virgin who lived in the periphery. The name Gabriel means God is strong. The name Mary means loved by Yahweh or Yahweh is my Lord.
The story of the visit of God to Mary begins with the expression: "In the sixth month". It refers to the "sixth month" of pregnancy of Elizabeth, relative of Mary, a woman of a certain age, who needs help. The concrete need of Elizabeth serves as a background to the whole episode. It is found at the beginning (Lk 1: 26) and at the end (Lk 1: 36, 39).
- Luke 1: 28-29: Mary's reaction. The angel had appeared to Zechariah in the Temple. The Angel appears to Mary in her house. The Word of God reaches Mary in the environment of her daily life. The Angel says: "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you!" These are words similar to those which were said to Moses (Ex 3: 12), to Jeremiah (Jr 1: 8), to Jedeon (Jz 6: 12), to Ruth (Rt 2: 4) and to many others. These words open the horizon for the mission which these persons of the Old Testament have to carry out in the service of the People of God. Deeply disturbed by this greeting, Mary tries to understand what it means. She is realistic, she uses her head. She wants to understand. She does not simply accept any apparition or inspiration.
- Luke 1: 30-33: The explanation of the angel. "Do not be afraid, Mary!" This is always the first greeting of God to human beings: do not be afraid! Immediately after that, the angel recalls the great promises of the past which will be realized through the son who will be born from Mary. This son must receive the name of Jesus. He will be called the son of the Most High and in him finally, will be realized the Kingdom of God

promised to David, which all were anxiously waiting for. This is the explanation which the Angel gave to Mary so that she would not be afraid.

- Luke 1: 34: New question asked by Mary. Mary becomes aware of the important mission which she is about to receive, but she continues to be realistic. She does not allow herself to be transported by the greatness of the offer and looks at her condition." But how can this come about? I have no knowledge of man". She analyses the offer according to criteria that we, human beings, have available. Because, humanly speaking, this was not possible that this offer of the Word of God would be realized at that moment.
- Luke 1: 35-37: New explanation by the angel. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God". The Holy Spirit, present in God's Word since Creation (Gn 1: 2), can realize things which seem impossible. This is why, the holy One who will be born from Mary will be called Son of God. When today God's Word is received, accepted by the poor who have no studies, something new takes place thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit! Something new and surprising like the son who is born to a virgin or like the son born from Elizabeth, a woman who was already old, of whom everybody said that she could have no children! The angel adds: "And I tell you this too, your cousin Elizabeth is now in her sixth month!"
- Luke 1: 38: Mary gives herself. The response of the angel clarifies everything for Mary. She gives herself to what the angel was asking for: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord! May it be done to me according to your word." Mary calls herself Servant, handmaid of the Lord. This title comes from Isaiah, who presents the mission of the people not as a privilege, but rather like a service to others (Is 42: 1-9; 49: 3-6). Later, the son who was about to be generated at that moment, will define his mission saying: "I have not come to be served but to serve!" (Mt 20: 28). He learns from his Mother!
- Luke 1: 39: The way that Mary finds to render service. The Word of God reaches Mary and makes her get out of self in order to serve others. She leaves the place where she was and goes toward Judah, at a distance of more than four days journey, in order to help her cousin Elizabeth. Mary begins serving and fulfills her mission in behalf of the People of God.

Personal Questions

- How do you perceive God's visit in your life? Have you been visited already? Have you been a visit from God in the life of others especially for the poor? How does this text help us to discover the visits of God in our life?
- The word of God became incarnate in Mary. How is the Word of God taking flesh in my personal life and in the life of the community?

Concluding Prayer

Let them thank Yahweh for his faithful love, for his wonders for the children of Adam! He has fed the hungry to their hearts' content, filled the starving with good things. (Ps 107: 8-9)

Wednesday, August 23, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening prayer

God our Father,

may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 20: 1-16

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Now the kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard.

Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage." So, they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing around, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You go into my vineyard too."

In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first." So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. They took it, but grumbled at the landowner saying, "The men who came last have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat."

He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?"

Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents a parable which is found only in Matthew's Gospel. It is not in the other Gospels. Like in all parables, Jesus tells a story about daily elements, daily things of the life of the people. He presents a picture of the social situation of his time, in which the listeners recognize themselves. But, at the same time, in the story of this parable, there are things which never take place in the reality of the life of the people. And this, because speaking about the master, Jesus thinks about God, about his Father. And this is why in the story of the parable; the master does things which are surprising which never take place in the daily life of the listeners. But, in this strange attitude of the master, it is necessary to find the key to understand the message of the parable.

- Matthew 20: 1-7: The five times that the landowner goes out to look for labourers. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers

for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard". This is how the story begins and it speaks for itself and does not need too many comments. In what follows, the landowner goes out four times to call other workers to go and work in his vineyard. Jesus refers to the terrible lack of work at that time. Now some details of the story:

- The landowner himself goes out personally five times to contract workers.
- When he contracts the workers, he fixes the salary only for the first group: one denarius a day. To those of nine o'clock in the morning he says: I will give you what is just, fair. With the others, he does not fix anything. He contracted them only to work in the vineyard.
- At the end of the day, when it was the time to pay the workers, the landowners orders the administrator to carry out this service.
- Matthew 20: 8-10: The strange way of fixing the accounts at the end of the day. When it was evening, the landowner of the vineyard told his administrator: Call the workers and pay them, beginning from the last ones to the first ones. Here, at the time of drawing the accounts, something strange takes place, which does not happen in normal life. It seems that things are inverted. The administrator begins to pay those who were contracted just an hour before. The salary is the same for all: one denarius as it was agreed with the first ones who were contracted at the beginning of the day. When the first came, they expected to get more but they too received one denarius each. Why does the landowner act like that? Would you do the same? It is precisely in this surprising gesture of the landowner that the key of understanding this parable is hidden.
- Matthew 20: 11-12: The normal reaction of the workers before the strange attitude of the landowner. The last ones also receive their salary as those who were contracted first. The story says that these began to grumble against the landowner and said: "The men who came last have done only one hour and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat". This is the normal reaction of a good sense. I think that all of us would have had the same reaction and would have said the same thing to the landowner. Would we have not?
- Matthew 20: 13-16: The surprising explanation of the landowner who gives the key of the parable. The response of the landowner is the following: "My friend, I am not being unjust to you. Did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you; have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?" These words give the key which explains the attitude of the landowner and indicates the message which Jesus wants to communicate to us:
 - The landowner was not unjust, because he acts according to what he had agreed with the first group of workers: one denarius a day.
 - It is the sovereign decision of the landowner to give to the last ones the same amount that he had agreed upon with those of the first hour. These do not have the right to complain and claim anything.
 - Acting with justice, the landowner has the right to do the good that he wants with the things that belong to him. The worker, on his part has this same right.
 - The last question touches on the central point: Why should you be envious because I am generous? God is different and his thoughts are not our thoughts (Is 55: 8-9).

- The background of the parable is the circumstance of the time, for Jesus as well as for Matthew. The workers of the first hour are the Jewish People, called by God to work in his vineyard. They bear the weight of the day, from Abraham to Moses, for over one thousand years. Now at the eleventh hour, Jesus calls the pagans, the gentiles to work in his vineyard and they succeed in having the preference in the heart of God. "Thus, the first ones will be last and the last will be first."

Personal Questions

- Those of the eleventh hour arrive, they have advantages and receive priority in regard to entrance into the Kingdom of God. When you wait in line for two hours, and a person arrives, and without saying anything she places herself before you. Would you accept this? Can these two situations be compared?
- God's action surpasses our calculations and our human way of acting. He surprises us and sometimes is uncomfortable. Has this happened to you in your life? What lessons have you drawn from this?

Concluding Prayer

Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life. I make my home in the house of Yahweh for all time to come. (Ps 23: 6)

Thursday, August 24, 2023

St. Bartholomew, Apostle

Opening Prayer

Father,

help us to seek the values that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world. In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.

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

Gospel Reading - John 1: 45-51

The next day, Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.'

Nathanael said to him, 'From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?'

Philip replied, 'Come and see.'

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, he said of him, 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception.' Nathanael asked, 'How do you know me?' Jesus replied, 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree.' Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.' Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.'

And then he added, 'In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man.'

Reflection

- Jesus returned to Galilee. He met Philip and called him telling him: "Follow me!" The purpose of the call is always the same: "to follow Jesus". The first Christians sought to preserve the names of the first disciples, and of some they even kept their family names and the name of their place of origin. Philip, Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida (Jn 1: 44). Nathanael was from Cana. Today many forget the names of the persons who were at the origin of their communities. To remember the names is a way of preserving the identity.
- Philip meets Nathanael and speaks to him about Jesus: "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth". Jesus is the one to whom all the history of the Old Testament refers.
- Nathanael asks: "From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?" Probably, even in his question there was some of the rivalry which existed among the small villages of the same region: Cana and Nazareth. Besides, according to the official teaching of the Scribes, the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, in Judah. He could not come from Nazareth in Galilee (Jn 7: 41-42). Philip gives the same answer which Jesus had given to the other two disciples: "Come and see for yourself!" It is not by imposing, but rather by seeing that persons are convinced. Once again, the same way: to meet, to experience, to share, to witness, to lead toward Jesus!
- Jesus sees Nathanael and says: "Truly, he is an Israelite in whom there is no deception". And affirms that he already knew him when he was under the fig tree. How could Nathanael be an "authentic or true Israelite" if he did not accept Jesus as the Messiah? Nathanael "was under the fig tree". The fig tree was the symbol of Israel (cf. Mi 4: 4; Zc 3:10; Kg 5: 5). An authentic Israelite is the one who knows how to detach himself from his own ideas when he perceives that they are not in agreement with God's project. The Israelite who is not ready to bring about this conversion is neither authentic nor honest. Nathanael is authentic. He was waiting for the Messiah according to the official teaching of the time (Jn 7: 41-42, 52). This is why at the beginning; he did not accept a Messiah coming from Nazareth. But the encounter with Jesus helped him to understand that God's project is not always as people imagine or desire that it be. He recognizes, acknowledges his deception or mistake, he changes his idea, accepts God as Messiah and confesses: "Rabi, you are the Son of God: you are the King of Israel!" The confession of Nathanael is only at the beginning: The one who will be faithful will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man. He will experience that Jesus is the new bond of union between God and us, human beings. It is the dream of Jacob which has become a reality (Gen 28: 10-22).

Personal Questions

- Which is the title of Jesus that pleases you the most? Why?
- Have you had an intermediary between you and Jesus?

Concluding prayer

Upright in all that he does, Yahweh acts only in faithful love. (Ps 145: 17) faithful love. (Ps 145: 17)

Friday, August 25, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,

may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 22: 34-40

The Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to put him to the test, one of them put a further question, 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?'

Jesus said to him, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.'

Reflection

The text is enlightened. Jesus is in Jerusalem and precisely in the Temple where a process between he and his adversaries is taking place, the chief priests and the Scribes (20: 18; 21: 15), between the chief priests and the elders of the people (21: 23) and between the chief priests and the Pharisees (21: 45). The point of controversy of the debate is: the identity of Jesus or of the Son of David, the origin of his identity, and, therefore, the question regarding the nature of the Kingdom of God. The evangelist presents this plot of debates with a sequence of controversies that present a growing rhythm: the tribute to be paid to Caesar (22: 15-22), the resurrection of the dead (22: 23-33), the greatest commandment (22: 34-40), the Messiah, son and Lord of David (22: 41-46). The protagonists of the first three discussions are representatives of the official Judaism who try to place Jesus in difficulty on some crucial questions. These disputes are addressed to Jesus in so far as he is "Master" (Rabbi), this title tells the reader the understanding that the interlocutors have of Jesus. But Jesus takes this occasion to lead them to ask themselves a more crucial question: the last time they took position concerning his identity (22: 41-46).

The greatest commandment. On the trail of the Sadducees who have preceded, the Pharisees ask Jesus a burning question: which is the greatest commandment? The Rabbis always first made evident the multiplicity of the prescriptions (248 commandments) the question is asked to Jesus regarding which is the fundamental precept. Just the same the Rabbis themselves had created a true survey to reduce them as far as possible: David lists eleven (Ps 15: 2-5), Isaiah six (Is 33: 15), Micah three (Mi 6: 8), Amos two (Am 5, 4) and Habakkuk only one (Hab 2: 4). But the intention of the Pharisees regarding their question, goes beyond every type of survey, it is a question of the essence itself of the prescriptions. Jesus, in answering binds together love of God and love of neighbor, so much so as to unite them in only one, but without renouncing to give priority to the first one, which subordinates, in a close way, the second one.

Thus, all the prescriptions of the Law, they were 613, are placed in relationship with this unique commandment: the whole Law finds its significance and foundation in the one of love. Jesus carries out a process of simplification of all the precepts of the Law: anyone who puts into practice the only commandment of love does not only observe the Law, but also the prophets (v. 40). Just the same, the novelty of the response is not so much in the material content as in its realization: in Jesus, the love of God and love of neighbor have their own context, their last solidity. That is to say, that God's love and of neighbor, shown and realized in some way in his person, guides man to place himself before God and before others through love. The only commandment in two, God's love and love for neighbor, become the supporting column, not only of the Scriptures, but also of the life of the Christian.

Personal Questions

- Is love for God and for neighbor only a vague sentiment, an emotion, a passing motion or a reality that affirms your whole person: heart, will, intelligence and human relationships?
- You were created out of love. Are you aware that your fulfilment takes place in God's love, to love Him with the whole heart, with the whole soul, with the whole mind? Such a love demands a confirmation of charity toward the brothers and sisters and their situation of life. Do you practice this in daily life?

Concluding Prayer

Let them thank Yahweh for his faithful love, for his wonders for the children of Adam! He has fed the hungry to their hearts' content, filled the starving with good things. (Ps 107: 8-9)

Saturday, August 26, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,

may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 23: 1-12

Then addressing the crowds and his disciples Jesus said, 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do and observe what they tell you; but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader headbands and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honor at banquets and

the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted respectfully in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. 'You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.'

Reflection

Today's Gospel is part of a long criticism of Jesus against the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23: 1-39). Luke and Mark mention only a few lines of this criticism against the religious heads of the time. It is only the Gospel of Matthew which has a longer presentation of this. This very severe text makes us foresee the polemics which existed in the communities of Matthew with the communities of the Jews of Galilee and Syria of that time.

In reading this text, which is strongly contrary to the one of the Pharisees, we have to be very attentive so as not to be unjust against the Jewish People. We Christians, for centuries, have had attitudes against the Jews and, for this reason, against the Christians. What is important in meditating these texts is to discover their objective. Jesus condemns the lack of coherence and of sincerity in the relationship with God and with the neighbor. He is speaking about hypocrisy, that of yesterday as well as that of today, of our hypocrisy!

- Matthew 23: 1-3: *The basic error: they say, but they do not do.* Jesus addresses himself to the multitude and to the disciples and criticizes the Scribes and the Pharisees. The reason for attacking them is the incoherence between their words and their acts. They speak but they do not do. Jesus recognizes the authority and the knowledge of the Scribes "*The Scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses! You must, therefore, do and observe what they tell you, but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach*".
- Matthew 23: 4-7: *The fundamental error is manifested in diverse ways.* The fundamental error is incoherence: "*They say, but they do not do*". Jesus enumerates the diverse points which reveal this incoherence. Some Scribes and Pharisees imposed heavy laws upon the people. They knew the Laws well, but they did not practice them; neither did they use their knowledge to lessen the weight imposed upon the people. They did everything possible to be seen and praised, they wore special tunics for prayer and they liked the first places and to be greeted in the public squares. They wanted to be called "Teacher". They represented a type of community which maintained, legitimized, and nourished the difference of social classes. It legitimized the privileges of the great and the inferior position of the little ones. Now, if there is something which displeases Jesus, it is appearances which deceive.
- Matthew 23: 8-12: *How to overcome the fundamental error.* How should a Christian community be? All the community functions should be assumed as a service: "*The greatest among you must be your servant!*" You should call nobody Teacher (Rabbi), nor Father, nor Guide; because the community of Jesus has to maintain, legitimize and nourish not the differences, but rather the fraternal spirit. This is the fundamental Law: "*You are all brothers and sisters!*" The fraternal spirit comes from the experience that Jesus is Father, and makes of all of us brothers and sisters. "*Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.*"

- *The group of the Pharisees!* The group of the Pharisees was born in the II century before Christ, with the proposal of a more perfect observance of the Law of God, especially regarding the prescriptions on purity. They were more open to novelty than the Sadducees. For example, they accepted faith in the Resurrection and faith in the angels, something which the Sadducees did not accept. The life of the Pharisees was an exemplary witness: they prayed and studied the Law during eight hours a day; they worked eight hours in order to be able to survive; they dedicated eight hours to rest. This is the reason why people respected them very much. And in this way, they helped people to keep their own identity and not to lose it, in the course of centuries.
- *The so-called Pharisaic mentality.* With time, the Pharisees took hold of power and no longer listened to the appeals of the people, nor did they allow them to speak. The word “Pharisee” means “separated”. Their observance was so strict and rigorous that they separated themselves from the rest of the people. This is why they were called “separated”. From this comes the expression “pharisaic mentality”. It is typical of the persons who think to obtain justice through the rigid and rigorous observance of the Law. Generally, they are persons who are afraid, who do not have the courage to assume the risk of liberty and of the responsibility. They hide themselves behind the Law and the authority. When these persons obtain an important function, they become harsh and insensitive and indifferent to hide their own imperfection.
- *Rabbi, Guide, Teacher, Father.* These are four titles that Jesus prohibits people to use. Today, in Church, the priests are called “Father”. Many study in the University of the Church and obtain the title of “Doctor” (Teacher). Many persons receive spiritual direction and take advice from persons who are called “Spiritual directors” (Guides). What is important is to take into account the reason which impelled Jesus to prohibit the use of these titles. If these were used by persons in order to affirm their position of authority and their power, these persons would be in error and would be criticized by Jesus. If these titles were used to nourish and deepen the fraternal spirit and service, they would not be criticized by Jesus.

Personal Questions

- Which is my reason for living and working in community?
- How does the community help me to correct and to improve my motivations?

Concluding Prayer

I am listening. What is God's message?

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

Sunday, August 27, 2023

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

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

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 16: 13-20

A Division of the Text to Help in the Reading:

- Matthew 16: 13-14: Jesus wants to know the opinion of the people;
- Matthew 16: 15-16: Jesus challenges the disciples, and Peter responds in the name of all;
- Matthew 16: 17-20: Solemn response of Jesus to Peter.

Key for the Reading:

In the Gospel of this Sunday, Jesus questions concerning who people think he is: "Who do people say that I am?" After knowing the opinion of the people, he wants to know the opinion of his disciples. Peter, in the name of all makes his profession of faith. Jesus confirms Peter's faith. In the course of the reading, let us pay attention to what follows: "Which type of confirmation does Jesus confer to Peter?"

The Text:

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?' 14 And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 15 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' 16 Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' 17 Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. 18 So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' 20 Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to say to anyone that he was the Christ.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- Which is the point which struck you the most? Why?
- Which are the opinions of people concerning Jesus? Which is the opinion of the disciples and of Peter concerning Jesus?
- Which is my opinion concerning Jesus? Who am I for Jesus?
- Peter is rock in two ways. Which? (Mt 16: 21-23)
- What type of rock am I for others? What type of rock is our community?
- In the text there are many opinions concerning Jesus and several ways of expressing faith. Today, also there are many diverse opinions concerning Jesus. Which are the opinions of our community concerning Jesus? What mission results for us from this?

To deepen the theme

Context in Which Our Text Appears in the Gospel of Matthew:

- The conversation between Jesus and Peter receives diverse interpretations and even opposite ones in the several Christian Churches. In the Catholic Church, this is the foundation for the primacy of Peter. This is why, without in fact, diminishing the significance of the text, it is convenient to place it in the context of the Gospel of Matthew, in which, in other texts, the same qualities conferred on Peter are almost all, attributed to other persons. They do not belong exclusively to Peter.
- It is always well to keep in mind that the Gospel of Matthew was written at the end of the first century for the community of the converted Jews who lived in the Region of Galilee and Syria. They were communities which suffered and were victims of many doubts concerning their faith in Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew tries to help them to overcome the crisis and to confirm them in the faith in Jesus, the Messiah, who came to fulfil the promises of the Old Testament.

Commentary on the Text:

- Matthew 15: 13-16: The opinions of the people and of the disciples concerning Jesus. Jesus asks the opinion of the people and of his disciples concerning himself. The answers are quite varied. John the Baptist. Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets. When Jesus questions about the opinion of his own disciples, Peter becomes the spokesman and says: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!". Peter's answer signifies that he recognizes in Jesus the fulfilment of the prophecy of the Old Testament and that in Jesus we have the definitive revelation of the Father for us. This confession of Peter is not new. First, after having walked on the water, the other disciples had already made the same profession of faith: "Truly You are the Son of God!" (Mt 14: 33). In the Gospel of John, Martha makes this same profession of Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of God who has come into the world" (Jn 11, 27).
- Matthew 16: 17: The response of Jesus to Peter: "Blessed are you, Peter!" Jesus proclaims Peter as "Blessed!" because he has received a revelation from the Father. In this case also, the response of Jesus is not new. First Jesus had made an identical proclamation of joy to the disciples for having seen and heard things which before nobody knew (Mt 13: 16), and had praised the Father for having revealed the Son to little ones and not to the wise (Mt 11: 25). Peter is one of these little ones to whom the Father reveals himself. The perception of the presence of God in Jesus

does not come "from the flesh nor from the blood", that is, it is not the fruit of the merit of a human effort, but rather it is a gift which God grants to whom he wants.

- Matthew 16: 18-20: the attributions of Peter:

Peter receives three attributions from Jesus:

- **To be Rock of Support:** Simon, the son of Jonah, receives from Jesus a new name which is Cephas, and that means, Rock. this is why he is called Peter. Peter has to be *rock*, that is, he has to be a sure foundation for the Church so that the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. With these words from Jesus to Peter, Matthew encourages the communities of Syria and Palestine, which are suffering and are the victims of persecutions, to see in Peter a leader on whom to find support, to base themselves concerning their origin. In spite of being weak and persecuted communities, they had a secure basis, guaranteed by the word of Jesus. At that time, the communities had very strong affective bonds with the persons who had begun, who were at the origin of the community. Thus, the Community of Syria and Palestine fostered their bond of union with the person of Peter. The community of Greece with the person of Paul. Some communities of Asia, with the person of the Beloved disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypses. Identifying themselves with these leaders of their origin helped the communities to foster their identity and spirituality better. But this could also be a cause of dispute, like in the case of the community of Corinth (1 Co 1: 11-12).

To be *rock* as the basis of faith evokes the Word of God to the people who are in exile in Babylonia: "Listen to me you who pursue saying injustice, you who seek Yahweh. Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave you birth; when I called him, he was the only one, but I blessed him and made him numerous" (Is 51: 1-2). Applied to Peter, this quality of *peter-foundation* indicates a new beginning of the people of God.

- **To Receive the Keys of the Kingdom:**

Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom to bind and to loosen, that is, to reconcile the persons among themselves and with God. Behold, that here again the same power to bind and to loosen, is given not only to Peter, but also to the other disciples (Jn 20: 23) and to their own communities (Mt 18: 18). One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists more is the reconciliation and forgiveness (Mt 5: 7, 23-24, 38-42-48; 6: 14-15- 35). In the years 80's and 90's, in Syria, because of faith in Jesus, there were many tensions in the communities and there were divisions in the families. Some accepted him as Messiah and others did not, and this was the cause for many tensions and conflicts. Matthew insists on reconciliation.

Reconciliation was and continues to be one of the most important tasks of the coordinators of the communities at present. Imitating Peter, they have to bind and loosen, that is, do everything possible so that there be reconciliation, mutual acceptance, building up of the true fraternity "Seventy times seven!" (Mt 18: 22).

- **To be the Foundation of the Church:**

The word Church, in Greek *eklesia*, appears 105 times in the New Testament, almost exclusively in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Letters. Only three times in the Gospels, and once only in the Gospel of Matthew. The word literally means "convoked" or "chosen". It indicates the people

who get together convoked by the Word of God, and who seek to live the message of the Kingdom which Jesus came to bring to us. The Church or the community is not the Kingdom, but an instrument or an indication of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is much greater. In the Church, in the community, what happens when a human group allows God *to reign* and allows God to be ‘Lord’ in one’s life, is rendered or should be rendered present to the eyes of all.

Deepening:

A Picture of Saint Peter:

Peter, who was a fisherman of fish, became fisherman of men (Mk 1: 17). He was married (Mk 1: 30). He was a good man, very human. He was a natural leader among the twelve first disciples of Jesus. Jesus respects this leadership and makes Peter the animator of his first community (Jn 21: 17). Before entering into the community of Jesus, Peter was called *Simão Bar Jona* (Mt 16: 17), that is, Simon, son of Jonah. Jesus calls him *Cefas or Rock* (Jn 1: 42), who later becomes *Peter* (Lk 6: 14).

By his nature and character, Peter could be everything, except *pietra – rock*. He was courageous in speaking, but in the moment of danger he allows himself to be dominated by fear and flees. For example, the time in which Jesus walked on the sea, Peter asks: “Jesus, allow me also to walk on the sea”. Jesus says: “You may come, Peter!” Peter got off from the boat and walked on the sea. But as soon as he saw a high wave, he was taken up with panic, lost trust, and began to sink and cry out: “Lord, save me!” Jesus assured him and saved him (Mt 14: 28-31).

In the Last Supper, Peter tells Jesus: “I will never deny you, Lord!” (Mk 14: 31), but a few hours later, in the Palace of the High Priest, in front of a servant, when Jesus had already been arrested, Peter denied, swearing that he had nothing to do with Jesus (Mk 14: 66-72).

When Jesus was in the Garden of Olives, Peter takes out the sword (Jn 18: 10), but ends fleeing, leaving Jesus alone. (Mk 14: 50). By nature, Peter was not rock!

But this Peter, so weak and human, so similar to us, becomes rock, because Jesus prays for him and says: “Peter, I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you in your turn must strengthen your brothers!” (Lk 22: 31-32). This is why Jesus could say: “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16: 18). Jesus helps him to be *rock*. After the Resurrection, in Galilee, Jesus appears to Peter and asks him two times: “Peter, do you love me?” And Peter responds two times: “Lord, you know that I love you!” (Jn 21: 15, 16). When Jesus repeats the same question a third time, Peter became sad. Perhaps he remembered that he had denied Jesus three times. To this third question he answers: “Lord, you know all things! You know that I love you very much!” And it is then that Jesus entrusted to him the care of his sheep, saying: “Peter, feed my lambs!” (Jn 21: 17). With the help of Jesus, the firmness of the rock grows in Peter and is revealed on the day of Pentecost.

On the day of Pentecost, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter opens the door of the room where all were meeting together, locked with a key because of fear of the Jews (Jn 20: 19), he takes courage and began to announce to the people the Good News of Jesus (Ac 2: 14-40). And he did not stop doing it! Thanks to this courageous announcement of the Resurrection, he was imprisoned (Ac 4: 3). During the trial, he was forbidden to announce the Good News (Ac 4: 18), but Peter does not obey this prohibition. He said: “We know that we have to obey God more than men!” (Ac 4: 19; 5:

29). He was arrested again (Ac 5: 18-26). He was tortured (Ac 5: 40). But he said: "Thank you. But we shall continue!" (cf. Ac 5: 42).

Tradition says that, towards the end of his life, in Rome, Peter was arrested and condemned to death, and death on the cross. He asked to be crucified with the head down. He believed he was not worthy to die like Jesus. Peter was faithful to himself up to the end!.

Completing the Context: Matthew 16: 21-23

Peter had confessed: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" He had imagined a glorious Messiah, and Jesus corrects him: "It is necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to die in Jerusalem". By saying that "it is necessary", he indicates that suffering has already been foreseen in the Prophecies (Is 53: 2-8). If Peter accepts Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, he has to accept him also as the servant Messiah who will be put to death. Not only the triumph of the glory, but also the journeys to the cross! But Peter does not accept the correction and seeks to dissuade him.

The response of Jesus is surprising: "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do". Satan is the one who separates us from the path which God has traced for us. Literally, Jesus says: "Get behind me" (Get away!). Peter wanted to place himself in front and indicate the direction. Jesus says: "Get behind me!" He who indicates the course and direction is not Peter, but Jesus. *The disciple* has to follow the Master. He has to live in continuous conversion.

The Word of Jesus is also a reminder for all those who guide or direct a community. They have "to follow" Jesus and not place themselves in front of him as Peter wanted to do. No, only they can indicate the direction or the route. Otherwise, like Peter, they are not rock of support, but they become a rock of obstacle. Thus, were some of the leaders of the communities at the time of Matthew, full of ambiguity. Thus, it also happens among us even today!

Psalm 121

The Lord is My Support

I lift up my eyes to the mountains; where is my help to come from? My help comes from Yahweh who made heaven and earth.

May he save your foot from stumbling; may he, your guardian, not fall asleep! You see -- he neither sleeps nor slumbers, the guardian of Israel.

Yahweh is your guardian, your shade, Yahweh, at your right hand.

By day the sun will not strike you, nor the moon by night.

Yahweh guards you from all harm Yahweh guards your life,

Yahweh guards your comings and goings, henceforth and forever.

Final Prayer

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

Monday, August 28, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening prayer

Father,

help us to seek the values that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world. In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 23: 13-22

Jesus Said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut up the kingdom of Heaven in people's faces, neither going in yourselves nor allowing others to go who want to.

'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte, and anyone who becomes one you make twice as fit for hell as you are.

'Alas for you, blind guides! You say, "If anyone swears by the Temple, it has no force; but anyone who swears by the gold of the Temple is bound." Fools and blind! For which is of greater value, the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? Again, "If anyone swears by the altar it has no force; but anyone who swears by the offering on the altar, is bound." You blind men! For which is of greater worth, the offering or the altar that makes the offering sacred? Therefore, someone who swears by the altar is swearing by that and by everything on it. And someone who swears by the Temple is swearing by that and by the One who dwells in it. And someone who swears by heaven is swearing by the throne of God and by the One who is seated there.

Reflection

During the next three days, we will meditate on the discourse pronounced by Jesus in which he criticizes the doctors of the Law and the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites. In today's Gospel (Mt 23: 13-22), Jesus pronounces against them four times the expression "Alas for you..." (Mt 23: 23-26), and in the Gospel of day after tomorrow, he uses this same expression two other times (Mt 23: 27-32). These are expressions against the religious heads of the times, and these are very hard words. In meditating them, I should not only think of the doctors and the Pharisees of the time of Jesus, but also, and above all in the hypocrisy found in me, in us, in our family, in the community, in our Church, in today's society. Let us look into the mirror of the text to discover the errors in ourselves.

- Matthew 23: 13: The first "Alas for you ..." against those who close the door of the Kingdom because in this way you will not enter and, you do not even let those who want to enter. How do they close the Kingdom? They do it by presenting God as a severe judge, leaving very little space for the mercy of God; by imposing, in the name of God, laws and norms which have nothing to do with the commandments of God, by presenting a false image of the Kingdom and by killing the desire to serve God and the Kingdom. A community which organizes itself around this false god "does not

enter into the Kingdom", and it is not even an expression of the Kingdom, and prevents its members from entering into the Kingdom.

- Matthew 23: 14: The second 'Alas for you ...' is against those who use religion to enrich themselves. You devour the property of widows, though you make a show of lengthy prayers. The more severe will be the sentence you receive because of this". Jesus allows the disciples to live the Gospel, because he says that the laborer has the right to his salary (Lk 10: 7; cf. 1 Co 9: 13-14), but to use prayer and religion as a means to enrich themselves, that is hypocrisy and does not reveal the Good News of God. It transforms religion into a market. Jesus drives out the merchants from the Temple (Mk 11: 15-19) quoting the prophet Jeremiah: "My house will be called a House of Prayer for all people; but you have turned it into a bandits' den!" (Mk 11: 17; cf. Is 56: 7; Jr 7: 11). When Simon the magician wanted to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter curses him (Ac 8: 18-24). Simon received the "most severe condemnation" of which Jesus speaks about in the Gospel today.
- Matthew 23: 15: The third expression of 'Alas for you ...' is against those who do proselytism you travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte, and anyone who becomes one you make twice as fit for hell as you are." There are persons who become missionaries and proclaim the Gospel not to radiate the Good News, but to attract persons for their group and their church. John once prohibited a person to use the name of Jesus because he was not part of his group. Jesus answered: "Do not prohibit him, because anyone who is not against us is for us (Mk 9: 39). The document of the Plenary Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America, which was held in March 2008 in Aparecida, Brazil, bears the title: "Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our people may have life in Him". That is, the purpose of the mission is not to do in such a way that people become Catholic, but rather that people may have life, and life in abundance.
- Matthew 23: 16-22: The fourth 'Alas for you ...' is against those who swear. "You say, if anyone swears by the Temple, it has no force, but anyone who swears by the gold of the Temple is bound". Jesus makes a long disquisition to show the incoherence of so many oaths that people made or that the official religion ordered to take: to swear for the gold of the Temple or for the offering which was on the altar. The teaching of Jesus given in the Sermon on the Mountain is the best commentary of today's Gospel: "But I tell you do not swear at all, either by heaven since that is God's throne, or by earth, since that is his footstool, or for Jerusalem since that is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need say is Yes if you mean yes, No, if you mean No; anything more than this comes from the Evil One" (Mt 5: 34-37).

Personal questions

- 'Alas for you...', is said four times; four reasons to receive a severe criticism from Jesus. Which of these four criticisms refers to me?
- Does our Church today deserve these 'Alas for you...' from Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh! Sing to Yahweh, all the earth! Sing to Yahweh, bless his name!

Proclaim his salvation day after day. (Ps 96: 1-2)

Tuesday, August 29, 2023

The Passion of St. John the Baptist

Opening Prayer

Father,

help us to seek the values that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world. In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.

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

Gospel Reading - Mark 6:17-29

Now it was this same Herod who had sent to have John arrested, and had had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife.' As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him, but she was not able to do so, because Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him.

An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you.' And he swore on her oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom.'

She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist.' The girl at once rushed back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, immediately, on a dish.' The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests; he was reluctant to break his word to her.

At once the king sent one of the bodyguards with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in the prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Reflection

Today we commemorate the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist. The Gospel gives a description of how John the Baptist was killed, without a process, during a banquet, victim of the corruption and arrogance of Herod and of his court.

- Mark 6:17-20. The cause of the imprisonment and murdering of John. Herod was an employee of the Roman Empire, who commanded in Palestine since the year 63 before Christ. Caesar was the Emperor of Rome. He insisted above all, in an efficient administration which would provide revenue for the Empire and for him. The concern of Herod was his own promotion and his security. This is why he repressed any type of corruption. He liked to be called the benefactor of the people, but in reality he was a tyrant (cf. Lk 22: 25). Flavio Giuseppe, a writer of that time, informs that the reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was the fear that Herod had of a

popular uprising or revolt. The denunciation of John the Baptist's against the depraved morality of Herod (Mk 6: 18), was the drop which made the glass overflow, and John was imprisoned.

- Mark 6: 21-29: The plot of the murderer. The anniversary and banquet of the feast, with dancing and orgy were the occasion for the murdering of John. It was an environment in which the powerful of the kingdom met together and in which the alliances were formed. In the feast participated "the great of the court, two officials and two important persons from Galilee". This was the environment in which the murdering of John the Baptist was decided. John, the prophet, was a living denunciation of that corrupt system, and this is why he was eliminated under the pretext of a personal vengeance. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of one man who had no control of self. In the enthusiasm of the feast, of the celebration and of wine, Herod makes a promise by oath to a young girl, a dancer. Superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to keep the promise made by oath. For Herod, the life of the subjects was worthless. This is how Mark gives an account of the fact as it happened and leaves the communities the task of drawing the conclusion.
- Between lines, the Gospel today gives much information on the time in which Jesus lived and on the way in which the power was exercised on the part of the powerful of that time. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod, the Great, from the year 4 before Christ until the year 39 after Christ, 43 years! During the whole time of the life of Jesus on earth there was no change of Government in Galilee! Herod was absolute lord of everything, and did not render an account to anyone, he did as he pleased. In him there was arrogance, lack of ethics, absolute power, without any control on the part of the people!

Herod constructed a new capital, called Tiberiades. Seffori the ancient capital, was destroyed by the Romans in retaliation against the popular revolt. This happened when Jesus was about seven years old. Tiberiade, the new capital, was inaugurated thirteen years later, when Jesus was approximately 20 years old. The capital was given that name in order to please Tiberius, the Emperor of Rome. Tiberiade was a strange place in Galilee. That was the place where the king, "the great of the court", the officials, the important people of Galilee lived (Mc 6: 21). The landowners, the soldiers, the policemen lived there and also the judges, who, many times were insensitive, and indifferent (Lk 18: 1-4). The taxes and tributes and the products of the people were channeled there. It was there that Herod held his orgies of death (Mk 6: 21-29). The Gospel does not say the Jesus entered the city.

During the 43 years of the government of Herod, a class of officials, faithful to the project of the king, was created: the Scribes, the merchants, the landowners, the tax collectors on the market, the tax collectors or publicans, the militia, policemen, judges, promoters, local heads. The majority of these persons lived in the capital and enjoyed the privileges which Herod offered, for example exemption from taxes. Others lived in the villages. In every village or city there was a group of persons who supported the government. Several Scribes and Pharisees were bound to the system and to the politics of the Government. In the Gospels, the Pharisees appear together with the Herodians (Mk 3: 6; 8: 15; 12: 13), and this shows the existing alliance between the religious and the civil powers. The life of the people in the villages of Galilee was very controlled, both by the government and by religion. Much courage was necessary to begin something new, as John and Jesus did! It was the same thing as to attract on oneself the anger of the privileged ones, both those of the religious power as those of the civil power, both at local and state levels.

Personal Questions

- Do you know any persons who died victims of corruption and the dominion of the powerful? And here, among us, in our community and in the Church, are there some victims of authoritarianism or of the excess of power? Give an example.
- Superstition, corruption, cowardice marked the exercise of power of Herod. Compare this with the exercise of religious and civil power today, in the various levels both of society and of the Church.

Concluding Prayer

In you, Yahweh, I take refuge, I shall never be put to shame.

In your saving justice rescue me, deliver me, listen to me and save me. (Ps 71: 1-2)

Wednesday, August 30, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

help us to seek the values that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world. In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 23: 27-32

Jesus said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of corruption. In just the same way, from the outside you look upright, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.'

'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build the sepulchres of the prophets and decorate the tombs of the upright, saying, "We would never have joined in shedding the blood of the prophets, had we lived in our ancestors' day." So! Your own evidence tells against you! You are the children of those who murdered the prophets! Very well then, finish off the work that your ancestors began.'

Reflection

These two last 'Alas for you ...' which Jesus pronounced against the doctors of the law and the Pharisees of his time, take again and strengthen, the same theme of the two 'Alas for you ...' of the Gospel of yesterday. Jesus criticizes the lack of coherence between the word and the practice, between what is interior and what is exterior.

- Matthew 23: 27-28: The seventh, 'Alas for you ..." against those who are like whitewashed tombs. You appear upright on the outside, but inside you are full of

hypocrisy and lawlessness". The image of "whitewashed sepulchers" speaks for itself and needs no commentaries. Jesus condemns those who have the fictitious appearance of upright persons, but who interiorly are the total negation of what they want to appear outside.

- Matthew 23: 29-32: The eighth 'Alas for you...' against those who build the sepulchers of the prophets and decorate the tombs of the upright, but do not imitate them. The doctors and the Pharisees said: "We would never have joined in shedding the blood of the prophets, had we lived in our ancestors' day". And Jesus concludes saying: The persons who speak like this "confess that they are children of those who killed the prophets", then they say "Our fathers". And Jesus ends saying: "Very well then, finish off the work that your ancestors began!" In fact, at that moment they had already decided to kill Jesus. In this way they were finishing off the work of their ancestors.

Personal Questions

- Still two other expressions, 'Alas for you...' but two reasons for being criticized severely by Jesus. Which of these is in me?
- Which image of myself do I try to present to others? Does it correspond, in fact, to what I am before God?

Concluding Prayer

How blessed are all who fear Yahweh, who walk in his ways!

Your own labors will yield you a living, happy and prosperous will you be. (Ps 128: 1-2)

Thursday, August 31, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father,

help us to seek the values that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world. In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.

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

Gospel Reading - Matthew 24: 42-51

Jesus said to his disciples: 'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

'Who, then, is the wise and trustworthy servant whom the master placed over his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed that servant if his

master's arrival finds him doing exactly that. In truth I tell you, he will put him in charge of everything he owns. But if the servant is dishonest and says to himself, "My master is taking his time," and sets about beating his fellow-servants and eating and drinking with drunkards, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.'

Reflection

The Gospel today speaks about the coming of the Lord at the end of time and exhorts us to be watchful, to watch. At the time of the first Christians, many persons thought that the end of this world was close at hand and that Jesus would have returned afterwards. Today many persons think that the end of the world is close at hand. And therefore, it is well to reflect on the meaning of vigilance, of watching.

- Matthew 24: 42: Watch. "So stay awake! Watch, because you do not know the day when your master is coming". Concerning the day and the hour of the end of the world, Jesus had said: "But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, no one but the Father!" (Mk 13: 32). Today, many people live concerned thinking about the end of the world. Have you seen when walking through the streets of the city that it is written on the walls: "Jesus will return!" And how will this coming be? After the year 1000, basing themselves on the Gospel of John, people began to say (Rev 20: 7): "1000 years have gone by, but 2000 will not pass by!" This is why, as the year 2000 approached, many were worried. There were even some people who were anguished because of the proximity of the end of the world, so much so that they committed suicide. Others, reading the Apocalypse of John, even were able to foretell the exact hour of the end. But the year 2000 came and nothing happened. The end of the world does not arrive! Many times, the affirmation "Jesus will return" is used to frighten people and oblige them to belong to a given church! Others, because they have waited so long and have speculated so much concerning the coming of Jesus, are not aware of his presence among us, in the most common things of life, in the facts of every day.
- The same problems existed in the Christian communities of the first centuries. Many persons of the communities said that the end of this world was close at hand and that Jesus would have returned. Some of the community of Thessalonica in Greece, basing themselves on the preaching of Paul said: "Jesus will return!" (1 Th 4: 13-18; 2 Th 2: 2). And this is why, there were even persons who no longer worked because they thought that the coming of the end was so close at hand, within a few days or a few weeks so, "Why work, if Jesus will return afterwards?" (cf. 2 Th 3: 11). Paul responds that it was not so simple as they imagined. And to those who had stopped working he would say: "Anyone who does not want to work, has no right to eat!" Others remained looking up at the sky, waiting for the return of Jesus in the clouds (cf. Ac 1: 11). Others rebelled because he delayed coming back (2 P 3: 4-9). In general, the Christians lived with the expectation of the imminent coming of Jesus. Jesus was coming to realize or carry out the Final Judgement to end with the unjust history of this world and to inaugurate the new phase of history, the definitive phase of the New Heaven and the New Earth. They believed that this would have taken place within one or two generations. Many persons would still be alive when Jesus would have appeared again, glorious in Heaven (1 Th 4: 16-17; Mc 9: 1). Others, tired of waiting would say: "He will never come back!" (2 P 3).

- Up until now the coming of Jesus has not arrived! How can this delay be understood? It is because they are not aware that Jesus has already returned and lives in our midst: "I am with you always, till the end of time." (Mt 28: 20). He is already at our side, in the struggle for justice, for peace, for life. The fullness has not as yet been attained, but a guarantee of the Kingdom is already in our midst. This is why, we expect with a firm hope the full liberation of humanity and of nature (Rm 8: 22-25). And while we wait and struggle, we say with certainty: "He is already in our midst" (Mt 25: 40).
- Matthew 24: 43-51: The example of the householder and of his servants. "Consider this: if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house." Jesus says this very clearly. Nobody knows anything regarding the hour: "Concerning this day and this hour, nobody knows anything, neither the angels, or the Son, but only the Father What is important is not to know the hour of the end of this world, but rather to be capable to perceive the coming of Jesus who is already present in our midst in the person of the poor (cf. Mt 25: 40) and in so many other ways and events of our daily life. What is important is to open the eyes and to keep in mind the commitment of the good servant of whom Jesus speaks about in the parable.

Personal Questions

- On which signs do people base themselves to say that the end of the world is close at hand? Do you believe that the end of the world is close at hand?
- What can we respond to those who say that the end of the world is close at hand? Which is the force which impels you to resist and to have hope?

Concluding Prayer

Day after day I shall bless you, Lord,

I shall praise your name for ever and ever. Great is Yahweh and worthy of all praise, his greatness beyond all reckoning. (Ps 145: 2-3)