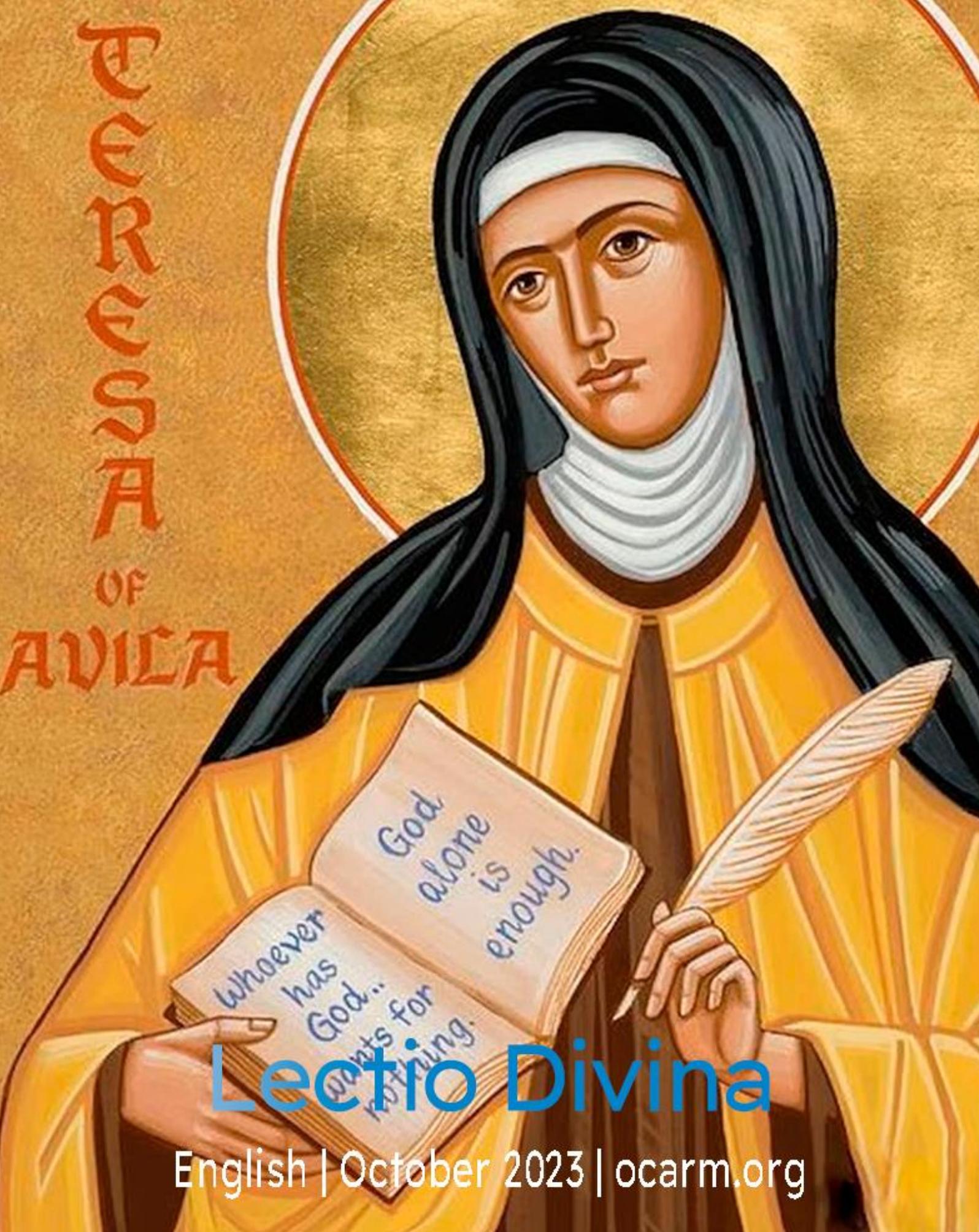


SAINTE  
TERESA  
OF  
AVILA



Lectio Divina

English | October 2023 | [ocarm.org](http://ocarm.org)

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# Sunday, October 1, 2023

*Twenty-Sixth Sunday of 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 – Mt. 21: 28-32

### A Key to Guide the Reading:

Jesus recounts a very common event in family life. One son says to the father, "I'm going!" but then does not go. Another son says, "I'm not going!" but then goes. Jesus asks his listeners to pay attention and express an opinion. In our reading let us be attentive so as to discover the precise point to which Jesus wishes to recall our attention.

### A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Mt. 21: 28-31<sup>a</sup>: The comparison
- Mt 21: 31b-32: The application of the comparison.

### The Text:

28-31a: 'What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, "My boy, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not go," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, "Certainl

y, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will?' They said, 'The first.'

31b-32: Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, showing the way of uprightness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.'

## 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.*

- Which point in this story of the two sons most caught your attention? Why?
- To whom does Jesus address himself? Why does He tell this parable?
- What is the main point underlined by Jesus in the attitude of the two sons?
- What kind of obedience does Jesus suggest through this parable?
- How exactly do the prostitutes and publicans get preference over the priests and elders?
- And I, where am I? Am I among the prostitutes and sinners or among the priests and elders?

## A Key to the Reading

*for those who wish to go deeper into the text.*

### **The Context Within Which Matthew places these words of Jesus (Matthew chapters 18-23):**

The context of Matthew's Gospel within which this parable is found is one of tension and danger. After the *Discourse on the community* (Mt 18: 1-35), Jesus leaves Galilee, crosses the Jordan and begins his last journey towards Jerusalem (Mt 19: 1). Long before, He had said that He was to go to Jerusalem to be apprehended and killed and that then He would rise again (Mt 16: 21; 17: 22-23). Now the time has come to go to the capital city and to face prison and death (Mt 20: 17-19).

- When He arrives in Jerusalem, Jesus becomes the subject of conflict. On the one hand the people welcome Him joyfully (Mt 21: 1-11). Even children acclaim Him when, with a prophetic gesture, He expels the sellers from the temple and He heals the blind and the lame (Mt 21:12-15). On the other hand the priests and doctors criticize him. They ask Him to tell the children to keep quiet (Mt 21: 15-16). The situation is so tense, that Jesus has to spend the night outside the city (Mt 21: 17; cfr Jn 11: 53-54). But the following day He goes back early in the morning and, on the road to the temple, curses the fig tree, symbol of Jerusalem, a fruitless tree bearing only leaves (Mt 21: 18-22). He then goes into the temple and begins to teach the people.
- While He is speaking to the people, the authorities come to discuss with him. Jesus answers them one by one (Mt 21:33-22:45), the high priests and the elders (Mt 21:23), the Pharisees (Mt 21:45; 22:41), the disciples of the Pharisees and of the Herodians (Mt 22:16), the Sadducees (Mt 22:23), and the doctors of the law (Mt 22:35). Finally, Jesus denounces at length, and in harsh terms, the scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23:1-36), followed by a tragic accusation against Jerusalem, the city that will not be converted (Mt 23:37-39). It is within this context of tension and danger that Jesus tells the parable of the two sons, the subject of our meditation.

### **Commentary on the Words of Jesus as Found in Matthew:**

- **Matthew 21: 28-30: An Example Taken from Family Life**  
What is your opinion? This is a provocative question. Jesus asks his listeners to be attentive and to reply. In the context of the parable, the listeners invited to give their opinion are the high priests and elders of the people (Mt 21: 23). These are the ones who, from fear of the people, would not give an answer to the question as to the origin of John the Baptist, whether He was from heaven or from earth (Mt 21: 24-27). These are the ones who will seek a way to arrest Him (Mt 21: 45-46).

A man had two sons. Jesus tells the story of a father who says to one of his sons "My boy, you go and work in the vineyard today." The young man replies, "Certainly, sir!" but then does not go. The father then says the same thing to his other son. This son replies, "I will not go!" but then goes. The listeners too are fathers of families and must have known these matters from personal experience.

Which of the two did the father's will? Jesus ends the parable by making explicit his initial question. The priests and elders answer promptly, the second! The answer came quickly because the matter concerned a familiar situation, well known and evident, one that they experienced in their own families and, most probably, practiced by them (and by all of us) when they were young. Thus, the answer was a judgment, not on the two sons in the parable, but also on themselves. By answering, the first, they were judging their own attitudes. For, in times past, they had so often told their father, "I will not go!" but then went under pressure of circumstances or because remorse led them to do that which the father asked. In their reply they show themselves as if they were obedient children.

This is precisely the function or the "trap" of the parable, namely, to bring the listeners to feel involved in the story, so that using their own experience as criterion, they would come to a value judgment of the story told in the parable. This judgment will soon be used as a key to apply the parable to life. The same didactic procedure may be found also in the parable of the vineyard (Mt 21: 41-46) and that of the debtors (Lk 7: 40-46).

- **Matthew 21: 31-32: Application of the Parable**

I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you! Using the reply given by the priests and elders as a key, Jesus applies the parable to the sinful silence of his listeners before the message of John the Baptist. The reply they gave becomes the sentence of their own condemnation. According to this sentence, it is the publicans and prostitutes who, at first, had said no to the father but then did the will of the Father, because they had received and accepted the message of John the Baptist as coming from God. Whereas they, the priests and elders, were the ones who, at first, had said yes to the father, but had not carried out that which the father had asked, because they would not accept the message of John the Baptist, not even in the face of so many who did accept it as from God.

Thus, by means of the parable, Jesus turns everything upside down: those who were considered transgressors of the Law and therefore condemned, were in truth those who had obeyed God and tried to walk the way of justice, while those who considered themselves obedient to the Law of God, were in fact those who disobeyed God.

The reason for this harsh judgment from Jesus lies in the fact that the religious authorities, priests and elders, would not believe that John the Baptist came from God. The publicans and the prostitutes, however, believed. This means that for Jesus, the contemplative outlook, the ability to recognize the active presence of God in persons and things of life, was not in the priests, not even among their leaders. Yet it was in those who were despised as sinners and unclean. It is easy to understand why these authorities decided to apprehend and kill Jesus: "when they heard these parables, the chief priests and the scribes realized He was speaking about them" (Mt 21: 45-46).

Anyone who wishes to apply this parable today would probably provoke the same anger that Jesus did through his conclusion. The same thing happens today. Prostitutes, sinners, the ignorant, some women, children, lay people, workers, people of color, prisoners, homosexuals, persons with AIDS, drunkards, drug addicts,

divorced persons, married clergy, heretics, atheists, unmarried mothers, the unemployed, the illiterate, the sick, that is, all those marginalized as not part of the religious circle, frequently have a sharper outlook in perceiving the way of justice than those of us who live all day in church and are part of the religious hierarchy. It is not just because a person belongs to the religious hierarchy, therefore, that He or she has an outlook that allows him or her to perceive the things of God in life.

## To Throw Light on the Words of Jesus

- **A New Way of Teaching People and to Speak of God.**

Jesus was not a scholar (Jn 7: 15). Unlike the apostle Paul, (Acts 23: 3), He did not go to the high school in Jerusalem.

He came from the country, from Nazareth, a small town in Galilee. Now, this carpenter from Galilee goes to Jerusalem and, without getting permission from the authorities, starts teaching the people in the square in front of the temple! He said new things. He spoke differently, divinely! The people were impressed by his way of teaching, "A new doctrine! Taught with authority! Different from that of the Scribes! (Mk 1: 22, 27). What Jesus did most was teach, it was a habit with him. Many times, the Evangelists say that Jesus taught. If they do not always say what Jesus taught, it is not because they are not interested in the content, but because the content comes through not only in the teaching but also in the gestures and in his attitude to the people. The content is never separate from the person who communicates it. The goodness and love that come through in his way of acting and of being with others are part of the content. They are like the "tempera," good content without goodness is like spilt milk.

- **Teaching through Parables.**

Jesus taught above all through parables. He had an extraordinary capacity to find comparisons in order to explain the things of God. Things that are not so evident by means of simple and clear examples, which the people knew and experienced in their lives in their daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: keeping to the experiences of life and keeping to the things of God, of the Realm of God.

Usually, Jesus does not explain the parables, but says, "Those who have ears to hear, listen!" Or "You have heard. Now try to understand!" For instance, the farmer who hears the parable of the seed says, "I know what the seed that falls on the ground is all about! But Jesus said that this is connected with the Realm of God. What does He mean?" We can then imagine the long conversations and discussions among the people. Once a bishop asked the community, "Jesus said that we must be like salt. What is salt used for?" The community discussed this and came up with more than ten purposes for salt! They then applied all this to the life of the community and discovered that to be salt is difficult and demanding. The parable had worked!

In some parables there are things that do not usually happen in life. For instance, when have we ever seen a shepherd leave ninety-nine sheep to go looking for the one that is lost? (Lk 15: 4). When have we ever seen a father who welcomes his dissolute son with a feast and not a word to scold him? (Lk 15: 20-24). Where have we ever seen a Samaritan who is better than a Levite or a priest? (Lk 10: 29-37). In this way, the parable provokes thought. It invites us to be involved in the story and to reflect on ourselves, starting from the experience of life and then confronting this with God. It makes us discover from experience that God is present in our everyday life. The parable is a participative form of teaching, of educating. It does not present every little detail. It does not give all the facts but entices us to discover. A parable changes our view; it makes us contemplatives, persons who delve into reality.

Herein lies the novelty of Jesus' teaching in parables. It is different from the teaching of the doctors who taught that God manifests himself only in the observance of the law. For Jesus, "The Realm of God is not the fruit of observance. The Realm of God is among you!" (Lk 17: 21).

## Psalm 121

### The Contemplative Eye Discovers the Presence of God in Life

I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved, he who keeps you will not slumber.

Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore.

## 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, October 2, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,

you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.

Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.

Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.

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

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 18: 1-5, 10

At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?'

So He called a little child to Him whom He set among them. Then He said, 'In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. 'Anyone who welcomes one little child like this in my name welcomes me.

'See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that they are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven.

## Reflection

Today's Gospel presents a text taken from the Discourse of the Community (Mt 18: 1-35), in which Matthew gathers together some phrases of Jesus to help the communities of the first century to overcome the two problems which they had to face at that moment: the leaving or going away of the little ones because of the scandal caused by some (Mt 18: 1-14) and the need for dialogue to overcome the internal conflicts (Mt 18: 15-35). The discourse of the Community treats several themes: the exercise of power in the community (Mt 18: 1-4), the scandal that excludes the little ones (Mt 18: 5-11), the obligation to struggle to bring back the little ones, for their return (Mt 18: 12-14), fraternal correction (Mt 18: 15-18), prayer (Mt 18: 19-20) and pardon (Mt 18: 21-35). The accent is placed on acceptance and on reconciliation because the basis of fraternity is the gratuitous love of God which accepts us and forgives us. It is only in this way that the community will be a sign of the Kingdom.

In today's Gospel we meditate on the part that speaks about the acceptance of the little ones. The expression, the little ones, or the least, does not only refer to children, but rather to persons who are not important in society, including children. Jesus asks that the little ones be at the center of the concern of the community, because "The Father does not want any of these little ones to be lost" (Mt 18: 14).

- Matthew 18: 1: The question of the disciples which results in the teaching of Jesus. The disciples want to know who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. The simple fact of asking this question indicates that they have not understood the message of Jesus well. The response of Jesus and the whole discourse of the community serves to make us understand that among the followers of Jesus the spirit of service, dedication to pardon, reconciliation and gratuitous love, without seeking one's own interest, has to be a priority.
- Matthew 18: 2-5: the fundamental criterion; the one who makes himself as little as this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. "Then Jesus called to himself a child and placed him in the middle"; the disciples want a reference point so as to be able to measure the importance of persons in the community. Jesus responds that it is the little ones! Children are not important in society; they do not belong to the world of the great. The disciples, instead of growing towards the heights and toward the center, should grow down and toward the periphery! In this way they will be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven! And the reason for this is the following: "anyone who welcomes one little child like this, in my name, welcomes me!" The love of Jesus for the little ones cannot be explained. The children have no merit; they are loved by their parents because they are children, not because of their position or ability or power. This is a pure gratuitous love of God which is manifested here and which can be imitated in the community of those who believe in Jesus.
- Matthew 18: 6-9: Do not scandalize the little ones. The Gospel today omits verses 6 to 9 and continues in verse 10. We give a brief key for the reading of these verses from 6 to 9. To scandalize the little ones means to be a reason for the loss of their faith in God and abandonment from the community. The excessive insistence on the norms

and observance, as some Pharisees did, caused the little ones to go away, because they no longer found the liberty that Jesus had brought. Before this, Matthew keeps very strong phrases from Jesus, such as the one of the millstones put around the neck, and the other one, "Alas for those who cause scandal!" This is a sign that at that time the little ones no longer identified themselves with the community and looked for another refuge. And today? In Brazil alone, every year, approximately one million persons abandon the historical churches and go to the Pentecostal ones. And these are the poor who do this. They leave because the poor and the little ones do not feel at home in their house! What is the reason? To avoid this scandal, Jesus orders to cut off the foot or the hand and take out the eye. These affirmations of Jesus cannot be taken literally. They mean that it is necessary to be very demanding in the struggle against scandal which drives away the little ones. It means to remove those things in our actions and ways that drive the little ones away. The hand, foot and eye were the mechanisms for action then. Today we have many more ways to perform actions and to interact with each other. We cannot in any way allow that the little ones feel marginalized in our community because in this case, the community would not be a sign of the Kingdom of God. It would not belong to Jesus Christ. It would not be Christian.

- Matthew 18: 10: The angels of the little ones are always in the presence of the Father. "See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in Heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in Heaven." Today we sometimes hear the question, "But do the angels exist or not? Perhaps they are an element of the Persian culture, where the Jews lived for long centuries during the Babylonian exile?" It is possible. But this is not the important thing or the principal aspect. In the Bible the angel has a different significance. There are texts which speak about the Angel of Yahweh or of the Angel of God and then suddenly they speak of God. They exchange one for the other (Gen 18: 1-2, 9, 10, 13, 16: cf. Gen 13: 3, 18). In the Bible the angel is the face of Yahweh turned toward us. The face of God turned toward me and toward you! It is the expression of the most profound conviction of our faith, that God is with us and with me -- always! It is a way of making God's love concrete in our life, even up to the smallest detail.

## Personal Questions

- Are the little ones accepted in our community? Do the poorest people participate in our community?
- The angels of God, our Guardian Angel, and many times the angel of God, is the person who helps another person. Are there many angels in your life?

## Concluding Prayer

Lord, you created my inmost self,  
knit me together in my mother's womb. For so many marvels I thank you;  
a wonder am I,  
and all your works are wonders. (Ps 139: 13-14)

# Tuesday, October 3, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,

you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.

Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.

Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.

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

## Gospel Reading - Luke 9: 51-56

It happened that as the time drew near for Him to be taken up, He resolutely turned his face towards Jerusalem and sent messengers ahead of him.

These set out, and they went into a Samaritan village to make preparations for him, but the people would not receive Him because He was making for Jerusalem.

Seeing this, the disciples James and John said, 'Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?' But He turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village.

## Reflection

The Gospel today narrates and tells us how Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem. It also describes the first difficulties which He finds along this road. He presents us the beginning of the long and hard way of the periphery toward the capital city. Jesus leaves Galilee and goes toward Jerusalem. Not all can understand him. Many abandon him, because the demands are enormous. Today, the same thing happens. Along the way in our community there are misunderstandings and abandonment.

- "Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem." This decision marks the hard and long way of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the periphery to the capital city. This journey occupies more than one third part of the Gospel of Luke (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28). This is a sign that the voyage to Jerusalem was of great importance in the life of Jesus. The long walk is also the symbol of the journey that the community is making. They seek to go through a difficult passage from the Jewish world toward the world of the Greek culture. This also symbolized the tension between the new and the ancient which was closing more and more in on itself. It also symbolizes the conversion which each one of us has to carry out in trying to follow Jesus. During the journey, the disciples try to follow Jesus, without returning back; but they do not always succeed. Jesus dedicates much time instructing those who follow Him closely. We have a concrete example of this instruction in today's Gospel. At the beginning of the journey, Jesus leaves Galilee and takes with Him the disciples to the territory of the Samaritans. He tries to form them so that they will be ready to understand the openness to the New, toward the other, toward what is different.
- Luke 9: 51: *Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem.* The Greek text says literally: "Now it happened that as the time drew near for Him to be taken up, He resolutely turned his face towards Jerusalem." The expression "assumption" or "being snatched" recalls the Prophet Elijah snatched to heaven (2 K 2: 9-11). The expression "turned his face" recalls the Servant of Yahweh who said: "I have set my face like flint and I know I shall

not be put to shame” (Is 50: 7). It also recalls an order which the Prophet Ezekiel received from God: “Turn your face toward Jerusalem!” (Ez 21: 7). To face something is to address it. One can meet someone face-to-face, which implies a gravity to the meeting. It is an expression that means there is seriousness, and not just a casual stroll. In using these expressions Luke suggests that while they were walking toward Jerusalem, the most open opposition to Jesus began with the official expectations and ideology of the Temple of Jerusalem. Those expectations wanted a glorious and nationalistic Messiah. Jesus wants to be a Servant Messiah. During the long journey, this opposition will increase and will finally end in the arrest of Jesus. The snatching of Jesus is his death on the Cross, followed by his Resurrection.

- Luke 9: 52-53: *The mission in Samaria failed.*  
During the journey, the horizon of the mission is extended. After the beginning, Jesus goes beyond the frontiers of the territory and of the race. He sends his disciples to go and prepare his arrival in a town of Samaria. But the mission together with the Samaritans fails. Luke says that the Samaritans did not receive Jesus because He was going to Jerusalem. But if the disciples would have said to the Samaritans: “Jesus is going to Jerusalem to criticize the project of the Temple and to demand a greater openness,” Jesus would have been accepted, because the Samaritans were of the same opinion. The failure of the mission is probably due to the disciples. They did not understand why Jesus “turned His face toward Jerusalem.” The official propaganda of the glorious and nationalistic Messiah prevented them from perceiving this. The disciples did not understand the openness of Jesus and therefore mission failed!
- Luke 9: 54-55: *Jesus does not accept the request of vengeance.*  
James and John do not want to take home this defeat. They do not accept that someone is not in agreement with their ideas. They want to imitate Elijah and use fire for revenge (2 K 1: 10). Jesus rejects the proposal. He does not want the fire. Some Bibles add: “You do not know what spirit is moving you!” This means that the reaction of the disciples was not according to the Spirit of Jesus. When Peter suggests to Jesus to not follow the path of the Servant Messiah, Jesus turns to Peter calling him Satan (Mk 8: 33). Satan is the evil spirit who wants to change the course of the mission of Jesus. The message of Luke for the communities: those who want to hinder the mission among the pagans are moved by the evil spirit!
- In the ten chapters which describe the journey up to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28), Luke constantly reminds us that Jesus is on the way toward Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51, 53, 57; 10: 1, 38; 11: 1; 13: 22, 33; 14: 25; 17: 11; 18: 31; 18: 37; 19: 1, 11, 28). He rarely says where Jesus passed. Only at the beginning of the journey (Lk 9: 51), in the middle (Lk 17: 11), and at the end (Lk 18: 35; 19: 1), is something known about the place where Jesus was passing. This refers to the communities of Luke and for all of us. The only thing that is sure is that we have to continue to walk. We cannot stop. But the place where we have to pass by is not always clear and definite. What is sure is the objective: Jerusalem.

## Personal Questions

- What are the problems which you have to face in your life because of the decision which you have taken to follow Jesus?
- What can we learn from the pedagogy of Jesus with his disciples who wanted to take revenge on the Samaritans?

## Concluding Prayer

All the kings of the earth give thanks to you, Yahweh, when they hear the promises you make;

they sing of Yahweh's ways,

'Great is the glory of Yahweh!' (Ps 138: 4-5)

## Wednesday, October 4, 2023

### Opening Prayer

O God, by whose gift Saint Francis was conformed to Christ in poverty and humility, grant that, by walking in Francis' footsteps, we may follow your Son, and, through joyful charity, come to be united with you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

### Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 25-30

At that time Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do.

Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

'Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

### Reflection

Today we celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the Gospel we will listen to the invitation of Jesus: "Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart." The Gospel shows the tenderness with which Jesus welcomes and accepts the little ones. He wanted the poor to find rest and peace in him.

The context of chapters 11 and 12 of Matthew. In this context it is stressed and made evident that the poor are the only ones to understand and to accept the wisdom of the Kingdom. Many people did not understand this preference of Jesus for the poor and the excluded.

- John the Baptist, who looked at Jesus with the eyes of the past had doubts (Mt 11: 1-15)
- The people, who looked at Jesus with their own interests were not capable of understanding Him (Mt 11: 16-19).
- The great cities around the lake which listened to Jesus' preaching and saw the miracles did not want to open themselves to his message (Mt 11: 20-24).
- The wise and the doctors who judged everything according to their own science were not capable of understanding the preaching of Jesus (Mt 11: 25).
- Not even his relatives understood Him (Mt 12: 46-50).

- Only the little ones understood Him and accepted the Good News of the Kingdom (Mt 11: 25-30).
  - The others want sacrifice, but Jesus wants mercy (Mt 12: 1-8).
  - The reaction against Jesus impels the Pharisees to want to kill Him (Mt 12: 9-14).
  - They said that Jesus was Beelzebul (Mt 12: 22-32).
  - But Jesus did not draw back. He continues to assume the mission of Servant, as described in the prophecies (Mt 12: 15-21). This is why He was persecuted and condemned to death.
- Matthew 11: 25-26: Only the little ones understand and accept the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus addresses a prayer to the Father: "I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do!" The wise and the doctors of that time had created a series of laws which they imposed upon the people in the name of God. They thought that God demanded this observance from the people. But the law of love, brought by Jesus, said the contrary. What is important is not what we do for God, but rather what God, in his great love, does for us! People understood the words of Jesus and were filled with joy. The wise thought that Jesus was not right. They could not understand this teaching which modified the relationship of the people of God.
  - Matthew 11: 27: The origin of the New Law: The Son knows the Father. Jesus, the Son, knows the Father. He knows what the Father wanted when, centuries before, He gave the Law to Moses. What the Father wants to tell us, He handed to Jesus, and Jesus revealed it to the little ones because they opened themselves up to his message. Today, also, Jesus continues to teach many things to the poor and to the little ones. The wise and the intelligent do well if they become pupils of the little ones!
  - Matthew 11: 28-30: "Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest." Jesus invites all those who are tired to find rest in him. These are the people who are tired under the weight of the impositions and the observances which the law of purity demanded. And He says: "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart." Many times this phrase has been manipulated to ask people to submit themselves, to be passive. What Jesus wants to say is the contrary. He asks people to leave aside the professors of religion of that time, to rest and to begin to learn from him, Jesus, who is "gentle and humble of heart." Jesus does not do like the Scribes who pride themselves on their own science, but He is like the people who live humiliated and exploited. Jesus, the new teacher, knows from experience what happens in the heart of the people and how much the people suffer.
  - The invitation of divine wisdom to all those who seek it. Jesus invites all those who are oppressed under the weight of the observance of the law to find rest in him, because He is gentle and humble of heart, capable of relieving and consoling the people who suffer, who feel tired and depressed (Mt 11: 25-30). In this invitation resounds the beautiful words of Isaiah who consoled the people who lived in exile (Is 55: 1-3). This invitation is bound to divine wisdom, which invites persons to the encounter with her (Ws 24: 19), saying: "her ways are filled with delight; her paths all lead to contentment" (Pr 3: 17). And he adds: "Wisdom brings up her own children and cares for those who seek her. Whoever loves her, loves life, those who seek her early will be filled with joy" (Si 4: 11-12). This invitation reveals a very important characteristic of the feminine face of God: tenderness and acceptance which consoles and gives life to people and leads them to feel well. Jesus is the protection and the maternal womb which the Father offers to people who are tired (cfr. Is 66: 10-13).

## Personal Questions

- What produces tension in you and what gives you peace? For you, to live in community, is it a source of tension or of peace?
- How can these words of Jesus help our community to be a place of rest for our life?

## Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is tenderness and pity,  
slow to anger and rich in faithful love; his indignation does not last forever,  
nor his resentment remain for all time. (Ps 103: 8-9)

## Thursday, October 5, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.

Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.

Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.

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

## Gospel Reading - Luke 10: 1-12

In those days the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of Him in pairs to all the towns and places He himself would be visiting.

He said to them, 'The harvest is rich but the laborers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to do his harvesting. Start off now, but look, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Take no purse with you, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road.

Whatever house you enter, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!" And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you. Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not move from house to house.

Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is put before you. Cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not make you welcome, go out into its streets and say, "We wipe off the very dust of your town that clings to our feet, and leave it with you. Yet be sure of this: the kingdom of God is very near." I tell you, on the great Day it will be more bearable for Sodom than for that town.'

## Reflection

- Context: Chapter 10, which begins with this passage, presents a characteristic of revelation. In 9: 51 it is said that Jesus “resolutely turned his face toward Jerusalem.” This journey, an expression of his being Son, is characterized by a two-fold action: He is closely united “to the fact of being taken away” (v. 51), and his “coming” through the sending out of his disciples (v. 52). There is a bond of union in the double movement: “to be taken away from the world” to go toward the Father, and to be sent to men. In fact, it happens that sometimes the one sent is not accepted (9: 52 and, therefore, He has to learn how to be “delivered,” without allowing himself, because of this, to be modified by the rejection of men (9: 54-55).

Three brief scenes make the reader understand the meaning of following Jesus who is going to Jerusalem to be taken out of the world. In the first one, a man is presented who desires to follow Jesus wherever He goes. Jesus invites him to abandon all that he has - all that gives him well-being and security. Those who want to follow Him have to share his destiny of a nomad life. In the second scene it is Jesus who takes the initiative and He calls a man whose father has just died. The man asks to delay in responding to the call in order to comply with the law and to his duty to bury the parents.

The urgency of announcing the Kingdom exceeds this duty. The concern of burying the dead is useless because Jesus goes beyond the doors of death and He fulfils this even for those who follow him. In the third scene, a man is presented who offers himself spontaneously to follow Jesus but He places a condition: to bid farewell to his parents. To enter into the Kingdom one does not delay. After this three-fold renunciation, the expression of Luke 9: 60, “Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God,” introduces the theme of chapter 10.

- The dynamic of the account. The passage which is the object of our meditation begins with somewhat dense expressions. The first one, “After these things, it sends us back to the prayer of Jesus and to his firm decision to go to Jerusalem. The second one concerns the verb “appointed”: He appointed seventy-two others and sent them out...” (10: 1). Where it is said concretely that He sent them ahead of him, it is the same resolute Jesus who is journeying to Jerusalem. The recommendations that He addresses to them before sending them are an invitation to be aware of the reality to which they are sent: abundant harvest in contrast to the few laborers. The Lord of the harvest arrives with all his force but the joy of that arrival is hindered by the reduced number of laborers.

Therefore, the categorical invitation to prayer: “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to do his harvesting” (v. 2). The initiative of sending out on mission is the competence of the Father but Jesus transmits the order: “Start off now” and then He indicates the ways of following (vv. 4-11). He begins with the luggage: no purse, no sack nor sandals. These are elements that show the fragility of the one who is sent and his dependence on the help that they receive from the Lord and from the people of the city. The positive prescriptions are synthesized first in arriving to a house (vv. 5-7) and then in the success in the city (Vv. 8-11). In both cases, the refusal is not excluded.

The house is the first place where the missionaries have the first exchanges, the first relationships, valuing the human gestures of eating and drinking and of resting as simple and ordinary mediations to communicate the Gospel. “Peace” is the gift that precedes their mission, that is to say, fullness of life and of relationships, the true and real joy of the arrival of the Kingdom. It is not necessary to seek comfort and it is indispensable to be welcomed. Instead, the city becomes, the most extensive field of the mission. It is there that life, political activity, the

possibility of conversion, acceptance, and rejection are developed. This last aspect is linked to the gesture of shaking off the dust (vv. 10-11). It is as if the disciples, in abandoning the city that has rejected them, would say to the people that they possess nothing as an expression of the end of the relationship. Finally, Jesus recalls the guilt of that city which will close itself to the proclamation of the Gospel (v. 12).

## Personal Questions

- You are invited every day by the Lord to announce the Gospel to those close to you (in the house) and to all persons (in the city). Do you assume a poor, essential style in witnessing your identity as a Christian?
- Are you aware that the success of your witness does not depend on your individual capacity but only on the Lord who orders and on your availability?

## Concluding Prayer

Your face, Yahweh, I seek; Do not turn away from me.

Do not thrust aside your servant in anger, without you I am helpless.

Never leave me, never forsake me, God, my Saviour. (Ps 27: 8-9)

## Friday, October 6, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,

you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.

Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.

Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.

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

## Gospel Reading - Luke 10: 13-16

Jesus said: 'Alas for you, Corazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. And still, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the Judgement than for you. And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be raised high as heaven? You shall be flung down to hell.

'Anyone who listens to you listens to me; anyone who rejects you rejects me, and those who reject me reject the one who sent me.'

## Reflection

The Gospel today continues speaking about the sending out of the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10: 1-12). At the end, after sending them out, Jesus speaks about shaking off the dust from their shoes if the missionaries are not welcomed or accepted (Lk 10: 10- 12). Today's Gospel stresses and extends the threats upon those who refuse to receive the Good News.

- Luke 10: 13-14: Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! The place which Jesus travelled or covered in the three years of his missionary life was small. It measures only a few square kilometres along the Sea of Galilee around the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin. In precisely this very small space Jesus works the majority of his miracles and presents his discourses. He has come to save the whole of humanity, and He hardly went out of the limited space of his land. But, tragically, Jesus had to see that the people of those cities do not want to accept the message of the Kingdom and are not converted. The cities fixed themselves in the rigidity of their beliefs, traditions and customs and they do not accept the invitation of Jesus to change their life. Alas for you, Chorazin; Alas for you Bethsaida! For if the miracle done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes." Jesus compares the two cities with Tyre and Sidon which in the past were unyielding enemies of Israel, ill-treating the people of God. For this reason, they were cursed by the Prophets: (Is 23: 1; Jr 25: 22; 47: 4; Ez 26: 3; 27: 2; 28: 2; Jl 4: 4; Am 1: 10). And now Jesus says that these same cities, symbols of all the evil done to the people in the past, would have already converted if so many miracles would have been worked in them as in Chorazin and in Bethsaida.
- Luke 10: 15: And you Capernaum. "Did you want to be raised high as Heaven? You shall be flung down to hell. Jesus recalls the condemnation which Isaiah, the Prophet launched against Babylonia. Proud and arrogant, Babylonia thought: "I shall scale the heavens; higher than the stars of God I shall set my throne. I shall sit on the Mount of the Assembly far away to the north. I shall climb high above the clouds, I shall rival the Most High" (Is 14: 13-14). That is what it thought! But it completely deceived itself! The contrary happened. The Prophet says: "Now you have been flung down to Sheol, into the depths of the abyss!" (Is 14: 15). Jesus compares Capernaum with that terrible Babylonia which destroyed the monarchy and the temple and took the people as slaves, from which it never recovered. Like Babylonia, Capernaum thought it was something important, but it fell into the most profound hell. The Gospel of Matthew compares Capernaum with the city of Sodom, the symbol of the worse perversion, which was destroyed by God's anger (Gen 18: 16 to 19: 29). Sodom would have converted if it had seen the miracles which Jesus worked in Capernaum (Mt 11: 23-24). Today, the same paradox continues to exist. Many of us, Catholics since we were children, have such consolidated convictions that nobody is capable of converting us. In some places, Christianity, instead of being a source of change and of conversion, has become the refuge of the most reactionary forces of politics of the country.
- Luke 10: 16: "Anyone who listens to you listens to me; anyone who rejects you rejects me. And those who reject me reject the one who has sent me." This phrase places the accent on the identification of the disciples with Jesus, in so far as He is despised by the authorities. In Matthew the same phrase of Jesus, placed in another context, underlines the identification of the disciples with Jesus accepted by the people (Mt 10: 40). In both cases, the disciples identify themselves with Jesus as total gift, and through this gift realize their encounter with God, that God allows himself to be found by those who seek him.

## Personal Questions

- Does my city and my country deserve the warning of Jesus against Capernaum, Corazin and Bethsaida?
- How do I identify myself with Jesus?

## Concluding Prayer

Protect me, O God, in you is my refuge. To Yahweh I say,  
 'You are my Lord, my happiness is in none.' My birthright, my cup is Yahweh;  
 you, you alone, hold my lot secure. (Ps 16: 1-2, 5)

## Saturday, October 7, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,

you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.

Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.

Help us to hurry towards the eternal life your promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.

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

## Gospel Reading - Luke 10: 17-24

The seventy-two came back rejoicing. 'Lord,' they said, 'even the devils submit to us when we use your name.'

He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Look, I have given you power to tread down serpents and scorpions and the whole strength of the enemy; nothing shall ever hurt you. Yet do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.'

Just at this time, filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, He said, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it has pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'

Then turning to his disciples, He spoke to them by themselves, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.'

## Reflection

- Context. Previously Jesus had sent 72 disciples. They now return from their mission and give an account of it. The proof of the success of their mission is due to the

experience of the superiority and supremacy of the name of Jesus in regard to the power of evil. The defeat of Satan coincides with the coming of the Kingdom and the disciples have seen it in their present mission. The diabolical forces have been weakened and the demons have submitted to the power of the name of Jesus. Such a conviction cannot be the foundation of their joy and the enthusiasm of their missionary witness though. Joy has its last root or origin in the fact of being known and loved by God. This does not mean that being protected by God through a relationship with Him always places us in an advantageous situation in the face of the diabolical forces. Here is inserted the mediation of Jesus between God and us: "Look, I have given you power" (v. 19). The power of Jesus is one that makes us experience success in regard to the devil's power and He protects us. Jesus has been present in the fall of Satan, even if he is not as yet definitively defeated or overcome. Christians are called to hinder and be an obstacle to the power of Satan on earth. They are sure of the victory in spite of the fact that they live in a critical situation. They participate in obtaining victory in the communion of love with Christ even though they may be tried by suffering and death. Just the same, the reason for joy is not in the certainty of coming out unharmed but of being loved by God. The expression of Jesus, "your names are written in heaven" is a witness that being present to the heart of God (memory) guarantees the continuity of our life in eternity. The success of the mission of the disciples is the result of the defeat of Satan. Now the benevolence of the Father is shown (vv. 21-22): the success of the word of Grace in the mission of the seventy two, seen as the design of the Father and in the communion in the resurrection of the Son, begins with this revelation of the benevolence of the Father. The mission becomes a space for the revelation of God's will in human time. This experience is transmitted by Luke in the context of prayer. It shows on one side the reaction in heaven: "I bless you Father," (v. 21) and that on earth (vv. 23-24).

- The prayer of rejoicing or exultation. In the prayer that Jesus addresses to the Father, guided by the action of the Spirit, the word "exults" expresses the openness of the Messianic joy and proclaims the goodness of the Father. This is made evident in the little ones, in the poor and in those who have no value because they have accepted the Word transmitted by those sent and thus they have access to the relationship between the Divine Persons of the Trinity. Instead, the wise and the learned, on account of feeling sure, are gratified because of their intellectual and theological competence. But such an attitude prevents them from entering into the dynamism of salvation given by Jesus. The teaching that Luke intends to transmit to individual believers, as well as to the ecclesial communities, may be synthesized as follows: Humility opens to faith. The sufficiency of one's assurance closes to pardon, to light, to God's goodness. The prayer of Jesus has its effects on all those who accept this and allow themselves to be wrapped up by the goodness of the Father.

## Personal Questions

- The mission to take the life of God to others implies a lifestyle that is poor and humble. Is your life permeated by the life of God, by the Word of grace that comes from Jesus?
- Do you have trust in God's call and in his power that asks to be manifested through simplicity, poverty and humility?

## Concluding Prayer

Lord, you are kind and forgiving,  
rich in faithful love for all who call upon you.

Yahweh, hear my prayer,  
listen to the sound of my pleading. (Ps 86: 5-6)

## Sunday, October 8, 2023

*Twenty-Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

Lord, this Sunday I wish to pray with one of the most beautiful images of the Old Testament: "do not forsake the vineyard your right hand planted." Continue to cultivate and enrich it with your favored love. May your Word in this Sunday's liturgy be hope and consolation for me. May I meditate them and let them resonate in my heart even to the end of my life. May my humanity be the fertile womb wherein the force of your word may sprout.

### Gospel Reading - Matthew 21: 33-43

#### Context:

Matthew frames the parable of the murderous laborers labor between two other parables: the one of the two sons (21: 28-32) and that of the wedding banquet (22: 1-14). All three parables contain a negative reply: that of the son to his father, that of some peasants to the master of the vineyard, and that of some invited guests to the king who is celebrating the wedding of his son. All three parables tend to point to one single point. Those who, because they have not accepted the preaching and baptism of John, are now unanimous in refusing the final invitation of God in the person of Jesus. The introduction to the first parable in 21: 28-33 should also be considered as the introduction to the parable of the murderous laborers labor:

After Jesus had entered the temple precincts, and while He was teaching, the chief priests and elders of the people came up to Him and said: On what authority do you do these things? Who has given you this power?

It is the priestly and secular aristocracy that goes to Jesus when He was in the temple. They are worried by Jesus' popularity and ask Him questions to know two things: what authority He attributes to himself in doing what He does, and the origin of this authority. In fact, the answer to the second question also gives the answer to the first question. The high priests and leaders of the people demand a juridical proof and they forget that the prophets had authority directly from God.

#### The Text:

33 'Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. 34 When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. 35 But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. 36 Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. 37 Finally he sent his son to them thinking, "They will respect my son." 38

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance." 39 So they seized him and threw him out of

the vineyard and killed him. 40 Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' 41 They answered, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him at the proper time.' 42 Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing and we marvel at it? 43 'I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.'

## A Moment of Prayerful Silence

We cannot comprehend the word of God unless God himself opens our hearts (Acts 16:14). However, it is up to us to arouse our curiosity by listening and to stop and stand before the Word...

## An Interpretation of the Text

### An invitation to listen:

The parable begins with an invitation to listen: *Listen to another parable* (v.33). Jesus draws the attention of the leaders of the people to the parable He is about to proclaim. This is an imperative, "listen," which does not exclude a certain threat if we look at the way the parable ends: " *I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit*" (v.43). On the other hand, Jesus explains the parable of the sower to his disciples without any sign of reproach (Mt 13:18).

What is the explanation of this invitation to listen, which is a little menacing? The answer is to be sought in the economic conditions of Palestine in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Big lots of land belonged to liberal foreigners who rented land in groups. The renting agreement provided that part of the harvest would go to the owner, who carried out his right by sending stewards to collect his share. In such a situation one can understand that the feelings of peasants were sorely tried. They felt greatly disheartened and this sometimes led to revolt.

In his parable, Jesus refers to this concrete situation but takes it to a higher level of understanding. The situation becomes a compendium of the story of God and his people. Matthew invites the reader to read the parable in a symbolic sense. The "owner" is the figure of God and the vineyard is Israel.

### The Careful Care of the Owner for his Vineyard (v.33):

First there is the initiative of the owner who plants a vineyard. Matthew uses five verbs to describe this attention and care: *planted... fenced... dug... built... leased*. After he had planted the vineyard, the owner leases it to those concerned and then goes abroad.

### The Many Attempts of the Owner to Retrieve the Fruits of the Vineyard (vv.34- 36):

In the second scene, the owner twice sends his servants who, charged with the task of retrieving the produce of the vineyard, are ill-treated and murdered. This aggressive and violent action is described with three verbs: *thrashed... killed... stoned...* (v.35). By sending many more servants and by intensifying the ill treatment suffered, Matthew means to allude to the history of the prophets who were also similarly ill-treated. We recall some of these: Uriah is killed by a sword (Jer 26: 23); Jeremiah was fettered (Jer 20:2); Zachary was stoned (2 Chr 24: 21. We may find a resume of this part of history of the prophets in Nehemiah 9: 26: ""they have killed your prophets...""

## Finally He Sent His Son:

The reader is invited to recognize in the son, who is sent “finally,” the one sent by God to whom respect is due and to whom the produce of the vineyard is to be delivered. This is the owner’s last attempt. The term “finally” defines the son as the Messiah. It is also possible that this view of eliminating the son may be modeled on another story from the OT: Joseph’s brothers who say: “Come on, let us kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns here!” (Gen 37: 20).

The parable reaches its dramatic peak with the outcome of the son’s mission who is killed by the leasing vinedressers so that they may take over the vineyard and usurp the inheritance. Jesus’ fate is set side by side with that of the prophets, but as son and heir, superior to them. Such Christological comparisons may be found in the Letter to the Hebrews, where the superiority of Christ as son and heir of the universe is placed in evidence: “*In times past, God spoke in many and varied ways to our fathers through the prophets; in this, the final age, He has spoken to us through his Son, whom He made heir of all things...*” (vv.1-2).

There is a detail at the end of this parable that we must not overlook. By placing the words, “*they threw him out*” followed by, “*they killed him*,” Matthew decidedly alludes to the passion of Jesus where He is taken out to be crucified.

## Leasing the Vineyard to Other Peasants (v.42-43):

The end of the parable confirms the loss of the kingdom of God and the giving of the kingdom to another people capable of bearing fruit. A people that is capable of a living an active faith and a practical love. The expressions “*I tell you, then...will be taken...and will be given...*” show the solemnity of God’s action marking the history of ancient Israel and of the new people.

## Meditations for Ecclesial Practice

- The symbol of the vineyard is a mirror where we can see a reflection of the personal and communitarian history of our relationship with God. Today, it is the church, this great vineyard that the Lord cultivates and cares for and that is entrusted to us, and the vinedressers (collaborators) who have the task of continuing the mission started by him. This is certainly a tall order. Nevertheless, as church, we are aware of the tension that exists and that the church may experience between fidelity and infidelity, between refusal and welcoming. This Sunday’s Gospel tells us that, notwithstanding the difficulties and apparent fragility, nothing can stop the love of God for us, not even the elimination of his Son. It is this sacrifice that gains salvation for all.
- We are called to stay with Jesus and continue his mission of helping men and women to meet Him and to be saved, and to struggle every day to counter the forces of evil and fulfill the desire to do good and promote justice.
- As church we are called to learn, after the example of Jesus, to experience conflict and be able to bear difficulties in our commitment to evangelization.
- Do you believe that trials instruct our hearts? And that difficulties can be an instrument to measure our authenticity and the firmness of our faith?

## Psalm 80 (79)

The psalmist expresses the desire of every person to be in contact with the hand of God who prepares the soil to plant and transplant his beloved vineyard.

You brought a vine out of Egypt, to plant it you drove out nations; you cleared a space for it, it took root and filled the whole country. The mountains were covered with its shade, and the cedars of God with its branches, its boughs stretched as far as the sea, its shoots as far as the River.

Why have you broken down its fences? Every passer-by plucks its grapes, boars from the forest tear at it, wild beasts feed on it.

God Sabaoth, come back, we pray, look down from heaven and see, visit this vine; protect what your own hand has planted. They have thrown it on the fire like dung, the frown of your rebuke will destroy them. May your hand protect those at your side, the child of Adam you have strengthened for yourself! Never again will we turn away from you, give us life and we will call upon your name. God Sabaoth, bring us back, let your face shine on us and we shall be safe.

## Closing Prayer

Lord, how many times is love repaid with darkest ingratitude? Nothing is more destructive than to feel betrayed and made a fool of, to know that one has been deceived. Even more difficult is to realize that so many acts of kindness, generosity, openness, tolerance and sincerity, and of commitment to solidarity have come to nothing.

Lord, you have experienced the ingratitude of many. You have been patient with those who assailed you. You, who have always been merciful and meek, help us fight our inflexible hardness towards others. With the Psalmist, we too pray, "Do not forsake the vineyard you have planted." After this encounter with your Word, may our prayer become an ever more penetrating plea so that it may touch your heart: "'Raise us up again Lord, show us your face and we shall be saved." Lord, we have great need of your mercy and as long as there is the desire in our hearts to seek your face, the way of salvation remains open to us. Amen!

## Monday, October 9, 2023

### Opening Prayer

Father,  
your love for us  
surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings,  
keep us in your peace  
and lead us in the way of salvation.

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

### Gospel Reading - Luke 10: 25-37

A lawyer stood up and, to test Jesus, asked, 'Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?' He replied,

'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.' Jesus said to him, 'You have answered right, do this and life is yours.' But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' In answer Jesus said, 'A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of bandits; they stripped him, beat him, and then made off, leaving him half dead. Now a priest happened to be travelling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him and passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan traveller who came on him was moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him.

Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have."

Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbor to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?'

He replied, 'The one who showed pity towards him.' Jesus said to him, 'Go, and do the same yourself.'

## Reflection

The Gospel today presents the parable of the Good Samaritan. To mediate on a parable is the same thing as to look deeper into our life to discover in it the call of God. In describing the long journey of Jesus to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28), Luke helps the communities to better understand what the Good News of the Kingdom consists of. He does it by presenting persons who come to speak with Jesus and ask Him questions. These are real questions from the people of the time of Jesus and they are also real questions asked by the communities of the time of Luke. Thus, today in the Gospel, a doctor of the law asks: "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" The response, both of the doctor and that of Jesus, helps us to better understand the objective of the Law of God.

- Luke 10: 25-26: "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" A doctor, who knew the law wants to test Jesus and asks him: "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" The doctor thinks that he has to do something in order to be able to inherit. He wants to obtain the inheritance through his own personal effort. But an inheritance is not merited. We receive an inheritance by the simple fact of being son or daughter. "Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir by God's own act." (Ga 4: 7). As sons and daughters, we can do nothing to merit the inheritance. We can lose it however!
- Luke 10: 27-28: The answer of the doctor. Jesus responds asking a new question: "What is written in the Law? The doctor responds correctly. Uniting two phrases of the Law, He says: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." This phrase comes from Deuteronomy (Dt 6: 5) and from Leviticus (Lv 19: 18). Jesus approves of the response and says: "Do this and life is yours!" What is important, the principal thing, is to love God! But God comes to me in my neighbor. The neighbor is the revelation of God for me. And because of this, I have to love my neighbor also with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my strength and with all my mind!

- Luke 10: 29: "And who is my neighbor?" Wanting to justify himself, the doctor asks: "And who is my neighbor?" He wants to know: "In which neighbor God comes to me?" That is, which is the person close to me who is the revelation of God for me? For the Jews the expression "neighbor" was linked to the clan, it was not a neighbor. Anyone who did not belong to the clan was not a neighbor. According to Deuteronomy, they could exploit the "foreigner," but not the "neighbor" (Dt 15: 1-3). Proximity was based on bonds of race and of blood. Jesus has a different way of seeing which He expresses in the parable of the Good Samaritan.
- Luke 10: 30-36: The parable.
- Luke 10: 30: The attack along the road of Jerusalem toward Jericho. The Desert of Judah is between Jerusalem and Jericho, which is a refuge of rebels, marginalized, and where one could be attacked. Jesus tells a real fact which had happened many times. "A man was on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of bandits; they stripped him, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead."
- Luke 10: 31-32: A priest passed by travelling on the same road, then a Levite passed by. By chance a priest passed by, and immediately after, a Levite passed. They are officials of the Temple of the official religion. Both of them saw the man who had been attacked, but passed by and did nothing. Why did they do nothing? Jesus does not say. He allows one to guess with whom one identifies oneself. This must have happened many times, in the time of Jesus as well as in the time of Luke. This also happens today: a person from the Church goes by close to a poor person without helping him. It could also be that the priest and the Levite had a justification: "He is not my neighbor!" or "he is impure and if I touch him, I will also be impure." And today: "If I help him, I will miss Sunday Mass and will commit a mortal sin!"
- Luke 10: 33-35: A Samaritan passed by. Immediately after, a Samaritan who was travelling passed by. He saw the man and moved with compassion, he got close, bandaged his wounds, lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him during the night. The following day he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper. That was the salary of ten days, and he tells him: "Look after him and on my way back I will make good any extra expenses you have!" This is the concrete and effective action. It is the progressive action: to arrive, to see, to be moved with compassion, to get close and to act. The parable says, "A Samaritan who was travelling." Jesus was also travelling up to Jerusalem. Jesus is the Good Samaritan. The communities should be the Good Samaritan.
- Luke 10: 36-37: Which of these three do you think proved himself a neighbor to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?" At the beginning the doctor had asked: "Who is my neighbor?" Behind the question was the concern for him. He wanted to know: God orders me to love whom, in a way to be able to have my conscience in peace and be able to say, "I have done everything that God has asked me to do." Jesus asks another question: "Which of these three do you think proved himself a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the bandits?" The condition of neighbor does not depend on the race, on the fact that they are relatives, on sympathy, on closeness or on religion. Humanity is not divided into neighbor and not neighbor. To know who our neighbor is depends on us: to arrive, to see, to be moved with compassion and to get close. If you get close, the other becomes your neighbor! It depends on you and not on the other! Jesus overturns everything and takes away from the doctor the security which could come to him from the Law.
- The Samaritans. The word Samaritan comes from Samaria, the capital of the Kingdom of Israel in the North. After the death of Solomon, in the year 931 before Christ, the ten tribes of the North separated themselves from the kingdom of Judea in the South and formed an independent kingdom (1 K 12: 1-33). The Kingdom of the

North survived approximately for 200 years. In 722, its territory was invaded by Assyria. A large part of its population was deported (2 K 17: 5-6) and people from other places went to Samaria (2 K 17: 24). There was a mixture of races and of religions (2 K 17: 25-33), and the Samaritans were born from these. The Jews of the South despised the Samaritans considering them unfaithful and adorers of false gods (2 K 17: 34-41). Many prejudices existed against the Samaritans. They were not well accepted. It was said of them that they had an erroneous doctrine and did not form part of the People of God. Some even went so far as to say that to be a Samaritan was something of the Devil (Jn 8: 48). Most likely, the cause of this hatred was not only a question of race and of religion, but also a political-economic problem, linked to the possession of the land. This rivalry even existed in the time of Jesus. But Jesus places the Samaritans as a model for others.

## Personal Questions

- The Samaritan of the parable was not of the Jewish people, but he did what Jesus asks. Does this happen today? Do you know people who do not go to Church but live what the Gospel asks? Today, who are the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan?
- The doctor asks: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus asks: "Who was the neighbor of the man who was the victim of the bandits"? There are two different points of view: the doctor asks starting from himself. Jesus asks starting from the needs of the other. Which is my perspective or point of view?

## Concluding Prayer

I give thanks to Yahweh with all my heart,  
in the meeting-place of honest people, in the assembly. Great are the deeds of Yahweh,  
to be pondered by all who delight in them. (Ps 111: 1-2)

## Tuesday, October 10, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
your love for us  
surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings,  
keep us in your peace  
and lead us in the way of salvation.

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

## Gospel Reading - Luke 10: 38-42

In the course of their journey He came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.

She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to Him speaking.

Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to Him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.'

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

## Reflection

- Context. The journey of Jesus, undertaken in 9, 51, is surrounded by particular encounters, among the doctors of the Law (10, 25-37), that precede the encounter with Martha and Mary (vv. 38-42). Above all, there is a doctor of the Law who asks Jesus a question and, for the reader, it becomes a convenient occasion to discover how eternal life is inherited or gained in intimacy with the Father. One can have access to eternal life by participating in the mission of Jesus, the first one sent who has shown us fully God's mercy (v. 37). In Jesus, the Father has become close to men and has shown his paternity in a tangible way. At the end of the encounter, the expression that Jesus addresses to the Doctor of the Law and to every reader is crucial: "Go, and do the same yourself" (v. 37). To become a neighbor, to get close to others as Jesus did, makes us become instruments to show, in a living way, the merciful love of the Father. This is the secret key to enter into eternal life.
- Listening to the Word. After this encounter with an expert of the Law, while He is on the way, Jesus enters into a village and is welcomed by old friends: Martha and Mary. Jesus is not only the first one sent by the Father, but He is also the one who gathers together men, and in our case, the members of the house of Bethany in so far as He is the only Word of the Father. If it is true that there are many services to be carried out, in welcoming attention to the needs of others, then even more is it true that what is irreplaceable is listening to the Word. The account that Luke gives is a real episode and at the same time an ideal. It begins with the welcome of Martha (v. 38). Then it sketches Mary with an attitude typical of the disciple, sitting at the feet of Jesus and totally attentive to listening to his Word. This attitude of Mary is extraordinary because in Judaism at the time of Jesus it was not permitted for a woman to go to the school of a teacher, a master. Up until now we have a harmonious picture: the welcome of Martha, the listening of Mary. But soon the welcome of Martha will be transformed into super activism: the woman is "pulled," divided by performing multiple services. She is so absorbed that she is unable to control the domestic services. The great amount of activities, understandable for such a guest, becomes so disproportionate as to prevent her living what is essential, precisely in the time that Jesus is present in her house. Her worry or concern is legitimate but then it becomes anguish, a state of mind that is not convenient when a friend is welcomed.
- Relate service to listening. Her service of acceptance, of welcome, is very positive but it is detrimental because of this state of anxiety with which she carries it out. The Evangelist makes the reader glimpse at this to show that there is no contradiction between the 'diaconia' of the table and that of the Word, but He wants to suggest that the service should be related to listening. Because she did not relate the spiritual attitude of service to that of listening, Martha feels that she has been abandoned by her sister. Instead, of dialoguing with Mary, she complains with the Master. Trapped in her solitude she goes against Jesus who seems to be indifferent to her problem

("Lord do you not care ...") and then with the sister, ("that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself?"). In his response, Jesus does not reproach her, nor criticize her, but He tries to help Martha to recover that which is essential at that moment: listening to the Master. He invites her to choose that part, unique and a priority, that Mary has spontaneously taken. The episode invites us to consider a danger which is always frequent in the life of Christians: anxiety, worry, super activism that can isolate us from communion with Christ and with the community. The danger is more underhanded because frequently the material concerns or worries carried out with anxiety are those we consider a form of service. What presses Luke is that in our communities the priority that should be given to the Word of God, and to listen to it, should not be neglected. Before serving the others, the relatives, and the ecclesial community, it is necessary to be served by Christ with His Word of grace. And thus immersed in the daily tasks like Martha, we forget that the Lord desires to take care of us... It is necessary, instead, to place in Jesus and in God all our concerns and worries.

## Personal Questions

- Do you know how to relate service to listening to the Word of Jesus? Or rather do you allow yourself to be taken up by anxiety because of the multiple things to be done?
- Have you understood that before serving you have to accept to be served by Christ? Are you aware that your service becomes divine only if previously you will have accepted Christ and his word?

## Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, you examine me and know me, you know when I sit, when I rise,  
you understand my thoughts from afar. You watch when I walk or lie down,  
you know every detail of my conduct. (Ps 139: 1-3)

## Wednesday, October 11, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
your love for us  
surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings,  
keep us in your peace  
and lead us in the way of salvation.

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 11: 1-4

Now it happened that Jesus was in a certain place praying, and when He had finished, one of his disciples said, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'

He said to them, 'When you pray, this is what to say: Father, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come;

give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us. And do not put us to the test.'

## Reflection

In yesterday's Gospel, we saw Mary sitting at the foot of Jesus, listening to his word. Anyone who listens to the Word of God has to give a response in prayer. In this way, today's Gospel continues with yesterday's Gospel. This is the account in which Jesus, because of his way of prayer, communicates to the disciples the desire to pray, to learn to pray from him.

- Luke 11: 1: Jesus, example of prayer. "One day, Jesus was in a certain place praying and when He had finished one of his disciples said to him: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." This petition of the disciples is strange, because at that time people learned to pray since they were children. Everyone prayed three times a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. They prayed often using the Psalms. They had their devotional practices, they had the Psalms, they had weekly meetings in the Synagogue and daily encounters at home. It seemed that this was not enough however. The disciple wanted more: "Teach us to pray!" In the attitude of Jesus he discovers that he could still advance more, and for this he needed some initiation. The desire to pray was in all of them, but the way of praying needs help. The way of praying attains maturity throughout life and changes through the centuries. Jesus was a good teacher: He taught how to pray with words and with witness.
- Luke 11: 2-4: The prayer of the Our Father. "Jesus answers: "When you pray this is what you have to say: Father, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come; give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt with us. And do not put us to the test." In the Gospel of Matthew, in quite a didactic way, Jesus summarizes all of his teaching in seven petitions addressed to the Father. Here in Luke's Gospel there are five petitions. In these five requests, Jesus repeats the great promises of the Old Testament and asks that the Father help us to fulfill them. The first three (or two) speak to us about our relationship with God. The other four (or three) speak to us about the relationships among us.
  - Mt - Lc: Introduction: Our Father who are in heaven
  - Mt - Lc: 1<sup>st</sup> request: Hallowed be your Name
  - Mt - Lc: 2<sup>nd</sup> request: Your Kingdom come
  - Mt: 3<sup>rd</sup> request: Your will be done
  - Mt - Lc: 4<sup>th</sup> request: Our daily bread
  - Mt - Lc: 5<sup>th</sup> request: Forgive our offences
  - Mt - Lc: 6<sup>th</sup> request: Lead us not into temptation
  - Mt: 7<sup>th</sup> request: Deliver us from evil
- Father (Our): The title expresses the new relationship with God (Father). It is the basis of fraternity.
  - *To sanctify the Name*: the Name of Yahweh I am with you! God with us. God made himself known with this **name** (Ex 3: 11-15). The Name of God is sanctified when it is used with faith and not with magic; when it is used according to its true objective,

and not for oppression, but for the liberation of the people and for the construction of the Kingdom.

- *Your Kingdom come*: The only Lord and King of human life is God (Is 45: 21; 46: 9). The arrival of the Kingdom is the realization of all hopes and promises. It is the fullness of life, the overcoming of frustration suffered with the kings and human governments. This Kingdom will come when the will of God is completely fulfilled.
- *The daily bread*: In Exodus, the people every day received manna in the desert (Ex 16: 35). Divine Providence passed for fraternal organization as well as for sharing. Jesus invites us to fulfill a new Exodus, a new way of sharing in a fraternal spirit which will guarantee bread for all (Mt 6: 34-44; Jn 6: 48-51).
- *Forgiveness of debts*: Every 50 years, the Jubilee Year obliged everybody to forgive their debts. It was a new beginning (Lev 25: 8-55). Jesus announces a new Jubilee Year, "a year of grace from the Lord" (Lk 4: 19). The Gospel wants to begin everything new! Luke changes "debts" for "sins."
- *Not to fall into temptation*: In Exodus the people were tempted and fell (Deut 9: 6-12). They complained and wanted to go back. (Ex 16, 3; 17, 3). In the new Exodus, the temptation was overcome thanks to the grace and strength that people received from God (1Co 10: 12-13).
- The witness of the prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke:
  - At twelve years old, He goes to the Temple, in the House of the Father (Lk 2: 46-50).
  - When He was baptized and He assumes his mission, He prays (Lk 3: 21).
  - When He begins his mission, He spends forty days in the desert (Lk 4: 1-2).
  - At the hour of temptation, He faces the Devil with texts from Scripture (Lk 4: 3-12).
  - Jesus usually participated in the celebrations in the Synagogues on Saturday (Lk 4: 16)
  - He looks for the solitude of the desert to pray (Lk 5: 16; 9: 18).
  - On the day before He chose the twelve Apostles, He spent the night in prayer (Lk 6: 12).
  - He prays before meals (Lk 9: 16; 24: 30).
  - He prays before presenting the reality and before speaking about his Passion (Lk 9: 18).
  - In time of crisis, He goes up to the mountain to pray, is transfigured while He prays (Lk 9: 28).
  - When the Gospel is revealed to the little ones, He says: "Father I thank you!" (Lk 10: 21)
  - By praying He awakens in the Apostles the desire to pray (Lk 11: 1).
  - He prays for Peter so that his faith will not fail (Lk 22: 32).
  - He celebrates the Paschal Supper with his disciples (Lk 22: 7-14).
  - In the Garden of Olives, He prays while his sweat fell like drops of blood (Lk 22: 41-42).
  - In his anguish He asks his friends to pray with Him (Lk 22: 40, 46).
  - When He was nailed to the cross, He asks for pardon for the bandits (Lk 23: 34).
  - At the hour of his death, He says: "Into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Lk 23: 46; Ps 31, 6)
  - Jesus dies sending out the cry of the poor (Lk 23: 46).

## Personal Questions

- Do I pray? How do I pray? What does prayer mean for me?
- Our Father: I go over the five petitions and examine how I live them in my life

## Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, all nations, extol him, all peoples,  
for his faithful love is strong  
and his constancy never-ending. (Ps 117: 1-2)

## Thursday, October 12, 2023

### Opening Prayer

Father,  
your love for us  
surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings,  
keep us in your peace  
and lead us in the way of salvation.

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 11: 5-13

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say, "My friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him;" and the man answers from inside the house, "Do not bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up to give it to you." I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it to him for friendship's sake, persistence will make him get up and give his friend all he wants.

'So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened.

What father among you, if his son asked for a fish, would hand him a snake? Or if he asked for an egg, hand him a scorpion?

If you then, evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

### Reflection

The Gospel today continues to speak about the theme of prayer, which began with the teaching of the Our Father (Lk 11: 1-4). Today, Jesus teaches that we should pray with faith and insistence without giving up. For this He uses a provocative parable.

- Luke 11: 5-7: *The parable that provokes.* As always when Jesus has an important thing to teach, He has recourse to a comparison, a parable. Today, He tells us a strange story which ends with a question. He addresses the question to the people who listened to Him and also to us who today read or listen to the story. *"Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say: My friend, lend me three*

*loaves because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him; and the man answers from inside the house: "Do not bother me. The door is bolted now and my children are with me in bed: I cannot get up to give it to you."* Before Jesus himself gives the answer, He wants our opinion. What would you answer: yes or no?

- Luke 11: 8: *Jesus responds to the provocation.* Jesus gives his response: *"I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it to him for friendship's sake, persistence will make him get up and give his friend all he wants."* If not Jesus, would you have had the courage to invent a story which suggests that God expects our prayers to see himself free from blows? The response of Jesus strengthens the message on prayer: God always expects our prayer. This parable reminds us of another one, also found in Luke's Gospel: the parable of the widow who insists to obtain her rights before the judge who respects neither God nor justice. He pays attention to the widow only because he wants to free himself from her insistence (Lk 18: 3-5). Then Jesus draws a conclusion to apply the message of the parable to life.
- Luke 11: 9-10: *the first application of the Parable.* *"So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, everyone who searches finds, everyone who knocks will have the door opened."* To ask, to search, to knock at the door. If you ask, you will receive. If you search, you will find. If you knock, the door will be opened for you. Jesus does not say how much time the request should last, this knocking at the door, but the result is certain.
- Luke 11: 11-12: *the second application of the parable.* *"What father among you, if his son asked for a fish, would hand him a snake? Or if he asked for an egg, hand him a scorpion?"* This second application allows us see this type of public listening to the words of Jesus and his way of teaching under the form of dialogue. He asks: "You who are a father, when your son asks you for a fish, would you give him a snake?" The people answer: "No!" "And if he asks you for an egg, would you give him a scorpion?" - "No!" Through dialogue, Jesus involves the people in the comparison and, from the responses He receives from them, the commitment to the message of the parable.
- Luke 11: 13: *The message: to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* *"If you then evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* The greatest gift that God has for us is the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we were created, He breathed his spirit into our nose and we became living beings (Gen 2: 7). In the second creation through Faith in Jesus, He gives us the Holy Spirit again. This is the same Spirit which made the Word become incarnate in Mary (Lk 1: 35). With the help of the Holy Spirit, the process of the Incarnation of the Word continues up to the hour of his death on the Cross. At the end, at the hour of death, Jesus commits the spirit to the Father: *"Into your hands I commit my Spirit"* (Lk 23: 46). Jesus promises us this Spirit as the source of truth and of understanding (Jn 14: 14-17; 16: 13) and a help in persecutions (Mt 10: 20; Ac 4: 31). This Spirit cannot be bought with money at the supermarket. The only way of obtaining it is through prayer. After nine days of prayer the abundant gift of the Spirit is obtained on the day of Pentecost (Ac 1: 14; 2: 1-4).

## Personal Questions

- How do I respond to the provocation of the parable? A person who lives in a small apartment in a large city, how will she answer? Would she open the door?
- When you pray, do you pray convinced that you will obtain what you ask for?

## Concluding Prayer

I give thanks to Yahweh with all my heart,  
in the meeting-place of honest people, in the assembly. Great are the deeds of Yahweh,  
to be pondered by all who delight in them. (Ps 111: 1-2)

## Friday, October 13, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,  
your love for us  
surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings,  
keep us in your peace  
and lead us in the way of salvation.

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 11: 15-26

Jesus was driving out a devil, but some of the people said, 'It is through Beelzebul, the  
prince of devils, that He drives devils out.' Others asked him, as a test, for a sign from  
heaven; but, knowing what they were thinking, He said to them, 'Any kingdom which is  
divided against itself is heading for ruin, and house collapses against house.

So, too, with Satan: if he is divided against himself, how can his kingdom last? - since  
you claim that it is through Beelzebul that I drive devils out. Now if it is through  
Beelzebul that I drive devils out, through whom do your own sons drive them out? They  
shall be your judges, then. But if it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out,  
then the kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares. So long as a strong man  
fully armed guards his own home, his goods are undisturbed; but when someone  
stronger than himself attacks and defeats him, the stronger man takes away all the  
weapons he relied on and shares out his spoil.

'Anyone who is not with me is against me; and anyone who does not gather in with me  
throws away.

'When an unclean spirit goes out of someone it wanders through waterless country  
looking for a place to rest, and not finding one it says, "I will go back to the home I  
came from." But on arrival, finding it swept and tidied, it then goes off and brings seven  
other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and set up house there, and so that  
person ends up worse off than before.'

## Reflection

Today's Gospel speaks about a long discussion around the expulsion of a mute demon which Jesus had performed before the people.

- Luke 11: 14-16: Three diverse reactions in the face of that expulsion. Jesus was casting out devils. Before this very visible fact, in front of everyone, there were three different reactions. People were surprised, astonished and applauded. Others said: "it is in the name of Beelzebul that He casts out devils." The Gospel of Mark tells us that it was a question of the Scribes who had gone to Jerusalem to control the activity of Jesus (Mk 3: 22). Others still asked for a sign from heaven because they were not convinced by a sign as evident as the expulsion done in front of all the people.
- Luke 11: 17-19: Jesus shows the incoherence of the enemies. Jesus uses two arguments to confront the accusation of casting out the devil in the name of Beelzebul. In the first place, if the devil casts out the devil himself, he divides himself and will not survive. In the second place, Jesus gives them back their argument: If I cast out the demons in name of Beelzebul, your disciples cast them out in whose name? With these words, they were also casting out demons in the name of Beelzebul.
- Luke 11: 20-23: Jesus is the strongest man who has come, a sign of the arrival of the Kingdom. Here Jesus leads us to the central point of his argument: "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own home, his goods are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than himself attacks and defeats him, the stronger man takes away all the weapons he relied on and shares his spoil." According to the opinion of the people of that time, Satan dominated the world through the demons (*daimonia*). He was a strong and well-armed man who guarded his house. The great novelty was the fact that Jesus succeeded to cast out the demons. This was a sign that He was and is the strongest man who has come. With the coming of Jesus the kingdom of Beelzebul was declining: "But if it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out, then the kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares." When the magicians of Pharaoh saw that Moses did things that they were not capable of doing, they were more honest than the Scribes before Jesus and they said: "Here is the finger of God!" (Ex 8: 14-15).
- Luke 11: 24-26: The second fall is worse than the first one. At the time of Luke in the 80's, a time of persecution, many Christians returned back and abandoned the community. They went back to live as before. To warn them and all of us, Luke keeps these words of Jesus about the second fall which is worse than the first one.
- The expulsion of the demons. The first impact caused by the action of Jesus among the people is the expulsion of the demons: "He gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him!" (Mk 1: 27). One of the principal causes of the discussion of Jesus with the Scribes was the expulsion of the devils. They slandered against Him saying: "He is possessed by Beelzebul!" "It is in the name of Beelzebul, head of demons that He casts out devils!" The first power that the Apostles received when they were sent out on mission was the power to drive out demons. "He gave them authority over unclean spirits" (Mk 6: 7). The first sign which accompanies the announcement of the Resurrection is the expulsion of demons. "The signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils!" (Mk 16: 17). The expulsion of devils was what struck people more (Mk 1: 27). This reached the center of the Good News of the Kingdom. By means of the expulsion Jesus restored or recovered persons to themselves. He restored their judgment and their conscience (Mk 5: 15). Especially in the Gospel of Mark, from beginning until the end, with words which are almost the same, constantly repeats the same image: "And Jesus cast out devils!" (Mk 1: 26, 34, 39; 3: 11-12, 22, 30; 5: 1-20; 6: 7, 13; 7: 25-29; 9: 25-27, 38; 16: 17). It seems to be a refrain which is always repeated. Today, instead of always using the same words, we will use

different words to transmit the same image and we will say: "Jesus overcame the power of evil, Satan, who causes so much fear to people, He dominated him, seized him, conquered him, cast him out, eliminated him, exterminated him, destroyed him and killed him!" By this the Gospel wants to tell us: "It is forbidden to the Christian to fear Satan!" By his Resurrection and by his liberating action, Jesus drives away from us the fear of Satan, He gives freedom to the heart, firmness in our actions and causes hope to emerge in the horizon! We should walk along the path of Jesus savouring the victory over the power of evil!

## Personal Questions

- To drive out the power of evil. Which is today the power of evil which standardizes people and robs from them the critical conscience?
- Can you say that you are completely free? In the case of a negative response, some part of you is under the power of other forces. What do you do in order to cast out this power which dominates you?

## Concluding Prayer

Full of splendor and majesty his work, his saving justice stands firm forever.

He gives us a memorial of his great deeds; Yahweh is mercy and tenderness. (Ps 111: 3-4)

## Saturday, October 14, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Father,

your love for us

surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings,

keep us in your peace

and lead us in the way of salvation.

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 11: 27-28

It happened that as Jesus was speaking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said, 'Blessed the womb that bore you and the breasts that fed you!'

But He replied, 'More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'

## Reflection

Today's Gospel is very brief, but it has a very important significance in the Gospel of Luke in general. It gives us the key to understand what Luke teaches regarding Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in the so-called Gospel of the Infancy (Lk 1 and 2).

- Luke 11: 27: The exclamation of the woman. "At that time, as Jesus was speaking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said: "Blessed the womb that bore you and the breasts that fed you!" The creative imagination of some apocryphal books suggests that the woman was a neighbor of Our Lady, there in Nazareth. She had a son called Dimas, who with other boys of Galilee at that time, went to war with the Romans. He was made a prisoner and killed at the side of Jesus. He was the good thief (Lk 23: 39- 43). His mother, having heard about the good that Jesus did to people, remembered her neighbor Mary, and said: "Mary must be very happy to have such a son!"
- Luke 11: 28: The response of Jesus. Jesus responds, giving the greatest praise to his mother: "More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep it." Luke speaks little about Mary here (Lk 11: 28) and in the Gospel of the Infancy (Lk 1 and 2). For Luke, Mary is the Daughter of Sion, the image of the new People of God. He represents Mary as the model for the life of the communities. In Vatican Council II, the document prepared on Mary was inserted in the last chapter of the document Lumen Gentium on the Church. Mary is the model for the Church. And especially in the way in which Mary relates with the Word of God, Luke considers her as an example for the life of the communities: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." Mary teaches us how to accept the Word of God, how to incarnate it, live it, deepen it, make it be born and grow, and allow it to shape us, even when we do not understand it, or when it makes us suffer. This is the vision which is subjacent in the Gospel of the Infancy (Lk 1 and 2). The key to understand these two chapters is given to us by today's Gospel: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Let us see in these chapters how Mary enters into relationship with the Word of God.
  - Luke 1: 26-38:  
The Annunciation: "Let it happen to me as you have said!"  
To know how to open oneself, to accept the Word of God so that it becomes incarnate.
  - Luke 1: 39-45:  
The Visitation: "Blessed is she who has believed!"  
To know how to recognize the Word of God in a visit and in many other facts of life.
  - Luke 1: 46-56:  
The Magnificat: "The Lord has done great things for me!"  
To recognize the Word in the story of the people and sing a song of resistance and hope.
  - Luke 2: 1-20:  
The Birth of Our Lord: "She pondered all these things in her heart!" There was no outward place for them. The marginalized accept the Word.
  - Luke 2: 21-32:  
The Presentation: "My eyes have seen the salvation!" The many years of life purify the eyes.
  - Luke 2: 33-38:  
Simeon and Anna: "A sword will pierce your soul too!"  
To accept and incarnate the Word in life, to be a sign of contradiction.
  - Luke 2: 39-52:

At twelve years old in the Temple: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

They did not understand what He meant!

- Luke 11: 27-28:

The praise to the mother: "Blessed the womb that bore you!" Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.

## Personal Questions

- Do you succeed in discovering the Word of God in your life?
- How do you live devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus?

## Concluding Prayer

Sing to him, make music for him, recount all his wonders!

Glory in his holy name,

let the hearts that seek Yahweh rejoice! (Ps 105,2-3)

# Sunday, October 15, 2023

*Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Spirit of truth, sent by Jesus to guide us to the whole truth, enlighten our minds so that we may understand the Scriptures. You who overshadowed Mary and made her fruitful ground where the Word of God could germinate, purify our hearts from all obstacles to the Word. Help us to learn like her to listen with good and pure hearts to the Word that God speaks to us in life and in Scripture, so that we may observe the Word and produce good fruit through our perseverance.

## Gospel Reading - Matthew 22: 1-14

### The Context:

The meaning of the parable is quite clear when we read it in its context. It comes straight after another parable on the Realm (21: 33-43) and is part of an argument between Jesus and the high priests and the Pharisees on his mission and authority (see 21: 23-46).

In the preceding parable on the vineyard, Jesus sums up the history of salvation. God enveloped Israel with special care and hoped that such care would have produced fruit in the shape of a life of faithfulness and justice. From time-to-time God sent prophets to remind the people of the fruit that God expected, but their mission always met with Israel's rejection. Finally, God sent his own Son, but they killed him. At this point Jesus says that because Israel continued to reject the Realm, the Realm would therefore pass on to another people, that is, the pagans (21: 43). This pronouncement gives us the key to the reading of our parable, which really repeats the message of the previous parable using a different image and with different nuances.

We must affirm clearly that both parables can in no way justify the idea that God rejected Israel in favor of the Church. Suffice it to read Romans 9-11 to be convinced of the contrary. Jesus says hard things, prophetic things, to draw *his* people to repentance and for them to accept him. Besides, the pagans too, the newly invited ones, run the risk of being thrown out if they do not wear the wedding garment.

### The Text:

Jesus began to speak to them in parables once again. 'The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come. Next he sent some more servants with the words, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, my banquet is all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding." But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them. The king was furious. He dispatched his

troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the main crossroads and invite everyone you can find to come to the wedding." So these servants went out onto the roads and collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. When the king came in to look at the guests, he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And the man was silent. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth." For many are invited but not all are chosen.'

## 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.*

- Whom do the invited guests who refuse the invitation represent?
- Whom do the newly invited guests found in the street represent?
- Whom does the person without the wedding garment represent?
- Are there "urgent matters" in my life that prevent me from accepting God's invitation?
- What is the wedding garment God wants me to wear for me to take part at the wedding banquet of the Realm of God?

## A Key to the Reading

*for those who wish to go deeper into the text.*

- The banquet of the Realm  
The prophets often proclaimed the benefits of salvation and especially those of the eschatological times through the image of a banquet. The first reading of this Sunday (Is 25: 6-10a) is an example. Like Jesus, Isaiah too speaks of a banquet

prepared by God for all peoples. However, the people of Israel and especially the city of Jerusalem remain at the center of God's plan as mediators of the salvation offered by God for all. In the New Testament, however, even though there is an admission that "salvation comes from the Jews" (Jn 4: 22), the only mediator of salvation is Jesus, who continues to exercise his mediation through the community of his disciples, the Church.

- The wedding garment  
It is an insult to the one who has sent the invitation to arrive at the feast wearing ordinary working clothes. It is sign of not giving proper consideration for the occasion to which one is invited. This image, used in the parable on the Realm, wants to convey the idea that one cannot enter the Realm without preparation, and the only preparation is conversion. In fact, to change garment in biblical terms means to change style of life or to be converted (see for instance Rom 13: 14; Gal 3: 27; Eph 4: 20-24).
- "Many are called but few are chosen"  
This expression is a semitism. In the absence of comparisons, biblical Hebrew uses expressions that are based on drastic opposites. Hence this expression says nothing on the numerical relationship between those called into the Church and the elect to eternal life. However, it is also true that the parable makes a distinction between the call to salvation, election, and final perseverance. The generosity of the ruler is huge, but we must be serious about the demands of the Realm. The expression is a pressing appeal not to be satisfied with just formal membership among the people of God. We cannot take salvation for granted. Here Jesus follows closely the teaching of the prophets. Recall Jer 7: 1-15 and Hos 6: 1-6.

## Psalm 47

### The Lord is Ruler of Israel and the World

Clap your hands, all peoples!

Shout to God with loud songs of joy! For the Lord, the Most High, is terrible, a great king over all the earth.

He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.

He chose our heritage for us,

the pride of Jacob whom he loves. God has gone up with a shout,

the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises!

Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!

God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.

The princes of the peoples

gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted!

## Closing Prayer

God, Lord of the world and Ruler of all peoples, from the beginning you have prepared a banquet for your children and you wish to gather us around your table to share in your own life. We thank you for having called us into your Church through Jesus your Son.

May your Spirit make us ever attentive and ready to continue to accept your invitation and may we, through the same Spirit, put on the new person, created according to God in justice and in true holiness, in the image of Christ, so that we may enter the banquet of your Realm together with a multitude of brothers and sisters. Use us, if you so wish, to continue to call others to the universal banquet of your Realm.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Monday, October 16, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

Lord,  
our help and guide,  
make your love the foundation of our lives.

May our love for you express itself  
in our eagerness to do good for others.

You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Gospel Reading - Luke 11: 29-32

The crowds got even bigger and Jesus addressed them, 'This is an evil generation; it is asking for a sign. The only sign it will be given is the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be a sign to this generation.

On Judgement Day the Queen of the South will stand up against the people of this generation and be their condemnation, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, look, there is something greater than Solomon here.

On Judgement Day the men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented; and, look, there is something greater than Jonah here.

### Reflection

The Gospel today presents a very hard accusation of Jesus against the Pharisees and the Scribes. They wanted Jesus to give them a sign, because they did not believe in the signs and in the miracles which He was working. This accusation of Jesus continues in the Gospels of the following days. In meditating on these Gospels, we have to be very attentive not to generalize the accusation of Jesus as if it were addressed to the Hebrew people. In the past, this lack of attention, unfortunately, contributed to an increase in anti-semitism among Christians, which has caused so much harm to humanity throughout the centuries. Instead of pointing the finger against the Pharisees of the time of Jesus, it is better to look at ourselves in the mirror of the texts to discover in them the Pharisee which may live hidden in our Church and in each one of us, and who merits this criticism from Jesus.

- Luke 11: 29-30: The sign of Jonah. “At that time, the people crowded and Jesus began to say: This is an evil generation; it is asking for a sign. The only sign it will be given is the sign of Jonah.” The Gospel of Matthew says that it was the Scribes and the Pharisees who were asking for a sign (Mt 12: 38). They wanted Jesus to work a sign for them, a miracle, in such a way that they could become aware if He was the one sent by God, as they had imagined. They wanted Jesus to submit himself to their criteria. They wanted to fit Him into the framework of their own idea of the Messiah. There was no openness for a possible conversion in them. But Jesus did not submit himself to their request. The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus, before the request of the Pharisees sighed profoundly (Mk 8, 12), probably because He was upset and sad in the face of such blindness. It serves nothing to try to show a beautiful picture to a person who does not want to open their eyes. The only sign that will be given is the sign of Jonah. “For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be a sign to this generation.” How will this sign of the Son of man be? The Gospel of Matthew responds: “For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights” (Mt 12: 40). The only sign will be the resurrection of Jesus. This is the sign which will be given in the future to the Scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus, who was condemned to death by them and to death on the cross, will rise from the dead by God and will continue to resurrect in many ways in those who believe in him. The sign which converts is not the miracles but the witness of life!
- Luke 11: 31: Solomon and the Queen of the South. The reference to the conversion of the people of Nineveh associates and recalls the conversion of the Queen of the South: “The Queen of the South will stand up against this generation and be their condemnation; because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and look, there is something greater than Solomon here.” This reminder of the episode of the Queen of the South who recognizes the wisdom of Solomon shows how the Bible was used at that time. It was by association. The principal rule for the interpretation was this one: “The Bible is explained by the Bible.” Up until now, this is one of the more important norms for the interpretation of the Bible, especially for the reading of the Word of God in a climate of prayer.
- Luke 11: 32: And look there is something greater than Solomon here. After the digression on Solomon and on the Queen of the South, Jesus returns to speak about the sign of Jonah: “The men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented.” The people of Nineveh were converted because of the witness of the preaching of Jonah. He denounces the unbelief of the Scribes and of the Pharisees because “something greater than Jonah is here.” Jesus is greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon. For us Christians, He is the principal key for Scripture (2Co 3: 14-18).

## Personal Questions

- Jesus criticizes the Scribes and the Pharisees who managed to deny the evidence, rendering themselves incapable to recognize the call of God in the events. As Christians today, personally and collectively, do we deserve the same criticism of Jesus?
- Nineveh was converted because of the preaching of Jonah. The Scribes and the Pharisees were not converted. Today, the calls of reality cause changes and conversions in people in the whole world: the ecological threat, urbanization that

dehumanizes, consumerism which standardizes and alienates, injustice, violence, etc. Many Christians live far away from these calls of God which come from reality.

## Concluding Prayer

Praise, servants of Yahweh, praise the name of Yahweh. Blessed be the name of Yahweh,

henceforth and for ever. (Ps 113: 1-2)

## Tuesday, October 17, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord,

our help and guide,

make your love the foundation of our lives.

May our love for you express itself

in our eagerness to do good for others.

You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Luke 11: 37-41

Jesus had just finished speaking when a Pharisee invited Him to dine at his house. He went in and sat down at table. The Pharisee saw this and was surprised that He had not first washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, 'You Pharisees! You clean the outside of cup and plate, while inside yourselves you are filled with extortion and wickedness. Fools! Did not He who made the outside make the inside too? Instead, give alms from what you have and, look, everything will be clean for you.'

## Reflection

In today's Gospel there is the continuation of the tense relationship between Jesus and the religious authority of his time. But in spite of the tension there was a certain familiarity between Jesus and the Pharisees. Invited to eat at their house, Jesus accepts the invitation. He does not lose his freedom before them, and neither do the Pharisees before him.

- Luke 11: 37-38: The admiration of the Pharisees before the liberty of Jesus. "At that time after Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited Him to dine at his house. He went in and sat down at table. The Pharisee saw this and was surprised that He had not first washed before the meal." Jesus accepts the invitation to eat at the house of the Pharisee, but He does not change his way of acting, sitting at table without washing his hands. Neither does the Pharisee change his attitude before Jesus, because he expresses his surprise at the fact that Jesus did not wash his hands. At that time, to wash the hands before eating was a religious obligation, imposed upon people in the name of purity, ordered by the law of God. The Pharisee was

surprised by the fact that Jesus does not observe this religious norm. But in spite of their total difference, the Pharisee and Jesus have something in common: for them life is serious. The way of doing of the Pharisee was in the following: every day, they dedicated eight hours to study and to the meditation of the law of God, another eight hours to work in order to be able to survive with the family and the other eight hours to rest. This serious witness of their life gives them a great popular leadership. Perhaps because of this, in spite of the fact of being very diverse, both Jesus and the Pharisees understood and criticized one another without losing the possibility to dialogue.

- Luke 11: 39-41: The response of Jesus. "You Pharisees you clean the outside of the cup and plate, while inside yourselves you are filled with extortion and wickedness. Fools! Did not He who made the outside make the inside too? Instead, give alms from what you have and, look, everything will be clean for you." The Pharisees observed the law literally. They only looked at the letter of the law and because of this they were incapable to perceive the spirit of the law, the objective that the observance of the law wanted to attain in the life of the persons. For example, in the law it was written: "Love the neighbor as yourself" (Lv 19: 18). And they commented: "We should love the neighbor, yes, but only the neighbor, not the others!" And from there arose the discussion around the question: "Who is my neighbor?" (Lk 10: 29) The Apostle Paul writes in his second Letter to the Corinthians: "The letter kills, the spirit gives life" (2 Co 3: 6). In the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus criticizes those who observe the letter of the law put transgress the spirit (Mt 5: 20). In order to be faithful to what God asks us it is not sufficient to observe the letter of the law. It would be the same thing as to clean the cup on the outside and to leave the inside all dirty: robbery and injustice so on. It is not sufficient not to kill, not to rob, not to commit adultery, not to swear. Only to observe the law of God fully, beyond the letter, goes to the roots and pulls out from within the person the desires of "robbery and injustice" which can lead to murder, robbery, adultery. It is in the practice of love that the fullness of the law is attained (cf. Mt 5: 21-48).

## Personal Questions

- Does our Church today merit the accusation which Jesus addressed against the Scribes and the Pharisees? Do I deserve it?
- To respect the seriousness of life of others who think in a different way from us, can facilitate today dialogue which is so necessary and difficult. How do I practice dialogue in the family, in work and in the community?

## Concluding Prayer

Let your faithful love come to me, Yahweh, true to your promise, save me!

Give me an answer to the taunts against me, since I rely on your word. (Ps 119: 41-42)

## Wednesday, October 18, 2023

*St Luke the Evangelist*

## Opening Prayer

Lord,  
our help and guide,  
make your love the foundation of our lives.

May our love for you express itself  
in our eagerness to do good for others.

You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Luke 10: 1-9

The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of Him in pairs, to all the towns and places He himself would be visiting. And He said to them, 'The harvest is rich but the laborers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to do his harvesting. Start off now, but look, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Take no purse with you, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road.

Whatever house you enter, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!" And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you. Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not move from house to house.

Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is put before you. Cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you."

## Reflection

Today, on the feast of the Evangelist Saint Luke, the Gospel presents to us the sending out of the seventy-two disciples who have to announce the Good News of God in the villages and in the cities of Galilee. We are the seventy-two who come after the Twelve. Through the mission of the disciples, Jesus seeks to recover the community values of the tradition of the people who felt crushed by the twofold slavery of the Roman domination and by the official religion. Jesus tries to renew and organize the communities in such a way that again they are an expression of the Covenant, an example of the Kingdom of God. This is why He insists in hospitality, sharing, communion, and acceptance of the excluded. This insistence of Jesus is found in the advice that He gave to his disciples when He sent them out on mission. At the time of Jesus there were other movements which, like Jesus, were looking for a new way to live and to live together. John the Baptist, the Pharisees and others for example. They also formed communities of disciples (Jn 1: 35; Lk 11: 1; Ac 19: 3) and they had their missionaries (Mt 23: 15). But as we will see there was a great difference.

- Luke 10: 1-3: *The Mission*. Jesus sends out the disciples to the places where He wanted to go. The disciple is the spokesperson of Jesus. He is not the owner of the Good News. He sends them out two by two. That favors reciprocal help, because the mission is not individual, but rather it is a community mission.
- Luke 10: 2-3: *Co-responsibility*. The first task is to pray in order that God sends laborers. All the disciples have to feel that they are responsible for the mission. This is why I should pray to the Father for the continuity of the mission. Jesus sends out his disciples as lambs in the middle of wolves. The mission is a difficult and dangerous task because the system in which the disciples lived, and in which we live, was and continues to be contrary to the reorganization of living communities.
- Luke 10: 4-6: *Hospitality*. Contrary to the other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus should not take anything with them, *no haversack, no sandals*; but they should take

*peace*. This means that they have to trust in the hospitality of the people. This is because the disciple who goes without anything, taking only peace, indicates that he trusts in people. He thinks that he will be welcomed, and people will feel respected and confirmed. By means of this practice the disciple criticizes the laws of exclusion and recovers the ancient values of life in a community. *Do not greet anybody on the way* means that no time should be lost with things which do not belong to the mission.

- Luke 10: 7: *Sharing*. The disciples *should not go from house to house, but they should remain in the same house*. That is, that they should live together with others in a stable way, participate in the life and work of the people and live from what they receive in exchange, *because the laborer deserves his wages*. This means that they should trust the sharing. Thus, by means of this new practice, they recover an ancient tradition of the people, criticizing a culture of accumulation which characterized the politics of the Roman Empire and they announced a new model of living together.
- Luke 10: 8: *Communion around the table*. When the Pharisees went on mission, they got ready. They thought that they could not trust the food the people would give them and that it was not always ritually “pure.” For this reason, they took with them a haversack, a purse and money to be able to get their own food. Thus, instead of helping to overcome divisions, the observance of the laws of purity weakened the living out of the community values even more. The disciples of Jesus should eat whatever the people offered them. They could not live separated, eating their own food. This means that they should accept sharing around the table. They should not be afraid to lose legal purity in contact with the people. Acting in that way, they criticize the laws which are in force, and they announce a new access to purity, that it is intimacy with God.
- Luke 10: 9a: *The acceptance of the excluded*. The disciples have to take care of the sick, cure the lepers and cast out devils (Mt 10: 8). That means that they should accept those who were excluded within the community. This practice of solidarity criticizes the society that excluded many and indicates concrete ways for changing this. This is what the pastoral ministry with the excluded, migrants and marginalized does today.
- Luke 10: 9b: *The coming of the Kingdom*. If these requests are respected, then the disciples can and should shout out to all parts of the world: *The Kingdom of God has arrived!* To proclaim the Kingdom is not, in the first place, to teach truth and doctrine, but to lead toward a new way of living and living together as brothers and sisters starting from the Good News which Jesus has proclaimed to us: God is Father and Mother of all of us.

## Personal Questions

- Hospitality, sharing, communion, welcoming and acceptance of the excluded: are pillars which support community life. How does this take place in my community?
- What does it mean for me to be Christian? In an interview on TV a person answered as follows to the journalist: “I am a Christian, I try to live the Gospel, but I do not participate in the community of the Church.” And the journalist commented: “Then do you consider yourself a football player without a team!” Is this my case?

## Concluding Prayer

All your creatures shall thank you, Yahweh, and your faithful shall bless you.

They shall speak of the glory of your kingship and tell of your might. (Ps 145: 10-11)

## Thursday, October 19, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

Lord,  
our help and guide,  
make your love the foundation of our lives.  
May our love for you express itself  
in our eagerness to do good for others.  
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Gospel Reading - Luke 11: 47-54

Jesus said: 'Alas for you because you build tombs for the prophets, the people your ancestors killed! In this way you both witness to what your ancestors did and approve it; they did the killing, you do the building.

'And that is why the Wisdom of God said, "I will send them prophets and apostles; some they will slaughter and persecute, so that this generation will have to answer for every prophet's blood that has been shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the Temple." Yes, I tell you, this generation will have to answer for it all.

'Alas for you lawyers who have taken away the key of knowledge! You have not gone in yourselves and have prevented others from going in who wanted to.'

When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began a furious attack on Him and tried to force answers from Him on innumerable questions, lying in wait to catch Him out in something He might say.

### Reflection

Once again for the hundredth time, today's Gospel speaks about the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities of that time.

- Luke 11: 47-48: Alas for you because you build tombs for the prophets. "Alas for you because you build tombs for the prophets, the people your ancestors killed! In this way you both witness to what your ancestors did and approve it; they did the killing, you do the building." Mathew says that these were the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23: 19). Jesus' reasoning is clear. If the ancestors killed the prophets and the sons built the tombs, it is because the sons approved the crime of their fathers. Besides this, everybody knows that the dead prophet does not disturb anybody. In this way the sons become witnesses and accomplices of the same crime (cf. Mt 23: 29-32).
- Luke 11: 49-51: To ask for an account of the blood that has been shed since the foundation of the world. "That is why the wisdom of God said: I will send them prophets and apostles; some they will slaughter and persecute, so that this generation will have to answer for every prophet's blood that has been shed since the foundation of

the world, from the blood of Able to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the Temple. Yes, I tell you, this generation is lying in wait to catch Him out in something He might say.” Compared with the Gospel of Matthew, Luke usually offers a brief version of Matthew’s text. But here he increases the observations: “shed since the creation of the world, of the blood of Abel.” He did the same thing with the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew, who wrote for the converted Jews, begins with Abraham (Mt 1: 1.2, 17), while Luke goes back to Adam (Lk 3: 38). Luke universalizes and includes the Pagans, then he writes his Gospel for the converted Pagans. The information about the murdering of Zechariah in the Temple is given in the Book of Chronicles: “The spirit of God then invested Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood up before the people and said, ‘God says this, ‘Why transgress Yahweh’s commands to your certain ruin? For if you abandon Yahweh, He will abandon you. Then they plotted against him and at the king’s order stoned him in the court of the Temple of Yahweh” (2Cr 24: 20-21). Jesus knew the story of his people to the minutest detail. He knew that He would be the next one on the list from Abel to Zechariah; and up until now the list continues to be open. Many people have died for the cause of justice and of truth.

- Luke 11: 52: Alas for you doctors of the Law. “Alas for you lawyers who have taken away the key of knowledge. You have not gone in yourselves and have prevented others from going in who wanted to.” How do they close the Kingdom? They believe that they have the monopoly on knowledge in regard to God and to God’s Law and they impose on others their own way, without leaving a margin for a different idea. They present God as a severe judge, and in the name of God they impose laws and norms which have nothing to do with the commandments of God. They falsify the image of the Kingdom and kill in others the desire to serve God and the Kingdom. A community which organizes itself around this false god “does not enter into the Kingdom.” Neither is it an expression of the Kingdom, and prevents its members from entering into the Kingdom. It is important to notice the difference between Matthew and Luke. Matthew speaks about the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven and the phrase is written in the verbal form in the present: “Alas for you, lawyers of the Law and Pharisees, hypocrites, who close the Kingdom of Heaven before men, because in this way you do not enter and you prevent others from going in who wanted to enter (Mt 23: 13). The expression to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven could mean to enter in Heaven after death, but it is possible that it is a question of entering into the community, around Jesus and in the communities of the first Christians. Luke speaks about the key of knowledge and the phrase is written in the past tense. Luke simply shows the pretension of the Scribes to possess the key of knowledge in regard to God and to the law of God which prevents them from recognizing Jesus as Messiah and prevents the Jewish people from recognizing Jesus as Messiah: You take possession of the key of knowledge. You yourselves do not enter and you prevent others to enter.
- Luke 11: 53-54: The reaction against Jesus. The reaction of the religious authority against Jesus was immediate. “When He left there, the Scribes and the Pharisees began a furious attack on him, and tried to force answers from Him on innumerable questions, lying in wait to catch Him out in something He might say.” Since they considered themselves the only true interpreters of the Law of God, they tried to provoke Jesus on questions of interpretation of the Bible so as to be able to surprise Him in something He would say. Thus the opposition against Jesus and the desire to eliminate Him continues to grow. (Lk 6: 11; 11: 53-54; 19: 48; 20: 19-20; 22: 2).

## Personal Questions

- Many persons who wanted to enter were prevented from doing it and they no longer believed because of the anti-evangelical attitude of the priests. Do you have any experience regarding this?
- The Scribes began to criticize Jesus who thought and acted in a different way. It is not difficult to find reasons for criticizing anyone who thinks differently from me. Do you have any experience regarding this?

## Concluding Prayer

Yahweh has made known his saving power, revealed his saving justice for the nations to see, mindful of his faithful love

and his constancy to the House of Israel. (Ps 98: 2-3)

## Friday, October 20, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord,

our help and guide, make your love the foundation of our lives.

May our love for you express itself in our eagerness to do good for others.

You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 1-7

Meanwhile the people had gathered in their thousands so that they were treading on one another. And Jesus began to speak, first to his disciples. 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and their hypocrisy. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. For this reason, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in hidden places will be proclaimed from the housetops.

'To you my friends I say: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. I will tell you whom to fear: fear Him who, after He has killed, has the power to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, He is the one to fear.

Can you not buy five sparrows for two pennies? And yet not one is forgotten in God's sight. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. There is no need to be afraid: you are worth more than many sparrows.

## Reflection

Today's Gospel presents a last criticism of Jesus against the religious authority of his time.

- Luke 12: 1<sup>a</sup>: Thousands were looking for Jesus. "At that time people had gathered in the thousands and were treading on one another." This phrase allows to have a glimpse of the enormous popularity of Jesus and the desire of the people to encounter Him (cf. Mk 6: 31; Mt 13: 2). It makes us also see the abandonment in which

people found themselves. “They are like sheep without a shepherd,” said Jesus on another occasion when He saw the crowds get close to Him to listen to his words (Mk 6: 34).

- Luke 12: 1b: Attention with hypocrisy. “Jesus began to speak first of all to his disciples: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees – their hypocrisy.” Mark had already spoken of the yeast of the Pharisees and of the Herodians and had suggested that it was a question of the mentality, or of the dominant ideology of that time, which expected a glorious and powerful Messiah (Mk 8: 15; 8: 31-33). In this text Luke identifies the yeast of the Pharisees with hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is an attitude which turns upside down or overturns the values. It hides the truth. It shows a beautiful cloak or cape which hides and falsifies what is rotten inside. In this case, hypocrisy was like the apparent cover of the extreme fidelity to the word of God which hid the contradiction of their life. Jesus wants the contrary. He wants coherence and not that which remains hidden.
- Luke 12: 2-3: That which is hidden will be revealed. “Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. For this reason, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in hidden places will be proclaimed from the housetops.” It is the second time that Luke speaks about this theme (cf. Lc 8: 17). Instead of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees which hides the truth, the disciples should be sincere. They should not be afraid of truth. Jesus invites them to share with the others the teachings which they learn from Him. The disciples cannot keep these to themselves, but they should spread them. One day, the masks will fall completely away and everything will be clearly revealed and will be proclaimed on the housetops (Mt 10: 26-27).
- Luke 12: 4-5: Do not be afraid. “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. I will tell you whom to fear: fear Him who after He has killed has the power to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, He is the one to fear.” Here Jesus addresses himself to his friends the disciples. They should not be afraid of those who kill the body, who torture, who trample on and make one suffer. Those who torture can kill the body, but they cannot kill liberty and the spirit. Yes, they should be afraid that fear of suffering may lead them to hide or to deny the truth will lead them to offend God; because he who separates himself from God will be lost forever.
- Luke 12: 6-7: You are worth more than many sparrows. “Can you not buy five sparrows for two pennies? And yet not one is forgotten in God’s sight. For every hair on your head has been counted. Do not fear you are worth more than many sparrows.” The disciples should not be afraid of anything, because they are in God’s hands. Jesus asks them to look at the sparrows. Two sparrows are sold for a few pennies and not one of them falls to the ground without the will of the Father. Even the hair on your head is counted. Luke says that not one hair falls from your head without the permission of the Father (Lk 21: 18). And so many hairs fall from our head! This is why, “Do not fear, you are worth more than many sparrows.” This is the lesson that Jesus draws from the contemplation of nature (cf Mt 10: 29-31).
- The contemplation of nature. In the Sermon on the Mount, the most important message Jesus takes is from the contemplation on nature. He says: “Have you heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy; but I say: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for He causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore set no bounds to your love, just as the

Heavenly Father sets non to his" (Mt 5: 43-45, 48). The observation of the rhythm of the sun and the rain led Jesus to make that revolutionary affirmation: "Love your enemies." The same thing is valid concerning the invitation to look at the flowers of the fields and the birds of the sky (Mt 6: 25-30). This contemplative and surprising attitude before nature led Jesus to criticize truths apparently eternal. Six times, one after another, He had the courage to publicly correct the Law of God: "It has been said, but I tell you..." The discovery made in the renewed contemplation of nature becomes a very important light to reread history for Him. A different look which discovers lights that were not perceived before. Today there is new vision of the universe which is circulating. The discoveries of science concerning the immensity of the macro-cosmos and of the micro-cosmos are becoming sources of a new contemplation of the universe. Many apparently eternal truths are now beginning to be criticized.

## Personal Questions

- What is hidden will be revealed. Is there in me something which I fear that it be revealed?
- The contemplation of the sparrows and of the things of nature lead Jesus to have a new and surprising attitude which reveals the gratuitous goodness of God. Do I usually contemplate nature?

## Concluding Prayer

The word of Yahweh is straightforward, all He does springs from his constancy. He loves uprightness and justice; the faithful love of Yahweh fills the earth. (Ps 33: 4-5)

## Saturday, October 21, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Lord,

our help and guide, make your love the foundation of our lives.

May our love for you express itself in our eagerness to do good for others.

You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 8-12

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I tell you, if anyone openly declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, the Son of man will declare himself for him in the presence of God's angels. But anyone who disowns me in the presence of human beings will be disowned in the presence of God's angels.

'Everyone who says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven, but no one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will be forgiven. 'When they take you before synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say, because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say.'

## Reflection

- Context. While Jesus is on the way toward Jerusalem, we read in Luke, chapter 11, that precedes our passage, presenting Him as having the intention to reveal the abyss of the merciful acting of God and at the same time the profound misery hidden in the heart of man. Particularly in revealing this to those who have the task of being witnesses of the Word and of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. Jesus presents such realities with a series of reflections which provoke effects in the reader, such as to feel attracted by the force of his Word to the point of feeling judged interiorly and detached from all desires of greatness which shake and agitate man (9: 46). The reader identifies himself with various attitudes that the teaching of Jesus arouses. Above all, he recognizes himself as follower of Christ in the disciple and sent to precede him in the role of messenger of the kingdom, in the one who hesitates somewhat in following him, and in the Pharisee or doctor of the Law, a slave of their interpretations and lifestyle. In summary, the course of the reader in chapter 11 is characterized by this encounter with the teaching of Jesus who reveals to him the intimacy of God, the mercy of God's heart, and the truth of his being a man. In chapter 12, Jesus opposes the perverted judgment of man to the goodness of God who always gives with superabundance. Man's life enters into play here. It is necessary to be attentive to the perversion of the human judgment and to the hypocrisy that distorts values in order to privilege only one's own interests and advantages more than being interested in life, that life which is accepted gratuitously. The Word of God gives the reader an appeal on how to face the question regarding life: man will be judged on his behavior at the time of threats. It is necessary to be concerned with the men who can "kill the body" but rather to have at heart the fear of God who judges and corrects. But Jesus does not promise the disciples that they will be free from threats and persecutions, but He assures them that they will have God's help at the moments of difficulty.
- To know how to recognize Jesus. The courageous commitment to recognize the friendship of Jesus publicly implies as a consequence a personal communion with Him at the moment of his return to judge the world. At the same time, the betrayal in "who will deny me," the one who is afraid to confess and recognize Jesus publicly, condemns himself. The reader is invited to reflect on the crucial importance of Jesus in the history of salvation. It is necessary to decide to be either with Jesus or against Him and of his Word of Grace. This decision, to recognize or to reject Jesus, depends is critical to our salvation. Luke makes it evident that the communion that Jesus gives at the present time to his disciples will be confirmed and will become perfect at the moment of his coming in glory ("he will come in his glory and of the Father and of the angels": 9: 26). The call to the Christian community is very evident. Even if it has been exposed to the hostility of the world, it is indispensable not to cease to give a courageous witness of Jesus, of communion with him, to value and not to be ashamed to show one is a Christian.
- Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Here Luke understands blasphemy as offensive speaking or speaking against. This verb was applied to Jesus when in 5, 21 He had forgiven sins. The question presented in this passage may give rise in the reader to some difficulty: is blasphemy against the Son of man less grave or serious than the one against the Holy Spirit? The language of Jesus may seem rather strong for the reader of the Gospel of Luke. Through the Gospel he has seen Jesus as showing the behaviour of God who goes to look for sinners, who is demanding but who knows how to wait for the moment of return to Him, when the sinner attains maturity. In Mark and Matthew blasphemy against the Spirit is the lack of recognizing the power of God in

the exorcisms of Jesus. But in Luke it may mean the deliberate and known rejection of the prophetic Spirit that is working in the actions and teaching of Jesus, that is to say, a rejection of the encounter with the merciful acting of salvation with the Father. The lack of recognition of the divine origin of the mission of Jesus, the direct offenses to the person of Jesus, may be forgiven, but anyone who denies the acting of the Holy Spirit in the mission of Jesus will not be forgiven. It is not a question of an opposition between the person of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, or of some contrasting symbol of two diverse periods of history, that of Jesus and that of the community after the Passover, but rather, the evangelist wants to definitively show that to reject the Holy Spirit in the mission of Jesus is equal to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

## Personal Questions

- Are you aware that to be a Christian requires the need to face difficulties, deceit, dangers, and even to risk one's own life to give witness of one's own friendship with Jesus?
- Do you become embarrassed of being a Christian? Are you more concerned about the judgments of men, their approval, are these more important for you or that of losing your friendship with Christ?

## Concluding Prayer

Yahweh our Lord,

how majestic is your name throughout the world!

Whoever keeps singing of your majesty higher than the heavens, even through the mouths of children, or of babes in arms. (Ps 8: 1-2)

## Sunday, October 22, 2023

*Twenty-Ninth 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 22: 15-21

A division of the text to help with the reading:

- Matthew 22: 15-17: The question of the Pharisees and Herodians
- Matthew 22: 18-21: Jesus' reply

### A Key to the Reading:

Jesus comes from Galilee to Jerusalem for the annual feast of the Pasch. As He enters the city, He is acclaimed by the people (Mt 21: 1-11). He immediately goes to the temple where He drives the vendors away (Mt 21: 12-16). Although He stays in Jerusalem, He spends the nights outside the city and returns to the city in the morning (Mt 21: 17). The situation is very tense. In his discussions with the authorities, the high priests, the elders and the Pharisees in Jerusalem, Jesus expresses himself in parables (Mt 21, 23 to 22, 14). They would like to get hold of him, but they are scared (Mt 21: 45-46). This Sunday's Gospel on the tribute due to Caesar (Mt 22, 15-21) is situated within this general state of conflict between Jesus and the authorities.

### Text:

15 Then the Pharisees went away to work out between them how to trap Him in what He said. 16 And they sent their disciples to him, together with some Herodians, to say, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man and teach the way of God in all honesty, and that you are not afraid of anyone, because human rank means nothing to you. 17 Give us your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' 18 But Jesus was aware of their malice and replied, 'You hypocrites! Why are you putting me to the test? 19 Show me the money you pay the tax with.' They handed Him a denarius, 20 and He said, 'Whose portrait is this? Whose title?' 21 They replied, 'Caesar's.' Then He said to them, 'Very well, give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.'

## A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

## Some Questions

*to help us in our personal reflection.*

- Which part of the text touched you most? Why?
- Which groups in power are getting ready to set a trap for Jesus? What kind of trap?
- What did Jesus do to get out of the trap laid by the powerful?
- For today, what does the saying: "Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar and God what belongs to God" mean?

## To Go Deeper into the Theme

### The Context of Our Text of the Gospel of Matthew:

As we were saying, the context of the Gospel of the 29th Sunday is the debate between Jesus and the authorities. It begins with the discussion with the priests and elders on the authority of Jesus (Mt 21: 23-27). Then comes the parable of the two sons where Jesus denounces the hypocrisy of some groups (Mt 21: 28-32). There follow two parables, one of the murderous wine growers (Mt 21: 33-46) and another concerning those who are invited but refuse to attend the wedding feast (Mt 22: 1-14). At this point in our text

(Mt 22: 15-22) the Pharisees and the Herodians enter to set a trap. They ask Him about the tribute to be paid to the Romans. It was a tricky question that divided public opinion. They wanted to accuse Jesus and so lessen his influence over the people at all costs. The Sadducees immediately begin to question Him on the resurrection of the dead, another controversial question and cause of dissent between the Sadducees and the Pharisees (Mt 22: 23-33). It all ends with a discussion on the greatest commandment of all (Mt 22: 34-40) and the Messiah as son of David (Mt 22: 41-45).

Like Jesus, the Christians of the communities in Syria and Palestine for whom Matthew was writing his Gospel were accused and questioned by the authorities, by other groups, and by their neighbors who felt uncomfortable because of the witness of the disciples. When reading these episodes of conflict with the authorities, they felt comforted and encouraged to continue on their journey.

### **A Commentary on the Text:**

- Matthew 22: 15-17: The question of the Pharisees and Herodians.  
The Pharisees and Herodians were the local authorities who did not enjoy popular support in Galilee. They had decided that it was time to kill Jesus (Mt 12: 14; Mk 3: 6). Now, by order of the priests and elders, they want to know whether Jesus is in favor of, or against, paying tribute to the Romans. A deliberate question and full of malice! Under the guise of fidelity to the law of God, they seek reasons for accusing him. If Jesus were to say: "You must pay!" they would accuse him, together with the people, of being a friend of the Romans. If He were to say: "You must not pay!" they would accuse him, together with the Roman authorities, of being a subversive. A dead end!
- Matthew 22: 18-21a: Jesus' reply: show me a coin.  
Jesus is aware of their hypocrisy. In his reply, He wastes no time in useless discussion and goes directly to the heart of the question: "Whose portrait is this? Whose title?" They answer: "Caesar's!"
- Matthew 22: 21b: Jesus' conclusion  
Jesus then draws the conclusion: "Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God!" In fact, they had already acknowledged Caesar's authority. They already paid Caesar what belonged to Caesar since they used his money to buy and sell and even to pay the tribute to the Temple! Hence, the question was useless. Why ask something whose answer was clear in practice? They, who by their question pretended to be servants of God, were in fact forgetting the most important thing: they forgot to give God what belongs to God! What mattered to Jesus was that "they pay to God what belongs to God," that is, they mislead the people that they had lead away from God through their own fault, because through their teachings they prevented people from entering the Kingdom (Mt 23: 13). Rather say: "Pay to God what belongs to God," which is, practice justice and honesty according to the demands of the law of God, because by your hypocrisy you are denying God what is due to Him. The disciples must be aware of this! Because it was the hypocrisy of these Pharisees and Herodians that was blinding their eyes! (Mk 8: 15).

### **A Deepening: Levies, Tributes, Taxes and Tithes:**

In Jesus' time, the people of Palestine paid very many levies, taxes, tributes, fines, contributions, donations, and tithes. Some scholars calculate that half of a family's income went to pay levies. Here is a list that gives an idea of all that the people paid in levies:

### Direct Levies on Properties and Persons:

- Levy on property (*tributum soli*). The taxation officers of the government checked on properties, production, the number of slaves and then fixed the amount to be paid. Periodically, new taxation amounts were set in accordance with census taken.
- Levies on persons (*tributum capitis*). For the poor without land, which included women and men between the ages of 12 and 65 years. The levy on the workforce was 20% of the income of every individual.

### Indirect Levies on Various Transactions:

- Golden crown: Originally this was a gift to the emperor, but then became a compulsory levy. It was paid on special occasions such as feasts or visits of the emperor.
- Salt levy: Salt was the emperor's monopoly. The tribute was paid on salt for commercial use. For instance, salt used by fishermen to salt fish. That is the origin of the word "salary."
- Levy on buying and selling: For each commercial transaction there was a levy of 1%. It was the taxation officers who collected this money. For instance, to buy a slave they asked for 2%.
- Levy on professional practice: For anything at all one needed a permit. For instance, a shoemaker in Palmira paid one denarius per month. One denarius was equivalent to a day's salary. Even prostitutes had to pay.
- Levy on the use of public utilities: Emperor Vespasian introduced a levy on the use of public baths in Rome. He used to say, "Money has no smell!"

### Other Taxes and Obligations:

- Toll: This was a levy on the movement of merchandise, collected by Publicans. Tolls were paid on the road. At certain points there were soldiers who forced those who were reluctant to pay.
- Forced labor: Everyone could be forced to render some service to the State for five years, without remuneration.
- Special subsidy for the armed forces: People were obliged to offer hospitality to soldiers. People also had to pay a certain amount of money for the nourishment and support of the troops.

### Levy for the Temple and for Worship:

- Shekalim: This was the levy for the upkeep of the Temple.
- Tithe: This was the levy for the upkeep of the priests. "Tithe" means the tenth part! First fruits: This was the levy for the upkeep of the cult. That is, the first fruits of all land products.

## Psalm 12

### Against Lying Lips

Help, Yahweh! No one loyal is left,

the faithful have vanished from among the children of Adam. Friend tells lies to friend, and, smooth-tongued, speaks from an insincere heart.

May Yahweh cut away every smooth lip, every boastful tongue, those who say, 'In our tongue lies our strength, our lips are our allies; who can master us?' 'For the poor who are plundered, the needy who groan, now will I act,' says Yahweh, 'I will grant salvation to those who sigh for it.' Yahweh's promises are promises unalloyed, natural silver which comes from the earth seven times refined. You, Yahweh, will watch over them, you will protect them from that brood forever. The wicked will scatter in every direction, as the height of depravity among the children of Adam.

## 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, October 23, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,  
our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy  
in serving you as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns  
with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 13-21

A man in the crowd said to him, 'Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance.' He said to him, 'My friend, who appointed me your judge, or the arbitrator of your claims?' Then He said to them, 'Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life does not consist in possessions, even when someone has more than he needs.'

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

## Reflection

The episode in today's gospel is found only in the Gospel of Luke and does not have a parallel in the other Gospels. It forms part of the long description of Jesus' trip from

Galilee to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28) in which Luke places most of the information which he collected concerning Jesus which is not found in the other three Gospels (cf. Lk 1: 2-3). The gospel today gives the response of Jesus to the person who asked Him to be the mediator in the distribution of an inheritance.

- Luke 12: 13: A request to distribute an inheritance. "One from the crowd told Jesus: Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance." Up until today, the distribution of an inheritance among the living relatives is always a delicate question and, many times, it is the occasion of disputes and of tensions without end. At that time, the inheritance also had something to do with the identity of the person (1 K 21: 1-3) and with survival (Num 27: 1-11; 36: 1-12). The greatest problem was the distribution of the land among the sons of the deceased father. If the family was numerous, there was a danger that the inheritance would be divided into small pieces of land which would not have guaranteed survival of all. For this reason, in order to avoid the breaking up or disintegration of the inheritance and to carry on the name of the family, the firstborn or eldest received double of what the other sons received (Dt 21: 17. cf. 2Rs 2: 11).
- Luke 12: 14-15: Response of Jesus: attention to greed, to cupidity. "Jesus answers: My friend, who appointed me your judge or the arbitrator of your claims?" In the response of Jesus appears the knowledge which He has of His mission. Jesus does not feel sent by God to respond to the request to be arbitrator between the relatives who argue or quarrel among themselves concerning the distribution of the inheritance. But the request of this man leads Him to the mission to orientate persons, because "Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life does not consist in possessions, even when someone has more than he needs." It was part of his mission to clarify the sense of life. The value of life does not consist in having many things, but rather in being rich for God (Lk 12: 21). Because when gain occupies the heart, it does not know how to distribute the inheritance in an equitable way and with peace.
- Luke 12: 16-19: The parable that makes one think on the sense of life. Then Jesus told a parable to help persons to reflect on the sense of life: "There was a rich man who having had a good harvest from his land, thought to himself: What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops." The rich man was very obsessed by the concern of his goods which had increased in an unforeseen way because of an abundant harvest. He thinks only of accumulating in order to guarantee a life without worries. He says: This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and store all my grain and my goods in them and I will say to my soul: My soul, now you have plenty of good things laid for many years to come, take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time."
- Luke 12: 20: The first conclusion of the parable. "But God said to him: 'Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul, and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?' So it is when someone stores up treasures for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God." Death is an important key to discovering the true sense of life. It makes all things relative because it shows what perishes and what remains. Anyone who only seeks to have, and forgets to be, loses everything at the hour of death. Here we have a thought which appears very frequently in the books of wisdom: Why accumulate great quantities of goods in this life if you do not know what will become of them and if you do not know what the heirs will do with what you will leave them. (Qo 2: 12, 18-19, 21).
- Luke 12: 21: second conclusion of the parable. "So it is with someone who stores up treasures for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God." How can one become rich for God? Jesus gives several suggestions and advice: Anyone who wants

to be first, let him be last (Mt 20: 27; Mk 9: 35; 10: 44); it is better to give than to receive (Ac 20: 35); the greatest is the smallest (Mt 18: 4; 23: 11; Lk 9: 48) he/she who loses his/her life will save it (Mt 10: 39; 16: 25; Mk 8: 35; Lk 9: 24).

## Personal Questions

- The man asked Jesus to help Him in the distribution of his inheritance. And you, what do you ask Jesus in your prayer?
- Consumerism creates needs and awakens in us the desire of gaining. What do you do so as not to be a victim of gain brought about by consumerism?

## Concluding Prayer

Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth, serve Yahweh with gladness,  
come into his presence with songs of joy! (Ps 100: 1-2)

## Tuesday, October 24, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,  
our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy  
in serving you as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns  
with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 35-38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'See that you have your belts done up and your lamps lit. Be like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.

Blessed those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. In truth I tell you, he will do up his belt, sit them down at table and wait on them.

It may be in the second watch that he comes, or in the third, but blessed are those servants if he finds them ready.

## Reflection

By means of this parable, the Gospel today exhorts us to be vigilant.

- Luke 12: 35: Exhortation to be vigilant, watchful. "Be ready and have your belts done up and your lamps lit." To gird oneself meant to take a cloth or a cord and put it around the robe. To be girded meant to be ready, prepared for immediate action. Before the flight from Egypt, at the moment of celebrating the Passover, the

Israelites had to gird themselves, that is be prepared, ready to be able to leave immediately (Ex 12: 11). When someone goes to work, to fight or to execute a task he girds himself (Ct 3: 8). In the letter of Paul to the Ephesians he describes the armor of God and he says that your waist must be girded with the cord of truth (Ep 6: 14). The lamps should be lit, because to watch is the task to be carried out during the day as well as during the night. Without light one cannot go in the darkness of the night.

- Luke 12: 36: A parable. In order to explain what it means to be girded, Jesus tells a brief parable. “Be like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.” The task of waiting for the arrival of the master demands constant and permanent vigilance, especially during the night, because one does not know at what time the master will return. The employee has to always be attentive and vigilant.
- Luke 12: 37: Promise of happiness. “Blessed those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; In truth I tell you, he will do up his belt, sit them down at table and wait on them.” Here in this promise of happiness, things turn upside down. The master becomes the employee and begins to serve the employee who becomes the master. At the Last Supper Jesus teaches that even though He is Lord and Master, He became the servant of all (Jn 13: 4-17). The happiness promised has something to do with the future, with happiness at the end of time, as opposed to what Jesus promised in the other parable when He said: “Which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, come and have your meal at once? Would he not be more likely to say, ‘Get my supper ready; fasten your belt and wait on me while I eat and drink. You yourself can eat and drink afterwards? Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told? So with you, when you have done all you have been told to do, say, ‘we are useless servants; we have done no more than our duty’ (Lk 17: 7-10).
- Luke 12: 38: He repeats the promise of happiness. “And if he comes at midnight, or at dawn, and finds those servants ready, blessed are they!” He repeats the promise of happiness which requires total vigilance. The master could return at midnight, at three o’clock in the morning, or at any other moment. The employee must be girded, ready to be able to do his work immediately.

## Personal Questions

- We are employees of God. We should be girded, ready, attentive, and vigilant twenty-four hours a day. Do you succeed to do this? How do you do it?
- The promise of future happiness is the opposite of the present. What does this reveal to us of the goodness of God for us, for me?

## Concluding Prayer

I am listening. What is God's message? Yahweh's message is peace for his people.

His saving help is near for those who fear him, his glory will dwell in our land. (Ps 85: 8-9)

## Wednesday, October 25, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,  
our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy  
in serving you as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns  
with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 39-48

Jesus said to his disciples. 'You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the wall of his house. You too must stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

Peter said, 'Lord, do you mean this parable for us, or for everyone?'

The Lord replied, 'Who, then, is the wise and trustworthy steward whom the master will place over his household to give them at the proper time their allowance of food?'

Blessed that servant if his master's arrival finds him doing exactly that. I tell you truly, he will put him in charge of everything that he owns. But if the servant says to himself, "My master is taking his time coming," and sets about beating the manservants and the servant-girls, and eating and drinking and getting drunk, 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 unfaithful.

'The servant who knows what his master wants but has got nothing ready and done nothing in accord with those wishes, will be given a great many strokes of the lash.

The one who did not know but has acted in such a way that he deserves a beating, will be given fewer strokes. When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person; when someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected.

## Reflection

Today's Gospel presents again the exhortation to vigilance with two other parables. Yesterday, it was the parable of the Master and the servant (Lk 12: 36-38). Today, the first parable is the one about the householder and the burglar (Lk 12: 39-40) and the other one speaks of the master and the steward (Lk 12: 41-47).

- Luke 12: 39-40: The parable of the householder and of the burglar. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the walls of the house. You too must stand ready, because the son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. So just as the householder does not know at what hour the burglar will come, in the same way, no one knows the hour when the Son of Man will arrive. Jesus says this very clearly: "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 worried about the end of the world. On the streets of the cities, we see written on the walls: Jesus will return! There are even persons who are in anguish because of the proximity of the end of the world, and they commit suicide. But time goes by and the end of the world does not arrive! Many times, the affirmation "Jesus will return" is used to frighten people and oblige them to go to church! After waiting and speculation about the coming of Jesus, many people no longer perceive the presence in our

midst, in the most common things of life, or in daily events. What is important is not to know the hour of the end of the world, but rather being capable of perceiving 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 everyday life.

- Luke 12: 41: Peter's question. "Then, Peter said, Lord, do you mean this parable for us, or for everyone? The reason for this question asked by Peter is not clearly understood. It recalls another episode, in which Jesus responds to a similar question saying: "To you it is granted to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted" (Mt 13: 10-11; Lk 8: 9-10).
- Luke 12: 42-48<sup>a</sup>: The parable of the householder and the steward. In the response to Peter's question, Jesus formulates another question in the form of a parable: "Who then is the wise and trustworthy steward whom the master will place over his household to give them at the proper time their allowance of food?" Immediately after, Jesus himself gives the response in the parable: the good steward is the one who carries out his mission of servant, he does not use the goods received for his own advantage and is always vigilant and attentive. Perhaps this is an indirect response to Peter's question, as if He would say: "Peter, the parable is really for you! It is up to you to know how to administer well the mission which God has given you: to coordinate the communities. In this sense, the response is also valid for each one of us. And here the final warning acquires much sense: "When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person; when someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected."
- The coming of the Son of Man and the end of this world. The same problems existed in the Christian communities of the first centuries. Many people of the communities said that the end of this world was close at hand and that Jesus would return afterwards. Some from the community of Thessalonica in Greece, basing themselves in Paul's preaching said: "Jesus will return!" (1 Th 4: 13-18; 2 Th 2: 2). And because of this, there were even persons who no longer worked, because they thought that the coming would be within a few days or few weeks. Why work if Jesus would return? (cf 2 Th 3: 11). Paul responds that it was not so simple as it seemed, and to those who did not work he would warn: "He who does not work has no right to eat!" Others remained looking up to Heaven, waiting for the return of Jesus on the clouds (cf. Ac 1: 11). And others did not like to wait (2 P 3: 4-9). In general the Christians lived expecting the imminent coming of Jesus. Jesus would come for the Final Judgment to end the unjust history of this world here below and to inaugurate a new phase of history, the definitive phase of the New Heavens and the New Earth. They thought that it would take place after one or two generations. Many people would still be alive when Jesus would appear glorious in Heaven (1Th 4: 16-17; Mk 9: 1). Others, tired of waiting would say: "He will never come back!" (2 P 3: 4). Even up until today, the final return of Jesus has not yet taken place! How can this delay be understood? We are not aware that Jesus has already returned, and that He is in our midst: "Look, I am with you always, yes, till the end of time." (Mt 28: 20). He is already at our side in the struggle for justice, for peace and for life. The plenitude and the fullness has not been attained, but an example or guarantee of the Kingdom is already in our midst. This is why, we wait with firm hope for the total liberation of humanity and of nature (Rm 8: 22-25). And when we wait and we struggle, we say rightly: "He is already in our midst!" (Mt 25: 40).

## Personal Questions

- The response of Jesus to Peter serves also for us, for me. Am I a good administrator of the mission which I have received?
- What do I do in order to be always vigilant?

## 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)

## Thursday, October 26, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,  
our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy  
in serving you as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns  
with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!

There is a baptism I must still receive, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! 'Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law.'

## Reflection

The Gospel today gives us some phrases of Jesus. The first one on bringing fire to the earth is only in Luke's Gospel. The others have more or less parallel phrases in Matthew. This leads us to the problem of the origin of the composition of these two Gospels for which much ink has already been used throughout the past two centuries. This problem will only be solved fully when we will be able to speak with Matthew and Luke, after our resurrection.

- Luke 12: 49-50: Jesus has come to bring fire on earth. "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!" The image of fire is frequently mentioned in the Bible and does not have just one meaning. It could be the image of devastation and punishment, but it can also be the image of purification and illumination (Is 1: 25; Zc 13: 9). It can also express protection as it appears in Isaiah: "Should you pass through fire, you will not suffer" (Is 43: 2). John the Baptist baptized with water, but after him Jesus baptized with fire (Lk 3: 16). Here the image of fire is

associated to the action of the Holy Spirit who descends at Pentecost as the image of the tongues of fire (Ac 2: 2-4). Images and symbols never have an obligatory sense, totally defined, which does not allow some divergence. In this case it would be neither image nor symbol. It is proper to the symbol to arouse the imagination of the listeners and onlookers. Leaving freedom to the listeners, the image of fire combined with the image of baptism indicates the direction toward which Jesus wants people to turn their imagination. Baptism is associated with the water and it is always the expression of a commitment. At another point, Baptism appears like the symbol of the commitment of Jesus with his Passion: "Can you be baptized with the baptism with which I will be baptized?" (Mc 10: 38-39).

- Luke 12: 51-53: Jesus has come to bring division. Jesus always speaks of peace (Mt 5: 9; Mk 9: 50; Lk 1: 79; 10: 5; 19: 36; Jn 14: 27; 16: 33; 20: 21, 26). So how can we understand the phrase in today's Gospel which seems to say the contrary? "Do you think that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." This affirmation does not mean that Jesus himself is in favor of division. No! Jesus did not want division. But the announcement of truth that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah becomes a reason for much division among the Jews. In the same family or community, some were in favor and others were radically against. In this sense, the Good News of Jesus was really a source of division, a "sign of contradiction" (Lk 2: 34), or as Jesus said: "from now on a household will be divided, father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law." That is what was happening in the families and in the communities. Much division and much discussion as a consequence of the Good News among the Jews of that time, with some accepting and others denying. The same thing could be applied to the announcement of fraternity as a supreme value of humanity living together. Not all agreed with this announcement because they preferred to maintain their privileges. And for this reason, they were not afraid to persecute those who announced sharing and fraternity. This was the division which arose which was at the origin of the Passion and death of Jesus. Jesus wants the union of all in truth (cf. Jn 17: 17-23). It is like this even now. Many times where the Church is renewed, the call of the Good News becomes a "sign of contradiction" and division. Persons who lived very comfortably for years in the routine of their Christian life do not want to be disturbed or bothered by the "innovations" of Vatican Council II. Disturbed by changes, they use all their intelligence to find arguments to defend their own opinions and to condemn the changes, considering them contrary to what they think is their true faith.

## Personal Questions

- Seeking union Jesus was the cause of division. Does this happen with you today?
- How do I react before the changes in the Church?

## Concluding Prayer

Shout for joy, you upright;

praise comes well from the honest. Give thanks to Yahweh on the lyre,

play for Him on the ten-stringed lyre. (Ps 33: 1-2)

# Friday, October 27, 2023

## Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,  
our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy  
in serving you as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns  
with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - Luke 12: 54-59

Jesus said again to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud looming up in the west you say at once that rain is coming, and so it does. And when the wind is from the south you say it's going to be hot, and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it you do not know how to interpret these times? 'Why not judge for yourselves what is upright?'

For example: when you are going to court with your opponent, make an effort to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer and the officer have you thrown into prison. I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the very last penny.'

## Reflection

The Gospel today presents the call on the part of Jesus to learn to read the signs of the times. This was the text which inspired the Pope John XXIII to convoke the Church to be more attentive to the signs of time and to better perceive the calls of God in the events of the history of humanity.

- Luke 12: 54-55: Everybody knows how to interpret the face of the earth and of the sky... "When you see a cloud looming up in the west you say at once that rain is coming, and so it does. And when the wind is from the south you say it's going to be hot and it is." Jesus reports a universal human experience. Everybody in his own country or region, knows how to read the face of the sky and of the earth. The body itself understands when there is threat of rain or when the time begins to change. They may say "It will rain." Jesus refers to the contemplation of nature since it is one of the most important sources of knowledge and of experience which He himself had of God. It was the contemplation of nature that helped his discovery of new aspects of faith and in the history of His people. For example, rain which falls on the good and the bad, and the sun which rises on the upright and on the unjust, helped Him to formulate one of the revolutionary messages: "Love your enemies!" (Mt 5: 43-45).
- Luke 12: 56-57: ..., but they do not know how to read the signs of the time. And Jesus draws the conclusion for his contemporaries and for all of us: "Hypocrites!" You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it you do not know how to interpret these times? Why not judge for yourselves what is upright? Saint Augustine said that nature, creation, is the first book that God wrote. Through nature, God speaks to us. Sin mixes up the letters of the book of nature, and because of this, we have not succeeded in reading God's message printed in the things of nature and in the facts of life. The bible is the second book of God, it was written not to occupy or substitute life but to help us interpret nature and life and to learn again to

discover the calls of God in the facts of life. "Why not judge for yourselves what is upright?" Sharing among ourselves what we see in nature, we will be able to discover God's call in life.

- Luke 12: 58-59: To know how to draw lessons for life. "When you are going to court with your opponent, make an effort to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge will hand you over to the officer and the officer will have you thrown into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the very last penny." One of the points on which Jesus insists most is reconciliation. At that time there were many tensions and conflicts among the radical groups which had different tendencies, without dialogue: Zelots, Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians... No one wanted to give in before others. The words of Jesus on reconciliation which require acceptance and understanding enlighten this situation, because the only sin which God does not forgive is our lack of forgiveness toward others (Mt 6: 14). This is why He advises to seek reconciliation before it is too late! When the time of judgment comes, it will be too late. When there is still time try to change life, behavior, and way of thinking, and seek to act justly (cf. Mt 5: 25-26; Col 3: 13; Ep 4: 32; Mk 11: 25).

## Personal Questions

- Read the signs of the Times. When I listen or read the news on TV or in the newspaper am I concerned with perceiving God's call in these facts?
- Reconciliation: to be reconciled is the most insistent request of Jesus. Do I try to collaborate in reconciliation between persons, the races, the people, the tendencies?

## Concluding Prayer

To Yahweh belong the earth and all it contains, the world and all who live there; it is He who laid its foundations on the seas, on the flowing waters fixed it firm. (Ps 24: 1-2)

# Saturday, October 28, 2023

*Feast of Saints Simon and Jude*

## Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, strengthen our faith, hope and love.

May we do with loving hearts what you ask of us  
and come to share the life you promise.

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 6: 12-19

Now it happened in those days that Jesus went onto the mountain to pray; and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.

When day came He summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them; He called them 'apostles': Simon whom He called Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

He then came down with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples, with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear Him and to be cured of their diseases. People tormented by unclean spirits were also cured, and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch Him because power came out of Him that cured them all.

## Reflection

Today the Gospel speaks about two facts: (a) to describe the choice of the twelve Apostles (Lk 6: 12-16) and (b) it says that an immense crowd wanted to meet Jesus to listen to him, to touch him, and to be cured (Lk 6: 17-19).

- Luke 6: 12-13: Jesus spends the night in prayer and chooses the twelve apostles. Before the final choice of the twelve Apostles, Jesus goes up to the mountain and spends the whole night in prayer. He prays in order to know whom to choose and He chooses the Twelve, whose names are given in the Gospels. And then they received the title of Apostles. Apostle means one sent, missionary. They were called to carry out a mission. The same mission that Jesus received from the Father (Jn 20: 21). Mark elaborates on the mission and says that Jesus called them to be with Him and to send them out on mission (Mk 3: 14).
- Luke 6: 14-16: The names of the twelve Apostles. The names of the Twelve are the same in the Gospels of Matthew (Mt 10: 2-4), Mark (Mk 3: 16-19) and Luke (Lk 6: 14- 16) with little difference. Many of these names come from the Old Testament: Simon is the name of one of the sons of the Patriarch Jacob (Gn 29: 33). James (Giacomo) is the same name as Jacob (Gn 25: 26). Judas is the name of the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Matthew had the name of Levi (Mk 2: 14), the other son of Jacob (Gn 35: 23). Of the twelve Apostles, seven have a name which comes from the time of the Patriarchs: two times Simon, two times James, two times Judas, and one time Levi! That reveals the wisdom in the pedagogy of the people. By the names of the Patriarchs and the 'Matriarchs', given to the sons and daughters, people maintained the tradition of the ancients alive and helped their own children not to lose their identity. Which are the names that we give today to our sons and daughters?
- Luke 6: 17-19: Jesus comes down from the mountain and people look for him. Coming down from the mountain with the twelve, Jesus encounters an immense crowd of people who were seeking to listen to His word and to touch Him because they knew that from Him came out a force of life. In this great crowd there were Jews and foreigners, people from Judaea and also from Tyre and Sidon. They were people who were abandoned and disoriented. Jesus accepts all those who seek him, Jews and Pagans! This is one of the themes preferred by Luke who writes for the converted Pagans.
- The persons called by Jesus are a consolation for us. The first Christians remembered and recorded the names of the Twelve Apostles and of the other men and women who followed Jesus closely. The Twelve, called by Jesus to form the first community with him, were not saints. They were common persons, like all of us. They had their virtues and their defects. The Gospels tell us very little about the temperament and the character of each one of them. But what they say, even if it is not much is a reason of consolation for us.

- Peter was a generous person and full of enthusiasm (Mk 14: 29, 31; Mt 14: 28-29), but in the moment of danger and when taking a decision, his heart becomes small and he turns back (Mt 14: 30; Mk 14: 66-72). He was even Satan for Jesus (Mk 8: 33). Jesus calls him *Pietra*- Rock (*Pietro*). Peter of himself was not Rock, he becomes Rock (*roccia*), because Jesus prays for him (Lk 22: 31-32).
- James and John are ready to suffer with and for Jesus (Mk 10: 39), but they were very violent (Lk 9: 54). Jesus calls them “sons of thunder” (Mc 3: 17). John seemed to have a certain jealousy. He wanted Jesus only for his group (Mk 9: 38).
- Philip had a welcoming way. He knew how to get others in contact with Jesus (Jn 1: 45-46), but he was not very practical in solving problems (Jn 12: 20-22; 6: 7). Sometimes he was very naïve. There was a moment when Jesus lost patience with him: Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? (Jn 14: 8-9)
- Andrew, the brother of Peter and friend of Philip, was more practical. Philip goes to him to solve the problems (Jn 12: 21-22). Andrew calls Peter (Jn 1: 40-41), and Andrew found the boy who had five loaves and two fish (Jn 6: 8-9).
- Bartholomew seems to be the same as Nathanael. He was from that place and could not admit that something good could come from Nazareth (Jn 1: 46).
- Thomas was capable of maintaining his opinion for a whole week, against the witness of all the others (Jn 20: 24-25). But when he saw that he was mistaken he was not afraid to recognize his error (Jn 20: 26-28). He was generous, ready to die with Jesus (Jn 11: 16).
- Mathew or Levi was the Publican, a tax collector, like Zacchaeus (Mt 9, 9; Lk 19, 2). They were persons committed to the oppressing system of the time.
- Simon, instead seems belonged to the movement which was radically opposed to the system that the Roman Empire imposed on the Jewish people. This is why they also called them Zelots (Lk 6, 15). The group of Zelots succeeded in provoking an armed revolt against the Romans.
- Judas was the one who was in charge of the money of the group (Jn 13, 29). He betrayed Jesus.
- Nothing is said about James of Alphaeus and Judas Thadeus in in the Gospels except the name.

## Personal Questions

- Jesus spends the whole night in prayer to know whom to choose, and He chooses these twelve. What conclusions do you draw from this gesture of Jesus?
- The first Christians remembered the names of the twelve Apostles who were at the origin of their community. Do you remember the names of the persons who are at the origin of the community to which you belong? Do you remember the name of some catechist or professor who was significant for your Christian formation? What do you especially remember about them: the content of what they taught you or the witness that they gave you?

## Concluding Prayer

The Lord is good,

his faithful love is everlasting, his constancy from age to age. (Ps 100: 5)

# Sunday, October 29, 2023

*Thirtieth 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 22: 34-40

### A Key to the Reading:

In the Gospel of the 30th Sunday of ordinary time, the Pharisees want to know what Jesus thinks the greatest commandment of the law is. This theme was much discussed among the Jews of those days. It was a regular debate. Today too, people wish to know what defines a person as a good Christian. Some say that this consists in being baptized, praying and going to Mass on Sunday. Others say it consists in practicing justice and living out fraternity. Each has his or her opinion. According to you, what is the most important thing in religion and in the life of the Church? When reading this text try to pay great attention to the way Jesus answers the question.

### Text:

34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees they got together 35 and, to put Him to the test, one of them put a further question, 36 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' 37 Jesus said to him, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and the first commandment. 39 The second resembles it: You must love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.'

## A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

## Some Questions

*to help us in our personal reflection.*

- What did you like most in this text or what touched you most? Why?
- Who were the Pharisees then? Who are the Pharisees today?

- How could the question asked of Jesus by the Pharisees put Him to the test?
- What is the relationship between the first and the second commandment?
- Why is it that the love of God and the love of neighbor constitute a summary of the law and the prophets?

## To Go Deeper into the Theme

### The Context of this Text as it Appears in the Gospel of Matthew:

This is one of the many discussions Jesus had with the religious authorities of that time. This time it was with the Pharisees. First, the Pharisees had tried to discredit Jesus with the people by spreading theories about Him saying that He was possessed by devils with which He drove out Beelzebub (Mt 12: 24). Now, in Jerusalem, they enter once more into a discussion with Jesus concerning the interpretation of the law of God.

### A Commentary on the Text:

- Matthew 22: 34-36: A question put by the Pharisees.  
First, to put Jesus to the test, the Sadducees had asked Him about belief in the resurrection and were firmly silenced by Jesus (Mt 22: 23-33). Now the Pharisees come to the fore. The Pharisees and Sadducees were enemies, but they become friends in criticizing Jesus. The Pharisees come together and one of them represents them by asking for a clarification: "Master, which is the greatest commandment of the law?" In those days, the Jews had a huge number of norms, customs, and laws, great and small, to regulate the observance of the Ten Commandments. One point concerning two commandments of the law of God was a matter of great discussion among the Pharisees. Some said: "All the laws, great or small, have equal value because they all come from God. We cannot make distinctions in matters concerning God." Others said: "Some laws are more important than others and thus they deserve greater observance!" The Pharisees want to know where Jesus stands in this debate.
- Matthew 22: 37-40: Jesus' reply.  
Jesus replies by quoting some words from the Bible: You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind!" (cfr Dt 6: 4-5). In Jesus' days, pious Jews recited this phrase three times a day, morning, noon and night. It was a well-known prayer among them, as the Our Father is for us today. And Jesus goes on quoting the Old Testament: "This is the greatest and first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19: 18). And He concludes: "On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets too." In other words, this is the way to God and the neighbor. There is no other. The greatest temptation of human beings is that of trying to separate these two loves, because in this way the poverty of others would not discomfort their consciences.

### A Deepening:

- **Pharisees:**  
The word "Pharisees" means "separate" because their rigid way of observing the Law of God separated them from others. Among themselves they called each other companions because they formed a community whose ideal was that of observing absolutely the norms and all the commandments of the Law of God. The way of life of most of them was a witness to the people because they lived by their labor and

dedicated many hours every day to study and meditation on the law of God. But there was something very negative They sought their safety not in God but in the rigorous observance of the Law of God. They trusted more in what they did for God than in what God did for them. They had lost the notion of gratuity, which is the source and fruit of love. Before such a false attitude towards God, Jesus reacts firmly and insists on the practice of love that makes the observance of the law, and of its true meaning, relative. In an age of change and uncertainty, such as now, the same temptation reappears. Seeking safety before God, not in the goodness of God towards us, but in the rigorous observance of the Law. If we succumb to such a temptation, then we deserve the same censure from Jesus.

- **A Parallel between Mark and Matthew:**

In the Gospel of Mark, it is a doctor of the law who asks the question (Mk 12: 32-33). After listening to Jesus' reply, the doctor agrees with Him and draws the following conclusion: "Yes, to love God and neighbor is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice." Or else, the commandment of love is the most important among all the commandments concerned with cult and sacrifices of the Temple and with external observances. This statement already existed in the Old Testament from the time of the prophet Hosea (Hos 6: 6; Ps 40: 6-8; Ps 51: 16-17). Today we would say that the practice of love is more important than novenas, promises, fasts, prayers and processions. Jesus approves of the conclusion reached by the doctor of the law and says: "You are not far from the Kingdom"! The Kingdom of God consists of this: acknowledging that the love of God is equal to the love of neighbor. We cannot reach God without giving ourselves to the neighbor!

- **The Greatest Commandment:**

The greatest commandment and the first is this: "You must love God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind" (Mk 12: 30; Mt 22: 37). As far as the people of God, throughout the centuries, understood the meaning of this love did they become aware that the love of God is real and true only if it is made concrete in the love of neighbor. That is why the second commandment resembles the first (Mt 22: 39; Mk 12: 31). "Anyone who says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, is a liar" (1Jn 4: 20). "On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also" (Mt 22: 40). Because of this identification of the two loves, there has been an evolution in three phases:

- 1st Phase: "neighbor," is the relative of the same race

The Old Testament already taught that we must "love our neighbor as ourselves!" (Lv 19: 18). Then the word neighbor was synonymous with relative. They felt obliged to love all those who were part of the same family, the same clan, the same people. As for strangers, that is, those who did not belong to the Jewish people, the book of Deuteronomy says: "From a foreigner you may exact payment, but you must remit whatever claim you have on your brother (relative, neighbor)!" (Dt 15: 3).

- 2nd Phase: "neighbor" is the one I approach or who approaches me.

The concept of neighbor is broadened. In Jesus' time, there was a whole discussion as to "who is my neighbor?" Some doctors of the law thought the concept of neighbor had to be extended beyond the limits of race. Others would not hear of this. So a doctor turns to Jesus and asks this vexed question: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus replies with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 29-37), where the neighbor is neither the relative nor the friend, but all those who approach us, irrespective of religion, colour, race, gender or language! You must love him!

- 3rd Phase: The measure of our love for the “neighbor” is the love with which Jesus loves us. Jesus had said to the doctor of the law: "You are not far from the Kingdom!" (Mk 12: 34). The doctor was already close because in fact, the Kingdom consists in uniting the love of God with the love of neighbor as the doctor had solemnly declared before Jesus (Mk 12: 33). But to enter the Kingdom he had to take one more step. In the Old Testament, the criterion of love for neighbor was the following: "love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus stretches the criterion further and says: "This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you! A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends!" (Jn 15: 12-13). Now, in the New Testament, the criterion is: "Love your neighbor as Jesus loved us!" Jesus interpreted the exact meaning of the Word of God and showed us the way to a more just and fraternal way of life.

## Psalm 62

### In God Alone There is Rest for My Soul

In God alone there is rest for my soul, from Him comes my safety;  
 he alone is my rock, my safety,  
 my stronghold so that I stand unshaken. How much longer will you set on a victim, all together, intent on murder,  
 like a rampart already leaning over, a wall already damaged?  
 Trickery is their only plan, deception their only pleasure,  
 with lies on their lips they pronounce a blessing, with a curse in their hearts.  
 Rest in God alone, my soul! He is the source of my hope.  
 He alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold, so that I stand unwavering.  
 In God is my safety and my glory, the rock of my strength.  
 In God is my refuge;  
 trust in him, you people, at all times. Pour out your hearts to him,  
 God is a refuge for us.  
 Ordinary people are a mere puff of wind, important people a delusion;  
 set both on the scales together,  
 and they are lighter than a puff of wind.  
 Put no trust in extortion, no empty hopes in robbery;  
 however much wealth may multiply, do not set your heart on it.  
 Once God has spoken, twice have I heard this:  
 Strength belongs to God, to you, Lord, faithful love;  
 and you repay everyone as their deeds deserve.

## 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, October 30, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, strengthen our faith, hope and love.

May we do with loving hearts what you ask of us

and come to share the life you promise.

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 13: 10-17

One Sabbath day Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and there before Him was a woman who for eighteen years had been possessed by a spirit that crippled her; she was bent double and quite unable to stand upright.

When Jesus saw her He called her over and said, 'Woman, you are freed from your disability,' and He laid his hands on her. And at once she straightened up, and she glorified God.

But the president of the synagogue was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, and He addressed all those present saying, 'There are six days when work is to be done. Come and be healed on one of those days and not on the Sabbath.'

But the Lord answered him and said, 'Hypocrites! Is there one of you who does not untie his ox or his donkey from the manger on the Sabbath and take it out for watering? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has held bound these eighteen years -- was it not right to untie this bond on the Sabbath day?'

When He said this, all his adversaries were covered with confusion, and all the people were overjoyed at all the wonders He worked.

### Reflection

The Gospel today describes the cure of a woman who was crippled. It is a question of one of the many episodes which Luke narrates, without too much order, in describing the long journey of Jesus toward Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51 to 19: 28).

- Luke 13: 10-11: The situation which brings about the action of Jesus. Jesus is in the synagogue on a day of rest. He keeps the Law respecting Saturday and participating in the celebration together with his people. Luke tells us that Jesus was teaching. In the Synagogue there was a crippled woman. Luke says that she had a spirit which crippled her and prevented her from straightening up. This was a way in which the people of that time explained sicknesses. It was already eighteen years that she was in that situation. The woman does not speak, does not have a name, she does not ask to be cured, she takes no initiative. One is struck by her passivity.

- Luke 13: 12-13: Jesus cures the woman. Seeing the woman, Jesus calls her and says to her: "Woman, you are freed from your disability!" The action of freeing is done by the word, addressed directly to the woman, and through the imposition of the hands. Immediately, she stands up and begins to praise the Lord. There is relation between standing up and praising the Lord. Jesus does things in such a way that the woman stands up, in such a way that she can praise God in the midst of the people meeting in the assembly. Peter's mother-in-law, once she was cured, she stands up and serves (Mk 1: 31). To praise God is to serve the brothers!
- Luke 13: 14: The reaction of the president of the Synagogue. The president of the synagogue became indignant seeing Jesus' action, because He had cured on Saturday: "There are six days when work is to be done. Come and be healed in one of those days and not on the Sabbath." In the criticism of the president of the synagogue, people remember the word of the Law of God which said: "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath for Yahweh your God. You shall do no work that day," (Ex 20: 8-10). In this reaction is the reason why the woman could not participate at that time. The domination of conscience through the manipulation of the law of God was quite strong. And this was the way of keeping the people submitted and bent down, crippled.
- Luke 13: 15-16: The response of Jesus to the president of the synagogue. The president condemned persons because he wanted them to observe the Law of God. What for the president of the synagogue is observance of the Law, for Jesus is hypocrisy: "Hypocrites, is there one of you who does not untie his ox or his donkey from the manger on the Sabbath and take it down for watering? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has held bound these eighteen years – was it not right to untie this bond on the Sabbath day?" With this example drawn from everyday life, Jesus indicates the incoherence of this type of observance of the Law of God. If it is permitted to untie an ox or a donkey on Saturday to give it water, much more will it be permitted to untie a daughter of Abraham to free her from the power of Satan. The true sense of the observance of the Law which pleases God is this: to liberate persons from the power of evil and to make them stand up, in order that they can render glory to God and praise Him. Jesus imitates God who sustains those who are unsteady or weak and lifts those who fall (Ps 145: 14; 146: 8).
- Luke 13: 17: The reaction of the people before the action of Jesus. The teaching of Jesus confuses his enemies, but the crowds are filled with joy because of the wonderful things that Jesus is doing: "All the people were overjoyed at all the wonders He worked." In Palestine, at the time of Jesus, women lived crippled, bent, and submitted to the husband, to parents and to the religious heads of the people. This situation of submission was justified by the religion. But Jesus does not want her to continue to be crippled, bent. To choose and to liberate persons does not depend on a certain date. It can be done every day, even on Saturday!

## Personal Questions

- The situation of women has changed very much since that time, or not? Which is the situation of women in society and in the Church? Is there any relation between religion and oppression of women?
- Did the crowds exult before the action of Jesus? What liberation is taking place today and is leading the crowd to exult and to give thanks to God?

## Concluding Prayer

How blessed is anyone who rejects the advice of the wicked and does not take a stand in the path that sinners tread,  
nor a seat in company with cynics,  
but who delights in the law of Yahweh  
and murmurs his law-- day and night. (Ps 1: 1-2)

## Tuesday, October 31, 2023

*Ordinary Time*

### Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, strengthen our faith, hope and love. May we do with loving hearts what you ask of us  
and come to share the life you promise.

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 13: 18-21

Jesus went on to say, 'What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it with? It is like a mustard seed which a man took and threw into his garden: it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air sheltered in its branches.'

Again He said, 'What shall I compare the kingdom of God with? It is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.'

### Reflection

- Context. Along the road that leads Him to Jerusalem, Jesus is surrounded by “thousands” of persons (11: 29) who crowd around him. The reason for such attraction from the crowds is the Word of Jesus. In chapter 12 one can notice how the people who listen to his Word alternate: the disciples (12: 1-12), the crowd (vv.13-21), the disciples (vv.22-53), the crowds (vv.54-59). The scandal of death is the dominating theme of Luke 13, 1-35. In the first part it is spoken about as the death of all (vv.1-9), in the second part, the death of Jesus (vv.31-35) and then to the death avoided by sinners because their conversion is expected. But there is another theme together with the dominant one: the salvation given to men. The cure of the woman who was bent, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had held during eighteen years, is liberated by Jesus. And in the center of this chapter 13 we find two parables that constitute the overall theme: the Kingdom of God as compared to the “mustard seed” and to the “leaven or yeast.”
- The Kingdom of God is similar to a mustard seed. Such a seed is very common in Palestine and particularly close to the Lake of Galilee. It is especially known because it is particularly small. In Luke 17: 6, Jesus uses such an image to express the hope that He has for the disciples that they have at least a small seed of faith: “If you had faith like a mustard seed...” This parable, which is very simple, confronts two diverse moments in the story of the seed: the moment when it is sown in the earth (the modest beginnings) and when it becomes a tree (the final miracle). Therefore, the

purpose of this account is to narrate the extraordinary growth of a seed that is thrown in one's own garden, and to this follows an amazing growth as it becomes a tree. Like this seed, the Kingdom of God also has its story. The Kingdom of God is the seed thrown into the garden, the place that in the New Testament is the place of the agony and the burial of moment of growth and concludes with becoming a tree open to all.

- The Kingdom of God is similar to yeast. Yeast is put into three measures of flour. In the Hebrew culture yeast was considered a factor of corruption so much so that it was eliminated from their houses, in order not to contaminate the feast at Passover which begins with the week of the unleavened dough. In the ears of the Jews the use of this negative element, to describe the Kingdom of God, was a reason to be disturbed. But the reader is able to discover the convincing force: it is sufficient to put a very small quantity of yeast in three measures of flour in order to get a big amount of dough. Jesus announces that this yeast, hidden or that has disappeared in three measures of flour, after a certain amount of time, leavens the whole dough.
- The effects of the text on the reader. What do these two parables communicate to us? The Kingdom of God, compared by Jesus to a seed that becomes a tree, is close to the story of God as a story of his Word: it is hidden in human history, and it is growing; Luke thinks of the Word of God (the Kingdom of God in our midst) is already developing but it has not as yet become a tree. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are supporting this growth of the Word. The image of yeast completes the frame of the seed. The yeast is the Gospel that is working in the world, as in the ecclesial communities and in the individual believers.

## Personal Questions

- Are you aware that the Kingdom of God is present in our midst and that it grows mysteriously and extends itself in the history of every person, and in the Church?
- The Kingdom is a humble reality, hidden, poor and silent, immersed between the competition and pleasures of life. Have you understood from the two parables, that you will not be able to get a glimpse of the Kingdom if you do not have an attitude of humble and silent listening?

## 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)