



Lectio Divina

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Lectio Divina - November 2023

Lectio Divina - November 2023	1
Wednesday, November 1, 2023	2
Thursday, November 2, 2023	6
Friday, November 3, 2023	9
Saturday, November 4, 2023	10
Sunday, November 5, 2023	12
Monday, November 6, 2023	15
Tuesday, November 7, 2023	17
Wednesday, November 8, 2023	19
Thursday, November 9, 2023	21
Friday, November 10, 2023	23
Saturday, November 11, 2023	25
Sunday, November 12, 2023	27
Monday, November 13, 2023	32
Tuesday, November 14, 2023	34
Wednesday, November 15, 2023	36
Thursday, November 16, 2023	38
Friday, November 17, 2023	40
Saturday, November 18, 2023	42
Sunday, November 19, 2023	44
Monday, November 20, 2023	49
Tuesday, November 21, 2023	51
Wednesday, November 22, 2023	53
Thursday, November 23, 2023	56
Friday, November 24, 2023	58
Saturday, November 25, 2023	60
Sunday, November 26, 2023	61
Monday, November 27, 2023	65
Tuesday, November 28, 2023	67
Wednesday, November 29, 2023	70
Thursday, November 30, 2023	72

Wednesday, November 1, 2023

All Saints Day

Listening to the Text

Opening Prayer:

Lord, the meaning of our life is to seek your Word, which came to us in the person of Christ. Make me capable of welcoming what is new in the Gospel of the Beatitudes, so that I may change my life. I would know nothing about you were it not for the light of the words spoken by your Son Jesus, who came to tell us of your marvels. When I am weak, if I go to Him, the Word of God, then I become strong. When I act foolishly, the wisdom of His Gospel restores me to relish God and the kindness of His love. He guides me to the paths of life. When some deformity appears in me, I reflect on His Word and the image of my personality becomes beautiful. When solitude tries to make me dry, my spiritual marriage to Him makes my life fruitful. When I discover some sadness or unhappiness in myself, the thought of Him, my only good, opens the way to joy. Therese of the Child Jesus has a saying that sums up the desire for holiness as an intense search for God and a listening to others: "If you are nothing, remember that Jesus is all. You must therefore lose your little nothing into His infinite all and think of nothing else but this uniquely lovable all..." (*Letters, 87, to Marie Guérin*).

Reading the Gospel -

Seeing the crowds, He went onto the mountain. And when He was seated His disciples came to him. Then He began to speak. This is what He taught them:

How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance.

Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness: they shall have their fill.

Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them.

Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognized as children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

'Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence:

It is important to be able to listen in deep silence so that the word of Christ may speak to us and so that the Word made flesh may dwell in us and us in him. It is only in silent hearts that the Word of God can take root and, on this Solemnity of All Saints, become flesh in us.

Light Shed on the Word (Lectio)

The Context:

Jesus' words on the Beatitudes that Matthew drew from his sources were condensed in short and isolated phrases, and The Evangelist has placed them in a broader context which Biblical scholars call the "*sermon on the mount*" (chapters 5-7). This sermon is considered to be like the statutes or *Magna Carta* that Jesus gave to the community as a normative and binding word that defines a Christian.

The many themes contained in this long sermon are not to be seen as collection of exhortations, but rather as a clear and radical indication of the new attitude of the disciples towards God, oneself, and the brothers and sisters. Some expressions used by Jesus may seem exaggerated, but they are used to stress reality and thus are realistic in the context, although not so in a literary sense. For instance, in vv. 29-30: "*If your right eye should be your downfall, tear it out and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body thrown into hell. And if your right hand should be your downfall, cut it off and throw it away, for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body go to hell.*" This manner of speaking indicates the effect to be created in the reader, who must understand Jesus' words correctly and not distort their meaning.

Our focus, for liturgical reasons, will be on the first part of the "*Sermon on the Mount*." That is the part dealing with the proclamation of the beatitudes (Mt 5: 1-12).

Some Details:

Matthew invites the reader to listen to the beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus with a rich concentration of details. First, he indicates the place where Jesus proclaims His sermon: "*Jesus went onto the mountain*" (5: 1). That is why exegetes call this the "*sermon on the mount*" even though Luke places this sermon on level ground (Lk 6: 20-26). The geographic location of the "*mountain*" could be a veiled reference to an episode in the OT quite like this, when Moses proclaims the Decalogue on mount Sinai. It is possible that Matthew wishes to present Jesus as the new Moses who proclaims the new law.

Another detail that strikes us is the physical posture of Jesus who proclaims His words: "*when He was seated.*" This posture confers upon Him a note of authority in the legislative sense. The disciples and the "crowd" gather around him. This detail shows what Jesus had to say was for all to hear. We note that Jesus' words do not present impossible matters, nor are they addressed to a special group of people, nor do they mean to establish a code of ethics exclusively for His inner circle. Jesus' demands are concrete, binding and decisively radical.

Someone branded Jesus' sermon as follows: "*For me, this is the most important text in the history of humankind. It is addressed to all, believers and non, and after twenty centuries it is still the only light still shining in the darkness of violence, fear and solitude in which the West finds itself because of its pride and selfishness*" (Gilbert Cesbron).

The word "*blessed*" (in Greek *makarioi*) in our context does not say "softly" but cries out happiness found throughout the Bible. For instance, in the OT, those called "*blessed*" are those who live out the precepts of Wisdom (Sir 25: 7-10). The prayerful person of the Psalms defines "*blessed*" as those who "*fear,*" or more precisely those who love the Lord, expressing this love in the observance of the precepts contained in the word of God (Sal 1: 1; 128: 1).

Matthew's originality lies in adding a secondary phrase that specifies each beatitude. For instance, the main assertion "*blessed are the poor in spirit*" is clarified by an added phrase "*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" Another difference with the OT is that

Jesus' words proclaim a saving blessedness here and now and without any limitations. For Jesus, all can attain happiness on condition that they remain united to Him.

The First Three Beatitudes:

- The first cry concerns the poor: "*How blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*" The reader may be shocked. How can the poor be happy? In the Bible, the poor are those who empty themselves of themselves and, above all, renounce the presumption of building their own present and future alone. They leave room for, and focus on, God's project and His Word. The poor, always in the biblical sense, is not someone closed in on himself, miserable and negative, but someone who nurtures being open to God and to others. God is all his/her treasure. We could say with St. Teresa of Avila that "*God alone suffices!*"

A great modern spiritual author described poverty as follows: "*As long as one does not empty one's heart, God cannot fill it with Himself. As you empty your heart, so does the Lord fill it. Poverty is emptiness, not only in what concerns the future but also the past. Not a regret or memory, not a worry or wish! God is not in the past, God is not in the future: He is in the present! Leave your past to God, leave your future to God. Your poverty is to live the present, the Presence of God who is Eternity*" (Divo Barsotti).

This is the first beatitude, not just because it is the first of many, but because it seems to encapsulate all the others in their diversity.

- "*Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted.*" One can mourn because of great pain or suffering. This underlines the fact that we are dealing with a serious situation even though the motives or the cause are not mentioned. If we wish to identify today "those who mourn," we could think of all the Christians who hold dear the demands of the kingdom and suffer because of many negative stories in the Church rather than focus on holiness. For them, the Church seems to present divisions and lacerations. They may also be those who suffer because of their sins and inconsistencies and who, in some way, slow down their conversion. To these, only God can bring the news of "consolation."
- "*Blessed are the gentle, they shall inherit the earth.*" The third beatitude is about gentleness. This is a quality that is not popular today. For many it has a negative connotation and is taken for weakness or the kind of imperturbability that knows how to calculatingly control one's emotions. What does the word "gentle" mean in the Bible? The gentle are remembered as those who enjoy great peace (Ps 37: 10), are happy, blessed, and loved by God. They are also contrasted with evildoers, the ungodly, and sinners. Thus the OT gives us a wealth of meanings that do not allow for one single definition.

In the NT, the first time we meet the word is in Mt 11: 29: "*Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart.*" A second time is in Mt 21: 5, when Matthew describes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and cites the prophet Zechariah in 2: 9: "*Behold your servant comes to you, meek [gentle].*" Truly, Matthew's Gospel may be described as the Gospel of gentleness. Paul also says that gentleness is an identifying quality of the Christian. In 2 Corinthians 10: 1 he exhorts believers "*I urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.*" In Galatians 5: 22 gentleness is considered one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in the heart of believers and consists in being meek, moderate, slow to punish, kind and patient towards others. Again in Ephesians 4: 32 and Colossians 3: 12 gentleness is an attitude that is part of the Christian and a sign of the new man in Christ.

- Finally, an eloquent witness comes from 1 Peter 3: 3-4: “*Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*”

How does Jesus use the word “gentle”? A truly enlightening definition is the one given by the gentle person of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini: “*The gentle person, according to the beatitudes, is one who, in spite of the fervor of his/her feelings, remains docile and calm, not possessive, interiorly free, always extremely respectful of the mystery of freedom, imitating God in this respect who does everything with respect for the person, and urges the person to obedience without ever using violence. Gentleness is opposed to all forms of material or moral arrogance, it gains the victory of peace over war, of dialogue over imposition.*”

- To this wise interpretation we add that of another famous exegete: “*The gentleness spoken of in the beatitudes is none other than that aspect of humility that manifests itself in practical affability in one’s dealings with the other. Such gentleness finds its image and its perfect model in the person of Jesus, gentle and humble of heart. Truly, such gentleness seems to us like a form of charity, patient and delicately attentive towards others*” (Jacques Dupont).

The Word Enlightens Me (To Meditate)

- Am I able to accept those little signs of poverty in my regard? For instance, the poverty of poor health and little indispositions? Do I make exorbitant demands?
- Am I able to accept my poverty and fragility?
- Do I pray like a poor person, as one who asks with humility the grace of God, His pardon and His mercy?
- Inspired by Jesus’ message concerning gentleness, do I renounce violence, vengeance and a vengeful spirit?
- Do I encourage, in families and in my place of work, a spirit of kindness, gentleness and peace?
- Do I pay back malice and insults with evil?
- Do I look after the weakest who cannot defend themselves? Am I patient with old people? Do I welcome lonely strangers who are often exploited at work?

To Pray

Psalm 23:

The Psalm seems to rotate around the title “The Lord is my shepherd.” The saints are the image of the flock on the way: they are accompanied by the goodness and loyalty of God, until they finally reach the house of the Father (L. Alonso Schökel, / *salmi della fiducia*, Dehoniana Libri, Bologna 2006, 54)

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows He lets me lie. By tranquil streams He leads me to restore my spirit.

He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits His name.

Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death I should fear no danger,
for you are at my side.

Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.

You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head
with oil;

my cup brims over.

Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life.

I make my home in the house of Yahweh for all time to come.

(The common translation of psalm 23:))

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;

he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;

for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall
dwell in the house of the Lord forever.)

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you show us the way of the beatitudes so that we may come to that happiness that is fullness of life and thus holiness. We are all called to holiness, but the only treasure of the saints is God. Your Word, Lord, calls saints all those who in baptism were chosen by your love of a Father, to be conformed to Christ. Grant, Lord, that by your grace we may achieve this conformity to Jesus Christ. We thank you, Lord, for the saints you have placed on our way and who manifest your love. We ask for your pardon if we have tarnished your face in us and denied our calling to be saints.

Thursday, November 2, 2023

All Souls Day

Lectio

Opening Prayer

Spirit of God, come from the four corners of the earth and breathe on these dead persons so that they may rise again (Ez 37: 9). Come Holy Spirit, breathe on our minds, hearts, and souls so that we may become a new creation in Christ, firstborn into life eternal. Amen.

Gospel Reading – John 6: 37-40

Jesus said to them, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me; and him who comes to Me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me; and this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Prayerful silent time

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

Meditatio

A Key to the Reading

In John's Gospel, the basic perspective concerning Jesus and His mission is that the Word made flesh is sent by the Father into the world to give us life and to save that which was lost. The world, however, rejects the Word incarnate. The prologue of the Gospel presents us with this thought (Jn 1: 1-18), which the Evangelist will gradually elaborate on in the Gospel story. The synoptic Gospels, in their own way, proclaim the same news. One need only think of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost drachma (Lk 15: 1-10) or the declaration: I did not come to call the just, but sinners (Mk 2: 17).

This thought is also found in this passage: I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me (Jn 6: 38). This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life (Jn 6: 40). The key words in John's Gospel are see and believe. To see implies and automatically means to believe in the Son sent by the Father. This faith brings the believer to possess eternal life. In John's Gospel, the salvation of the world is already fulfilled by the first coming of Christ through the incarnation and the resurrection of the one who allows Himself to be lifted up on the cross. The second coming of Christ on the last day will be a completion of this mystery of salvation.

Today's Gospel is taken from the section that speaks of the mystery of Jesus (Jn 1-12). The text takes us, for the second time in John's Gospel, to Galilee at the time of the Passover: After this, Jesus went across the sea of Galilee ... it was near the Passover, the feast of the Jews (Jn 6: 1-4). A great crowd followed him, (Jn 6: 2) and Jesus, seeing the crowd that followed him, multiplies the loaves. The crowd wants to proclaim Him king, but Jesus disappears and goes up to the mountain alone (Jn 6: 15). After a brief pause that allows us to contemplate the Lord walking on the water (Jn 6: 16-21). the story continues the next day (Jn 6: 22) when the crowd, seeks out Jesus. Then comes the discourse on the bread of life and Jesus' warning to obtain the food that will last forever (Jn 6: 27). Jesus defines Himself as the bread of life. He makes reference to the manna given to the people by Moses as a figure of the true bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (Jn 6: 30-36). This is the context in which the words of Jesus are pronounced (Jn 6: 37-40). In this context we come across a new kind of opposition and a new rejection of the revelation of the Christ as the bread of life (Jn 6: 41-66).

Jesus' words concerning everyone who goes to him echo God's invitation to take part in the benefits of the banquet of the covenant (Is 55: 1-3). Jesus does not reject those who come to him. Rather, He gives them eternal life. In fact, His mission is to seek and save the lost ones (Lk 19: 27). We are reminded of this in the story of the meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well (Jn 4: 1-42). Jesus does not reject the

Samaritan woman but begins a 'pastoral' dialogue with the woman who comes to the well to draw material water and there finds the man, the prophet, and the Messiah who promises to give her the water of eternal life (Jn 4: 13-15). In our passage, we find the same structure. On the one hand the people seek material bread. On the other hand, Jesus gives them a long spiritual discourse on the bread of life. The witness of Jesus who eats the bread of God's will (Jn 4: 34) echoes the teaching of the Master in this Gospel passage (Jn 6: 38).

At the last supper, Jesus takes up this discourse again in chapter 17. It is He who gives eternal life (Jn 17: 2) and preserves and watches over all those whom the Father has given to him. Of these none is lost except the son of perdition (Jn 17: 12-13).

A Few Questions

to guide our meditation and practice.

- The Word made flesh is sent into the world by the Father to give us life, but the world rejects the incarnate Word. Do I welcome into my life the Divine Word who gives eternal life? How?
- I came down from heaven not to do my will, but the will of Him who sent Me (Jn 6: 38). In Jesus, we see obedience to the will of the Father. Do I internalize this virtue in my life and live it out daily?
- Anyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life (Jn 6: 40). Who is Jesus for me? Do I try to see Him with the eyes of faith, listen to His words and contemplate His way of being? What does eternal life mean for me?

Oratio

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;

he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;

for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Closing Prayer

O God, who at the table of your word and of the bread of life nourish us so that we may grow in love, grant that we may welcome your message into our heart so that we may become yeast and instruments of salvation in the world. Through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Contemplatio

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

Friday, November 3, 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 14: 1-6

It happened that on a Sabbath day Jesus had gone to share a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees and they watched Him closely. Now there in front of Him was a man with dropsy. Jesus addressed the lawyers and Pharisees with the words "Is it against the law to cure someone on the Sabbath or not?" They remained silent, so He took the man and cured him and sent him away.

Then He said to them, "Which of you here, if his son falls into a well, or his ox, will not pull him out on a Sabbath day without any hesitation?" And to this they could find no answer.

Reflection

Today's Gospel narrates an episode of the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees which took place along His journey from Galilee up to Jerusalem. It is very difficult to situate this fact in the context of the life of Jesus. There are similarities with a fact narrated in the Gospel of Mark (Mk 3, 1-6). It is probably a question of the many stories transmitted orally and, in the oral transmission, they were adapted in accordance to the situation, the needs and hopes, of the people of the communities.

- Luke 14: 1: The invitation on a Saturday. "On a Sabbath day Jesus went to share a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees and they watched Him closely." This initial information on the reception in the house of a Pharisee gives Luke the possibility to present several episodes which speak about welcoming and accepting the invitation to have a meal: the cure of the sick man (Lk 14: 2-6), choice of places where to eat (Lk 14: 7-11), choice of the guests invited (Lk 14: 12-14), and those invited who do not accept the invitation (Lk 14: 15-24). Many times Jesus is invited by the Pharisees to share a meal. Perhaps the reason for inviting Him was out of curiosity as well as malice, wishing to observe Jesus to see how He observes the prescriptions of the law.

- Luke 14: 2: The situation which brings about the action of Jesus. “There was a man with dropsy.” It is not said how a man with dropsy could enter the house of the head of the Pharisees. But if he is in front of Jesus, it is because he wants to be cured. The Pharisees observe Jesus. It was a Saturday, and it is forbidden to cure on a Saturday. What to do? Can it be done or not?
- Luke 14: 3: The question of Jesus to the scribes and the Pharisees. “Jesus addressing the lawyers and the Pharisees asked, Is it against the law to cure someone on the Sabbath or not? With His question Jesus explains the problem which they had before them: “Can one cure or not on Saturday? Does the law permit this, yes or no? In Mark’s Gospel the question is even more provocative: “Is it permitted on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” (Mk 3: 4).
- Luke 14: 4-6: The cure. The Pharisees do not respond and remain in silence. Before the silence of the one who neither approves nor disapproves, Jesus takes the man by the hand, cures him, and sends him away. Afterward, in response to a possible criticism, He explains the reason that has moved Him to cure: “Which of you here, if his son falls into a well, or his ox, will not pull him out on a Sabbath day without any hesitation?” With this question Jesus shows the incoherence of the lawyers and of the Pharisees. If one of them has no problem, on Saturday, to help his son or even an animal, then Jesus also has the right to help the man with dropsy. Jesus’ question recalls the Psalm which says that God Himself helps men and animals (Ps 36: 8). The Pharisees “Could not respond anything to these words”; because before the evidence, there are no arguments which can deny it.

Personal Questions

- The liberty of Jesus before a situation. Even though He is being observed by those who do not approve of him, He does not lose His liberty. What liberty do I have?
- There are difficult moments in life in which we are obliged to choose between the immediate need of our neighbor and the letter of the law. How should we act?

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)

Saturday, November 4, 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 14: 1, 7-11

It happened that on a Sabbath day Jesus had gone to share a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees and they watched Him closely. He then told the guests a parable because He had noticed how they picked the places of honor. He said this: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in the place of honor. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, and the person who invited you both may come and say, "Give up your place to this man." And then, to your embarrassment, you will have to go and take the lowest place.

No, when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that when your host comes he may say "My friend, move up higher." Then, everyone with you at the table will see you honored.

For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be raised up."

Reflection

- **Context:** The Word of grace that Jesus visibly rendered with His teaching and the cures He worked runs the risk of being suppressed. For Jesus, the event of death is always closer, like all the prophets who have preceded him. Such a reality which Jesus is going toward shows not only God's patience, but man's rejection. By rejecting Jesus as the one sent, the Father's only Word of grace, man condemns himself and closes the possibility that the Father has given him access to salvation. However, hope is not extinguished. It is possible that someday man will recognize Jesus as "the one" who comes from the Lord and that will be a reason to rejoice. Therefore, the conclusion of chapter 13 of Luke's Gospel makes us understand that salvation is not a human enterprise but can only be received as an absolutely gratuitous gift. Let us see, then, how this gift of salvation is fulfilled while always keeping in mind this rejection of Jesus as the only one sent by God.
- **The invitation to lunch:** In the face of the danger of being reduced to silence it might have been suggested to Jesus that He flee. Instead, He accepts the invitation to lunch. The attitude of Jesus makes one understand that He does not fear the attempts of aggression against His person, they Him. Inviting Him is "one of the heads of the Pharisees," a person who has authority. The invitation takes place on a Saturday, an ideal day for a festive lunch which was usually taken around noon after all had participated in the liturgy in the Synagogue. During lunch, the Pharisees "were observing him" (v. 11): an act of supervision and control that refers to the suspicion regarding His behavior. In other words, they observe Him, expecting that He will do some inappropriate action regarding their law. Finally, they corner Him, not to safeguard the observance of the law, but rather to catch Him in some gesture of His. In the meantime, on Saturday, having cured the one suffering from dropsy before the Pharisees and the Doctors of the Law, He expresses two reflections on how it is necessary to accept an invitation to table and in the spirit in which the invitation is to be given (vv. 12-14). The first one Luke calls a "parable," that is to say, an example, a model or a teaching to be followed. Above all, it is necessary to invite with gratuity and with freedom of spirit. Frequently, men go ahead and ask to be invited instead of waiting to receive an invitation. For Luke, the point of view of God is the contrary. It is that of humility: "He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly." The call to participate in the "great supper" of the

Kingdom has, as a result, an improvement in the level of life for the one who is capable to accept the invitation of salvation with gratitude.

- **The last place:** It is true that to cede or give up one's own place to others is not gratifying. It could be humiliating and is a limitation of one's pride. It is even more humiliating and a reason to feel embarrassed when one has to move to the last place because it is a dishonor in the eyes of all. Luke thinks of all those humiliating and painful situations of shame in which the believer can find himself, in the place reserved for one who lives these events before the eyes of God and His Kingdom. The proud, those who seek to have first places, and the important gratify themselves because of their social position. On the contrary, when Jesus came to live among us, "there was no place for him" (2: 7) and He decided to remain, choosing a place among the poor and humble people. This is why God raised Him and exalted Him. From here comes the precious suggestion to choose His attitude, considering the last place as a privilege. The reader may remain disturbed by these words of Jesus that undermine the utilitarian and egoistic sense of life, but in the long run His teaching reveals itself to be necessary to ascend on high and the way of humility that leads to glory.

Personal Questions

- In your friendships with others, does the calculation of interest and the expectation to receive something in exchange, prevail?
- In your relationship with others, is there always and everywhere your "I," even when you do something for the brothers and sisters? Are you ready to give yourself in what you are?

Concluding Prayer

I thirst for God, the living God;
when shall I go to see the face of God? I have no food but tears day and night,
as all day long I am taunted, "Where is your God?" (Ps 42: 2-3)

Sunday, November 5, 2023

Thirty-First Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send us the Spirit that we may read your Word free of all prejudice, so that we may meditate upon your proclamation in its entirety and not selectively, so that we may pray that we grow in communion with you and with our brothers and sisters, so that we may finally act, contemplating the reality that we are living this day with your feelings and with your mercy. You who live with the Father and who grants us Love.
Amen.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 23: 1-12

Introduction:

This Gospel passage is the last of Jesus' public teachings, which began with the sermon on the mount (cc. 5-7). Jesus is in Jerusalem. The time for His arrest is close at hand, and He is having a hard time confronting many kinds of people: the high priests, elders, scribes, Pharisees, etc. Jesus is questioning Jewish religiosity as such, but He uses strong words concerning the efforts of some, especially those in authority, to twist Jewish authentic values by means of inappropriate attitudes. In this first part of chapter 23, Matthew, reporting the words of Jesus, warns the community of early Christians against reproducing a kind of life that is incompatible with faith in Jesus. Behind these words, we glimpse the conflict between the budding church and the synagogue.

A Possible Division of the Text:

- Matthew 23: 1-7: Warning listeners and denouncing the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees.
- Matthew 23: 8-12: Recommendations to the community of disciples.

Text:

1 Then, addressing the crowds and His disciples Jesus said, 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. 3 You must therefore do and observe what they tell you; but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! 5 Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader headbands and longer tassels, 6 like wanting to take the place of honor at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, 7 being greeted respectfully in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. 8 "You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. 9 You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and He is in Heaven. 10 Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you must be your servant. 12 Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up."

A Moment of Silence

To listen to the Spirit and let the Word of God enter and enlighten our life.

Some Questions

To whom is Jesus speaking?

With whom is Matthew conversing?

Can observance and hypocrisy live together? What is new in Jesus' message?

What attitudes mark the community of disciples of Jesus?

Meditation

These words of Jesus seem hard and argumentative. Let us try to meditate on them in conjunction with Jesus' first discourse on the mount according to Matthew. This then becomes a comparison between the ideal of the life of a disciple of Christ and the attitudes that do not correspond with this ideal, seen in those who are still "under the Law," as Paul would say. The discourse is addressed to the crowd and especially to the

disciples, not to the scribes and Pharisees, at least in this first part of the chapter. However, there are also scribes who are “not far from the kingdom of God” (Mk 12: 34). Everywhere there are those who “*say and do not do.*”

Concerning the teaching of the scribes who “*occupy the chair of Moses;*” it was real enough in the synagogues, but this also has a symbolic reference because occupying the chair of Moses became a sign of power, while Jesus was teaching sitting on the ground (Mt 5: 1). Jesus’ relationship with the Law is made clear in the sermon on the mount when He says that He did not come to abolish the law but to complete it (Mt 5: 17-19). Thus authentic commandments must be put into practice: “*do what they tell you and listen to what they say.*” In the previous discourse Jesus added: “For I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 5: 20). He followed the authentic interpretation of the Law: “you have heard it said... but I say to you.” Jesus goes beyond the formal observance of the Law (Mk 7: 15) because the Kingdom of God has come (Mt 4: 17), and with its coming Love, is above the Law. It is no longer sufficient to have recourse to the Law to justify the validity of religious observances (the Sabbath, the washing of hands) nor to impose “heavy burdens.” Now reference must be made to the love of God who alone gives final meaning to the behavior of human beings. For the disciple of Christ, interior motives and authentic intentions are what make an action valid (Mt 6: 22-23). By proclaiming that the kingdom of God is here, Jesus is giving us a new criterion for action that does not suppress the Law but rather reveals its authentic meaning. The commandment to love is the measure by which to criticize the Law. “Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened ...Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light” (Mt 11: 28-30). The “*heavy burdens*” are prescriptions elaborated on by oral tradition. These may help in the observance of the Torah, but they can also bypass and supplant human customs. Thus, they concern others but not the leaders: “*will they lift a finger to move them?*”

Religiosity can also be a means of pure exhibitionism (vv. 5-7) contrary to all the teachings of the sermon on the mount. “Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men” (Mt 6: 1). Give alms (Mt 6: 3), pray (Mt 6: 5), fast (Mt 6: 16), which were the most frequent good deeds for a Jew, must be performed “in secret” by the disciple of Christ because their only motive is to adore God. What is more important for the disciple is not social approval or the respect of other human beings, nor is it about titles of honor such as “*rabbi;*” but to be “poor in spirit” (Mt 5: 3) because he or she has placed him/herself in the hands of God and claims nothing for him/herself. That is where his/her treasure lies (Mt 6: 21), in heaven. This entails persecution (Mt 5: 10-11) rather than applause or approval (Mt 23: 6-7). God is “Our Father” (Mt 6: 9), no one can take His place. That is why the disciple of Christ must be careful not to confer titles such as rabbi, father, or master. Importance and power obscure the fact that there is *only* one who is rabbi, father, master and *you are all brothers*. When John, who baptized, saw the true Master passing by, he sent his disciples to Him (Jn 1: 35), the only Master, and did not keep them for himself. The community of Jesus is the one described in the discourse on the “Beatitudes” with all its radical consequences, One community of brothers and sisters capable of receiving God who comes to save gratuitously. The ideal of this community is the “service” (Mt 20: 28) of the Son of Man and model of the Church. The authority of leadership loses its attraction and is no longer an ideal, “*The greatest among you must be your servant*” (conf. Mk 10: 41-44; Jn 13), and there is no talk of hierarchical model but of service and humility, “*anyone who raises himself will be humbled and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.*” Jesus’ words involve more than just an argument with the scribes and Pharisees and much more than just an exhortation to be coherent. They remind us of the identity of His disciples and of the new way in which they are called to witness.

Prayer

Let us pray with Psalm 131

Yahweh, my heart is not haughty, I do not set my sights too high.

I have taken no part in great affairs, in wonders beyond my scope.

No, I hold myself in quiet and silence, like a little child in its mother's arms, like a little child, so I keep myself.

Let Israel hope in Yahweh henceforth and forever.

Contemplation

Lord, you have warned me against hypocritical behavior that does not reflect the new way that inspires the community of your disciples. How easy it is to place oneself back in the center, to grow attached to habits and to stay still while listening to your Word. Yes, I too am among those who "say and do not do" and your Word makes me uncomfortable. The search for external signs, for approval, for titles and honors disturbs my thoughts and weakens fraternity. Make my intentions and behavior as pure as were those of your mother, Mary, so as to build a community according to your feelings and with your same compassion for all. Amen

Monday, November 6, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, only with your help
can we offer you fitting service and praise.

May we live the faith we profess and trust your promise of eternal life.

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 14: 12-14

Jesus said to His host, "When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relations or rich neighbors, in case they invite you back and so repay you. No, when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you and so you will be repaid when the upright rise again."

Reflection

The Gospel today continues to present the teaching Jesus was giving on different themes, all related to curing in the setting of a banquet: a cure during a meal (Lk 14: 1-6), advice not to take the places of honor (Lk 14: 7-12), and advice to invite the excluded (Lk 14: 12-14). This organization of the words of Jesus around a particular word, for

example, table or banquet, helps one perceive the method used by the first Christians to keep the words of Jesus in their memory.

- Luke 14: 12: Interested invitation. Jesus is eating in the house of a Pharisee who has invited Him (Lk 14: 1). The invitation to share at table is the theme of the teaching of today's Gospel. There are different types of invitations: the interested invitations for the benefit of oneself and disinterested invitations for the benefit of others. Jesus says: "When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relations or rich neighbors, in case they invite you back and so repay you." That was the normal custom of the people: to invite friends, brothers and relatives to eat. Nobody would sit at table with unknown persons. They would sit around the table only with people who were their friends. That was the custom of the Jews. Even now we also act in the same way. Jesus thinks differently and orders us to invite unknown people. These were invitations which nobody used to make.
- Luke 14: 13-14: Disinterested invitation. Jesus says "On the contrary, when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you. So you will be repaid when the upright rise again." Jesus orders them and us to break the closed circle and asks us to invite the excluded, the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. This was not the custom then and it is not today either. But Jesus insists: "Invite these persons." Why? Because in the disinterested invitation, addressed to excluded and marginalized persons, there is a source of happiness: "And then you will be blessed for they have no means to repay you." This is a strange type of happiness, a diverse happiness! You will be blessed for they have no means to repay you. It is the happiness that comes from the fact that you have done a totally gratuitous gesture, without asking for anything. Jesus says that this is the happiness which God will give us in the resurrection; the happiness of the Resurrection which He will give us not only at the end of history, but even now. To act in this way is to glimpse the happiness in the resurrection!
- It is the Kingdom which will be confirmed. The advice which Jesus gives us in the Gospel today recalls the sending out of the seventy-two on the mission of announcing the Kingdom (Lk 10: 1-9). Among the different recommendations given on that occasion, as signs of the presence of the Kingdom, there is: (a) the invitation to the table and (b) the acceptance of the excluded: "Whenever you go into a town, where they make you welcome, eat what is put before you, cure those who are sick and say: the Kingdom of God is very near to you!" (Lk 10: 8-9) Here, in these recommendations, Jesus orders the transgression of that norm of legal purity which prevented fraternal living together.

Personal Questions

- An interested or disinterested invitation: which of these takes place in my life?
- If you invited in a disinterested way, would this cause some difficulties? Which ones?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, my heart is not haughty, I do not set my sights too high.

I have taken no part in great affairs, in wonders beyond my scope.

No, I hold myself in quiet and silence, like a little child in its mother's arms,

like a little child, so I keep myself. (Ps 131: 1-2)

Tuesday, November 7, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, only with your help can we offer you fitting service and praise. May we live the faith we profess and trust your promise of eternal life.

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 14: 15-24

One of those gathered round the table said to Jesus, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." But He said to him, "There was a man who gave a great banquet, and he invited a large number of people. When the time for the banquet came, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, saying 'Come along: everything is ready now.' But all alike started to make excuses.

The first said, 'I have bought a piece of land and must go and see it. Please accept my apologies.'

Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out. Please accept my apologies.'

Yet another said, 'I have just got married and so am unable to come.'

The servant returned and reported this to his master. Then the householder, in a rage, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

'Sir,' said the servant, 'your orders have been carried out and there is still room.'

Then the master said to his servant, 'Go to the open roads and the hedgerows and press people to come in, to make sure my house is full; because I tell you, not one of those who were invited shall have a taste of my banquet.'"

Reflection

The Gospel today continues the reflection around themes linked to the table and the invitation. Jesus tells the parable of the banquet. Many people had been invited, but the majority did not go. The master of the feast was indignant because of the absence of those who had been invited and then sent his servants to call the poor, the crippled the blind and the lame. Even after that, there was still room. Then he ordered his servant to invite everybody until his house was full. This parable was a light for the communities of the time of Luke.

In the communities at the time of Luke there were Christians who had come from Judaism and Christians who came from the Gentiles, called pagans. Notwithstanding the difference in race, class and gender, they profoundly lived the ideal of sharing and of communion (Ac 2: 42; 4: 32; 5: 12). But there were many difficulties because some norms of legal purity prevented the Jews to eat with the pagans. Even after they had

entered the Christian community, some of them kept this old custom of not sitting at table with a pagan. This is the reason Peter had a conflict with the community in Jerusalem because he entered into the house of Cornelius, a pagan, and for having eaten with him (Ac 11: 3). Because of these problems in the communities, Luke kept a series of teachings of Jesus regarding the banquet. (Lk 14: 1-24). The parable on which we are meditating is an image of what was happening in the communities.

- Luke 14: 15: Blessed are those who will eat the bread of the Kingdom of God. Jesus had finished telling two parables: one on the choice of places
- (Lk 14: 7-11), and the other on the choice of the guests who were invited
- (Lk 14: 12-14). While listening to this parable someone who was at table with Jesus must have picked up the importance of the teaching of Jesus and must have said: "Blessed are those who eat the bread of the Kingdom of God!" The Jews compared the future time of the Messiah to a banquet, characterized by gratitude and communion (Is 25: 6; 55: 1-2; Sal 22: 27). Hunger, poverty, and the lack of so many things made the people hope that in the future they would obtain what they were lacking and did not have at present. The hope of the Messianic goods, usually experienced in banquets, was a perspective of the end of time.
- Luke 14: 16-20: The great banquet is ready. Jesus responds with a parable. There was a man who gave a great banquet, and he invited a great number of people." But the duty of each one prevents the guests from accepting the invitation. The first one says: I have bought a piece of land and must go and see it!" The second I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out!" The third one: "I have just got married and so am unable to come!" In the limits of the law those persons had the right not to accept the invitation (cf. Dt 20: 5-7).
- Luke 14: 21-22: The invitation remains, it is not cancelled. The master of the banquet was indignant in seeing that his invitation had not been accepted. In the last instance, the one who is indignant is precisely Jesus because the norms of the strict observance of the law reduced the space for people to be able to live the gratuity of an invitation to the house of friends, an invitation characterized by the fraternal spirit and by sharing. Thus, the master of the feast orders the servants to invite the poor, the blind, the crippled, the lame. Those who were normally excluded because they were considered unclean, are now invited to sit around the table of the banquet.
- Luke 14: 23-24: There is still room. The banquet room is not full. Then, the master of the house ordered the servants to invite those passing on the street. Those are the pagans. They are also invited to sit around the table. Thus, in the banquet of the parable of Jesus, everybody sits around the same table, Jews and pagans. At the time of Luke, there were many problems which prevented the realization of this ideal of the common banquet. By means of the parable Luke shows that the practice of the banquet came precisely from Jesus.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, in the year 70, the Pharisees took over the government in the Synagogues demanding the rigid fulfilment of the norms which identified them as the Jewish people. The Jews who converted to Christianity were considered a threat because they destroyed the walls which separated Israel from other people. The Pharisees tried to force them to abandon their faith in Jesus. Because they did not succeed, they drove them away from the Synagogues. All this brought about a slow and progressive separation between the Jews and the Christians which was a source of great suffering especially for the converted Jews (Rm 9: 1-5). In the parable, Luke indicates very clearly that these converted Jews were

not unfaithful to their people. To the contrary: they are the ones who are invited and accept the invitation. They are the true continuation of Israel. Those who were unfaithful were those who did not accept the invitation and did not want to recognize Jesus the Messiah (Lk 22: 66; Ac 13: 27).

Personal Questions

- In general, which are the persons who are invited and which are the persons who in general are not invited to our feasts?
- Which are the reasons which today limit the participation of persons in society and in the Church? And which are the reasons that some give to exclude themselves from the community? Are they just reasons?

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)

Wednesday, November 8, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, only with your help can we offer you fitting service and praise.

May we live the faith we profess and trust your promise of eternal life.

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 14: 25-33

Great crowds accompanied Jesus on His way and He turned and spoke to them.

"Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and yes, his own life too, cannot be my disciple. No one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be my disciple.

And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, anyone who saw it would start making fun of him and saying, 'Here is someone who started to build and was unable to finish.'

Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who was advancing against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace.

So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple without giving up all that he owns."

Reflection

The Gospel today speaks about discipleship and presents the conditions to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem where He will die soon on the Cross. This is the context in which Jesus speaks about discipleship.

- Luke 14: 25: An example of catechesis. The Gospel today is a beautiful example of how Luke transforms the words of Jesus into catechesis for the people in the communities. He says: "Great crowds accompanied him. He turned and spoke to them." Jesus speaks to the great crowd, that is, He speaks to all, to the persons of the communities at the time of Luke, and today He speaks for us. In the teaching which follows, Jesus gives the conditions for those who want to be His disciples.
- Luke 14: 25-26: First condition: to hate father and mother. Some reduce the force of the word to hate and translate it as "to prefer Jesus to one's own parents." The original text uses the expression "to hate one's parents." In another place, Jesus says one must love and respect one's parents (Lk 18: 20). How can this contradiction be explained? Is it a contradiction? The force of the word is typically Semitic. Matthew uses the terms "loves father or mother more," which shows the meaning of hate is rather to *love less*. At the time of Jesus, social and economic conditions led families to become self-contained. This prevented them from fulfilling the law of ransom or liberation (*goel*) which calls one to help one's brothers and sisters in community (clan) who were in danger of losing their land or becoming slaves (cf. Dt 15: 1-18; Lv 25: 23-43). Closed in upon themselves, the families weakened life in the community. Jesus wants to reconstruct life in community. This is why He asks to put an end to the restricted vision of the small family. He asks the family to open itself and be united by the larger family of community. This is the sense of hating father and mother, and wife, sons, sisters and brothers. Himself When His family wants to take Him back to Nazareth, Jesus does not sympathize with their request. He ignores or hates their petition and extends His family saying: "Behold, my mother and my brothers! Anyone who does the will of God, is my brother, sister and mother" (Mk 3: 20-21, 31-35). The family bonds of union cannot prevent the formation of the Community. This is the first condition.
- Luke 14: 27: Second condition: to carry the cross. "No one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be my disciple." In order to understand the importance of this second requirement we have to look at the context in which Luke places this word of Jesus. Jesus is going toward Jerusalem to be crucified and to die. To follow Jesus and to carry the cross means to go with Him up to Jerusalem to be crucified with him. This recalls the attitude of the women who "followed and served Him when He was still in Galilee, and many others who went up to Jerusalem with him" (Mk 15: 41). This also reminds us of Paul's phrase in the Letter to the Galatians: "But as for me, it is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Ga 6: 14)
- Luke 14: 28-32: Two parables. Both of these parables have the same objective: that people may think well before making a decision. In the first parable, He says "which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, anyone who saw it would start making fun of him and saying: Here is someone who started to build and was unable to finish!" This parable needs no explanation. It speaks for itself. Let each one reflect well on his/her way of following Jesus and ask him/herself if he/she values the conditions before making the decision to become a disciple of Jesus.

- The second parable: Or again, “which king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who was advancing against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace.” This parable has the same purpose of the one before. Some ask: “How is it that Jesus uses an example of war?” The question is a pertinent one for us who today know the wars. The Second World War (1939-1945) caused the death to about 54 million people! At that time, though, the wars were similar to commercial competition between enterprises which today struggle among themselves to obtain the greatest profit or gain at the expense of the other.
- Luke 14: 33: Conclusion for discipleship. The conclusion is only one: to be Christian, to follow Jesus, is something serious. For many people today, to be Christian is not a personal choice, and neither is it a decision for life, but a simple cultural phenomenon. They do not even think of making a choice. Anyone who is born a Brazilian is a Brazilian. He who is born Japanese is Japanese. He does not have to choose. He is born like that and will die like that. Many people are Christians because they were born so, without ever choosing their faith.

Personal Questions

- To be a Christian is something serious. I have to think out well my way of following Jesus. How does this take place in my life?
- “To hate one’s parents,” community or family! How do I put together these two things? Am I capable of harmonizing them?

Concluding Prayer

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

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

Thursday, November 9, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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

Gospel Reading - John 2: 13-22

When the time of the Jewish Passover was near Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the temple, He found people selling cattle and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting there.

Making a whip out of cord, He drove them all out of the temple, sheep and cattle as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the dove sellers, "Take all this out of here and stop using my Father's house as a market." Then His disciples remembered the words of scripture: I am eaten up with zeal for Your house.

The Jews intervened and said, "What sign can you show us that you should act like this?"

Jesus answered, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple: are you going to raise it up again in three days?" But He was speaking of the Temple that was His body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the scripture and what He had said.

Reflection

- Context. Our passage contains a clear and unmistakable teaching of Jesus in the temple. Previously John the Baptist had given witness of Jesus saying that He was the Messiah (1: 29). The first disciples, on the indication of the Baptist, have recognized Him as the Lamb of God. A quality of the Messiah: to inaugurate a new Passover and covenant and bring about the definitive liberation of man (Jn 1: 35-51) In Cana, Jesus works a first sign to show His glory (Jn 2: 1-12). The glory becomes visible. It can be contemplated, and therefore it manifests itself. It is the glory of the Father present in the person of Jesus which manifests itself at the beginning of His activity in this way, anticipating His "hour" (17: 1). In what way is His glory manifested? God gratuitously restores a new relationship with man. He unites him intimately to Him giving him the capacity to love like He loves, through the Spirit who purifies the heart of man and makes Him son of God. But, it is necessary to recognize the immutable love of God, manifested in Jesus, responding with faith, with a personal adherence.
- Jesus and the Temple. Now Jesus is in the temple in Jerusalem fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi (Ml 3: 1-3). He proclaims Himself Messiah. His teaching produces tension. Now the reader understands how the great disputes with the Jews always take place in the temple, where Jesus pronounces His substantial denunciations. His task is to lead the people outside the temple (2: 15; 10: 4). In the last instance Jesus was condemned because He represented a danger to the temple and for the people. Jesus goes to Jerusalem on the occasion of the Passover of the Jews to manifest Himself in public and to reveal to all that He is the Messiah. During that feast Jerusalem is full of pilgrims who have come from all parts, and therefore His actions would have had a great effect on the whole of Palestine. When He arrived in Jerusalem He immediately is seen in the temple where there are a number of people selling cattle, sheep and doves and the money changers sitting there. The encounter in the temple is not with persons who seek God but dealers of the sacred. The amount paid to be able to open a stand to be able to sell was given to the high priest. Jesus chooses this occasion (the Passover) this place (the temple) to give a sign. He takes a whip, an instrument which was a symbol of the Messiah who punishes vices and evil practices, and He drives out these people from the temple, together with the cattle and sheep. It is worthy to note His act against those selling the doves (v. 15). The dove was an animal used for the propitiatory holocausts (Lv 9: 14-17), in the sacrifices of expiation and of purification (Lv 12, 8; 15, 14.29), and especially if those

who offered it were poor (Lv 5: 7; 14: 22, 30ff). The sellers, those who sold the doves, sold reconciliation with God for money.

- The house of my Father. The expression wants to indicate that Jesus in His actions behaves as a Son. He represents the Father in the world. They have transformed the worship of God into a market, a place for trading. The temple is no longer the place of encounter with God, but a market where the presence of money is in force. Worship has become the pretext to gain more. Jesus attacks the central institution of Israel, the temple, the symbol of the people and of the election. He denounces that the temple has been deprived of its historical function, to be the sign of the dwelling of God in the midst of His people. The first reaction to Jesus' action comes from the disciples who associate this to Psalm 69:10: "I am eaten up with zeal for your house." The second reaction comes from the high priests who respond in the name of those selling in the temple: "What sign can you show us that you should act like this?" (v. 18). They have asked Him for a sign and He gives them that of His death. "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up" (v. 19). Jesus is the Temple that is an assurance of the presence of God in the world. The presence of His love and the death on the cross will make of Him the only and definitive Temple of God. The temple constructed by the hands of man has fallen into decay. Jesus will be the one to replace it, because He is now the presence of God in the world as the Father is present in Him.

Personal Questions

- Have you understood that the sign of love of God for you is no longer the temple but a Person: Jesus crucified?
- Do you not know that this sign is turned to you personally to bring about your definitive liberation?

Concluding Prayer

God is both refuge and strength for us, a help always ready in trouble;

so we shall not be afraid though the earth be in turmoil, though mountains tumble into the depths of the sea. (Ps 46: 1-2)

Friday, November 10, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, only with your help can we offer you fitting service and praise.

May we live the faith we profess and trust your promise of eternal life.

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 16: 1-8

Jesus said to His disciples, "There was a rich man and he had a steward who was denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward any longer.'

Then the steward said to himself, 'Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me, what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed. Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes.'

Then he called his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?' 'One hundred measures of oil,' he said. The steward said, 'Here, take your bond; sit down and quickly write fifty.' To another he said, 'And you, sir, how much do you owe?' 'One hundred measures of wheat,' he said. The steward said, 'Here, take your bond and write eighty.'

The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light."

Reflection

Today the Gospel presents a parable that concerns the administration of goods which is found only in Luke's Gospel. It is called the parable of the dishonest steward. It is a disconcerting parable. Luke says: "The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness." The master is Jesus Himself and not the administrator or steward. How is that Jesus praises a corrupt employee?

- Luke 16: 1-2: The steward is threatened to lose his job. "There was a rich man and he had a steward, who was denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship, because you are not to be my steward anymore.'" This example, taken from the world of business and work, speaks for itself. It refers to the existing corruption. The master discovers the corruption and decides to send away the dishonest steward. The steward unexpectedly finds himself in an emergency situation and is obliged by the unforeseen circumstances to find a way out in order to survive. When God becomes present in the life of a person, everything unexpectedly changes and the person finds himself/herself in an emergency situation. The person has to take a decision and find a way out.
- Luke 16: 3-4: What to do? Which is the way out? "Then the steward said to himself, Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed." He begins to reflect to find a way out. He analyzes, one by one, the possible alternatives: to dig or work the land in order to survive, he feels that he does not have the strength to do this, and to beg, he would feel ashamed. Calculating the possible alternative she says, "Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes." It is a question of trying to guarantee his future. The steward acts consistently with his way of thinking and living.
- Luke 16: 5-7: Execution of the solution he found. "Then he called his master's debtors, one by one, and said to the first one: How much do you owe my master? One hundred measures of oil, he said. The steward said, 'Here, take your bond, sit down and quickly write fifty. Then he said to another one, and you, sir, how much do you owe? 'One hundred measures of wheat', he answered. The steward said, 'Here take your bond and write eighty.'" In his total lack of ethics the steward was consistent.

The criteria of his actions are not honesty and justice, nor the good of the master on whom he depends to live and to survive, but his own interest. He wants to have the guarantee that there will be someone who will receive him in his house.

- Luke 16: 8: The Master praises the dishonest steward. This is the disconcerting conclusion. "The Master praises the dishonest steward for his astuteness: For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light." The word Master or Lord indicates Jesus and not the rich man. The latter would never praise a dishonest employee working for Him in service, and now he robs even more, with 50 measures of oil and 20 sacks of wheat! In the parable, the one who extends the praise is Jesus. He certainly does not praise the theft but the spirit of the steward. He knew how to calculate things well and finds a way out when he unexpectedly finds himself without a job. In this way the children of this world know how to be experts in their own things. In the same way, the children of light should learn from them to be experts in the solution to their problems using the criteria of the Kingdom and not the criteria of this world. "Be cunning as serpents and innocent as doves" (Mt 10: 16).

Personal Questions

- Am I consistent in thought and action?
- Which criteria do I use in the solution of my problems?

Concluding Prayer

One thing I ask of Yahweh, one thing I seek:
to dwell in Yahweh's house all the days of my life, to enjoy the sweetness of Yahweh, to seek out His temple. (Ps 27: 4)

Saturday, November 11, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, only with your help can we offer you fitting service and praise.
May we live the faith we profess and trust your promise of eternal life.

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 16: 9-15

Jesus said to His disciples: "And so I tell you this: use money, tainted as it is, to win you friends, and thus make sure that when it fails you, they will welcome you into eternal dwellings.

Anyone who is trustworthy in little things is trustworthy in great; anyone who is dishonest in little things is dishonest in great.

If then you are not trustworthy with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches?

And if you are not trustworthy with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own?"

"No servant can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money."

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and jeered at him. He said to them, "You are the very ones who pass yourselves off as upright in people's sight, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed in human eyes is loathsome in the sight of God."

Reflection

The Gospel today presents some words of Jesus concerning goods. They are words and loose phrases, and we do not know in which context they were said. Luke puts them here to form a small unity around the correct use of the goods of this life and to help us to better understand the sense of the parable of the dishonest steward (Lk 16: 1-8).

- Luke 16: 9: Use well the unjust money. "Use money, tainted as it is, to win friends, and then make sure that when it fails you, they will welcome you into eternal dwellings." Luke seeks to show it is better to use money to win "friends" here, by using it towards the poor and God's Kingdom, so that you will be welcomed into the Kingdom later. He generally viewed money as a corrupting influence both for the person and for the community as the communities grew beyond just the poor. In the Old Testament, the ancient word to indicate the poor (ani) means impoverished. It comes from the verb ana, to oppress, to lower. This affirmation recalls the parable of the dishonest steward whose riches were unjust. Here we have the context of the communities at the time of Luke in the years of the 80's after Christ. At the beginning, the Christian communities arose among the poor (cf. 1 Co 1: 26; Ga 2: 10). Little by little persons who were richer joined the communities. The entrance of the rich caused some problems which appear in the advice given in the Letter of James (Jm 2: 1-6; 5: 1-6), in the Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (1Co 11: 20-21) and in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 6: 24). These problems became worse toward the end of the first century, as it is said in the Apocalypse in its letter to the community of Laodicea (Rev 3: 17-18). The phrases of Jesus kept by Luke are a help to clarify and solve this problem.
- Luke 16: 10-12: To be faithful in small as well as in great things. "Anyone who is trustworthy in little things is trustworthy in great, and anyone who is dishonest in little things is dishonest in great. If then you are not trustworthy with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches? And if you are not trustworthy with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own?" This phrase clarifies the parable of the dishonest steward. He was not faithful. That is why he was taken away from the administration. This word of Jesus also suggests how to give life and to put into practice the advice regarding making friends with unjust money. The advice moves from eschatological times to the present. One can "make friends" with unjust money by putting it to good use to help the poor. In this case, "unjust money" is not money gotten improperly, but riches that create an unjust "attachment" to it and corrupts. "Genuine riches" in this passage are grace and gifts from God. So this suggests that charity to the poor precedes being trusted with greater "genuine" riches. Sharing and giving to the poor is the beginning, and the opening up of self to be able to receive even greater gifts.

- Luke 16: 13: You cannot serve God and money. Jesus is very clear in His affirmation. No servant can be the slave of two masters. He will either hate the first and love the second or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot be a slave to both God and money.” Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees loved their wealth and positions, and Luke’s point is that money corrupts. Each one of us should make a choice, and ask himself/herself: “Whom do I put in the first place in my life, God or money?” In the place of the word money each one can put other words: automobile, employment, prestige, goods, house, image, etc. This choice will depend on understanding Divine Providence (Mt 6: 25-34). It is a matter of priority in life and trust. To build up these riches for their own sake, or as a form of protection, is to trust in them more than God’s providence. It can also lead to excesses, beyond what is sufficient. These are choices that show, by how one lives, where love and trust in God are placed.
- Luke 16: 14-15: Criticism of the Pharisees who like money. “The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and jeered at him. He said to them, “You are the very ones who pass yourselves off as upright in people’s sight, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed in human eyes is loathsome in the sight of God.” On another occasion Jesus mentions the love of some Pharisees toward money: “You devour the property of widows, rob their houses and in appearance you make long prayers” (Mt 23: 14; Lk 20: 47; Mk 12: 40). They allowed themselves to be dragged by the wisdom of the world, of which Paul says: “Consider, brothers, how you were called; not many of you are wise by human standards, not many influential, not many from noble families. But God chose those who by human standards are fools to shame the wise. He chose those who by human standards are weak to shame the strong, those who by common standards are common and contemptible, indeed those who count for nothing - to reduce to nothing all those who do count for something” (1 Cor 1: 26-28). Some Pharisees liked money, just like today some priests like money. The advice of Jesus and of Paul is valid for them.

Personal Questions

- You and money: what choice do you make?
- Faithful in small things. How do you speak of the Gospel and how do you live the Gospel?

Concluding Prayer

How blessed is anyone who fears Yahweh, who delights in His commandments!
His descendants shall be powerful on earth, the race of the honest shall receive blessings. (Ps 112: 1-2)

Sunday, November 12, 2023

Thirty-second 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 – Matthew 25: 1-13

A Key to Guide the Reading:

Our meditation is on the parable of the ten virgins. In His parables, Jesus loves to make use of well-known facts in the life of the people as a means of comparison in order to clarify some unknown aspect of the Realm of God. In the parable of the ten virgins, He builds a story around the different attitudes of the girls who accompany the bridegroom on the feast day of his wedding. Jesus uses this fact, which is well known to all, in order to shed light on the event of the sudden coming of the Realm of God in people's lives.

Generally, Jesus does not explain His parables, but says: "Let him who has ears to hear, understand!" Or "So it is. You have heard! Now try to understand." He provokes people, so that known facts of daily life might help them discover God's promptings in their lives. He involves His listeners in the discovery of the meaning of the parable. The experience that each person has of the facts of life as told in the parable, contributes to the discovery of the meaning of Jesus' parable. This shows that Jesus trusted in people's ability to understand. They become co-owners of the meaning.

At the end of the parable of the ten virgins, Jesus says "Watch, therefore, because you do not know the day or the hour." This final warning serves as a key to the reading. It shows the direction of Jesus' thinking. In this reading we should seek to discover the central point of this parable that Jesus uses as a comparison for the Realm of God.

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

- Mt 25: 1-4: The different attitudes of the girls who accompany the bridegroom: five wise and five foolish.
- Mt 25: 5-6: The delay in the coming of the bridegroom and his sudden arrival in the night.
- Mt 25: 7-9: The different attitudes of the wise and the foolish.
- Mt 25: 10-12: The different outcome for the wise and the foolish.
- Mt 25: 13: The conclusion of the parable.

The Text:

1-4: Then the kingdom of Heaven will be like this: ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones, though they took their lamps, took no oil with them, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps.

5-6: The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him."

7-9: Then all those virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the

sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out." But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves."

10-12: They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other attendants arrived later. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us." But he replied, "In truth I tell you, I do not know you."

13: So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection

- What did you like best in the parable and what caught your attention? Why?
- What is the context of people's daily life that Jesus stresses in this parable?
- From the start, Jesus distinguishes between "wise" and "foolish." What is the meaning of wisdom and of foolishness?
- How can we interpret the bridegroom's harsh reply: "I tell you solemnly, I do not know you"?
- Of what day and which hour is Jesus speaking at the end of the parable?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

The Context Within Which Matthew Records Jesus' Words

Matthew's Gospel has two kinds of parables. Those that help in the understanding of the Realm of God as present in Jesus' activities, and those that help us prepare for the future coming of the Realm. The first are more frequent in the early apostolic life of Jesus. The latter are more frequent in the second half when it is clear that Jesus will be persecuted, apprehended, and killed by the civil and religious authorities. In other words, both dimensions of the Realm are to be found in the parables:

- 1) the Realm already present, here and now, hidden in the daily events of life and which may be discovered and appreciated by us, and
- 2) the future Realm still to come and for which each one of us must prepare starting now.

The tension between *the already and the not yet* pervades the life of the Christian. Christmas is at once a celebration of the Realm already present and the anticipation of the Realm that is still to come.

A Commentary on Jesus' Words as Recorded in Matthew

- *Matthew 25: 1-4*: The different attitudes of the girls who accompany the bridegroom: five wise and five foolish.

Jesus begins the parable with the words: "The kingdom of heaven will be like this..." This means that the parable of the ten virgins is about the future coming of the Realm for which we must prepare starting now. In order to shed light on this dimension of the Realm, Jesus uses the well-known custom of inviting some young girls of the village to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding feast. They had to accompany the bridegroom with lighted lamps. But the lamps were small and the oil they contained was sufficient only for a limited time. That is why it was prudent for each to take with her a little oil in reserve since the journey with the bridegroom could take longer than the limited time the oil in the lamps would last.

The following is what is implied in this story of the ten virgins: those who accept an assignment must prepare themselves according to the requirements of that assignment. The young girl, who accepts to be lady in waiting at a wedding must do what is required for this function. She must be far-sighted and carry the oil needed for the lamp. Those who undertake a trip of 100 kilometers on a road that has no petrol stations, and who know that, and leave with petrol for only 50 kilometers, are neither prudent nor far-sighted. People will say: "Silly, they have no brains."

- *Matthew 25 :5-6*: The delay of the bridegroom and his sudden arrival in the night.

The sequence of events told by Jesus is quite normal. It is night and the bridegroom is delayed. The girls, with every good intention and without meaning to, fall asleep. They try to stay awake because the bridegroom might come at any moment. Suddenly a cry goes up!

"The bridegroom is coming!" It is the signal they were all awaiting. It is at this critical moment that a person's values are revealed. The things that happen to us suddenly, independent of our will, show whether we are far-sighted or foolish.

- *Matthew 25: 7-9*: The different attitudes of the wise and the foolish.

When they awake, the girls begin to prepare the lamps they need to make light on the road. It was time to add some oil because the lamps were running low. The girls who did not bring oil with them in reserve ask to borrow some from those who had brought oil. These reply that they cannot give them any oil, because then both of them would not have enough. If it was just a question of making light for the road, the wise ones could have said: walk beside us and you will be able to see where you go. But it was not a question of just making light for the road. The lamps were also a festive sign and to make light for the bridegroom on his arrival. This was the task of these ladies in waiting. Each would hold a lamp in her hand.

At the critical moment, the foolish girls ask for a share. They ask that the wise share the oil with them. Often, a parable makes only one point. Sharing was a very important and fundamental practice among the people of God. But in this case, it was not a question of sharing, because had the wise ones shared their oil, they would have caused harm to the bridegroom and spoiled the wedding feast. Neither they nor the others would have fulfilled the function which they had accepted. That is why the wise meet the request of the foolish negatively and offer realistic advice: "Buy

some yourselves!" However, it was already midnight and it would have been difficult to find a shop open.

- *Matthew 25: 10-12*: The different outcome for the wise and the foolish.

While the foolish girls went to buy oil, the bridegroom arrived and those who were prepared went into the wedding feast with him and the door was closed. In the parable, the foolish girls found a shop open and bought some oil. Late as they were, they come and cry: "Open the door for us!" The bridegroom (at least, it seems that it is he) answers harshly: "In truth I tell you, I do not know you."

- *Matthew 25: 13*: Conclusion: Watchfulness.

The conclusion applied by Jesus Himself at the end of the story is a phrase that may be seen as the key to the whole parable: "Stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour!" God can come at any time during our lives. Everyone must be prepared. Like the young girls at the wedding feast, everyone must be prudent and show foresight and carry sufficient oil. There is a personal responsibility, even within the context of community. One cannot "borrow" good works from the community when the time comes. Everyone must stay on guard in the service of God and neighbor because you know not the time the bridegroom will arrive.

To Conclude:

How can we explain the harsh phrase: "I do not know you!"? We suggest two possible answers:

- Many parables contain something strange: the father who does not scold the prodigal son, the shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep to look for the one, the Samaritan who behaves better than the priest and the Levite, etc. Usually, these strange or surprising aspects hide an important key for the discovery of the central point of the parable. In the parable of the ten virgins there are some strange things that do not usually happen: 1) There are no shops open at night, 2) The door is not usually closed at a wedding feast, 3) Normally, the bridegroom would never say: I do not know you. It is through these strange matters that the central thread of the teaching of the parable runs through. What is that? "Listen! Anyone who has ears."
- -- The bridegroom in the parable is Jesus Himself who arrives late at night. It is what the context of other texts in the Gospels and in the Old Testament implies. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus says that she had five husbands and the one she had now, the sixth, is not her true husband. The *seventh* is Jesus, the real spouse (Jn 4: 16-18). While the bridegroom is with His disciples they need not fast (Mk 2: 19-20). From the time of the prophet Hosea, in the 8th century before Christ, there grew in the people a hope of being able to one day come to an intimacy with God like that between bridegroom and bride (Hos 2: 19- 20). Isaiah says clearly: God wishes to be the husband of the people (Is 54: 5; Jer 3: 14), to rejoice with His people as a bridegroom rejoices in the presence of His bride (Is 62: 5). This hope is realized in the coming of Jesus. When Jesus enters the life of a person, all else must withdraw because He is the bridegroom. This view of the story and the centuries long hope of the people helps us to understand the meaning of the harsh phrase of the bridegroom: "I do not know you!" Jesus also uses denial as a means to differentiate those not prepared for the Kingdom, as in Mt 10: 33, *whoever will have denied me before men, I also will deny before my Father, who is in heaven*. Because of the lack of commitment and seriousness, the five foolish girls clearly show that they were not ready yet to commit themselves definitively to wed God. They needed some more time to prepare themselves: "Watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Psalm 63: 2-9

God's Desire

O God, thou art my God, I seek thee,

my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is.

So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory.

Because thy steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise thee.

So I will bless thee as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on thy name. My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips, when I think of thee upon my bed,

and meditate on thee in the watches of the night; for thou hast been my help,

and in the shadow of thy wings, I sing for joy.

My soul clings to thee; thy right hand upholds me.

Final Prayer

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

Monday, November 13, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 17: 1-6

Jesus said to His disciples, "scandals are sure to come, but alas for the one through whom they occur! It would be better for such a person to be thrown into the sea with a millstone round the neck than to be the downfall of a single one of these little ones.

Keep watch on yourselves! If your brother does something wrong, rebuke him and, if he is sorry, forgive him.

And if he wrongs you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I am sorry,' you must forgive him."

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." The Lord replied, "If you had faith like a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

Reflection

Today the Gospel gives us three different words of Jesus. One on how to avoid causing scandal or scandalizing the little ones, the other one on the importance of pardon and a third one on faith in God which we should have.

- Luke 17: 1-2: First word: To avoid scandal. "Jesus said to His disciples: "It is unavoidable that there are scandals, but alas for the one through whom they occur. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around the neck than to be the downfall of a single one of these little ones." To cause scandal means to make people trip and fall. At the level of faith, it means that which drives away the person from the right path. To scandalize the little ones means to be the cause of their drawing away from God and to make them lose their faith in God. Anyone who does this deserves the following sentence: "A millstone round the neck and to be thrown into the sea!" Why such severity? Because Jesus identifies Himself with the little ones who are the poor (Mt 25: 40, 45). They are those He prefers and the first ones to whom the Good News will be given (cf. Lk 4: 18). Anyone who touches them touches Jesus! Because of our way of living faith, we Christians throughout the centuries have been the cause of why the little ones have many times drawn away from the Church and have gone towards other religions. They have not been able any longer to believe, as the Apostle said in the Letter to the Romans quoting the Prophet Isaiah: "In fact, it is your fault that the name of God is held in contempt among the nations." (Rm 2: 24; Is 52: 5; Ez 36: 22). Up to what point are we guilty? Is it our fault? Do we also deserve the millstone around the neck?
- Luke 17: 3-4: Second word: Forgive your brother. "If your brother does something wrong rebuke him and, if he is sorry, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I am sorry', you must forgive him." Seven times a day! This is not little! Jesus asks very much! In the Gospel of Matthew, He says that we should forgive seventy times seven! (Mt 18: 22). Forgiveness and reconciliation are some of the themes on which Jesus insists the most. The grace to be able to forgive persons and to reconcile them among themselves and with God was granted to Peter (Mt 16: 19), to the Apostles (Jn 20: 23), and to the community (Mt 18: 18). The parable on the need to forgive our neighbor leaves no doubt: if we do not forgive our brothers we cannot receive pardon from God (Mt 18: 22-35; 6: 12, 15; Mk 11: 26). There is no proportion between the pardon that we receive from God and the pardon that we have to offer to our neighbor. The pardon with which God forgives us gratuitously is like ten thousand talents compared to one hundred denarii (Mt 18: 23-35). It is estimated that ten thousand talents are 174 tons of gold. One hundred denarii are not more than 30 grams of gold.
- Luke 17: 5-6: Third word: Increase our faith. "The apostles said to the Lord: 'Increase our faith!'" The Lord answered: If you had faith like a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea', and it would obey you." In this context in Luke, the question of the apostles seems to be motivated by the order of Jesus to forgive, in one day, up to seventy times seven the brother or the sister who sins against us. It is not easy to forgive. It is only with great faith in God that it is possible to reach the point of having such a great love that it makes it possible for us to forgive, in one day, up to seventy times seven the brother who sins against us.

Humanly speaking, in the eyes of the world, to forgive in this way is foolish and a scandal. However, for us this attitude is the expression of divine wisdom which forgives us infinitely much more. Paul said: "We announce Christ crucified: a stumbling block for the Jews and foolishness for the gentiles (I Co 1: 23).

Personal Questions

- In my life, have I been a cause of scandal for my neighbor? Have others been a cause of scandal for me?
- Am I capable to forgive seven times a day my brother or my sister who offends me, or even seventy times seven times a day?

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)

Tuesday, November 14, 2023

Tuesday - Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 17: 7-10

Jesus 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.'"

Reflection

The Gospel today narrates a parable which is found only in Luke's Gospel and has no parallel in the other Gospels. The parable wants to teach that our life has to be characterized by an attitude of service. It begins with three questions which are ultimately answered by Jesus.

- Luke 17: 7-9: The three questions of Jesus. It asks three questions taken from daily life, and therefore the listeners have to think about each one with his own experience to give a response according to that experience. In the first question, Jesus asks

“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?” All will answer “No!” The second question asks 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?” All will answer: “Yes! Certainly!” Finally, the third question inquires “must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told?” All will answer “No!” The way in which Jesus asks the questions orientates people to his way of thinking. He wants us to be servants to one another.

- Luke 17: 10: The response of Jesus. At the end Jesus draws a conclusion which was already implicit in the questions: “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.’” This applies to all Christians, to serve the Master and to avoid pride in doing so. Jesus has told us what to do, and we must do it with the humility of one who sees himself as a useless servant, expecting to have our reward after doing the Master’s work. He has given us an example of service when He said: “The Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve” (Mk 10: 45). Service is a theme which Luke likes. Service represents the form in which the poor in the time of Jesus, the *anawim* were waiting for the Messiah. Not like a royal and glorious Messiah, high priest or judge, but rather as the Servant of Yahweh, announced by Isaiah (Is 42: 1-9). Mary, the Mother of Jesus, says to the angel: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word!” (Lk 1: 38). In Nazareth, Jesus presents Himself as the Servant described by Isaiah (Lk 4: 18-19 and Is 61: 1-2). In Baptism and in the Transfiguration, He was confirmed by the Father who quotes the words addressed by God to the Servant (Lk 3: 22; 9: 35 e Is 42: 1). Jesus asks His followers: “Anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave” (Mt 20: 27). Useless servants! This is the definition of the Christian. Paul speaks about this to the members of the community of Corinth when he writes “I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God gave the growth. In this, neither the planter nor the waterer counts for anything only God who gave growth” (1 Co 3: 6-7). Paul and Apollos are nothing, only simple instruments. The only one who counts is God. He alone! (1 Co 3: 7).
- To serve and to be served. Here in this text, the servant serves the master and not the master the servant. But in the other text of Jesus the contrary is said: “Blessed are 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” (Lk 12: 37). In this text, the master serves the servant and not the servant the master. In the first text, Jesus spoke in the present. In the second text, Jesus is speaking in the future. This contrast is simply another way of saying that the one who is ready to lose his life out of love for Jesus and the Gospel will find it (Mt 10: 39; 16: 25). Anyone who serves God in this present life will be served by God in the future life!

Personal Questions

- How do I define my life?
- Do I ask myself the three questions Jesus asks? Do I live like a useless servant?

Concluding Prayer

The lives of the just are in Yahweh's care. Their birthright will endure forever.

Yahweh guides a strong man's steps and keeps them firm and takes pleasure in him.
(Ps 37: 18, 23)

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 17: 11-19

Now it happened that on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was traveling in the borderlands of Samaria and Galilee.

As He entered one of the villages, ten lepers came to meet him. They stood some way off and called to him, "Jesus! Master! Take pity on us."

When He saw them, He said, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." Now as they were going away they were cleansed.

Finding himself cured, one of them turned back praising God at the top of his voice and threw himself prostrate at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan.

This led Jesus to say, "Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they? Has no one has come back to give praise to God, except this foreigner?" He said to the man "Stand up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you."

Reflection

In today's Gospel, Luke gives an account of the cure of ten lepers, in which only one thanks Jesus. And he was a Samaritan! Gratitude is another theme which is very typical of Luke: to live in an attitude of gratitude and to praise God for everything which we receive from Him. This is why Luke says many times that people admired and praised God for the things that Jesus did (Lk 2: 28-38; 5: 25-26; 7: 16; 13: 13; 17: 15-18; 18: 43; 19: 37; etc). The Gospel of Luke gives us several canticles and hymns which express this experience of gratitude and of thanksgiving (Lk 1: 46-55; 1: 68-79; 2: 29-32).

- Luke 17: 11: Jesus on His way to Jerusalem. Luke recalls that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, passing through Samaria to go to Galilee. From the beginning of His journey (Lk 9: 52) up until now (Lk 17: 11), Jesus walks through Samaria. It is only now that He is leaving Samaria, passing through Galilee to reach Jerusalem. That means that the important teachings given in these last chapters from the 9th to the 17th were all given on a territory which was not predominantly Jewish. To hear that must have been a great joy for Luke's communities, which were from pagan territory. Jesus the pilgrim continues His journey toward Jerusalem. He continues to eliminate the differences or inequalities which men have created. He continues the long and painful road of the periphery toward the capital city, from a religion closed in upon

itself toward an open religion which knows how to accept others as brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father. This openness is also manifested in the acceptance given to the ten lepers.

- Luke 17: 12-13: The calling out of the lepers. Ten lepers went close to Jesus, and they stopped at a distance and called out: "Jesus, Master! Take pity on us!" A leper was a person who was excluded, marginalized, despised, and had no right to live with the family. According to the law of purity, lepers had to go around with torn clothes and uncombed hair, calling out: "Impure! Impure!" (Lv 13: 45-46). For the lepers to look for a cure meant the same thing as to seek purity in order to be able to be integrated again into the community. They could not get close to others (Lv 13: 45-46). Anyone who was touched by a leper became unclean and that prevented him from being able to address himself to God. By means of crying out they expressed their faith in Jesus who could cure them and give them back purity. To obtain purity meant to feel again accepted by God and be able to address him to receive the blessings promised to Abraham.
- Luke 17: 14: The response of Jesus and the cure. Jesus answered: "Go and show yourselves to the priest!" (cf. Mk 1: 44). The priest had to verify the cure and bear witness to the purity of the one who had been cured (Lv 14: 1-32). The response of Jesus demanded great faith on the part of the lepers. They had to go to the priest as if they had already been cured when their bodies continued to be covered with leprosy. But they believed in Jesus' word and went to the priest. It happens that along the way, their cure takes place. They are purified. This cure recalls the story of the purification of Naaman from Syria (2 K 5: 9-10). The prophet Elisha orders the man to go and wash in the Jordan. Naaman had to believe in the word of the prophet. Jesus orders the ten lepers to present themselves to the priests. They should believe in the word of Jesus.
- Luke 17: 15-16: Reaction of the Samaritan. "One of them, seeing himself cured, turned back praising God at the top of his voice, and threw himself prostrate at the feet of Jesus, thanking him. The man was a Samaritan." Why did the others not return? Why only the Samaritan? According to the opinion of the Jews of Jerusalem, the Samaritan did not observe the law as he should. Among the Jews there was the tendency to observe the law to be able to merit or deserve or acquire justice. Thanks to the observance, they already had accumulated merits and credit before God. Gratitude and gratuity do not form part of the vocabulary of persons who live their relationship with God in this way. Perhaps this is the reason why they do not thank God for the benefits received. In the parable of yesterday's Gospel, Jesus had formulated the same question: "Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told?" (Lk 17: 9) And the answer was "No!" The Samaritan represents the person who realizes he has no merits or rights before God. Everything is grace, beginning from the gift of one's own life!
- Luke 17: 17-19: The final observation of Jesus. Jesus observes: "Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they? Has no one come back to give praise to God except this foreigner?" For Jesus, thankfulness for benefits received is a way of rendering the praise that is due to God. What of the others though? Are they to be faulted for carrying out Jesus' orders? Since it was the Law to be proclaimed clean by the priest, the others, like the Pharisees, placed adherence to the Law above gratitude. On this point, the Samaritans gave a lesson to the Jews. Today the poor are those who carry out the role of the Samaritan and help us to rediscover this dimension of gratitude in life. Everything that we receive should be considered a gift from God who comes to us through brother and sister.

- The welcome given to the Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke. For Luke, the place which Jesus gave to the Samaritans is the same as that which the communities had to reserve for the pagans. Jesus presents a Samaritan as a model of gratitude (Lk 17: 17-19) and of love toward neighbor (Lk 10: 30-33). This must have been quite shocking, because for the Jews, the Samaritans or pagans were the same thing. They could not have access inside the temple of Jerusalem or participate in worship. They were considered to be bearers of impurity. They were impure from birth. For Luke, the Good News of Jesus is addressed in the first place to the persons of these groups who were considered unworthy to receive it. The salvation of God which reaches us through Jesus is purely a gift. It does not depend on the merits of anyone.

Personal Questions

- Do you generally thank persons? Do you thank out of conviction or simply because of custom? In prayer, do you give God thanks, or do you forget?
- To live with gratitude is a sign of the presence of the Kingdom in our midst. How can we transmit to others the importance of living in gratitude and in gratuity?

Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows He lets me lie. By tranquil streams He leads me. (Ps 23: 1-2)

Thursday, November 16, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 17: 20-25

When asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was to come, Jesus gave them this answer: "The coming of the kingdom of God comes not with observation and there will be no one to say, "Look, it is here! Look, it is there!" For look, the kingdom of God is within you." He said to the disciples, "A time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of man and will not see it.

They will say to you, 'Look, it is there!' or 'Look, it is here!' Make no move; do not set off in pursuit; for as the lightning flashing from one part of heaven lights up the other, so will be the Son of man when His Day comes. But first He is destined to suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."

Reflection

Today's Gospel gives us the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees on the coming of the Kingdom. The Gospel today and that of the following days deal with the coming of the end of time.

- Luke 17: 20-21 - The Kingdom is among you. "Asked when the Kingdom of God was to come?" Jesus answered "The coming of the Kingdom of God does not come with (through) observation and there will be no one to say, 'Look, it is here! Look, it is there! For look, the Kingdom of God is within you!" The Pharisees thought that the Kingdom could come only after people would have reached the perfect observance of the Law of God. For them, the coming of the Kingdom would be the reward from God for the good behavior of the people, and the Messiah would have come in a very solemn way as a king, to be received by his people. Jesus says the contrary. The coming of the Kingdom cannot be observed as the coming of an earthly king is observed. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God has already come! It is already among us, independently of our effort or merit. Jesus sees things in a different way. He has another way of reading life. He prefers the Samaritan who lives with gratitude to the nine who think that they merit the good that they receive from God (Lk 17: 17-19).
- Luke 17: 22-24 - The signs to recognize the coming of the Son of Man. "A time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man and will not see it. They will say to you, 'Look it is there!' or 'Look, it is here!' Make no move, and do not set off in pursuit. For as the lightning flashing from one part of heaven lights up the other, so will be the Son of Man when His Day comes." In this affirmation, from there are elements taken from apocalyptic visions of history quite common in the first centuries after Jesus. An apocalyptic vision of history has certain distinguishing characteristics. Certainly, in time of great persecution and oppression the poor have the impression that God loses control of history. They feel lost, without a horizon and without any hope of liberation. In those moments of apparent absence of God, prophecy assumes the form of apocalypse. The apocalyptic vision seeks to enlighten the desperate situation with the light of faith in order to help people not lose hope and continue to have courage. To show that God does not lose control of history, they describe the different stages of the realization of the project of God throughout history. Begun in a particular significant moment in the past, this project of God advances, stage after stage, through the situations lived by the poor, until the final victory is obtained at the end of history. In this way, the apocalyptic places the present moment like a stage which has already been foreseen in the overall project of God. Generally, the last stage, before the coming of the end, is represented as a moment of suffering and crisis, which many try to profit from by deceiving people. "They will tell you: Look it is here, or look it is there, but do not move, do not follow them. Because like lightning flashing from one part of heaven lights up the other, so will be the Son of man when His Day comes." Having the eyes of faith which Jesus communicates, the poor can perceive that the Kingdom is already among them (Lk 17: 21), like lightning, without any doubt. The coming of the Kingdom brings with it its own evidence and does not depend on the forecast or prediction of others.
- Luke 17: 25 - By the Cross up to the Glory. "But first He is destined to suffer many things and be rejected by this generation." Always the same warning: the Cross, scandal for the Jews and foolishness for the Greek, but for us the expression of the wisdom and the power of God (1Co 1: 18, 23). The path toward the glory passes through the Cross. The life of Jesus is our Canon. It is the canonical norm for all of us.

Personal Questions

- Jesus said “The Kingdom is in your midst!” Have you already found some sign of the Kingdom in your life, in the life of your nation or in the life of your community?
- The cross in our life: How do you consider or see suffering? What do you do about it?

Concluding Prayer

He keeps faith forever,

gives justice to the oppressed, gives food to the hungry; Yahweh sets prisoners free. (Ps 146: 6-7)

Friday, November 17, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 17: 26-37

Jesus said to His disciples “as it was in Noah's day, so will it also be in the days of the Son of man. People were eating and drinking, marrying wives and husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and the Flood came and destroyed them all.

It will be the same as it was in Lot's day: people were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but the day Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and it destroyed them all. It will be the same when the day comes for the Son of man to be revealed.”

“When that Day comes, no one on the housetop, with his possessions in the house, must come down to collect them, nor must anyone in the fields turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Anyone who tries to preserve his life will lose it, and anyone who loses it will keep it safe.

I tell you, on that night, when two are in one bed, one will be taken, the other left. When two women are grinding corn together, one will be taken, the other left.”

The disciples spoke up and asked, 'Where, Lord?' He said, 'Where the body is, there too will the vultures gather.’”

Reflection

Today's Gospel continues the reflection on the coming of the end of time and presents to us the words of Jesus about how to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Kingdom. This was an affair which produced much discussion at that time. God is the one who determines the hour of the coming end of time. But the time of God (*kairós*) is not measured according to the time of our clock (*chronos*). For God one day can be equal to one thousand years, and one thousand years equal to one day (Ps 90: 4; 2 P 3: 8). The time of God goes by invisibly in our time, but independently of us and our time.

We cannot interfere in time, but we have to be prepared for the moment in which the hour of God becomes present in our time. It could be today, or it could be in one thousand years. What gives us security is not to know the hour of the end of the world, but the certainty of the presence of the Words of Jesus present in our life. The world will pass, but the Word of God will never pass (cf. Is 40: 7-8).

- Luke 17: 26-29 - "As it was in the day of Noah and of Lot. Life goes by normally: eating, drinking, getting married, buying, selling, sowing, harvesting. Our routine can include so much that we do not manage to think about anything else. The consumerism of our time generates in many of us a total lack of attention to the more profound dimensions of life. We allow the moths to enter into the beam of faith which holds up the more profound dimensions of life. When the storm destroys the house, many of us blame the carpenter: "It was badly made!" In reality it crumbled down due to our continual lack of attention. The reference to the destruction of Sodom as a figure of what will happen at the end of time may be a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the years 70's AD (cf. Mk 13: 14).
- Luke 17: 30-32 - So it will also be in the days of the Son of Man. "So it will be in the days when the Son of Man will reveal Himself." It is difficult for us to imagine the suffering and the trauma that the destruction of Jerusalem caused in both Jewish and Christian communities. To help them to understand and face this suffering Jesus uses a comparison taken from life: "When that Day comes, no one on the housetop, with his possessions in the house, must come down to collect them, nor must anyone in the fields turn back." The destruction will take place so rapidly that it is not worthwhile to go down to look for something in the house (Mk 13, 15-16). "Remember Lot's wife" (cf. Gn 19: 26): that is do not look back, do not lose time, decide and go. It is a question of life or death.
- Luke 17: 33 - To lose one's life in order to save it. "Anyone who tries to preserve his life will lose it, and anyone who loses it will keep it safe." Only the person who has been capable of giving himself/herself completely to others will feel totally fulfilled in life. Anyone who preserves life for self alone loses it. This advice of Jesus is the confirmation of the most profound human experience: the source of life is found in the gift of life. In giving, one receives. "In all truth I tell you: unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies it yields a rich harvest." (Jn 12: 24). The motivation which Mark's Gospel adds is important: "for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel" (Mk 8: 35). Saying that no one is capable of preserving his life by his own efforts, Jesus recalls the Psalm in which it is said that nobody is capable of paying the price for the ransom of his life: "No one can redeem himself or pay his own ransom to God. The price for himself is too high it can never be that he will live on forever and avoid the sight of the abyss." (Ps 49: 8-10).
- Luke 17: 34-36 - Vigilance. "I tell you, on that night, when two are in one bed, one will be taken, the other left. When two women are grinding corn together one will be taken, the other left." This recalls the parable of the ten Virgins. Five were prudent and five were foolish (Mt 25: 1-11). What is important is to be prepared. The words "one will be taken and the other left" recall the words of Paul to the Thessalonians (1 Th 4: 13-17), when he says that with the coming of the Son of Man, we will be taken to Heaven at the side of Jesus. These words "left behind" furnished the title of a terrible and dangerous romance of the fundamentalist extreme right of the United States: "Left Behind!" This is a romance which has nothing to do with the real sense of the words of Jesus.

- Luke 17: 37 - Where and when? "The disciples asked: Where, Lord?" And Jesus answered: "Where the body is, there too the vultures will gather." This is an enigmatic response. Some think that Jesus recalled the prophecy of Ezekiel, taken up in the Apocalypse, in which the prophet refers to the final victorious battle against the force of evil. The birds of prey or the vultures will be invited to eat the flesh of the bodies (Ez 39: 4, 17-20; Rv 19: 17-18). Others think that it is a question of the Valley of Jehoshaphat where the final judgment will take place according to the prophecy of Joel (Ga 4: 2, 12). Others think that it is simply a variation of a popular proverb which meant more or less what our contemporary proverb says: "Where there is smoke, there is fire!"

Personal Questions

- Am I from the time of Noah or from the time of Lot?
- A Romance of the extreme right. How do I place myself before this political manipulation of the faith in Jesus? ---I have no idea what this means.

Concluding Prayer

How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the Law of Yahweh!

Blessed are those who observe His instructions, who seek Him with all their hearts. (Ps 119: 1-2)

Saturday, November 18, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

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 18: 1-8

Jesus told a parable to His disciples about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. There was a judge in a certain town, who had neither fear of God nor respect for anyone. In the same town there was also a widow who kept on coming to him and saying, "I want justice from you against my enemy!" For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself, "Even though I have neither fear of God nor respect for any human person, I must give this widow her just rights lest she troubles me, lest continually coming she weary me."

And the Lord said, "You notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now, will not God see justice done to His elect if they keep calling to Him day and night even though He still delays to help them?"

I promise you, He will see justice done to them, and done speedily. But when the Son of man comes, will He find any faith on earth?

Reflection

Today's Gospel presents an element which is very dear to Luke: Prayer. This is the second time that Luke gives us the words of Jesus to teach us to pray. The first time (Lk 11: 1-13), He taught us the Our Father and, by means of comparisons and parables, He taught that we must pray continually, without getting tired. Now, this second time, (Lk 18: 1-8), He uses a parable taken from life to teach us insistence in prayer. It is the parable of the widow who pestered the unscrupulous judge. The way He presents the parable is very didactic. In the first place, Luke presents a brief introduction which serves as the key for the reading. Afterwards, he narrates the parable. Finally, Jesus Himself explains it.

- Luke 18: 1: The introduction. Luke presents the parable with the following phrase: "Then He told them a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart." The recommendation "to pray without losing heart" appears many times in the New Testament (1 Th 5: 17; Rm 12: 12; Ep 6: 18; etc). And it is a characteristic of the spirituality of the first Christian communities.
- Luke 18: 2-5: The parable. Then Jesus presents two personages of real life: a judge who had no consideration for God and no consideration for others, and a widow who struggles to obtain her rights from the judge. The simple fact of indicating these two personages reveals the critical conscience which He had regarding the society of His time. The parable presents the poor people who struggle in the tribunal to obtain their rights. The judge decides to pay attention to the widow and to do justice. The reason is to free himself from the widow who is pestering him and to get rid of her. This is an interesting reason. But the widow obtained what she wanted! This is an example from daily life, which Jesus uses to teach us to pray.
- Luke 18: 6-8: The application. Jesus applies the parable: "You notice what the unjust judge has said. Now, will not God see justice done to His elect if they keep calling to Him day and night even though He still delays to help them? Will He make them wait long? I tell you He will see justice done to them, and done speedily." If it had not been Jesus, we would not have had the courage to compare Jesus to an unjust judge! Nevertheless, at the end, Jesus expresses a doubt: "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" In other words, will we have the courage to wait and have patience, even if God delays in doing what we ask him?
- Jesus in prayer. The first Christians had an image of Jesus in prayer, in permanent contact with the Father. In fact, the life of Jesus was to do the will of the Father (Jn 5: 19). Jesus prayed very much and insisted that His disciples also pray. Luke is the Evangelist who gives us a great deal of information on the prayer life of Jesus. He presents Jesus in constant prayer. The following are some moments in which Jesus appears praying:
 - When He was twelve years old and goes to the temple, to the House of the Father (Lk 2: 46- 50).
 - He prays when He is baptized and assumes His mission (Lk 3: 21).
 - At the beginning of the mission, He spends forty days in the desert (Lk 4: 1-2).
 - At a time of temptation, He opposes the devil with texts from Scripture (Lk 4: 3-12).
 - Jesus used to participate in the celebration in the Synagogue on Saturday (Lk 4: 16)

- He seeks solitude in the desert to pray (Lk 5: 16; 9: 18).
- Before choosing the twelve Apostles, He spends the night in prayer (Lk 6: 12).
- He prays before meals (Lk 9: 16; 24: 30).
- In a time of crises, He goes up to the mountain and pray where he is transfigured. (Lk 9: 28).
- When revealing the Gospel to little ones He says: "Father, I thank you!" (Lk 10: 21)
- In praying, He arouses in the Apostles the desire to pray (Lk 11: 1).
- He prays for Peter so that he does not lose his faith (Lk 22: 32).
- He celebrates the Paschal Supper with His disciples (Lk 22: 7-14).
- In the Garden of Olives, He prays, even when sweating blood (Lk 22: 41-42).
- In the anguish of the agony, He asks His friends to pray with Him (Lk 22: 40, 46).
- At the moment when He was being nailed to the Cross, He asks pardon for the murderers (Lk 23: 34).
- At the hour of death, He says "Into your hands I commend my spirit!" (Lk 23: 46; Ps 31: 6)
- Jesus dies crying out with the cry of the poor (Lk 23: 46).

This long list indicates everything which follows. For Jesus, prayer is intimately linked to life, to concrete facts, and to the decisions which He had to take. In order to be able to be faithful to the project of the Father, He sought to remain alone with Him. He listened to Him. In difficult and decisive moments in His life, Jesus recited Psalms. Just as any devout Jew, He knew them by heart. The recitation of the Psalms did not take away His creativity. Rather, Jesus Himself created a Psalm which He transmitted to us: the Our Father. His life is a permanent prayer: "I always seek the will of the one who sent me!" (Jn 5: 19, 30) The Psalm applies to Him when it says: "I am prayer!" (Ps 109: 4)

Personal Questions

- There are people who say that they do not know how to pray, but they speak with God the whole day. Do you know such a person? There are many ways which people express their devotion and pray today. What are they?
- What do these two parables teach us on prayer? What do they teach me regarding the way of seeing life and persons?

Concluding Prayer

How blessed is anyone who fears Yahweh, who delights in His commandments!
His descendants shall be powerful on earth, the race of the honest shall receive blessings. (Ps 112: 1-2)

Sunday, November 19, 2023

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, and 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 25: 14-30

The Division of the Text to Help in the Reading:

- Matthew 25: 14-15: The master distributes his goods among his servants
- Matthew 25: 16-18: The way of acting of each servant
- Matthew 25: 19-23: The rendering of account of the first and second servant
- Matthew 25: 24-25: The rendering of account of the third servant
- Matthew 25: 26-27: Response of the master to the third servant
- Matthew 25: 28-30: The final word of the master which clarifies the parable

Key for the Reading:

On this 33rd Sunday in Ordinary time, we shall meditate on the parable of the talents which deals with two very important themes and is very current: (i) The gifts which each person receives from God and the way in which he receives them. Each person has qualities and talents with which he can and should serve others. Nobody is just a pupil; nobody is just a professor. We learn from one another. (ii) The attitude with which persons place themselves before God who has given us His gifts. During the reading, we shall try to be attentive to these two points: what is the attitude of the three servants regarding the gifts received, and what image of God does this parable reveal to us?

Text:

14 It is like a man about to go abroad who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to a third, one, each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out on his journey. 16 The man who had received the five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. 17 The man who had received two made two more in the same way. 18 But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 Now a long time afterwards, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with five talents; here are

five more that I have made." 21 His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness."

22 Next the man with the two talents came forward. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made." 23 His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness."

24 Last came forward the man who had the single talent. "Sir," said he, "I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered; 25 so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back." 26 But his master answered him, "You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? 27 Well then, you should have deposited my money in the bank, and on my return I would have got my money back with interest. 28 So now, take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has. 30 As for this good-for-nothing servant, throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

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 is the meaning of this text. What has struck me most deeply?
- In the parable, the three servants receive according to their capacity. What is the attitude of each servant concerning the gift he has received?
- What is the reaction of the master? What does he demand from his servants?
- How should the following phrase be understood: "To everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has"?
- What image of God does the parable reveal to us?

To Deepen the Theme

Context of Our Text in the Gospel of Matthew:

The "Parable of the Talents" (Mt 25: 14-30) forms part of the 5th Sermon of the New Law (Mt 24: 1-25, 46). These three parables clarify the context relative to the time of the coming of the Kingdom. The parable of the Ten Virgins insists on vigilance: The Kingdom of God can arrive from one moment to the next. The parable of the talents focuses on the growth of the Kingdom. The Kingdom grows when we use the gifts we received in order to serve. The parable of the Final Judgment teaches how to take possession of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is accepted when we accept the little ones.

One of the things which exerts a great influence in our life is our concept of God. Among Jews of the Pharisee class, there was an image of God as a severe judge who

treated people according to the merits they acquired by observing the law. This caused fear and prevented people from growing. It prevented them from opening a space within themselves to accept the new experience of God which Jesus communicated. To help such people, Matthew narrates the parable of the talents.

Commentary on the Text:

- Matthew 25: 14-15: A door to enter into the story of the parable

The parable tells the story of a man, who before setting out on a journey, distributes his goods to his servants, giving five, two and one talent, according to the capacity of each one of them. A talent corresponds to 34 kilos of gold which is no small amount! In the final analysis, all receive the same thing because each one receives "according to his capacity." To the one who has a big cup, he fills it, and to the one who has a small cup, he also fills it. Then the master goes abroad and remains there a long time. The story leaves us a bit perplexed! We do not know why the master distributed his money to the servants. We do not know how the story will end. Perhaps the purpose is that all those who listen to the parable must begin to compare their life with the story told in the parable.

- Matthew 25: 16-18: The way of acting of each servant.

The first two servants worked and doubled the talents. But the one who received one talent buries it to keep it secure and not lose it. All receive some goods of the Kingdom, but not all respond in the same way!

- Matthew 25: 19-23: The rendering of account of the first and second servant

After a long time, the master returns to take an account from the servants. The first two say the same thing: "Sir, you gave me five / two talents. Here are other five / two which I have gained!" he master responds in the same way to both: "Well done, good and trustworthy servant, you have shown that you are trustworthy in small things, I will trust you with greater, come and join in your master's happiness."

- Matthew 25: 24-25: Rendering of an account of the third servant

The third servant arrives and says: "Sir, I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered, so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is, it was yours, you have it back!" In this phrase, there is an erroneous idea of God which is criticized by Jesus. The servant sees in God a severe master. Before such a God, the human being is afraid and hides himself behind the exact and meticulous observance of the law. He thinks that acting in this way he will avoid judgment and the severity of the master who might punish him. This is how some Pharisees thought. In reality, such a person has no trust in God but rather trusts in himself and his observance of the law. It is a person closed in upon himself, far from God and unconcerned about others. This person becomes incapable of growing freely. This false image of God isolates the human being, kills the community and does not help people live joyfully.

- Matthew 25: 26-27: Response of the master to the third servant

The response of the master is ironic. He says: "You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? Well, then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have got my money back with interest!" The third servant was not consistent with the severe image which he had of God. If he had imagined God so severe, he should have deposited the money in the bank. This is why he was condemned not

by God but by his wrong idea of God which left him terrified and immature. It was not possible for him to act responsibly because his image of God left him paralyzed by fear.

- Matthew 25: 28-30: The final word of the master which clarifies the parable

The master asks that the talent be taken away from him and given to the one who already has some. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has." This is the key which clarifies everything. In reality, the talents, "the money of the master," the goods of the Kingdom, are love, service, sharing, all gratuitous gifts. A talent is everything that makes the community grow and which reveals the presence of God. When one is closed in upon oneself out of fear, one loses even what little one has. For love dies, justice is weakened and sharing disappears. In contrast, the person who does not think of himself and gives to others grows and receives everything which he has been given and more. "Because anyone who finds his life will lose it, but anyone who loses his own life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10: 39).

Deepening:

The Different Currency of the Kingdom:

There is no difference between those who receive more and those who receive less. All receive according to their capacity. What is important is that the gift is placed at the service of the Kingdom by making the community grow, in love, fraternity, and sharing. The parable does not stress producing more talents but indicates the way we are to live our life with God. The first two servants ask for nothing. They do not seek their own well-being. They do not keep the talents for themselves and make no calculations. Very naturally, without being aware, without seeking merit for themselves, they work for the Kingdom. Because the third servant is afraid, he does nothing. According to the norms of the ancient law, he acts in a correct way. He remains within the established norms. He loses nothing, but also gains nothing. As a result, he loses even what little he had. The Kingdom entails a risk. The one who does not risk loses the Kingdom!

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

Monday, November 20, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good,
keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 18: 35-43

Now it happened that as Jesus drew near to Jericho there was a blind man sitting at the side of the road begging. When he heard the crowd going past he asked what it was all about, and they told him that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by. So he called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me." The people in front scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, "Son of David, have pity on me."

Jesus stopped and ordered them to bring the man to him, and when he came up, asked him "What do you want me to do for you?" "Sir," he replied, "let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you."

And instantly his sight returned and he followed Him praising God, and all the people who saw it gave praise to God.

Reflection

The Gospel today describes Jesus' arrival in Jericho. It is the last stop before Jesus goes to Jerusalem, where His "Exodus," according to what he announced in the Transfiguration scene will take place. He has also issued similar sentiments along the way to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 44; 18: 31-33).

- Luke 18: 35-37 - The blind man sitting on the side of the road. "Now it happened that as Jesus drew near to Jericho, there was a blind man sitting on the side of the road begging. When he heard the crowd going past, he asked what it was all about. They told him that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by." In the Gospel of Mark, the blind man is called Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 46). Since he was blind, he could not participate in the procession which accompanied Jesus. At that time, there may have been many blind people in Palestine possibly because of the strong sun and arid conditions.
- Luke 18: 38-39 - The cry of the blind man and the reaction of the people. "Then he began to cry out: Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" He calls Jesus using the title "Son of David." The teaching of that time taught that the Messiah would descend from David, a "Son of David." Jesus did not like this title. In quoting the Messianic Psalm, he asks Himself: "How is it that the Messiah can be the son of David if even David calls him "My Lord?" (Lk 20, 41- 44) The cry of the blind man bothers the people who accompany Jesus. This Consequently, "The people in front scold him telling him to keep quiet." However, "he only shouted all the louder, Son of David have pity on me!" This occurs in our time when the cry of the poor bothers in established society.
- Luke 18: 40-41 - The reaction of Jesus before the cry of the blind man. And what does Jesus do? Jesus stopped and ordered them to bring the man to him. Those who wanted to stop the blind man from shouting b, now are asked to help poor man to get to Jesus. The Gospel of Mark adds that the blind man left everything and went to Jesus. He did not have much, only his mantle to cover his body (cf. Es 22: 25-26). His mantle was his home! Today, Jesus listens to the cry of the poor which we do not want to hear. When he came up to Jesus, He asked him: "What do you want me to do for you?" It is not sufficient to shout or cry out. It is necessary to know why he is shouting! The blind man answers: "Lord that I may see again."
- Luke 18: 42-43 - Go! Your faith has saved you! And Jesus says "Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you." Immediately he recovers his sight and begins to follow Jesus praising God. And all the people, when they saw that, praised God. When the blind man calls Jesus itle that was uncomfortable, by the title "Son of David," he probably bothered people. His faith in Jesus exceeded his ideas about Jesus. He did not demand anything as Peter did (Mk 8: 32-33). J. Healing is the fruit of his faith in Jesus. Once he was cured, he follows Jesus and walks along with Him toward Jerusalem. In this way, he becomes a model disciple for all of us who want "to follow Jesus along the road" toward Jerusalem. This decision to walk with Jesus is the source of courage and seed of victory in the cross. The cross is not something fatal but rather an experience of God. It is a consequence of the decision to follow Jesus in obedience to the Father.
- Faith is a force which transforms the person. The Good News of the Kingdom announced by Jesus was a sort of fertilizer. It made the seed of life hidden in people grow. That seed lay hidden like fire under the ashes. . Jesus blew on the ashes and the fire ignited. The Kingdom appears and people rejoice. The condition was always the same: to believe in Jesus. The cure of the blind man clarifies a very important aspect of our faith. The blind man had faith and was cured despite his understanding of Jesus. He was converted and left everything behind and followed Jesus along the

road toward Calvary! The full understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained from a theoretical instruction but rather from a practical commitment walk with Him in the way of service. Anyone who insists, as Peter at one point does, that Messiahship comes without the cross, understands nothing of Jesus. Such a person does not have the attitude of a true disciple of Jesus. Anyone who believes in Jesus and gives himself (Lk 9: 23-24), anyone who accepts being last (Lk 22: 26), anyone who drinks the chalice of suffering and carries his/her cross (Mt 20: 22; Mk 10: 38), I will succeed in "following Jesus along the way" (Lk 18: 43). Walking with Jesus finds is the source of courage and provides the seed of victory in the cross.

Personal Questions

- How do I see and hear the cry of the poor such as migrants, people of color, AIDS sufferers, beggars, refugees etc.?
- How is my faith? Am I rigid in my ideas about Jesus ?

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, November 21, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good,

keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 19: 1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was going through the town and suddenly a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance. He was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He kept trying to see where Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see Him for the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and spoke to him, "Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today."

And he hurried down and welcomed Him joyfully.

They all complained when they saw what was happening. "He has gone to stay at a sinner's house," they said. But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the Lord, "Look,

sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody, I will pay him back four times the amount."

And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost."

Reflection

In today's Gospel, we reach the end of a long journey which began in chapter 9 (Lk 9: 51). During the journey, it has not been easy to know where Jesus is going. Now the geography is clear. Jesus reaches Jericho, the city of the palm trees, in the Valley of the Jordan. This is the last stop of pilgrims before going up toward Jerusalem. He went to Jericho where the long road of exodus in the desert ended. Jesus' exodus has also ended. In entering Jericho, Jesus meets a blind man who wanted to see Him (Lk 18: 35-43). Now, going out of the city, He meets Zacchaeus, a tax collector. He also wants to see him. Both the blind man and the Publican are excluded from Jewish society. Both bother and disturb the people. The blind man disturbed people because he was shouting to Jesus. The Publican incurs people's hostility because he collects taxes. Both are accepted by Jesus.

- Luke 19: 1-2: Jesus enters Jericho and crosses the city where he sees "a man whose name was Zacchaeus, head of the tax collectors and a rich man." The tax collector was the person who collected the public taxes on selling and buying of merchandise. As head tax collector, Zacchaeus was closely linked to the Roman government which dominated Israel. Since the more religious Jews believed their king to be God, they regarded Rome's dominion as ungodly. Anyone who collaborates with the Romans sins against God. Thus, the soldiers who served in the Roman army and tax collectors, like Zacchaeus were excluded and avoided because they were considered traitorous and impure.
- Luke 19: 3-4 - The attitude of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. Being small, he ran ahead and climbed on a tree and waited for Jesus to go by. He really had a great desire to see Jesus. Before, in the parable of poor Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16: 19-31), Jesus had said that it was truly difficult for a rich person to be converted. However, in Zacchaeus, we see a rich man who does not close himself up in his riches. Zacchaeus wants something more. Certainly, an adult who climbs a tree does not care much about the opinion of others. Something more important moves him. He wants to open the door for poor Lazarus.
- Luke 19: 5-7 - Attitude of Jesus, reaction of the people and of Zacchaeus. Seeing Zacchaeus on the tree, Jesus does not ask, nor does He demand, anything. He only responds to the desire of the man and says "Zacchaeus come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your home today!" Zacchaeus gets down and receives Jesus, in his house, with great joy. All complained "He has gone to stay at a sinner's house!" Luke says that all complained. Jesus is alone in His attitude of accepting the excluded, especially Roman collaborators. But Jesus does not care about the criticism. He goes to the house of Zacchaeus and defends him from the criticism. Rather than calling him sinner, He calls him "son of Abraham" (Lk 19: 9).
- Luke 19: 8 - Decision of Zacchaeus. "Look, Lord, I am going to give half of my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody, I will pay him back four times the amount!" This is the conversion produced in Zacchaeus because of the acceptance that he received from Jesus. To give back four times was what the law prescribed to do in certain cases (Ex 21: 37; 22: 3). To give half of my possessions to the poor was the novelty which contact with Jesus produced in him. In fact, sharing was taking place.

- Luke 19: 9-10 - Final word of Jesus. "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham." The interpretation of the Law by means of the ancient tradition excluded the tax collectors from the race of Abraham. Jesus says that He comes to seek and save what was lost. The Kingdom is for all. Nobody can be excluded. By denouncing unjust divisions, Jesus opens a space for a new way of living directed by the values of truth, justice, and love.
 - Son of Abraham. "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham!" By being a descendant of Abraham, all nations of earth will be blessed (Gn 12, 3; 22, 18). It was very important for Luke's communities, formed by Christians of both Jewish and pagan origin, that Jesus calls Zacchaeus "son of Abraham." For we find the confirmation that in Jesus, God was fulfilling the promises made to Abraham, addressed to all nations. Gentiles are also sons of Abraham and heirs of the promises. Jesus accepts those who were not accepted. He offers a place to those who do not have it. He receives as brothers and sisters people whom the religion and the government excluded. Here is a list of those outcasts in who found acceptance in Jesus: :
 - immoral: the prostitutes and the sinners (Mt 21: 31-32; Mk 2: 15; Lk 7: 37-50; Jn 8: 2-11),
 - heretic: pagans and Samaritans (Lk 7: 2-10; 17: 16; Mk 7: 24-30; Jn 4: 7-42),
 - impure: lepers and possessed (Mt 8: 2-4; Lk 17: 12-14; Mk 1: 25-26),
 - marginalized: women, children and the sick (Mk 1: 32; Mt 8: 16; 19: 13-15; Lk 8: 2-3),
 - fighters: publicans and soldiers (Lk 18: 9-14; 19: 1-10);
 - the poor: the people of the place and the poor who had no power (Mt 5: 3; Lk 6: 20; Mt 11: 25-26).

Personal Questions

- How does our community accept people who are despised and marginalized? Can we, like Jesus, perceive people's problems and give them attention?
- How do we perceive salvation entering into our house and our community? The welcoming tenderness of Jesus produced a total change in the life of Zacchaeus. Is the tenderness of our community producing some change in the neighborhood? Where?

Concluding Prayer

With all my heart I seek you,

do not let me stray from your commandments.

In my heart, I treasure your promises and seek to avoid sinning against you. (Ps 119: 10-11)

Wednesday, November 22, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good, keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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

Gospel Reading - Luke 19: 11-28

Jesus told the following parable because He was near Jerusalem and they thought that the kingdom of God was going to show itself then and there.

Thus He said, "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to be appointed king and then return. He summoned ten of his servants and gave them ten pounds, telling them, 'Trade with these, until I get back.'"

But his compatriots detested him and sent a delegation to follow him with this message, "We do not want this man to be our king." Now it happened that on his return, having received his appointment as king, he sent for those servants to whom he had given the money, to find out what profit each had made by trading.

The first came in, "Sir," he said, "your one pound has brought in ten." He replied, "Well done, my good servant! Since you have proved yourself trustworthy in a very small thing, you shall have power over ten cities."

Then came the second, "Sir," he said, "your one pound has made five." To this one he said, "And you shall be in charge of five cities."

Next came the other, "Sir," he said, "here is your pound. I put it away safely wrapped up in a cloth because I was afraid of you; for you are an exacting man: you gather in what you have not laid out and reap what you have not sown." He said to him, "You wicked servant! Out of your own mouth I condemn you. So you knew that I was an exacting man, gathering what I have not laid out and reaping what I have not sown? Then why did you not put my money in the bank? On my return I could have drawn it out with interest."

And he said to those standing by, "Take the pound from him and give it to the man who has ten pounds." And they said to him, "But, sir, he has ten pounds . . ." "I tell you, to everyone who has will be given more; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has.

"As for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence."

When He had said this He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

Reflection

The Gospel today presents the parable of the talents in which Jesus speaks of the gifts that persons receive from God. All persons have some qualities; they receive some gifts or know something which they can teach to others. Nobody is only a pupil. Nobody is only a professor. We all learn from one another.

- Luke 19: 11 - The key to understand the story of the parable. To introduce the parable Luke says the following: "At that time Jesus went on to tell a parable because He was near Jerusalem and the disciples thought that the Kingdom of God was going to show itself then and there." In this initial statement, Luke presents the reasons which

led Jesus to tell this parable: A) Proximate to the Passion, B) The imminent coming of the Kingdom of God, because the persons who accompanied Jesus thought that the Kingdom of God would come later.

- Luke 19: 12-14 - The beginning of the parable. "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to be appointed king and then return. He summoned ten of his servants and gave them ten pounds telling them, 'Trade with these, until I get back.'" Some scholars think that in this parable Jesus is referring to Herod who seventy years before (40 BC), went to Rome to receive the title and power of King of Palestine. People did not like Herod and did not want him to become king because of the experience they had with him. He was the commander who repressed the rebellions in Galilee against Rome which was tragic and painful. This is why they said: "We do not want this man to be our king!" The last phrase of this parable would apply to Herod: "As for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence." In fact, Herod killed many people.
- Luke 19: 15-19 - The account given by the first of ten servants who each received one pound. The story also recounts that Herod, after having obtained the title of king, returned to Palestine to take over power. In the parable, the king called his servants to whom he had given ten pounds to know how much they had gained. The first one came in and said: "Sir, your pound has produced ten other pounds." He replied, "Well done, my good servant! Since you have proved yourself trustworthy in a very small thing, you shall have the government of ten cities." Then came the second one, and said, "Sir, your pound has brought five other pounds." To this one also he said, "And you shall be in charge of five cities."

According to the story, Herod the Great and his son Herod Antipas both knew how to deal with money and to promote the persons who helped them. In the parable, the king gave ten cities to the servant who multiplied by ten the money he had received and five cities to the one who multiplied it by five.

- Luke 19: 20-23 - The rendering of account by the servant who gained nothing. The third servant arrived and said: "Sir, here is your pound I put it away safely wrapped up in a cloth, because I was afraid of you, for you are an exacting man, you gather in what you have not laid out and reap what you have not sown." In this part, we have a mistaken idea of God which is criticized by Jesus. The servant considers God a severe master. Before such a God, the human being is afraid and hides himself behind the exact and poor observance of the law. He thinks that by acting this way, he will not be punished severely by the ruler. Such a person does not believe in God, but believes only in self and in his observance of the law. He closes himself up in self. He draws away from God and is not concerned about others. He becomes incapable of growth as a free person. This false image of God isolates the human being, kills the community, extinguishes joy and impoverishes life. The king answers: "Out of your own mouth I condemn you, wicked servant!" You knew that I was an exacting man, gathering what I have not laid out and reaping what I have not sown? Then why did you not put my money in the bank? On my return I could have drawn it out with interest. The servant is not consistent in his image of God. If he imagined God to be so severe, he should have put the money in the bank. He is not condemned by God, but by his mistaken idea of God, which renders him immature and fearful. One of the things which greatly influence a person's life is his image of God. Some Jews, especially the Pharisees, imagined God as a severe judge who treated them according to the merits gained by observance of the Law. This caused fear and prevented people from growing. Above all, it prevented them from opening a space within themselves to accept the new experience of God which Jesus communicated.

- Luke 19: 24-27 - Conclusion for all. “And he said to those standing by: Take the pound from him and give it to the man who has ten pounds.” And they answered: “But, Sir, he already has ten! “I tell you, to everyone who has will be given more, but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. As for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence.” The king then orders it taken away and given to the one who has ten, because “To everyone who has will be given more, but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has.” In this last phrase is found the key which clarifies the Parable. In the symbolism of the parable, the silver coin of the king are the goods of the Kingdom of God, that is, all that which makes the person grow and which reveals God’s presence: love, service, sharing. Anyone who becomes selfish out of fear will lose what little he has. Therefore, the person who does not think only of self, but gives himself/herself to others, will grow and will receive super abundantly, all that he/she has given and much more: “one hundred times more, a hundred-fold” (Mk 10: 30). “Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, anyone who has the courage to lose it, will save it” (Lk 9: 24; 17: 33; Mt 10: 39; 16: 25; Mk 8: 35). The third servant is afraid and does nothing. He does not want to lose anything and because of this he gains nothing. He loses even the little he had. The Kingdom is a risk. Anyone who does not run, runs a risk and loses the Kingdom!
- Luke 19: 28 - Return to the triple initial key. At the end, Luke closes this theme with the following information: “Having said these things Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.” This final information recalls the triple key given at the beginning: the acceptance to be given to the excluded, the closeness of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem, and the idea of the imminent coming of the Kingdom. To those who thought that the Kingdom of God was about to arrive, the parable orders a change in understanding. The Kingdom of God arrives but through the death and the Resurrection of Jesus which will take place within a short time in Jerusalem. The reason for Jesus’ death and Resurrection is His acceptance of the excluded. He disturbs the great, and they eliminated Him by condemning Him to death on the cross.

Personal Questions

- In our community, do we try to know and to value and appreciate the gifts of every person? Sometimes, the gifts of others cause jealousy and competitiveness in others. How do we react?
- In our community, is there a space where persons can show or manifest their gifts?

Concluding Prayer

Praise God in His holy place,

praise Him in the heavenly vault of His power, praise Him for His mighty deeds, praise Him for all His greatness. (Ps 150: 1-2)

Thursday, November 23, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good,
keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 19: 41-44

As Jesus drew near and came within sight of the city, He shed tears over it and said, "If you too had only recognized on this day the way to peace! But in fact, it is hidden from your eyes!

Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all around you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation."

Reflection

The Gospel today tells us that Jesus, when he saw Jerusalem as he approached, began to shed tears and to pronounce a very dark future for the city of His people.

- Luke 19: 41-42 - Jesus sheds tears over Jerusalem. At that time, Jesus was near Jerusalem, and when He saw the city, He shed tears over it and said "if you too had only recognized on this day the way to peace! But in fact, it is hidden from your eyes!" Jesus sheds tears because He loves His homeland and His people, the capital city of His land, and the temple. He sheds tears because He knows that everything will be destroyed because of the fault of His people who were not aware of the call made by God through His ministry. People were not aware of the way to peace (Shalom). In fact, it is hidden from their eyes. This affirmation recalls the criticism of Isaiah to the person who adored idols: "He adores ashes, his deluded heart has led him astray; he will not save himself; he will not think. What I have in my hand is nothing but a lie!" (Is 44, 20). People became incapable of perceiving the truth. As Saint Paul says: "But for those who out of jealousy have taken for their guide not truth but injustice, there will be a fury of retribution" (Rm 2: 8). It is truth that remains the prisoner of injustice. On another occasion, Jesus complains that Jerusalem did not know how to become aware of God's visit nor of accepting it: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused! Look, your house will be left to you, it will be deserted" (Lk 13: 34-35).
- Luke 19: 43-44 - Announcement of the destruction of Jerusalem. "Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all around you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and your children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation" Jesus describes what will happen to Jerusalem. He uses the images of war which were common at that time when an army attacked a city: trenches, killing of people, and total destruction of the walls and houses. In the past, this is the way Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The Roman legions used to do this with rebellious cities, and this is what will be done again, forty years later, to the city of Jerusalem. In

fact, in the year 70, Jerusalem was surrounded and invaded by the Roman army. Everything was destroyed. Before this historical background, the gesture of Jesus becomes a very serious warning for all those who pervert the Good News. They should have listened to the final warning: "Because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation" In this warning, everything which Jesus does is defined as a "visitation from God."

Personal Questions

- Do you weep over a world situation? Looking at the present-day situation of the world, would Jesus shed tears? The vision is dark. From the point of view of ecology, we have already gone beyond the limit. The vision is tragic.
- In Jesus, God visits His people. In your life, have you received some visit from God?

Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh:

his praise in the assembly of the faithful! Israel shall rejoice in its Maker, the children of Zion delight in their king. (Ps 149: 1-2)

Friday, November 24, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good,

keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 19: 45-48

Jesus went into the temple and began driving out those who were busy trading, saying to them, "According to scripture, my house shall be a house of prayer but you have turned it into a den of robbers."

He taught in the temple every day. The chief priests and the scribes, along with the leading citizens, tried to do away with him, but they could not find a way to carry this out because the whole people hung on His words.

Reflection

Context. Luke, having described Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (11-19, 28), now presents carrying out His mission in the temple. (vv. 45-48).

The gesture of Jesus. His action does not have political value but rather prophetic significance. The great purpose of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is to enter the temple. The prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled with Jesus entrance. For Malachi says "and

suddenly the Lord whom you seek will come to His Temple..." (3: 1). Jesus' gesture of driving out the sellers from the temple recalls Is 56: 7 which says "My house will be a house of prayer." Jesus returns the temple to the Father. The commercial and business activity has made the temple a den of robbers and has deprived it of its only function: encountering to provide a dwelling for the presence of God. The second reference from scripture is taken from Jeremiah 7: 11: "Do you look on this temple that bears my name as a den of robbers?" The image of a den of robbers serves Jesus to condemn the material traffic on the one side and the dishonest traffic of trade or business that was carried out in the temple. Jesus demands a complete change in order to to purify the temple from all of these negative human things and to make it a place for authentic service to God. In driving out those merchants of trade and business, the prophecy of Zechariah is fulfilled: "There will be no more traders in the temple of Yahweh Sabaoth, when that day comes" (14: 21). These words of Jesus regarding the temple are not directed at a restoration of the purity of the cult or worship, as was the intention of the Zelots. The intention of Jesus goes beyond the purity of the cult. It is more radical and timeless. The temple is not a work done by human efforts, and the presence of God is not bound to its material aspect.

The authentic service of God is carried out by Jesus through His teaching. Because of this preaching, "the high priests and the scribes together with the leading citizens tried to do away with him" (v. 47). Within this temporary place of the temple, Jesus carries out a highly significant teaching. It is precisely because this place is so fundamental to the Jews that His teaching reaches its summit and it will be from here that the words of the Apostles will also begin (Act 5: 12, 20, 25, 42). The diffusion of the Word of grace which Jesus bears extends like an arch. It begins with His opposition when He was still only twelve years old in the temple among the doctors of the Law. It is continued with His teaching across Galilee and during His journey to Jerusalem.

Until it reaches a climax when He enters the temple and takes possession of the house of God. The basis for the future mission of the Church, the diffusion of the Word of God, begins in this place. The leaders of the people do not intend to suppress Jesus for having ruined the progress of the economic affairs of that time. Rather, the reasons go back to His previous teaching activities. These play a part in His discourse against the temple. Jesus claims something and this causes a reaction from the high priests and the scribes. In contrast with this hostile behavior, one can see a positive one from the people who "are hanging from His words." Jesus is the Messiah who gathers around Him with His Word of grace the people of God.

Personal Questions

- Does your prayer to the Lord consist in a simple relationship of father to son in which you find all that is needed to communicate with God, or is it accompanied by usage and practices to gain His goodness?
- When you listen to the Word of Jesus do you feel seized by His teaching like the crowds who hung from His words? Are you sufficiently attentive to listen to the Gospel and do you adhere to Christ?

Concluding Prayer

The Law you have uttered is more precious to me than all the wealth in the world.

How pleasant your promise to my palate, sweeter than honey in my mouth! (Ps 119: 72, 103)

Saturday, November 25, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Father of all that is good, keep us faithful in serving you, for to serve you is our lasting joy.

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 20: 27-40

Some Sadducees who argue that there is no resurrection, approached Jesus and put this question to him, "Master, Moses wrote for us, if a man's married brother dies childless, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his brother. Well then, there were seven brothers. The first, having married a wife, died childless. The second and then the third married the widow. And the same with all seven, they died leaving no children. Finally, the woman herself died. Now, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be since she had been married to all seven?"

Jesus replied, "The children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and in the resurrection from the dead do not marry because they can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection, they are children of God.

And Moses showed that the dead rise again, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now He is God, not of the dead, but of the living; for to Him everyone is alive."

Some scribes then spoke up. They said, "Well put, Master." They did not dare to ask Him any more questions.

Reflection

The Gospel today gives us the discussion of the Sadducees with Jesus on faith in the resurrection.

- Luke 20: 27 - The ideology of the Sadducees. The Gospel today begins with the following affirmation: "The Sadducees affirm that there is no resurrection." The Sadducees were an elite type of aristocrat. They were conservative, insisting on a literal interpretation of the Law, and were invested in Roman rule and order. They did not accept faith in the resurrection. At that time, this faith was beginning to be valued by both the Pharisees and by ordinary people. This motivated people to resist the dominion of the Romans and of the priests, elders, and the Sadducees for whom the Messianic Kingdom was already present in the status quo. The Sadducees were typically well off and content with the way things were at the time. They wanted religion to remain immutable like God himself. To ridicule faith in the resurrection, they created fictitious cases in which faith in the resurrection seemed absurd.
- Luke 20: 28-33 - The fictitious case of the woman who married seven times. According to the law of the time, if the husband died without leaving any children, his brother had to marry the widow of the deceased man. This was done in case someone died without any descendants. In such cases, the dead man's property

would go to another family (Dt 25: 5-6). The Sadducees invented the story of a woman who buried seven husbands, brothers among themselves, and then she herself also died without children. And they asked Jesus: "This woman then, in the resurrection, whose wife will she be? Because the seven of them had her as wife." This was invented in order to show that faith in the resurrection creates absurd situations and exemplifies the literal interpretation the Sadducees gave to the Law.

- Luke 20: 34-38 - The response of Jesus which leaves no doubts. The response of Jesus displays the irritation of one who cannot bear pretense or deceit. Jesus cannot bear hypocrisy on the part of the elite which manipulates and ridicules faith in God to legitimize and defend its own interests. The response contains two parts. (a) you understand nothing of the resurrection: "The children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and in the resurrection from the dead, do not marry, because they can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection, they are children of God" (vv. 34-36). Jesus explains that the condition of persons after death will be totally different from the current condition. After death, there will be no marriages and all will be like angels in heaven. (b) The Sadducees imagined life in Heaven the same as life on earth. You understand nothing about God: "That the dead will rise, Moses has also showed this in regard to the bush, when he calls the Lord: the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not God of the dead, but of the living, because all live in him." The disciples are attentive and learn! Those who are on the side of the Sadducees find themselves on the opposite side of God.
- Luke 20: 39-40 - The reaction of others before the response of Jesus. "Then some of the scribes said: "Master you have spoken well. And they no longer dared to ask Him any more questions." It is possible that some of these scribes were Pharisees, because the Pharisees believed in the resurrection (cf. Ac 23, 6). Either way, Jesus reduced his opponents to silence.

Personal Questions

- Today, how do the groups which have power imitate the Sadducees and prepare traps in order to prevent changes in the world and in the Church?
- Do you believe in the resurrection? When you say that you believe in the resurrection, do you think about something of the past, of the present or of the future? Have you ever had an experience of resurrection in your life?

Concluding Prayer

This I believe: I shall see the goodness of Yahweh, in the land of the living.

Put your hope in Yahweh, be strong, let your heart be bold, put your hope in Yahweh.
(Ps 27: 13-14)

Sunday, November 26, 2023

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

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.

Reading

The Context:

Our text is part of a long eschatological discourse (Mt 24: 1-25: 46) given by Jesus on the Mount of Olives to His disciples privately (Mt 24: 3). The discourse begins with the proclamation of the destruction of Jerusalem in order to speak of the end of the world. The two events become confused as though they were one. This part of the discourse ends with the coming of the Son of man with great power and glory. He will send His angels to gather His elect (Mt 24: 30-31). Here the chronological flow of the events proclaimed is interrupted by the insertion of some parables on the need to watch so as not to be caught by surprise at the coming of the Son of Man (Mt 24: 24-25: 30). The eschatological discourse comes to its literary and theological peak in our text. This text ties up with (Mt 24: 30-31) and speaks once more of the coming of the Son of man accompanied by His angels. The gathering of the elect here takes the form of a final judgment.

Gospel Text - Mt 25: 31-46

When the Son of man comes in His glory, escorted by all the angels, then He will take His seat on His throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before Him and He will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." Then the upright will say to Him in reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?" And the King will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."

Then He will say to those on His left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and His angels. For I was hungry, and you never gave me food, I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink, I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, lacking clothes and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me." Then it will be their turn to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or lacking clothes, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" Then He will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me." And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the upright to eternal life.

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 criterion does Jesus use for the separation?
- Who are the least of the brethren with whom Jesus identifies Himself?
- How did Jesus, in His life, show preference for the least?
- Who are the least of Jesus' brethren that I meet?
- Am I capable of seeing, loving and serving Jesus in them?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

The Son of Man:

The Son of man is a Semitic expression that simply means a human being (see for instance the parallelism between "man" and "son of man" in Psalm 8: 5). The book of Ezekiel often uses this term with this meaning when God addresses Himself to the prophet as "son of man" (Mt 2: 1, 3, 6, 8; 3: 1, 2, 4, 10, 16+) in order to emphasize the distance between God who is transcendent and the prophet who is but a man. However, in Daniel 7:13-14 the expression acquires a special meaning. The prophet sees "coming on the clouds of heaven, one like a son of man" who receives from God "sovereignty, glory and kingship." This text is still talking of a human being, however, who is introduced into the sphere of God. The text has been interpreted both in a personal and a collective sense, but always in a messianic sense. Thus, whether we are dealing with one person or with all of the People of God, the Son of man is the Messiah who gives rise to the Realm of God, an eternal and universal realm.

The application of the term "Son of man" to Jesus as it is used in Daniel 7: 13-14 is very common in the Gospels. We also find it in Acts 7: 56 and the Apocalypse 1: 13 and 14: 14. Scholars think that Jesus gave Himself this title. In the Gospel of Matthew this term is attributed to Jesus especially when He speaks of His passion (Mt 17: 12, 22; 20: 18, 28)), His resurrection as an eschatological event (Mt 17: 19; 26: 64) and His glorious return (Mt 24: 30 and 25: 31, the beginning of our text).

Jesus King, Judge and Shepherd:

Matthew also gives Jesus the title of king (Mt 1: 23; 13: 41; 16: 28; 20: 21). The kingship of God is a theme very dear to the Bible. Because Jesus is the Son of God, He rules together with the Father. In our text, the king is Jesus, but He exercises His royal power in close relationship with the Father. The elect are "blessed of my Father" and the realm to which they are invited is the realm prepared for them by God, as the passive form of the verb indicates. This form of the verb, called the divine passive, is often found in the Bible and always has God as its implicit subject. In this text, the realm points to eternal life.

In Daniel 7 (see especially verses 22, 26 and 27) and in our text, the royal status of the Son of man is connected with the judgment. The king, especially in ancient times, was always considered the supreme judge. The judgment that Jesus exercises is a universal judgment, a judgment that involves all peoples (see v. 32). And yet it is not a collective judgment. It is not the peoples that are judged but individual persons.

In the same way, the pastoral symbolism is connected with royal status. In ancient times, the king was often presented as shepherd of his people. The Old Testament also speaks of God, king of Israel, as shepherd (see for instance Psalm 23, Is 40: 11; Ez 34) and the New Testament applies the title to Jesus (Mt 9: 36; 26: 31; Jn 10) as well. The shepherds of the Holy Land, in the time of Jesus, shepherded mixed flocks of sheep and goats. However, at night they were separated because sheep sleep in the open while goats prefer to sleep under shelter. In our text the sheep represent the elect because of their valuation over goats and because of their white color that often stands for salvation in the Bible.

The Least of my Brethren:

Traditionally, this Gospel passage was interpreted to mean that Jesus identified Himself with the poor and marginalized. Jesus will judge everyone, and especially those who have not had the chance to know His Gospel, according to the mercy they have shown towards the needy. All have the opportunity to welcome or reject him, if not personally, at least in the person of the needy with whom Jesus identifies Himself.

Modern exegesis tends to read the text in a more ecclesiastical sense. It is placed next to Matthew 10: 40-42 and exegetes insist that it is not a question of philanthropy but of a response to the Gospel of the Realm that is spread by Jesus' brethren, even the most insignificant of them, and not only by the leaders of the Church.

The nations (the pagans) are therefore invited to welcome the disciples of Jesus who preach the Gospel to them and suffer for its sake, as if they were welcoming Jesus Himself. Christians, on their part, are invited to practice generous hospitality towards their brothers who are itinerant preachers of the Gospel and who suffer persecution (see 2 Jn 5-8). In this manner, they would show the authenticity of their commitment as disciples.

In the context of Matthew's Gospel, this latter interpretation is probably more accurate. However, in the context of the whole of the Bible (see for instance Is 58: 7; Jer 2: 1-9; 1 Jn 3: 16-19) the first interpretation cannot be set aside entirely.

Psalm 72

The Messiah-King Promotes Justice and Peace

Give the king thy justice,

O God, and thy righteousness to the royal son! May He judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with justice!

Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness!

May He defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor!

May He live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!

May He be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!

In His days may righteousness flourish,

and peace abound, till the moon be no more! May He have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!

May His foes bow down before Him, and His enemies lick the dust!

May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render Him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!

May all kings fall down before Him, all nations serve Him!

For He delivers the needy when He calls, the poor and Him who has no helper.

He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

From oppression and violence He redeems their life; and precious is their blood in His sight.

Long may He live, may gold of Sheba be given to Him! May prayer be made for Him continually, and blessings invoked for Him all the day! May there be abundance of grain in the land; on the tops of the mountains may it wave; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may men blossom forth from the cities like the grass of the field! May His name endure forever,

His fame continues as long as the sun! May men bless themselves by Him, all nations call Him blessed!

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

Blessed be His glorious name for ever; may His glory fill the whole earth! Amen and Amen!

Closing Prayer

Lord God, you have set Jesus, your Son, to be universal king and judge. He will come at the end of time to judge all the nations. He comes to us every day in a thousand ways and asks us to welcome Him. We meet Him in the Word and in the broken bread. But we also meet Him in our broken brothers and sisters, disfigured by hunger, oppression, injustice, sickness, and the stigma of our society. Open our hearts that we may welcome Him today in our lives so that we may be welcomed by Him in the eternity of His realm.

We ask this through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Monday, November 27, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,

increase our eagerness to do your will and help us to know the saving power of your love. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel reading - Luke 21: 1-4

Looking up, Jesus saw rich people putting their offerings into the treasury and He noticed a poverty-stricken widow putting in two small coins, and He said, 'I tell you truly, this poor widow has put in more than any of them; for these have all put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in all she had to live on.'

Reflection

In today's Gospel, Jesus weaves the praise of a poor widow who knows how to share more than the rich. Many poor people today do the same. People say: "The poor do not let the poor starve to death." But sometimes even this is not possible. A woman who went to live out in the country in the periphery of a city in Brazil, in Paraiba, said: "In the country the people are poor, but they always have something to share with the poor who knock at their door. Now that I am here in the city, when I see a poor person who knocks on the door, I hide because I feel ashamed, because I have nothing in the house to share with him!" On one side, there are rich people who have everything but do not know how to share and on the other side, there are poor people who have hardly anything but who want to share the little they have.

At the beginning, in the Church, the great majority of the first Christian communities were formed by poor people. (1 Co 1: 26). After a short time, well-to-do people also entered these communities, and this caused several problems. The social tensions which were present in the Roman Empire began to appear in the life of the communities. For example, it manifested itself when they met together to celebrate the supper (1Co 11: 20-22), or when they held a meeting (Jm 2: 1-4). This is why the teaching of the act of the widow was very meaningful, both for them as well as for us today.

- Luke 21: 1-2: The widow's mite. Jesus was near the treasury in the temple and observed people who put in their offering. The poor put in a few pennies; the rich put in offerings of great value. The treasury of the temple received much money. All gave something for the maintenance of the worship, to support the clergy and for the preservation of the building. Part of this money was used to help the poor, because at that time there was no social security. The poor lived at the mercy of public charity. The persons who had the greatest needs were the orphans and the widows. They depended on the charity of others for everything, but even in this way, they tried to share with others the little that they had. Thus, a very poor widow put her offering into the treasury of the temple of just two pennies!
- Luke 21: 3-4 - The comment of Jesus. Which is worth more: the few pennies of the widow or the great amount of the rich? According to the majority, the money of the rich was more useful for charity, than the few pennies of the widow. For example, the disciples thought that the problems of the people could be resolved only with much money. On the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves, they had suggested buying bread to feed the people (Lk 9: 13; Mk 6: 37). Philip succeeded in saying: "Two-hundred denarii of bread are not even enough for everyone to have a piece of bread" (Jn 6: 7). In fact, for anyone who thinks like that, the two pennies of the widow do not serve for anything. But Jesus says: "I tell you truly, this poor widow has put in more than any of them." Jesus has a different criteria. Calling the attention of the disciples to the act of the widow, He teaches them and us where we have to look for the manifestation of God's will: in the poor and in sharing. This is a very important criteria: "In fact all these have put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in all she had to live on."
- Alms, sharing, riches. The practice of giving alms was very important for the Jews. It was considered to be a "good work," because the law of the Old Testament said: "Of course, there will never cease to be poor people in the country, and that is why I am giving you this command: Always be open handed with your brother, and with anyone in your country who is in need and poor" (Dt 15: 11). The alms put into the treasury of the temple, whether for worship or for the needy, orphans, or widows,

were considered a pleasing act to God (Eccl 35: 2; cf. Eccl 17: 17; 29: 12; 40: 24). To give alms was a way to recognize that all goods of the earth belong to God and that we are only the administrators of these gifts. But the tendency to accumulate continues to exist and is very strong. It always arises anew in the human heart. Conversion is always necessary. This is why Jesus said to the rich young man: "Go, sell all you possess, and give it to the poor!" (Mk 10: 21). In the other Gospels the same requirement is repeated: "Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it" (Lk 12: 33-34; Mt 6: 9-20). The practice of sharing and of solidarity is one of the characteristics which the Spirit of Jesus wants to realize in the community. The result of the effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was this: "None of the members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from the sale of them, to present it to the apostles" (Ac 4: 34-35a; 2: 44-45). This money, deposited at the feet of the Apostles, was not accumulated but "it was then distributed to any who might be in need" (Ac 4: 35b; 2: 45). The entry of the rich into the Christian communities on the one side rendered possible the expansion of Christianity, providing better conditions for the missionary voyages. But on the other side, the tendency to accumulate blocked the movement of solidarity and of sharing. James helped people to become aware that they were following a mistaken path: "Well now you rich! Lament, weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is rotting; your clothes are all moth-eaten." (Jm 5: 1-3). To undertake the way to the Kingdom, all need to become pupils of that poor widow, who shared with others what was necessary for her living (Lk 21: 4).

Personal Questions

- What difficulties and joys do you find in practicing solidarity and sharing with others?
- How is it that the two pennies of the widow can be worth more than the large amounts of the rich? Which is the message of this text for us today?

Concluding Prayer

Be sure that Yahweh is God, He made us, we belong to him, His people, the flock of His sheepfold. (Ps 100: 3)

Tuesday, November 28, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,

increase our eagerness to do your will and help us to know the saving power of your love. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 21: 5-11

When some were talking about the temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said, "All these things you are staring at now, the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another; everything will be destroyed."

And they put to Him this question, "Master," they said, "when will this happen, and what sign will there be that it is about to take place?"

But He said, "Take care not to be deceived, because many will come using my name and saying, 'I am the one' and 'The time is near at hand.' Refuse to join them. And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified, for this is something that must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end." Then He said to them, "Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines in various places; there will be terrifying events and great signs from heaven."

Reflection

The Gospel today begins with the discourse of Jesus called the Apocalyptic Discourse. It is a long discourse which will be the theme of the Gospels in the next days up to the last week of the liturgical year. For us of the XXI century, the apocalyptic language is strange and confusing. But, for the poor and persecuted people of the Christian communities of that time, these were the words that everybody understood, and the principal purpose was to animate the faith and hope of the poor and oppressed. The apocalyptic language is the fruit of the witness of faith by these poor people, who in spite of the persecution, and against all contrary appearances, continued to believe that God was with them and that He continued to be the Lord of history.

- Luke 21: 5-7: Introduction to the Apocalyptic Discourse. In the days leading up to the Apocalyptic Discourse, Jesus had broken away from the temple (Lk 19: 45-48), the priests and the elders (Lk 20: 1-26), the Sadducees (Lk 20: 27-40), and from the scribes who exploited the widows (Lk 20: 41-47). Finally, as we read in yesterday's Gospel, He ends by praising the widow who gave as alms all she possessed (Lk 21: 1-4). Now, in today's Gospel, "while some were talking about the temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said: "The time will come when not a single stone will be left on another everything will be destroyed." In listening to this comment of Jesus, the disciples asked: "Master, when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that it is about to take place?" They ask for more information. The Apocalyptic Discourse which follows is the response of Jesus to this question from the disciples on when and how the destruction of the temple will take place. The Gospel of Mark tells us the following about the context of this discourse which Jesus pronounces. He says that Jesus had left the city and was now sitting on the Mount of Olives (Mk 13: 2-4). There, from the top of the mountain He had a majestic view of the temple. Mark also says that there were only four disciples who listened to His last discourse. At the beginning of His preaching, three years before in Galilee, the crowds followed Jesus to listen to His words. Now, in the last discourse, there are only four who listen: Peter, James, John and Andrew (Mk 13: 3).
- Luke 21: 8: Objective of the discourse: "Take care not to be deceived!" The disciples had asked: "Master, when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that it is about to take place?" Jesus begins His response with a warning: "Take care not to be deceived. Many will come using my name and saying, 'I am the one' and 'the time is

near at hand'; refuse to join them." At a time of change and confusion there are always people who want to take advantage of the situation and deceive others. This happens today and it happened in the time of the 80's, at the time when Luke wrote his Gospel. Many thought that the end of time was close at hand with the disasters and wars of those years, and the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 and the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. There were people who said: "God no longer controls the events! We are lost!" This is why the main concern of the Apocalyptic Discourses is always the same: to help the communities to better discern the signs of the times. They should not be deceived by the conversations of people concerning the end of the world: "Take care not to be deceived." The discourse offers signs to help them discern and increases their hope.

- Luke 21: 9-11 - Signs to help them read the facts. After this brief introduction, the discourse begins: "When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified, for this is something that must happen first, but the end will not come at once" Then He said to them: "Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines in various places, there will be terrifying events and great signs from heaven." To understand these words one has to understand that Jesus lives and speaks in the year 33. The readers of Luke live and listen in the year 85. Now, in the 50 years between the year 33 and the year 85, the majority of things mentioned by Jesus had already taken place and were known to everyone. For example, in diverse parts of the world there were wars, false prophets arose, there were sicknesses and plagues, and in Asia Minor, the earthquakes were frequent. According to the apocalyptic style, this discourse lists all these events, one after the other, as signs or stages of the project of God in the history of the People of God, from the time of Jesus down to our time:
 - 1st sign: the false Messiahs (Lk 21: 8);
 - 2nd sign: war and revolutions (Lk 21: 9);
 - 3rd sign: nations which fight against other nations, one kingdom against another kingdom (Lk 21: 10);
 - 4th sign: earthquakes in different parts (Lk 21: 11);
 - 5th sign: hunger, plagues, and signs in the sky (Lk 21: 11).

Here ends the Gospel for today. That of tomorrow presents another sign: the persecution of the Christian communities (Lk 21: 12). Thus, by means of these signs within the Apocalyptic Discourse, the communities of the 80's, the time when Luke wrote his Gospel, could see God's plan and discover that history had not escaped the hands of God. Everything happened according to what was foretold and announced by Jesus in the Apocalyptic Discourse.

Personal Questions

- What sentiment or feeling did you experience during the reading of today's Gospel? Peace or fear?
- Do you think that the end of the world is close at hand? What can we answer to those who say that the end of the world is close at hand? How can we encourage people today to resist and to have hope?

Concluding Prayer

Let the countryside exult, and all that is in it, and all the trees of the forest cry out for joy, at Yahweh's approach, for He is coming, coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with saving justice, and the nations with constancy. (Ps 96: 12-13)

Wednesday, November 29, 2023

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord,

increase our eagerness to do your will and help us to know the saving power of your love. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Luke 21: 12-19

Jesus said to His disciples: "You will be seized and persecuted; you will be handed over to the synagogues and to imprisonment and brought before kings and governors for the sake of my name, and that will be your opportunity to bear witness.

Make up your minds not to prepare your defense, because I myself shall give you a mouth and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict.

You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations, and friends; and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated universally on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost.

Your perseverance will gain your lives."

Reflection

In today's Gospel, which is a continuation of the discourse begun yesterday, Jesus lists different signs to help the communities place themselves in these events and not lose faith in God, as well as the courage to persevere against the attacks of the Roman Empire. We will repeat the first five signs mentioned in yesterday's Gospel:

- 1st sign: the false Messiahs (Lk 21: 8);
- 2nd sign: war and revolutions (Lk 21: 9);
- 3rd sign: nations which fight against other nations, a kingdom against another kingdom (Lk 21: 10);
- 4th sign: earthquakes in different places (Lk 21: 11);
- 5th sign: hunger, plagues and signs in the sky (Lk 21: 11);

The Gospel of yesterday ends here. Now, in today's Gospel another sign is added:

- 6th sign: the persecution of Christians (Lk 21: 12-19).
- Luke 21: 12 - *The sixth sign is the persecution.* At various times, in the few years which He lived among us, Jesus warned the disciples that they would be persecuted. Here, in the last discourse, He repeats the same warning and makes them know that the persecution has to be taken into consideration in discerning the signs of the times:

“You will be seized and persecuted, you will be handed over to the Synagogues and to imprisonment, and brought before kings and governors, for the sake of my name.” Of these apparently very negative warnings, Jesus had said: *“Do not be terrified for this is something that must happen first, but the end will not come at once.”* (Lk 21: 9). And the Gospel of Mark adds that all these signs *“have only begun, this is the beginning of the birth pains!”* (Mk 13, 8). Birth pains, though being very painful for the mother are not a sign of death, but rather of life! They are not a reason for fear, but rather to hope! This way of reading the events brings peace to the persecuted communities. Reading or hearing these signs, prophesied by Jesus in the year 33, the readers of Luke of the years 80 could conclude that all these things are taking place according to the plan foreseen and announced by Jesus! Therefore, the history has not escaped from God’s hand! God is with us!

- Luke 21: 13-15 - *The mission of the Christians during the time of persecution.* Persecution is not something fatal or a reason for discouragement or despair. It should be considered a possibility offered by God and a way that the communities may carry out the mission of witnessing to the Good News of God. God says: *“That will be your opportunity to bear witness. Make up your minds not to prepare your defense because I myself shall give you a mouth and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict.”*
- Through this affirmation Jesus encourages the persecuted Christians who lived in anguish. He makes them know that even if they are persecuted, they have a mission to carry out, to give witness of the Good News of God and thus be a sign of the Kingdom (Ac 1: 8). A courageous witness would lead the people to repeat what the magicians in Egypt said before the signs and to have courage like Moses and Aaron: *“The finger of God is here”* (Ex 8: 19). Conclusion: the communities should not be worried. If everything is in God’s hands, if everything was already foreseen, if everything is nothing more than birth pains, then there is no reason to worry.
- Luke 21: 16-17 - *Persecution even within the family.* *“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends, and some of you will be put to death; you will be hated universally on account of my name.”* Persecution does not only come from outside, from the Empire, but also from inside, from one’s own family. In the same family, some accepted the Good News, others did not. The announcement of the Good News caused divisions within families. There were even some people who denounced and killed their own relatives who declared themselves followers of Jesus, using the old Law (Dt 13: 7-12).
- Luke 21: 18-19 - *the source of hope and of resistance.* *“But not a hair of your head will be lost. Your perseverance will gain your lives!”* This final observation of Jesus recalls the other word which Jesus had said: *“But not a hair of your head will be lost!”* (Lk 21: 18). This comparison was a strong call to not lose faith and to continue righteously in the community. And this also confirms what Jesus had said on another occasion: *Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, but anyone who will lose his life for my sake will save it”* (Lk 9: 24).

Personal Questions

- How do you usually read the stages of the history of your life or of your country?
- Looking at the history of humanity of the last years, has hope increased or diminished in you?

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)

Thursday, November 30, 2023

Feast of St. Andrew

Prayer

O Father, you called St. Andrew from the net of the world to become the wonderful fisher of men for the proclamation of the Gospel. Please also make us taste the sweetness of the heavenly Father and make us to be your beloved children, so that we can open our heart to you with full confidence in order to allow it to be made and formed by the eyes and words of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus, and that together with Him, we bring the joyful news of your merciful love to our brothers and sisters, which makes our life more beautiful.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 4: 18-22

As He was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen.¹⁹ He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, ²² and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

Meditation

- "He was walking along the Sea of Galilee." Jesus is just out of the desert, after 40 days of great loneliness and struggle against the devil (Mt 4: 1-11). He emerged victorious, secure in His love of the Father, and came into Galilee and dwelt in Capernaum on the seacoast, in the borders of Zabulon and of Nephthalim, bringing His great light and His salvation (Mt 4: 12- 16). Here He began to shout His message of joy and liberation: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4: 17). There is no more loneliness since the Lord Jesus has arrived in our land, Galilee, among the Gentiles. He is very close, He is God-with-us. He is not far away and does not stay hidden. He "walks," along the sea and along the shores of our poor lives. Indeed, even more. Galilee, meaning "ring," tells us that He, being love, is to marry and to join with Him forever. Then you just have to welcome Him, as He walks by the sea. He already sees us, even from a distance, we already know.
- The verb "saw," repeated twice, first in reference to Andrew and his brother, then James and John, brings all the strength and intensity of a gaze that comes deep from the heart. Thus, the Lord sees us, as readers, with loving attention to browse the pages of our lives, and who knows everything about us, everything He loves.
- It is no accident that Matthew often uses a particular vocabulary to describe this episode of family vocation. In this encounter with the Lord Jesus we find the word

"brother" four times and the word "father" two times. We discover that we too are sons and brothers. Jesus enters our reality in a most human way everyday. He enters the flesh, in the heart, in my entire life, to make us born again.

- "Follow me." These are His words, simple and clear. He asks us to set out, to move, to "come to Him." It is a nice feeling to awaken to this voice that reaches us and is stronger and sweeter than the voice of the waters of the sea in the world which are noisy and confused. When He speaks to the heart, it becomes a great calm, and calm returns. Then He offers a course, marks the path to follow, and does not let us lose. "Follow me," says the Lord. Just accept the invitation, accept Him to know more, and just follow him as He opens the road.
- "They left and followed." The two brothers, the first called, Peter and Andrew, become for us the beginning of this journey, as a clear, strong decision. They teach us to do the moves, the movement, to choose. "Release" and "Forward" become the key verbs and the words are written in the heart. Maybe we will often have to make these changes on the inside, in the secret soul, where only we can see. This is where the Lord is faithful. For us it does this wonderful thing, this word of the Gospel, so bright and strong that it changes your life.
- "Now." Matthew shows us twice the welcoming and readiness of the disciples as the Lord is passing by, with His gaze and His voice for them. They do not put up obstacles. There is no doubt or fear, and they trust Him blindly and respond immediately, saying yes to that Love.
- In a crescendo, Matthew slides before our eyes all the elements that inspired the scene on the shore of the sea: nets, boats, the father, then it slips away into the background and is left aside. There remains only the Lord who goes before, and behind Him are the four new, called men. They carry our name, the story that God wrote for us.

Some Questions

- The horizon of this Gospel story and the grace that God still does for us is like the sea, a clear sea, which has a name and a geography. Can I, before the Word of God, at this moment, give a precise image of the horizon of my life? Do I have the inner peace to lay bare my life as it is, my Galilee, my sea, before the eyes of Christ? Do I fear that water in my heart, like a menacing sea, dark and empty? Can I allow the Lord to walk along my bank? Can I let myself look like Andrew, or as Simon, James or John?
- And if I'm silent at this moment, if I believe the steps of Jesus really are as close to me as to leave my poor sand on His prints of love and friendship, then do I have the courage to let myself look into His eyes full of light? Or do I continue to hide a bit, to escape, to hide somewhere such that I do not want to see or accept?
- And again, do I let Him talk to me, tell me, perhaps for the first time: "Come after me"? Or do I prefer to just keep listening to the sound of the sea, its waves invading and breaking on the shore?
- This Gospel speaks to me very strongly of the company of brothers. I speak of my being a son. It lays bare the deepest part of the heart, like the intimacy of home. Perhaps this is the place where there is more pain for me, where I do not feel understood, accepted, and loved as I am? For the Lord puts His finger in my wound. Brothers, father, mother, friends ... Jesus is all this for me, and much more. Do I really

feel it? Is there room for Him in my house? And how is my relationship with him? Is it as a brother, or friend, or a son? Do you only know from a distance?

- It seems very clear that in this passage the Lord does great things in the life of the disciples. "I will make you fishers of men" He tells them. How do you react to this discovery? Do I let myself be touched by Him, really and truly? Do you want to let Him change your life? With Him I want to start a new adventure, looking for brothers and sisters who need to meet, to know and to feel loved by His infinite love? I can be a fisher of men, like Andrew and his brothers.
- We have just one thing: the decision to follow the Lord and to walk behind Him. What do I have to leave today to take this important step? What is holding me back which does not allow me to move? What weight in my heart, my soul? Perhaps I have in me the need to confess, to open my heart. My answer is now written into the look that He has laid on me, His words being stronger than the sound of the sea and I cannot pretend that nothing has happened. The Lord has left a mark. I am no longer what I was. I mean yes, as did Andrew. Amen.

Concluding Prayer

Your Word, Lord is a lamp to my feet.

How can the young walk without fault? Only by keeping your words.

With all my heart I seek you;

do not let me stray from your commands.

In my heart I treasure your promise, that I may not sin against you.

Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your laws.

With my lips I recite all the edicts you have spoken.

I find joy in the way of your decrees more than in all riches. I will ponder your precepts and consider your paths.

In your laws I take delight; I will never forget your word.