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Lectio: Wednesday, August 1, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

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

2) Gospel Reading

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

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

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents two brief parables from the discourse of the Parables. Both are similar to each other, but with significant differences to clarify better determinate aspects of the Mystery of the Kingdom, which the parables are revealing.
- Matthew 13,44: *The parable of the treasure hidden in the field.* Jesus tells a very simple and brief story which could happen in the life of any person. He says: *The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field; someone finds it and hides it again, then he goes off with great joy, he sells everything he owns and buys the field*". Jesus does not explain, he only says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is similar to a treasure hidden in a field". In this way he urges the auditors to share with others what this story has aroused in them. I share some points that are discovered: (a) The treasure, the Kingdom, is already found in the field, in life. It is hidden. We go through the field and step over the plants without

being aware. (b) The man finds the treasure, just out of chance. He did not expect to find it, because he was not looking for it. (c) Seeing that it is a question of a very important treasure, what does he do? He does what we all would do in order to take possession of the treasure. He goes and he sells everything that he has and he buys the field. And, thus, together with the field he obtains the treasure also, the Kingdom. The condition is to sell everything! (d) If the treasure, the Kingdom, is already in my life, then an important aspect of life begins to have a new value. (e) In this story, what dominates is gratuity. The treasure is found by chance, independently of our programmes. The Kingdom comes! And we must draw the consequences and not allow this moment of grace to go by without bearing fruit.

- Matthew 13,45-46: *The parable of the merchant of fine pearls*. The second parable is similar to the first one, but with an important difference. Let us try to discover it. The story is the following: *“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value, he goes off and sells everything he owns and buys it”*. I share some points that I have discovered: (a) it is the story of a merchant of pearls. His profession is to look for pearls. This is the only thing that he does in his life: to look for and to find pearls. Looking, he finds a pearl of great value. Here the discovery of the Kingdom is not just by chance, but it is the fruit of a long search. (b) The merchant of pearls knows the value of the pearls, because many persons would like to sell him the pearls that they find. But the merchant does not allow himself to be deceived. He knows the value of his merchandise. (c) When he finds a pearl of great value, he goes and sells everything which he owns and buys the pearl. The Kingdom is the greatest value.

- Summarizing the teaching of the two parables. Both of them have the same objective: to reveal the presence of the Kingdom, but each one reveals it in a diverse way: through the discovery of the gratuity of God’s action in us, and through the effort and the search which each human being makes to discover always better, the sense of his/her life.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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



Lectio: Thursday, August 2, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 13,47-53

Jesus said to the people: 'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast in the sea and brings in a haul of all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen bring it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are no use. This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, to throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. 'Have you understood all these?' They said, 'Yes.'

And he said to them, 'Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old.' When Jesus had finished these parables he left the district.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents the last parable of the Discourse of the Parables, the story of the dragnet thrown into the sea. This parable is found only in the Gospel of Matthew without any parallel in the other three Gospels.
- Matthew 13,47-48: *The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast into the sea and brings in a whole haul of all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore; then sitting down; they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are no use*". This story is well known by the people of Galilee who live around the lake. This is their work. The story shows clearly the end of a day of work. The fishermen go fishing with only one purpose: to cast the net and to catch a great number of fish, to haul the net ashore and to choose the good fish to take home and to throw away those that are no good. Describe the satisfaction of the fishermen, at the end of the day of a day, being very tired having worked hard. This story must have brought a smile of satisfaction on the face of the fishermen who listened to Jesus. The worse thing is to arrive to the shore at the end of the day without having caught anything (Jn 21,3).

• Matthew 13,49-50: *The application of the parable.* Jesus applies the parable, or better still gives a suggestion in order that persons can discuss and apply the parable to their life: *“This is how it will be at the end of time, the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth”*. How are we to understand this blazing furnace? These are very strong images to describe the destiny of those who separate themselves from God or who do not want to know anything about God. In every city there is a place where to throw the garbage every day. There is a permanent furnace nourished every day by the garbage of every day. The garbage place in Jerusalem was located in a valley called *geena*, where, at the time of the kings, there was a furnace even to sacrifice to the false gods of Molok. For this reason, the furnace of *geena* becomes the symbol of exclusion and of condemnation. God is not the one who excludes. God does not want the exclusion and the condemnation of anyone; he wants that all may have life and life in abundance. Each one of us excludes himself/herself.

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

Two points to clarify:

(a) Jesus compares the doctor of the law to the father in the family. What does the father of the family do? *“He brings out from his treasure new things and old things”*. Education at home takes place through the transmission to the sons and daughters of what the parents have received and learnt along the time. It is the treasure of the family wisdom where the richness of faith is enclosed, the customs of life and many other things that the children learn with time. Now Jesus wants that in the community the persons who are responsible for the transmission of faith be as the father in the family. Just like the parents are responsible for the life of the family, in the same way, these persons who are responsible for the teaching should understand the things of the Kingdom and transmit it to the brothers and sisters in the community.

(b) *Here there is the question of a doctor of the law who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom.* Therefore, there were doctors of the law who accepted Jesus, and saw in him the one who revealed the Kingdom. Is this what happened to a doctor when he discovers the Messiah in Jesus, the Son of God? Everything which he has studied to be able to be a doctor of the law continues to be valid, but it receives a deeper dimension and a broader purpose. A comparison can clarify what has just been said. In a group of friends one shows a photo, where one sees a man with a severe face, with his finger up, almost attacking the public. Everybody thinks that it is a question of an inflexible person, demanding, who does not allow for any intimacy. At that moment a young boy arrives, he sees the photo and exclaims: *“He is my father!”* The others look at him and comment: *“A severe Father, true?”* He answers: *“No, and no! He is very affectionate. My father is a*

lawyer. That photo was taken in the tribunal, while he was denouncing the crime of a great landowner who wanted a poor family to abandon their home where they had lived for many years! My father won the cause. And the poor family remained in the house!” All looked at him again and said: “What a pleasant person!” Almost like a miracle the photo enlightened from within and assumed a different aspect. That very severe face acquired the features of great tenderness! The words of the son, the result of his experience of being the son, changed everything, without changing anything! The words and the gestures of Jesus, result of his experience as a Son, without changing a letter or a comma, enlightened from within the wisdom accumulated by the doctor of the law. And thus, God who seemed to be so far away and so severe acquired the features of a good Father and of enormous tenderness!

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh, my soul!

I will praise Yahweh all my life,

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



Lectio: Friday, August 3, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 13,54-58

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

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today tells us the visit of Jesus to Nazareth, his native community. Passing through Nazareth was painful for Jesus. What was his community at the beginning, now it is no longer so. Something has changed. Where there is no faith, Jesus can work no miracles.
- Matthew 13, 53-57^a: The reaction of the people of Nazareth before Jesus. It is always good for people to go back to their land. After a long absence, Jesus also returns, as usual, on a Saturday, and he goes to the meeting of the community. Jesus was not the head of the group, but just the same he speaks. This is a sign that persons could participate and express their own opinion. People were astonished. They did not understand Jesus' attitude: "Where did the man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" Jesus, son of that place, whom they knew since he was a child, how is that now he is so different? The people of Nazareth were scandalized and do not accept him: "This is the carpenter's son, surely? The people do not accept the mystery of God present in a common man as they are, as they had known Jesus. In order to speak about God he should be different. As one can see, not everything was positive. The persons, who should have been the first ones to accept the Good News, are the first ones to refuse to accept it. The conflict is not only with foreigners, but also with his relatives and with the people of Nazareth. They do not accept because they cannot understand the mystery envelops Jesus: "Is not his mother, the woman called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? And his sisters too, are they not all here with us? So where did the man get it all?" They are not able to believe.
- Matthew 13, 57b-58: Reaction of Jesus before the attitude of the people of Nazareth. Jesus knows very well that "no one is a prophet in his own country". And he says: "A prophet is despised only in his own country and in his own house". In fact, where there is neither acceptance nor faith, people can do nothing. The prejudice prevents it. Jesus himself, even wanting, can do nothing. He was astonished before their lack of faith.
- The brothers and sisters of Jesus. The expression "brothers of Jesus" causes much polemics between Catholics and Protestants. Basing themselves in this and in other texts, the Protestants say that Jesus had many brothers and sisters and that Mary had more children! Catholics say that Mary did not have any other children. What can we think about this? In the first place, both positions, that of Catholics as well as that of Protestants, contain arguments taken from the Bible and from the Tradition of their

respective Churches. For this reason, it is not convenient to discuss this question with arguments which are only intellectual, because it is a question of profound convictions, which have something to do with faith and with the sentiments of both and of each one. The argument which is only intellectual cannot change a conviction of the heart! It only irritates and draws away! Even if I do not agree with the opinion of others, I have to respect it. In the second place, instead of discussing around texts, all of us, Catholics and Protestants, should unite ourselves much more to fight for the defence of life, created by God, a life so disfigured by poverty, injustice, lack of faith. We should recall some other phrases of Jesus. "I have come so that they may have life and life to the full" (Jn 10, 10). "That all may be one, so that the world may believe that you, Father, has sent me" (Jn 17, 21). "Do not prevent them! Anyone who is not against us is for us" (Mk 10, 39.40)

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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



Lectio: Saturday, August 4, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 14,1-12

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

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

3) Reflection

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

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

- Matthew 14, 3-5: The hidden cause of the murdering of John. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod, the Great, from the year 4 BC until the year 38 AD, after Christ. Forty-three years in all! During the time of the life of Jesus, there were no changes of government in Galilee! Herod was the absolute Lord of everything, he did not render an account to anyone, he did whatever passed through his mind. Arrogance, lack of ethics, absolute power, without control from the people! But the one, who commanded in Palestine since the year 63 before Christ, was the Roman Empire. Herod, in Galilee, so as not to be dismissed, tried to please Rome in everything. Above all, he insisted on an efficient administration which would bring riches to the Empire. His concern was his own promotion and his security. For this reason, he refrained from any type of subversion. Matthew says that the reason for murdering John was because he had denounced Herod, because he had married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Flavio Joseph, a Jewish writer of that time, says that the true reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was the fear of Herod that there would be a popular

revolt. Herod like to be called the benefactor of the people, but in reality he was a tyrant (Lk 22, 25). The denunciation of John against Herod was the drop that caused the glass to overflow: “It is against the Law for you to have her”. And John was put in prison.

• Matthew 14, 6-12: The plot of the murderer. An anniversary and a festive banquet, with dances and orgy! Mark says that in the feast were “the great of the court, the officials and the important people of Galilee” (Mk 6, 21). This is the environment in which the murdering of John the Baptist is planned. John, the prophet, was a living denunciation of that corrupt system. This is why, he was eliminated with the pretext of a problem of personal revenge. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of one man incapable to control himself! In the enthusiasm of the feast and of the wine, Herod makes a promise by oath to Salome, the young dancer, daughter of Herodias. Superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to maintain this oath, and respond to the caprice of the girl; and because of this he ordered the soldier to bring the head of John on a tray and give it to the dancer, who then gave it to her mother. For Herod, the life of his subjects was worthless. He disposes of them as he disposes of the staircases in his house!

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

a) The New Capital. Tiberiade was inaugurated when Jesus was only 20 years old. It was called like that in order to please Tiberius, the emperor of Rome. It was inhabited by the lords of the earth, the soldiers, the policemen, the unscrupulous judges (Lk 18, 1-4). The taxes and the products of the people were channelled toward it. It was there that Herod made his orgy of death (Mk 6, 21-29). Tiberiades was the city of the palaces of the King, where those who wore soft, delicate dresses lived (cf. Mt 11, 8). It is not known by the Gospels that Jesus entered this city.

b) The large estates. Scholars say that during the long government of Herod, the large estates grew causing harm to community property. The Book of Henoch denounces the lords of the land and expresses the hope of the little ones: “And then the powerful and the great will no longer be the lords of the land”. (Hen 38,4). The ideal of ancient times was the following: “Each one will peacefully sit under his vine and nobody will frighten them” (1 Mac 14,12; Mi 4,4; Zc 3,10). But the politics of the government of Herod made this ideal impossible.

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

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

The humble have seen and are glad.

Let your courage revive, you who seek God.

For God listens to the poor,

he has never scorned his captive people. (Ps 69,32-33)

Lectio: Sunday, August 5, 2012

Jesus the bread of life.

Ordinary Time

1. 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.

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The Discourse of the Bread of Life is not a text to be discussed and dissected, but rather it should be meditated and pondered. This is why, even if it is not fully understood, we should not be concerned. This text of the Bread of Life demands a whole life to meditate on it and deepen it. Such a text, people have to read it, meditate it, pray it, think about it, read it again, repeat it and ponder it, as one does with a good sweet in the mouth. We turn

it and turn it in the mouth until it is finished. The one, who reads the Fourth Gospel superficially, may have the impression that John always repeats the same thing. Reading it more attentively, one becomes aware that it is not a question of repetition. The author of the fourth Gospel has his own way of repeating the same theme, but always at a higher and more profound level. It seems to be like a winding staircase. By turning one reaches the same place, but always at a higher level or a more profound one.

b) A division of chapter six:

It is good to keep in mind the division of the chapter in order to understand better its significance:

John 6,1-15: the great multiplication of the loaves

John 6,16-21: the crossing of the lake, and Jesus who walks on the water

John 6,22-71: the dialogue of Jesus with the people, with the Jews and with the disciples

1st dialogue: 6, 22-27 with the people: the people seek Jesus and find him in Capernaum

2nd dialogue: 6, 28-34 with the people: faith as the work of God and the manna of the desert

3rd dialogue: 6, 35-40 with the people: the true bread is to do God's will.

4th dialogue: 6, 41-51 with the Jews: the complaining of the Jews

5th dialogue: 6, 52-58 with the Jews: Jesus and the Jews.

6th dialogue: 6, 59-66 with the disciples: reaction of the disciples

7th dialogue: 6, 67-71 with the disciples: confession of Peter

c) The text: John 6,24-35

When the people saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into those boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. When they found him on the other side, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?'

Jesus answered: In all truth I tell you, you are looking for me not because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of man will give you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal.

Then they said to him, 'What must we do if we are to carry out God's work?' Jesus gave them this answer, 'This is carrying out God's work: you must believe in the one he has sent.'

So they said, 'What sign will you yourself do, the sight of which will make us believe in you? What work will you do? Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as scripture says: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'

Jesus answered them: In all truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread; for the bread of God is the bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

'Sir,' they said, 'give us that bread always.' Jesus answered them: I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever hunger; no one who believes in me will ever thirst.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

a) The people were hungry, they eat the bread and they look for more bread. They seek the miracle and do not seek the sign of God who was hidden in that. What do I seek more in my life: the miracle or the sign?

b) Hungry for bread, hungry for God. Which of these two predominates in me?

c) Jesus says: "I am the bread of life". He takes away hunger and thirst. Which of these experiences do I have in my life?

d) Keep silence within you for a moment and ask yourself: "To believe in Jesus: What does this mean for me concretely in my daily life?"

5. For those who wish to deepen more into the theme

a) Context:

In today's Gospel we begin the Discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn 6, 22-71). After the multiplication of the loaves, the people follow Jesus. They had seen the miracle; they had eaten and were satiated and wanted more! They were not concerned about looking for the sign or the call of God that was contained in all of this. When the people found Jesus in the Synagogue of Capernaum, he had a long conversation with them, called the Discourse of the Bread of Life. It is not really a Discourse, but it treats of a series of seven brief dialogues which explain the meaning of the multiplication of the bread, symbol of the new Exodus and of the Eucharistic Supper.

The conversation of Jesus with the people, with the Jews and with the disciples is a beautiful dialogue, but a demanding one. Jesus tries to open the eyes of the people in a way that they will learn to read the events and discover in them the turning point that life should take. Because it is not enough to follow behind miraculous signs which multiply the bread for the body. Man does not live by bread alone. The struggle for life without mysticism does not reach the roots. The people, while speaking with Jesus, always remain more annoyed or upset by his words. But Jesus does not give in, neither does he change the exigencies. The discourse seems to be a funnel. In the measure in which the conversation advances, less people remain with Jesus. At the end only the twelve remain there, but Jesus cannot trust them either! Today the same thing happens. When the Gospel begins to demand commitment, many people withdraw, go away.

b) Commentary on the text

John 6,24-27: People look for Jesus because they want more bread. The people follow Jesus. They see that he did not go into the boat with the disciples and, because of this, they do not understand what he had done to reach Capernaum. They did not even

understand the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. People see what has happened, but they cannot understand all this as a sign of something more profound. They stop only on the surface; in being satisfied with the food. They look for bread and life, but only for the body. According to the people, Jesus does what Moses had done in the past: to feed all the people in the desert. According to Jesus, they wanted the past to be repeated. But Jesus asks the people to take a step more and advance. Besides working for the bread that perishes, they should work for the imperishable food. This new food will be given by the Son of Man, indicated by God himself. He brings life which lasts forever. He opens for us a new horizon on the sense of life and on God.

John 6,28-29: “Which is God’s work?” The people ask: what should we do to carry out this work of God? Jesus answers that the great work of God asks us to “believe in the one sent by God”. That is, to believe in Jesus!

John 6,30-33: “What sign will you yourself do, the sign which will make us believe in you?” People had asked: What should we do to carry out the work of God? Jesus responds: “The work of God is to believe in the one who has sent”, that is to believe in Jesus. This is why people formulate the new question: “Which sign do you do so that we can see and can believe? Which work do you do?” This means that they did not understand the multiplication of the loaves as a sign from God to legitimize Jesus before the people, as the one sent by God! They continue to argue: In the past our fathers ate the manna which Moses gave them! They called it “bread from Heaven” (W 16,20), that is, “bread of God”. Moses continues to be the great leader in whom to believe. If Jesus wants the people to believe in him, he should work a greater sign than Moses. “What work do you do?”

Jesus responds that the bread given by Moses was not the true bread from heaven. Coming from on high, yes, but it was not the bread of God, because it did not guarantee life to any one. All of them died in the desert (Jn 6,49). The true bread of heaven, the bread of God, is the one which conquers death and gives life! It is the one which descends from Heaven and gives life to the world. It is Jesus himself! Jesus tries to help the people to liberate themselves from the way of thinking of the past. For him, fidelity to the past does not mean to close up oneself in the ancient things and not accept renewal. Fidelity to the past means to accept the novelty which comes as the fruit of the seed which was planted in the past.

John 6,34-35: “Lord, gives us always of that bread!” Jesus answers clearly: “I am the bread of life!” To eat the bread of heaven is the same as to believe in Jesus and accept to follow the road that he teaches us, that is: “My food is to do the will of the one who has sent me and to complete his work!” (Jn 4,34). This is the true food which nourishes the person, which transforms life and gives new life.

6. Prayer of Psalm 111

Alleluia! 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.
Full of splendour and majesty his work,
his saving justice stands firm for ever.
He gives us a memorial of his great deeds;
Yahweh is mercy and tenderness.
He gives food to those who fear him,
he keeps his covenant ever in mind.
His works show his people his power
in giving them the birthright of the nations.
The works of his hands are fidelity and justice,
all his precepts are trustworthy,
established for ever and ever,
accomplished in fidelity and honesty.
Deliverance he sends to his people,
his covenant he imposes for ever;
holy and awesome his name.
The root of wisdom is fear of Yahweh;
those who attain it are wise.
His praise will continue for ever.

7. Final Prayer

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



Lectio: Monday, August 6, 2012

The transfiguration of Jesus: the cross on the horizon The passion that leads to glory

Ordinary Time

1. 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.

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

On this Solemnity, the Church meditates on the Transfiguration of Jesus in the presence of the three disciples who joined him on the mountain. The Transfiguration takes place after the first announcement of the death of Jesus (Lk 9:21-22). This announcement had confused the disciples and especially Peter. When we take a close look at the small details, we see that the text describes the transfiguration in a way that makes us aware of how this unusual experience of Jesus was able to help the disciples overcome the crisis in which they found themselves. As we read, let us try to pay attention to the following: "How did the transfiguration take place and what was the reaction of the disciples towards this experience?"



b) A division of the text to help our reading:

Mark 9:2-4: The Transfiguration of Jesus in the presence of his disciples

Mark 9:5-6: Peter's reaction to the transfiguration

Mark 9:7-8: The voice from heaven that explains the meaning of the Transfiguration

Mark 9:9-10: Keeping secret what they had seen

c) Text:

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain on their own by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became brilliantly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus, 'Rabbi,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three shelters, one

for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus. As they were coming down from the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which part of the text did you like most or that touched you most? Why?
- b) How does the transfiguration take place and what is the reaction of the disciples to this experience?
- c) Why does the text present Jesus with brilliant clothes while he is speaking with Moses and Elijah? Who are Moses and Elijah for Jesus? Who are they for the disciples?
- d) What is the message of the voice from heaven for Jesus? And what is the message for the disciples?
- e) How can we transfigure, today, our personal and family life and the life of the community in our area?

5. For those who wish to go deeper into the theme

a) The context then and now

The foretelling of the passion sank the disciples into a deep crisis. They lived among the poor, but in their minds they were confused, lost as they were in the propaganda of the government and of the official religion of their time (Mk 8:15). The official religion taught that the Messiah would be glorious and victorious! That is why Peter reacts strongly against the cross (Mk 8:32). Someone condemned to die on the cross could not be the Messiah, rather, according to the Law of God, he had to be considered "cursed by God" (Dt 21:22-23). In these circumstances, the experience of the Transfiguration of Jesus was able to help the disciples overcome the trauma of the Cross. In fact, at the Transfiguration, Jesus appears in glory and speaks with Moses and Elijah of his Passion and Death (Lk 9:31). The journey towards glory, then, is through the cross.

In the 70's, when Mark is writing his Gospel, the Cross was a great obstacle for the Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah. How could it be that one crucified, one who died as one marginalized, was the great Messiah expected for centuries by the people? The cross was an obstacle to believing in Jesus. "The cross is a scandal," they said (1Cor 1:23). The community did not know how to respond to the critical questions put to them by the Jews. One of the great efforts of the early Christians was that of assisting people to see that the cross was neither scandal nor madness, but rather the expression of the power and

wisdom of God (1Cor 1:22-31). Mark's Gospel contributes to that effort. He uses texts from the Old Testament to describe the scene of the Transfiguration. He shed light on the events of the life of Jesus and shows that Jesus fulfils the prophecies and that the Cross is the way that leads to Glory. It was not just the cross of Jesus that was a problem! In the 70's, the cross of persecution was part of every-day life for Christians. In fact, just a little time before, Nero had launched his persecution and many died. Today too, many people suffer because they are Christians and because they live the Gospel. How do we approach the cross? What does it mean? With these questions in mind we meditate and comment on the text of the transfiguration.

b) A commentary on the text:

Mark 9:2-4: Jesus looks different.

Jesus goes up a high mountain. Luke adds that he goes there to pray (Lk 9:28). There, on the summit of the mountain, Jesus appears in glory in the presence of Peter, James and John. Together with him appear Moses and Elijah. The high mountain recalls Mount Sinai, where in times past, God had made known his will to the people by presenting the law to Moses. The white clothes of Jesus recall Moses shrouded in light as he speaks to God on the Mountain and as he receives the law from God (cf. Ex 34:29-35). Elijah and Moses, the two great authorities of the Old Testament, speak with Jesus. Moses represents the Law and Elijah the prophets. Luke says that they talked about the Death of Jesus in Jerusalem (Lk 9:31). Thus it was clear that the Old Testament, both the Law and the Prophets, taught that the way to glory is through the cross (Cf Is 53).

Mark 9:5-6: Peter likes what is happening but does not understand.

Peter likes what is going on and wants this pleasing moment on the Mountain to last. He suggests building three tents. Mark says that Peter was afraid and did not know what he was saying, and Luke adds that the disciples were sleepy (Lk 9:32). For them, as it is for us, it is difficult to understand the Cross!

The description of the transfiguration begins with an affirmation: "Six days later". What six days are these? Some scholars explain this phrase thus: Peter wants to build three tents, because it was the sixth day of the feast of tents. This was a very popular feast of six days that celebrated the gift of the Law of God and the forty years spent in the desert. To recall these forty years, the people had to spend six days in temporary tents. That is why it was called the Feast of the Tents. If they could not celebrate the whole six days, they had to celebrate at least the sixth day. The affirmation "six days later" would then be an allusion to the feast of the tents. That is why Peter recalls the duty of building tents. And spontaneously, he offers himself to build the tents. Thus Jesus,

Moses and Elijah would have been able to go on talking.

Mark 9:7: The voice from heaven shed light on the events.

As soon as Jesus is shrouded in glory, a voice from heaven says: "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him!" The expression "Beloved Son" recalls the figure of the Servant Messiah, proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah (cf. Is 42:1). The expression "Listen to him" recalls the prophecy that promised the coming of the new Moses (cf. Dt 18:15). In Jesus,

the prophecies of the Old Testament are being fulfilled. The disciples could not doubt this. The Christians of the 70's could not doubt this. Jesus is truly the glorious Messiah, but the way to glory is through the cross, the second proclamation made in the prophecy of the Servant (Is 53:3-9). The glory of the Transfiguration is proof of this. Moses and Elijah confirm this. The Father is the guarantor of this. Jesus accepts this.

Mark 9:8: Only Jesus and no one else!

Mark says that after the vision, the disciples see only Jesus and no one else. The emphasis on the affirmation that they see only Jesus suggests that from now on Jesus is the only revelation of God for us! For us Christians, Jesus, and only Jesus, is the key to understanding the complete meaning of the Old Testament.

Mark 9: 9-10: Knowing how to keep silent.

Jesus asks his disciples not to say anything to anyone until he would have risen from the dead, but the disciples do not understand him. Indeed, anyone who does not link suffering to the resurrection, does not understand the meaning of the Cross. Jesus is stronger than death.

Mark 9:11-13: The return of the prophet Elijah.

The prophet Malachi had proclaimed that Elijah was to return to prepare the way of the Messiah (Ml 3:23-24). This same proclamation is also found in the book of Ecclesiastes (Ec 48:10). Then, how could Jesus be the Messiah if Elijah had not returned yet? That is why the disciples asked: "Why do the Scribes say that Elijah must come first?" (9:11). Jesus' reply is clear: "I tell you that Elijah has come and they have treated him as they pleased, just as the scriptures say about him" (9: 13). Jesus was referring to John the Baptist who was murdered by Herod (Mt 17:13).

c) Further information:

i) The Transfiguration: the change that takes place in the practice of Jesus

In the middle of conflicts with the Pharisees and Herodians (Mk 8:11-21), Jesus leaves Galilee and goes to the region of Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:27), where he begins to prepare his disciples. On the way, he puts a question to them: "Who do people say I am?" (Mk 8:27) After listening to their reply that they considered him the Messiah, Jesus begins to speak of his passion and death (Mk 8:31). Peter reacts: "Heaven preserve you, Lord!" (Mt 16:22). Jesus replies: "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do!" (Mk 8:33) This was a moment of crisis for the disciples, who still held on to the thought of a glorious Messiah (Mk 8:32-33; 9:32), not understanding Jesus' reply and trying to divert it in another direction. It was close to the feast of the Tents, (cf Lk 9:33), when the popular messianic expectation was much stronger than usual. Jesus goes up the mountain to pray (Lk 9:28). He overcomes temptation by prayer. The revelation of the Kingdom was different from that which the people imagined. The victory of the Servant would take place through the death sentence (Is 50:4-9; 53:1-12). The cross appears on the horizon, not just as a possibility, but as a certainty. From this moment on a change takes place in Jesus' practice. Here are some important signs of this change:

Few miracles. At first there are many miracles. Now, beginning with Mk 8:27; Mt 16:13 and Lk 9:18, miracles are almost an exception in Jesus' activities.

Proclaiming the Passion. Earlier there was talk of the passion as a remote possibility (Mk 3:6). Now there is constant talk of it (Mk 8:31; 9:9.31; 10:33.38).

Taking up the Cross. Earlier, Jesus proclaimed the imminent coming of the Kingdom. Now he insists on watchfulness, the demands on those who follow him and the necessity to take up one's cross (Mt 16:24-26; 19:27-30; 24:42-51; 25:1-13; Mk 8:34; 10:28-31; Lk 9:23-26.57-62; 12:8-9.35-48; 14:25-33; 17:33; 18:28-30).

He teaches the disciples. Earlier he taught the people. Now he is more concerned with the formation of his disciples. He asks them to choose again (Jn 6:67) and begins to prepare them for the future mission. He goes out of the city so as to stay with them and busy himself with their formation (Mk 8:27; 9:28. 30-35; 10:10.23.28-32; 11:11).

Different parables. Earlier, the parables revealed the mystery of the Kingdom present in the activities of Jesus. Now the parables tend towards the future judgement, at the end of time: the murderous vine growers (Mt 21:33-46); the merciless servant (Mt 18:23-35), the workers of the eleventh hour (Mt 20:1-16), the two sons (Mt 21:28-32), the wedding banquet (Mt 22:1-14), the ten talents (Mt 25:14-30).

Jesus accepts the will of the Father that is revealed in the new situation and decides to go to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51). He takes this decision with such determination as to frighten his disciples, who cannot understand what is going on (Mk 10:32; Lk 18:31-34). In the society of that time, the proclamation of the Kingdom as Jesus proclaimed it, could not be tolerated. So either he had to change or he had to die! Jesus did not change his proclamation. He continued to be faithful to the Father and to the poor. That is why he was sentenced to death!

ii) The transfiguration and the return of the prophet Elijah

In Mark's Gospel, the scene of the transfiguration is linked to the question of the return of the prophet Elijah (Mk 9:9-13). In those days, people expected the return of the prophet Elijah and were not aware that Elijah had already returned in the person of John the Baptist (Mk 9:13). The same thing happens today. Many people live in expectation of the return of Jesus and even write on the walls of cities: Jesus will return! They are not aware that Jesus is already present in our lives. Every now and then, like an unexpected flash of lightning, this presence of Jesus breaks out and shines, transforming our lives. A question that each one of us should ask is: Has my faith in Jesus offered me a moment of transfiguration and intense joy? How have such moments of joy given me strength in moments of difficulties?

6. The prayer of a Psalm: Psalm 27 (26)

The Lord is my light

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

Yahweh is the fortress of my life,

whom should I dread?

When the wicked advance against me to eat me up,
they, my opponents, my enemies,
are the ones who stumble and fall.

Though an army pitch camp against me,
my heart will not fear,
though war break out against me,
my trust will never be shaken.

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.

For he hides me away under his roof on the day of evil,
he folds me in the recesses of his tent,
sets me high on a rock.

Now my head is held high above the enemies who surround me;
in his tent I will offer sacrifices of acclaim. I will sing,
I will make music for Yahweh.

Yahweh, hear my voice as I cry,
pity me, answer me!

Of you my heart has said,
'Seek his face!'

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

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

Never leave me, never forsake me,
God, my Saviour.

Though my father and mother forsake me,
Yahweh will gather me up.

Yahweh, teach me your way,
lead me on the path of integrity because of my enemies;
do not abandon me to the will of my foes
- false witnesses have risen against me,
and are breathing out violence.

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.

7. Final Prayer

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



Lectio: Tuesday, August 7, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise you.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 14,22-36

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

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

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

It was Peter who answered. 'Lord,' he said, 'if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.' Jesus said, 'Come.' Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord,' he cried, 'save me!'

Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'You have so little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' 32 And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. 33 The men in the boat bowed down before him and said, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.'

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

3) Reflection

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

- Matthew 14, 22-24: To begin the crossing asked by Jesus. Jesus obliges the Disciples to go into the boat and to go toward the other side of the sea, where the land of the pagans was. He goes up to the mountain to pray. The boat symbolizes the community. It has the mission to direct itself toward the pagans and to announce among them the Good News of the Kingdom also, which was the new way of living in community. But the crossing was very tiring and long. The boat is agitated by the wave, because the wind is contrary. In spite of having rowed the whole night, there is still a great distance left before reaching the land. Much was still lacking in the community in order to be able to cross and go toward the pagans. Jesus did not go with his disciples. They had to learn to face together the difficulties, united and strengthened by faith in Jesus who had sent them. The contrast is very great: Jesus is in peace together with God, praying on the top of the mountain, and the Disciples are almost lost there below, in the agitated sea.

- The crossing to the other side of the lake symbolizes also the difficult crossing of the community at the end of the first century. They should get out of the closed world of the ancient observance of the law toward the new manner of observing the Law of love., taught by Jesus; they should abandon the knowledge of belonging to the Chosen People, privileged by God among all other peoples, for the certainty that in Christ all peoples

would be united into one Only People before God; they should get out from isolation and intolerance toward the open world of acceptance and of gratitude. Today also, we are going through a difficult crossing toward a new time and a new way of being Church. A difficult crossing, but which is necessary. There are moments in life in which we are attacked by fear. Good will is not lacking, but this is not sufficient. We are like a boat faced with the contrary wind.

- Matthew 14, 25-27: Jesus comes close to them but they do not recognize him. Toward the end of the night, that is between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus goes to meet the Disciples. Walking on the water, he gets close to them, but they did not recognize him. They cried out in fear, thinking that it was a ghost. Jesus calms them down saying: "Courage! It is me! Do not be afraid!" The expression "It is me!" is the same one with which God tried to overcome the fear of Moses when he sent him to liberate the people from Egypt (Ex 3, 14). For the communities, of today as well as for those of yesterday, it was and it is very important to be always open to novelty: "Courage. It is me!. Do not be afraid!"

- Matthew 14, 28-31: Enthusiasm and weakness of Peter. Knowing that it is Jesus, Peter asks that he also can walk on the water. He wants to experience the power which dominates the fury of the sea. This is a power which in the bible belongs only to God (Gn 1, 6; Ps 104, 6-9). Jesus allows him to participate in this power. But Peter is afraid. He thinks that he will sink and he cries out: "Lord, save me!" Jesus assures him and takes hold of him and reproaches him: "You have so little faith! Why did you doubt?" Peter has more strength than he imagined, but is afraid before the contrary waves and does not believe in the power of God which dwells within him. The communities do not believe in the force of the Spirit which is within them and which acts through faith. It is the force of the Resurrection (Eph 1, 19-20).

- Matthew 14, 32-33: Jesus is the Son of God. Before the waves that come toward them, Peter begins to sink in the sea because of lack of faith. After he is saved, he and Jesus, both of them, go into the boat and the wind calms down. The other Disciples, who are in the boat, are astonished and bowed before Jesus, recognizing that he is the Son of God: "Truly, you are the Son of God". Later on, Peter also professes the same faith in Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (Mt 16,16). In this way Matthew suggests that it is not only Peter who sustains the faith of the Disciples, but also that the faith of the Disciples sustains Peter's faith.

- Matthew 14, 34-36: They brought all the sick to him. The episode of the crossing ends with something beautiful: "Having made the crossing they came to Gennesaret. When the local people recognized him they spread the news through the whole neighbourhood and took all who were sick to him, begging him just to let them touch the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched it were saved".

4) Personal questions

- Has there been a contrary wind in your life? What have you done to overcome it? Has this happened sometimes in the community? How was it overcome?

• Which is the crossing which the communities are doing today? From where to where? How does all this help us to recognize today the presence of Jesus in the contrary waves of life?

5) Concluding Prayer

Keep me far from the way of deceit,
grant me the grace of your Law.
I have chosen the way of constancy,
I have moulded myself to your judgements. (Ps 119,29-30)



Lectio: Wednesday, August 8, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise you.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 15,21-28

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

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

But the woman had come up and was bowing low before him. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.'

He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.'

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

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

3) Reflection

- Context. The bread of the children and the great faith of a Canaanite woman is the theme presented in the liturgical passage taken from chapter 15 of Matthew who proposes to the reader of his Gospel a further deepening of faith in Christ. The episode is preceded by an initiative of the Pharisees and Scribes who go down to Jerusalem and cause a dispute to take place with Jesus, but which did not last long, because he, together with his disciples withdrew to go to the region of Tyre and Sidon. While he is on the way, a woman from the pagan places comes to him. This woman is presented by Matthew by the name of a “Canaanite woman” who in the light of the Old Testament, she is presented with great harshness. In the Book of Deuteronomy the inhabitants of Canaan were considered people full of sins, evil and idolatrous people.

- The dynamic of the account. While Jesus carries out his activity in Galilee and is on the way toward Tyre and Sidon, a woman came up to him and began to bother him with a petition for help for her sick daughter. The woman addresses Jesus using the title “Son of David”; a title which sounds strange pronounced by a pagan and that could be justified because of the extreme situation in which the woman lives. It could be thought that this woman already believes in some way, in the person of Jesus as final Saviour, but this is excluded because it is only in v. 28 that her act of faith is recognized, precisely by Jesus. In the dialogue with the woman Jesus seems to show that distance and diffidence which reigned between the people of Israel and the pagans. On one side Jesus confirms to the woman the priority for Israel to have access to salvation, and before the insistent prayer of her interlocutor Jesus seems to withdraw, to be at a distance; an incomprehensible attitude for the reader, but in the intention of Jesus it expresses an act of pedagogical value. To the first invocation “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David” (v. 22) Jesus does not respond. To the second intervention this time on the part of the disciples who invite him to listen to the prayer of the woman, he only expresses rejection that stresses that secular distance between the chosen people and the pagan people (vv. 23b-24) But at the insistence of the prayer of the woman who bows before Jesus, a harsh and mysterious response follows: “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to little dogs” (v. 26). The woman goes beyond the harsh response of the words of Jesus and gets a small sign of hope: the woman recognizes that the plan of God being carried out by Jesus initially concerns the chosen people and Jesus asks the woman to recognize that priority; the woman takes advantage of that priority to present a strong reason to obtain the miracle: “Ah yes, Lord, but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters’ table” (v. 27). The woman has exceeded the test of faith: “Woman, you have great faith” (v. 28); in fact, to the humble insistence of her faith corresponds a gesture of salvation.

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

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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



Lectio: Thursday, August 9, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise you.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading

Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?'

And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you

bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to say to anyone that he was the Christ. From then onwards Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to rebuke him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord,' he said, 'this must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do.'

3) Reflection

- We are now in the narrative part between the Discourse of the Parables (Mt 13) and the discourse of the Community (Mt 18). In these narrative parts which link together the five Discourses, Matthew usually follows the sequence of the Gospel of Mark. Once in a while, he gives other information, also known by Luke. And here and there, he quotes texts which appear only in the Gospel of Matthew, like for example the conversation between Jesus and Peter, in today's Gospel. This text has different interpretations and even opposed ones in the diverse Christian Churches.
- At that time, the communities fostered a very strong affective bond of union with the leaders who had given origin to the community. For example, the communities of Antioch in Syria, fostered their relationship with Peter. Those of Greece, with Paul. Some communities of Asia, with the Beloved disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypse. An identification with these leaders to whom they owed their origin helped the communities to foster better their identity and spirituality. But this could also be a reason for dispute, like in the case of the community of Corinth (1 Co 1,11-12).
- Matthew 16, 13-16: *The opinions of the people and of the Disciples concerning Jesus.* Jesus asks the opinion of the people concerning his person, the Son of Man. The responses are varied: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the Prophets. When Jesus asks the opinion of the Disciples, Peter becomes the spokesman and says: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!*" The response is not a new one. Before, the Disciples had said the same thing (Mt 14, 33). In John's Gospel, the same profession of faith is made by Martha (Jn 11,27). It means that the prophecies of the Old Testament are realized in Jesus.
- Matthew 16, 17: *The response of Jesus to Peter: "Blessed are you, Simon!"* Jesus proclaims Peter "Blessed", because he has received a revelation from the Father. Here, also, the response of Jesus is not new. Before, Jesus had praised the Father because he had revealed the Son to the little ones and not to the wise (Mt 11, 25-27) and had made the same proclamation of joy to the Disciples who were seeing and hearing new things which, before them, nobody knew nor had heard (Mt 13, 16).
- Matthew 16, 18-20: *The attributions of Peter: To be rock and to receive the keys of the Kingdom.*

(a) To be rock: Peter has to be *Rock* that is the stable basis for the Church in such a way that it can resist against the gates of hell. With these words which Jesus addressed to Peter, Matthew encourages the persecuted community of Syria and Palestine who see in Peter the leader who belongs to their origin. In spite of the persecution and the weakness, the community has a firm basis, guaranteed by the word of Jesus. The function of being rock based on faith evokes the word of God to the people in exile: *“Listen to me you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh; consider the rock (pietra) from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug; consider Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave you birth. When I called him, he was the only one, but I blessed him and made him numerous”* (Is 51, 1-2). This indicates that a new beginning of the People of God is with Peter.

(b) The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom. The same power of binding and loosing is also given to the communities (Mt 18, 18) and to the other disciples (Jn 20, 23). One of the points in which the Gospel of Matthew insists more is reconciliation and pardon. It is one of the more important tasks of coordinators of the communities. By imitating Peter, they should bind and loosen, that is, do in such a way that there is reconciliation and reciprocal acceptance, construction of fraternity, even up to seventy times (Mt 18, 22).

- Matthew 16, 21-22: *Jesus completes what was missing in Peter’s response, and Peter reacts.* Jesus begins saying: *“that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer very much on the part of the Elders, of the high priests and of the Scribes, and would be killed and on the third day, he would rise from the dead”*. Saying that he had to go and would be killed, or that it was necessary to suffer, he indicated that suffering had been foreseen by the prophecies. The way of the Messiah is not only one of triumph and glory, but also one of suffering and of the cross! If Peter accepts Jesus as the Messiah and son of God, he has to accept him also as Messiah servant who will be killed. But Peter does not accept the correction of Jesus and tries to draw him away. *Taking Jesus aside, he began to rebuke him: Heaven preserve you, Lord, this must not happen to you!”*

- Matthew 16, 23: *the response of Jesus to Peter: stumbling stone.* The response of Jesus is surprising. Peter wanted to direct Jesus taking the initiative. Jesus reacts: *“Get behind me, Satan. You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do”*. Peter has to follow Jesus, and not the contrary. Jesus is the one who gives the directions. Satan is the one who draws persons away from the road traced by Jesus. Once again the expression *rock – pietra* - appears, but now in the contrary sense. Peter, at one time is the supporting rock, at other times the stumbling rock! The communities at the time of Matthew were like that, characterized by ambiguity. This is the way we all are, according to what John Paul II said, that the Papacy itself, was characterized by the same ambiguity of Peter: rock of support for the faith and stumbling rock in the faith.

4) Personal questions

- Which are the opinions about Jesus which exist in our community? These differences in the way of living and of expressing faith, do they enrich the community or do they render the way more difficult?
- What type of rock is our community? Which is the mission for us?

5) Concluding Prayer

Give me back the joy of your salvation,
sustain in me a generous spirit.
I shall teach the wicked your paths,
and sinners will return to you. (Ps 51, 12-13)



Lectio: Friday, August 10, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,
your Spirit made us your children,
confident to call you Father.
Increase your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 12,24-26

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

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

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

3) Reflection

- This passage contains solemn and crucial words concerning the modality with which the mission of Jesus and of his disciples “produces much fruit”. But in this solemn and

central declaration of Jesus; “unless a wheat grain falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a large harvest” (v.24), it is inserted in that narrative context of 12, 12-36 where the encounter of Jesus as Messiah with Israel is narrated and the rejection of the Jews of his Messianic proposal. Which are the principal themes that describe the Messianism of Jesus? The Jews expected a Messiah who would be a powerful king, who would continue with the royal style of David and would restore to Israel its glorious past. Instead, Jesus, places in the centre of his Messianism the gift of his life and the possibility given to man to be able to accept God’s project on his life.

- The story of a seed. The gift of his life, as a crucial characteristic of his Messianism, Jesus outlines it with a mini parable. He describes a central and decisive event of his life drawing from the agricultural environment from where he takes the images to render his parables interesting and immediate. It is the story of a seed: a small parable to communicate with the people in a simple and transparent way: a seed begins its course or journey in the dark meander of the earth, where it is suffocated and withers but in the Spring it becomes a green stalk and in the Summer a spike charged with grain. The focal points of the parable are two: the production of much fruit; the finding of eternal life. The seed that breaks through the darkness of earth has been interpreted by the First Fathers of the Church as a symbolical reference to the Incarnation of the Son of God. In the ground it seems that the vital force of the seed is destined to get lost because the seed withers and dies. But then the surprise of nature: in the summer when the spikes turn golden, the profound secret of that death is revealed. Jesus knows that death is becoming imminent, threatens on his person, even though he does not see it as a beast that devours. It is true that it has the characteristics of darkness and of being ripped, but for Jesus it contains the secret force typical of child birth, a mystery of fecundity and of life. In the light of this vision one can understand another expression used by Jesus: “Anyone who loves his life will lose it and anyone who hates his own life in this world will preserve it for eternal life”. Anyone who considers his own life as a cold property to be lived in egoism is like a seed closed in itself and without any perspective of life. On the contrary who “hates his life”, a very sharp Semitic expression to indicate the renunciation of only fulfilling oneself applied to the axis of the meaning of an existence on the donation to others; it is only thus that life becomes creative: it is a source of peace, of happiness and of life. It is the reality of the seed that sprouts. But the reader can also get in the mini parable of Jesus another dimension, that of the “Passover”. Jesus knows that in order to lead humanity to the threshold of divine love he has to go through the dark way of death on the cross. On the trail of this life the disciple also faces his own “hour”, that of death, with the certainty that it will lead to eternal life, that is to say, to full communion with God.

- In synthesis. The story of the seed is that of dying in order to multiply itself; its function is that of a service to life. The annihilation of Jesus is comparable to the seed of life buried in the earth. In Jesus’ life to love is to serve and to serve is to lose oneself in the life of others, to die to oneself in order to allow others to live. While his “hour” is approaching, the conclusion of his mission, Jesus assures his own with the promise of a consolation and of a joy without end, accompanied, by every type of disturbance or

trouble. He gives the example of the seed that has to wither and of the woman who has to give birth in the pangs of child birth. Christ has chosen the cross for himself and for his own: anyone who wants to be his disciple is called to share his same itinerary. He has always spoken to his disciples in a radical way: «Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, will save it” (Lk 9, 24).

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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



Lectio: Saturday, August 11, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Prayer

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

2) Reading

From the Gospel according to Matthew 17.14-20

At that time, when they came to the crowd a man approached, knelt down before Jesus, and said, "Lord, have pity on my son, for he is a lunatic and suffers severely; often he falls into fire, and often into water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him." Jesus said in reply, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long will I be

with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him here to me." Jesus rebuked him and the demon came out of him, and from that hour the boy was cured. Then the disciples approached Jesus in private and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. Amen, I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

3) Reflection

- Context. Our passage has Jesus in his work of healing. After having stayed with the disciples alone in the region of Caesarea Philippi (16.13 to 28) Jesus climbs a high mountain and is transfigured before three disciples (from 17.1 to 10) and then reaches the crowd (17.14 - 21) attempts a new approach to Galilee to regain (7.22). What to think of these geographical shifts of Jesus? It is not excluded that they could have a value of geographical, but Matthew press submit their role of spiritual journey. In his journey of faith community is increasingly called upon to retrace that spiritual which marked the life of Jesus from Galilee of his public and that his resurrection by way of the cross. A spiritual journey in which the power of faith plays a crucial role.
- The power of faith. Jesus, after his transfiguration, with its small community of disciples returned from the crowd, before returning to Galilee (v. 22) and arrive in Capernaum (v.24). And while in the crowd a man approached him and begged him to urgently intervene in the evil that keeps her imprisoned son. The description preceding the intervention of Jesus really clear: this is a case of epilepsy with all its pathological consequences on the psychic level. At the time of Jesus, this type of illness was traced to evil forces and specifically the action of Satan, enemy of God and man, and therefore the origin of evil and all evil. Faced with such a situation arise in which evil forces far beyond human capabilities to the disciples find themselves powerless to heal the child (vv.16-19) and because of their lack of faith (V.20). For the evangelist, this young epileptic is a symbol of those who devalue the power of faith (V.20), not mindful of the presence of God in their midst (V.17). The presence of God in Jesus, Emmanuel, is not recognized, the fact understand something of Jesus is not enough, we need the true faith. After Jesus rebuked the crowd, you bring the boy: "Bring him here" (V.17), heals and frees it when rebuked the devil. Not simply the miracle of healing a single person "" you must also heal the weak and uncertain faith of the disciples. Jesus approaches them who are confused or dazed for their impotence: "Because we could not throw it out?" (V.20). Jesus' answer is clear: "For your wavering faith". Jesus calls for faith that can move mountains of his heart to identify with his person, his mission, his divine power. It is true that the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus but have failed to heal the epileptic boy because of "little faith." It is not lack of faith, only that it is weak, vacillating for sure, with a predominance of mistrust and doubt. It is a faith that is rooted entirely in relationship with Christ. Jesus goes beyond the language when he says: "if you have faith like a mustard seed" can move mountains, is an exhortation to be guided by the power of faith in action, which becomes especially strong in times of trial and suffering and attains maturity when no offense most of the scandal of the cross. Faith can do anything,

provided waivers to rely on their human capacity, can move mountains. The disciples, the early community have experienced that unbelief can not be won by prayer and fasting, but you must join the death and resurrection of Jesus

4) Personal questions

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

5) Final Prayer

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



Lectio: Sunday, August 12, 2012

The bread of life John 6: 41-51

Ordinary Time

Opening prayer

Shaddai, God of the mountain,
You who make of our fragile life
the rock of your dwelling place,
lead our mind
to strike the rock of the desert,
so that water may gush to quench our thirst.
May the poverty of our feelings
cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night
and may it open our heart to hear the echo of silence
until the dawn,
wrapping us with the light of the new morning,
may bring us,
with the spent embers of the fire of the shepherds of the Absolute

who have kept vigil for us close to the divine Master,
the flavour of the holy memory.

1. LECTIO

a) The text:

41 The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. 46 Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."



b) A key to the reading:

The sixth chapter of John's Gospel presents a entire picture that develops around the Paschal theme and, analogously with what precedes it, unfolds through the telling of a miracle (5:1-9a 6:1-15) followed by a discourse (5:16-47; 6:22-59). The chapter relates that part of Jesus' activity in Galilee, precisely at its most sublime moment, when Jesus reveals himself as bread of life to be believed in and eaten in order to be saved. In vv. 1-15 we find the great sign of the multiplication of the loaves whose significance is revealed in the discourse of the following day in vv. 26-59: the gift of bread to satisfy the hunger of the people prepares the way for the words concerning the bread of eternal life. Inserted, vv. 16-21, we find the story of Jesus walking on the water. In vv. 60-71 Jesus, knowing their lack of faith (vv. 60-66) and trying to encourage their faith (vv. 66-71), invites the twelve disciples to make up their minds. The whole discourse on the bread of life (6: 25-71) presents parallels with some Hebrew texts, especially with Philon.

c) A moment of silence:

Let the sound of the Word echo in us.

2. Meditatio

a) A few questions:

- *They murmured at him:* how many are the voices that murmur against God?
- *I am the bread which has come down from heaven:* where do we acquire the bread that we eat every day?
- *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him:* does the Father draw us or do we drag our feet behind him criticising that which he says to us in our daily life?
- *If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever:* we nourish ourselves with the Word of God and the broken Bread once a week or even every day... why is it that eternal life is not evident in our words and our human experience?

b) A key to the reading:

To murmur. What better way is there for us not to live in depth that which the Lord asks of us? There are thousands of plausible reasons... thousands of valid justifications... thousands of licit motives... for us not to swallow a Word that defies every reason, every justification, every motivation to allow new echoes to resonate from a not so distant heaven that dwells in our hearts

v. 41. *The Jews murmured at him because he had said: "I am the bread which came down from heaven"*. Jesus had just said: *I am the bread of life* (v. 35) and *I have come down from heaven* (v. 38) and this provokes dissent among the crowd. The term Jews is a theological one in John and may be thought of as synonymous with unbelievers. In truth these were Galileans who were called Jews because they murmured at Christ whose words disturbed their usual categories. The Jews were familiar with the term bread come down from heaven. The children of Israel knew the bread of God, the manna, which had satisfied their hunger in the desert and had given security to a precarious journey whose horizons were uncertain. Christ, manna for humankind who in the desert of an unsatisfied hunger invokes heaven to sustain it on its journey. This is the only bread that satisfies hunger. The words of the Jews are an objection to the person of Jesus and also an occasion to introduce the theme of unbelief. In other passages the people "whisper" about Jesus (7:12, 32), but in this chapter they "murmur" about what he says, about his words. This murmuring puts an emphasis on their unbelief and incomprehension.

v. 42. *"Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know? How does he now say: I have come down from heaven?"*. This is subtle irony. The unbelievers know the earthly origins of the Christ, they know for certain the son of Joseph, but not the son of God. Only those who believe know his transcendental origin by the direct intervention of God in the Virgin. The passage goes from material language, bread made from water and flour, to a spiritual language, bread for the human soul. As once the people in the desert did, the Jews murmur: they do not understand the origin of Jesus' gift: and as once their forbears refused the manna because it was too light, so now the descendants refuse the Word made flesh, bread come down from heaven, because of its earthly origin. The Jews, from all that Jesus said, only take note that he had said: *I*

have come down from heaven (v. 38). Yet this is that which gives substance to all that was said before about *being the bread of life* (v. 35). The question: *Is not this...* is asked in a context of surprise in the Synoptic Gospels. In Matthew and Luke, through the story of Jesus' childhood, the reader has already been told of the virginal conception of Jesus. In John, the Galileans are confronted with someone who claims to have come down from heaven without any previous discussion as to his human condition. *Son of Joseph* means that Jesus is a man like all other men (cfr. 1,45).

v. 43-44. *Jesus answered them: "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day"*. Jesus does not seem to dwell on his divine origin but stresses that only those drawn by the Father can come to him. Faith then is a gift of God and depends on a person's openness and ability to listen... but what does it mean to say the *Father draws*? Is not a person free on this journey? The attraction is simply the desire written in the tablets of flesh borne in the heart of every person. Thus complete freedom exists in a spontaneous clinging to the source of one's being. Life can only attract life, only death cannot attract.

v. 45. *It is written in the prophets: "And they shall all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to me"*. The rest of the narrative follows a very precise order. These words are not an invitation, but a command. The creative Word of God, who called into existence from nothing light and all other creatures, now calls his own likeness to participate in the new creation. The consequence does not flow from an autonomous and personal decision, but from meeting with the person of Jesus and his call. It is a grace event, not a human choice. Jesus does not wait for a free decision, but calls with divine authority as God called the prophets in the Old Testament. It is not the disciples who choose the Master as was the case with rabbis at the time, but the Master who chooses the disciples as beneficiaries of God's inheritance, which is much greater than any doctrine or teaching. The call implies the giving up of family, profession, a complete change of one's way of life in order to cling to a way of life that leaves no space for self-centredness. The disciples are people of the kingdom. The call to become disciples of Jesus is an "eschatological call". The words of the Babylonian prophet of the exile says: *"and all her children (Jerusalem's) shall be"* - referring to the Jews. The use of: *"all shall be"* is an expression of the universality of salvation whose fulfilment is Jesus.

v. 46. *Not that any one has seen the Father, except him who comes from God, he has seen the Father.* Only Jesus, who is from God, has seen the Father and can reveal him definitively. People are called to come from God. Knowledge of the Father is not a conquest, it is an origin. The movement is not external. If I look for an external origin I can say that I have a father and mother, a creature of the created world. If I look for a deeper origin of my essential being I can say that I come from the Father, Creator of all life.

v. 47. *Truly, truly, I say to you: He who believes has eternal life.* To believe in the words of Jesus, in his revelation, is a condition for obtaining eternal life and to be able to be "taught by the Father". I believe, I lean on a rock. The strength is not within my

creature limitations, nor in the realisation of my creature efforts to attain perfection. All is firm in Him who has no temporal attachments. How can a creature lean on itself when it is not master of one single instant of its life?

v. 48. *I am the bread of life.* Again the theme of the bread of life is presented together with that of faith and of eternal life. Jesus is the true bread of life. This verse is connected with verse 51 "*I am the living bread*". Only he who eats this bread, he who assimilates Jesus' revelation as vital bread, will be able to live.

vv. 49-50. *Your Fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died: this is the bread which comes down from heaven that a man may eat of it and not die.* The bread come down from heaven is contrasted with the manna that fed their fathers but not preserved them from death. This bread that gives life without end and comes from on high is the incarnate Word of God. The Eucharistic theme, already implied in some expressions, now becomes central. Earthly death does not contradict this experience of life if one walks along transcendental ways. The limitation is no limitation for those who eat of Him.

vv. 51. *I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.*" The "flesh" of Jesus is the vital food for the believer. The word flesh (sàrx), which in the Bible indicates the fragile reality of the human person before the mystery of God, now refers to the body of Christ immolated on the cross and to the human reality of the Word of God. It is no longer a metaphorical *bread of life*, it is the revelation of Jesus because the bread is the very flesh of the Son. For *the life of the world* means *in favour of* and emphasises the sacrificial dimension of Christ because for the world expresses the salvation which flows from that dimension.

c) Reflection:

Murmur. If our murmuring were like a soft breeze, it would act as a harmonious basis for the eternal words that become our flesh: I am the living Bread that has come down from heaven. What a surprise that would be, knowing that this eternal Bread is not a stranger, but Jesus, the son of Joseph, a man whose father and mother we know. We eat and we are assumed, because those who eat of this bread will live for ever. This is a bread that is born of the love of the Father. We are invited to listen and learn from Him on the trajectory of attraction, on that peak of faith that allows us to see. Bread with bread, Flesh with flesh. Only He who comes from God has seen the Father. And when we have made of our flesh the table of the living Bread, then we shall have seen the Father. Desert and death, heaven and life. A sweet marriage fulfilled in every Eucharist... on every altar, on the altar of the heart where the life of the divine Breath consumes the disfigured lineaments of a lost person.

3. Oratio

Psalm 33 (32)

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,

and all their host by the breath of his mouth.
He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle;
he put the deeps in storehouses.
The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nought;
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
The counsel of the Lord stands for ever,
the thoughts of his heart to all generations.
Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,
that he may deliver their soul from death,
and keep them alive in famine.

4. Contemplatio

The experience of the food that satisfies the hunger of the heart reminds me, Lord, that I can pass from imperfection to the fulfilment of being a reflection of yourself, not by doing away with the hunger, but by finding in it no longer a homo dormiens, someone who does not ask questions of himself, who lives without any interest, who does not wish to see or feel, who will not allow himself to be touched, who lives in fear, superficially rather than in depth, and who keeps a horizontal position when confronted by events, sleeping or ignoring whatever he meets... but rather a homo vigilans, he who is always present to himself and others, capable of satisfying himself by his work and service, who responsibly does not stop at that which is immediate, but who knows how to pace himself for the long and patient waiting, who expresses the all that dwells in each fragment of his life, who no longer fears feeling vulnerable, because he knows that the wounds of his humanity can be transformed into scars through which Life joins in the passing of time, a Life that is finally able to realise his End and that sings to Love with his "scarred heart" wrapped in a "flame that consumes but does not hurt" and in order to meet him definitively is prepared to "tear the veil". Hunger is no longer hunger, because it now becomes the sweet burden of limitation, protected by "the delicious wound" and always open to the "sweet encounter" that will satisfy every desire: "The Beloved is the mountain, the solitary valleys full of shade... He is like the calm night, very close to dawn, a silent music, a resounding silence... Who will heal this my scarred heart?... He is the consuming flame that does not hurt! O my Beloved, tear the veil at the moment of our sweet encounter."



Lectio: Monday, August 13, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 17,22-27

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

When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel came to Peter and said, 'Does your master not pay the half-shekel?' 'Yes,' he replied, and went into the house. But before he could speak, Jesus said, 'Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?' And when he replied, 'From foreigners,' Jesus said, 'Well then, the sons are exempt. However, so that we shall not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that rises, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for yourself.'

3) Reflection

- The five verses of today's Gospel speak about two very different themes between them. (a) The second announcement of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus (Mt 17, 22-23); (b) they inform on the conversation of Jesus with Peter about paying the taxes and the dues to the temple (Mt 17, 24-27).
- Matthew 17, 22-23: *The announcement of the death and resurrection of Jesus.* The first announcement (Mt 16, 21) had produced a strong reaction on Peter who did not want to know anything about suffering nor the cross. Jesus had answered just as strongly: "*Get behind me, Satan!*" (Mt 16, 23). Here, in the second announcement, the reaction of the disciples is less strong, less aggressive. The announcement produces sadness. It seems that now they begin to understand that the cross forms part of the journey. The proximity of the death and the suffering weigh heavily on them, giving rise to a great discouragement. Even if Jesus tries to help them, the resistance of centuries against the idea of a crucified Messiah, was much greater.
- Matthew 17 24-25a: *The question which the tax collectors ask Peter concerning the taxes.* When they reached Capernaum, the tax collector of the taxes of the Temple asks Peter: "Does your Master not pay the half-shekel for the Temple?" Peter answered: "Yes". From the time of Nehemias (V Century BC), the Jews who had returned from the

exile of Babylonia, committed themselves solemnly in the Assembly to pay the diverse taxes and dues in order to allow the Temple to continue to function and to take care of the maintenance both of the priestly service and of the building of the Temple. (Ne 10, 33-40). From what we can see from Peter's response, Jesus paid the taxes like any other Jew.

- Matthew 17, 25b-26: The question of Jesus to Peter concerning the taxes. The conversation between Jesus and Peter is very strange. When they reach home, Jesus asked: "Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?" Peter responds: "From foreigners". And Jesus says: "Therefore, the sons are exempt!" Probably, here we can see a discussion between the Christian Jews before the destruction of the Temple, in the year 70. They asked themselves if they had to continue or not to pay the taxes of the Temple, as they did before. By Jesus' response they discover that they are not obliged to pay this tax: "The sons are exempt!" The sons are the Christians, but even if they are not obliged to pay, the recommendation of Jesus is to pay in order not to cause scandal.

- Matthew 17, 27: *The conclusion of the conversation on the paying of the tax.* The solution which Jesus gives to this situation is even stranger. He tells Peter: "*However, so that we shall not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook: take the first fish that rises, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for yourself.*" This was a strange miracle, strange like that of the 2000 pigs which threw themselves into the sea (Mk 5, 13). Which ever is the interpretation of this miraculous fact, this way of resolving the problem suggests that it is a question that is not too important for Jesus.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

Praise Yahweh from the heavens,
praise him in the heights.
Praise him, all his angels,
praise him, all his host! (Ps 148,1-2)



Lectio: Tuesday, August 14, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 18,1-5.10.12-14

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

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

'Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? In truth I tell you, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all. Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

3) Reflection

- Here, in Chapter 18 of the Gospel of Matthew begins the fourth great discourse of the New Law, the Discourse of the Community. As has already been said before (on Monday of the 10th Week of the Year), the Gospel of Matthew written for the communities of the Christian Jews of Galilee and of Syria, present Jesus as the new Moses. In the Old Testament, the Law of Moses was codified in the five books of the Pentateuch. Imitating the ancient model, Matthew represents the New Law in five great Discourses: (a) The Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5, 1 to 7, 29); (b) the Discourse of the Mission (Mt 10, 1-42); (c) The Discourse of the Parables (Mt 13, 1-52); (d) The Discourse of the Community (Mt 18, 1-35); (e) The discourse of the Future of the Kingdom (Mt 24,1 to 25,46). The narrative parts which are inserted among the five Discourses describe the practice of Jesus and show how he practiced and embodied the New Law in his life.

- The Gospel today gives the first part of the Discourse of the Community (Mt 18, 1-14) which has as key word "the little ones". The little ones are not only the children, but also

the poor persons, those who are not important in society and in the community, and also the children. Jesus asks that these “little ones” should always be the centre of the concern of the communities because “The Father in Heaven does not will that one of these little ones should be lost” (Mt 18, 14).

- Matthew 18, 1: The question of the disciples which provokes the teaching of Jesus. The disciples want to know who is the greater in the Kingdom. The simple fact of this question reveals that they had not understood anything or very little the message of Jesus. The whole Discourse of the Community, is in order to make them understand that among the followers of Jesus the spirit of service should prevail, the gift of self, of pardon, of reconciliation and of gratuitous love, without seeking one’s own interest and one’s own promotion.

- Matthew 18, 2-5: The fundamental criterion: the little one and the greater one. The disciples ask for a criterion so as to be able to measure the importance of the persons in the community: “Who is the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus answers that the criterion are the littler ones! The little ones are not socially important; they do not belong to the world of the great. The disciples have to become children. Instead of growing up, to the heights, they must grow down and toward the periphery, where the poor and the little ones live. In this way, they will be the greater in the Kingdom! The reason is the following: “Anyone who receives one of these little ones receives me”. Jesus identifies himself with them. The love of Jesus for the little ones cannot be explained. Children have no merit. It is the complete gratuity of the love of God which manifests itself and asks to be imitated in the community of those who call themselves disciples of Jesus.

- Matthew 18, 6-9: Do not scandalize the little ones. These four verses concerning the scandal to little ones are omitted from today’s Gospel. We give a brief commentary on them. To scandalize the little ones means: to be the cause for them to lose their faith in God and to abandon the community. Matthew keeps a very hard phrase of Jesus: “Anyone who scandalizes even one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a mill stone tied around his neck and then be thrown into the sea”. It is a sign that at that time many little ones no longer identified themselves with the community and sought another refuge. And today, in Latin America, for example, every year, approximately three million persons abandon the historical Church and go toward the Evangelical churches. This is a sign that they do not feel at home among us. What is lacking in us? Which is the cause of this scandal of the little ones? In order to avoid the scandal, Jesus orders to cut the foot or take out the eye. This phrase cannot be taken literally. It means that we should be very firm, strict in fighting against scandal which draws the little ones away. We cannot, in any way, allow that the little ones should feel marginalized in our community; because in this case, the community would not be a sign of the Kingdom of God.

- Matthew 18, 10-11: The angels of the little ones are in the presence of the Father. Jesus recalls Psalm 91. The little ones take Yahweh as their refuge and make the most High their fortress (Ps 91, 9) and because of this: “No disaster can overtake you, no plague

come near your tent; he has given angels orders about you to guard you wherever you go. They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone” (Ps 91, 10, 12).

- Matthew 18, 12-14: The parable of the one hundred sheep. According to Luke, this parable reveals the joy of God on the conversion of a sinner (Lk 15, 3-7). According to Matthew, it reveals that the Father does not want that not even one of the little ones be lost. In other words, the little ones should be the pastoral priority of the Community, of the Church. They should be in the centre of the concern of all. Love toward the little ones and the excluded should be the axis of the community of those who want to follow Jesus; because it is in this way that the community becomes the proof of the gratuitous love of God who accepts all.

4) Personal questions

- Who are the poorest persons of our neighbourhood? Do they participate in our community? Do they feel at home or do they find in us a cause to withdraw?
- God the Father does not want any of the little ones to get lost. What does this mean for our community?

5) Concluding Prayer

Your instructions are my eternal heritage,
they are the joy of my heart.
I devote myself to obeying your statutes,
their recompense is eternal. (Ps 119,111-112)



Lectio: Wednesday, August 15, 2012

The visit of Mary to Elizabeth

Ordinary Time

1. LECTIO

a) Opening prayer:

Holy Spirit, Spirit of Wisdom, of Science, of Intelligence, of Counsel, fill us, we pray, with the knowledge of the Word of God, fill us with every kind of spiritual wisdom and intelligence, so as to be able to understand it at depth. May we, under your guidance be able to understand the Gospel of this Marian solemnity. Holy Spirit, we need you, you, the only one who continually moulds in us the figure and the form of Jesus. And we turn to you, Mary, Mother of Jesus and of the Church, you who have lived the inebriating and

totalising Presence of the Holy Spirit, you who have experienced the power of his force in you, who has seen it operating in your Son Jesus from the time when he was in the maternal womb, open our heart and our mind, so that they may be docile to listen to the Word of God.

b) Reading of the Gospel:



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

And Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord

and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;

because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed,

for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name,

and his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him.

He has used the power of his arm, he has routed the arrogant of heart.

He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly.

He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love

-according to the promise he made to our ancestors -- of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.

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

c) Moments of prayerful silence:

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

2. Meditatio

a) Key to the Reading:

Blessed are you among women

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

Together with Mary, Jesus, in his mother's womb, moves with her. From here it is easy to deduce the Christological value of the episode of the visit of Mary to her cousin: above all, the attention is for Jesus. At first sight, it could seem to be a scene concentrated on the two women, in reality, what is important for the Evangelist is the prodigious fact present in their conceiving. Mary moving tends, in last instance, to have the encounter between the two women.

As soon as Mary enters into the house and greets Elizabeth, the small John leaped in her womb. According to some this leaping is not comparable to the changing place of the foetus, which is experienced by every pregnant woman. Luke uses a particular Greek verb which precisely means "jumping". Wishing to interpret the verb a bit literally, it could be indicated with "dancing", thus excluding a physical phenomenon only. Someone has thought that this 'dance' could be considered as a form of 'homage' which John

renders to Jesus, inaugurating, though not yet born, that attitude of respect and of subjection which will characterize his life: "After me is coming someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals" (Mk 1, 7). One day, John himself will give witness: "it is the bridegroom who has the bride; and yet the bridegroom's friend, who stands there and listens to him, is filled with joy at the bridegroom's voice. This is the joy that I feel and it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow less" (Jn 3, 29-30). Thus Saint Ambrose comments: "Elizabeth was the first one to hear the voice, but John is first to perceive the grace". We find a confirmation of this interpretation in the words themselves of Elizabeth which, repeating the same Greek verb in v. 44. which was already employed in v. 41, says: "The child in my womb leapt for joy". Luke, with these particular details, has wished to evoke the prodigies which took place in the intimacy of Nazareth. It is only now, thanks to the dialogue with an interlocutor, the mystery of the divine maternity leaves aside its secrecy and its individual dimension, to become a notable fact, and object of appreciation and of praise.

The words of Elizabeth, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?" (vv. 42-43). With a Semitic expression which is equivalent to a superlative ("among women"), the Evangelist wishes to attract the attention of the reader on the function of Mary: to be the "Mother of the Lord". And, then, a blessing is reserved for her ("Blessed are you") and a blessed Beatitude. In what does this one consist? It expresses Mary's adherence to the Divine Will. Mary is not only the receiver of a mysterious design which makes her blessed, but also a person who knows how to accept and adhere to God's will. Mary is a creature who believes, because she trusts in a plain, simple word and which she has vested with her "yes" of love. And Elizabeth acknowledges this service of love, identifying her as "blessed as mother and blessed as believer".

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

b) A song of love:

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

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

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

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

Now, according to the Magnificat, the poor have a thousand reasons to rejoice, because God glorifies the anawim (Psalm 149, 4) and humbles the proud. An image taken from the New Testament, which expresses very well the attitude of the poor of the Old Testament, is that of the Publican who with humility beats his breast, while the Pharisee being complacent of his merits is being consumed by his pride (Lk 19, 9-14). Definitely, Mary celebrates all that God has done in her and all that he works in every creature. Joy and gratitude characterize this hymn to salvation which recognizes the greatness of God, but which also makes great the one who sings it.

c) Some question for meditation:

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

3. Oratio

a) Psalm 44 (45)

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

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

b) Final Prayer:

The prayer which follows is a brief meditation on the maternal role of Mary in the life of the believer: "Mary, woman who knows how to rejoice, who knows how to exult, who allows herself to be invaded by the full consolation of the Holy Spirit, teach us to pray so

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

4. Contemplatio

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



Lectio: Thursday, August 16, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,
your Spirit made us your children,
confident to call you Father.
Increase your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 18,21-19,1

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

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

'And so the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet, with the words, "Be patient with me and I will pay the whole sum." And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt.

Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow-servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him, saying, "Pay what you owe me." His fellow-servant fell at his feet and appealed to him, saying, "Be patient with me and I will pay you." But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt.

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

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

Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and he left Galilee and came into the territory of Judea on the far side of the Jordan.

3) Reflection

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

- Matthew 18, 21-22: Forgive seventy times seven! Before the words of Jesus on fraternal correction and reconciliation, Peter asks: "How often must I forgive? Seven times?" Seven is a number which indicates perfection and, in the case of the proposal of Peter, seven is synonymous of always. But Jesus goes beyond. He eliminates all and whatever possible limitation there may be to pardon: "Not seven I tell you, but seventy-seven times". It is as if he would say "Always, NO! Peter. But seventy times seven always!". And this because there is no proportion between God's love for us and our love for our brother. Here we recall the episode of the Old Testament of Lamech: "Lamech says to his wives, Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; listen to what I say: I killed a man for wounding me, a boy for striking me. Sevenfold vengeance for Cain, but seventy-sevenfold for Lamech" (Gn 4, 23-24). The task of the communities is to invert the process of the spiral of violence. In order to clarify his response to Peter, Jesus tells them the parable of pardon without limits.

- Matthew 18, 23-27: The attitude of the master. This parable is an allegory, that is, Jesus speaks about a master, but thinks of God. This explains the enormous contrasts of the

parable. As we will see, in spite that it is a question of daily ordinary things, there is something in this story which does not take place in daily life. In the story which Jesus tells, the master follows the norms of the law or rights of that time. It was his right to take a labourer with all his family and to keep him in prison until he would have paid his debt carrying out his work as a slave. But before the request of the debtor servant, the master forgives the debt. What strikes us is the amount: ten thousand talents! One talent was equal to 35 kg, and so according to the estimate made, ten thousand talents were equal to 350 tons of gold. Even if the debtor and his family would have worked their whole life, they would never have been capable to earn 350 tons of gold. The extreme estimate is made on purpose. Our debt before God is countless and unpayable!

- Matthew 18, 28-31: The attitude of the labourer. As soon as he went out, that servant found a fellow servant as himself who owned him one hundred denarii and, he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him saying: Pay what you owe! This servant owed him one hundred denarii; that is the salary of one hundred days of work. Some have estimated that it was a question of 30 grams of gold. There was no comparison between the two! But this makes us understand the attitude of the labourer: God forgives him 350 tons of gold and he is not capable to forgive 30 grams of gold. Instead of forgiving, he does to the companion what the master could have done with him, but did not do it. He puts in prison his companion according to the norms of the law until he would have paid his debt. This is an inhuman attitude, which also strikes the other companions. Seeing what had happened, the other servants were sad and went to refer to their master everything which had happened. We also would have done the same; we would also have had the same attitude of disapproval.

- Matthew 18, 32-35: The attitude of God “Then the master called that man and said to him: “You wicked servant! I have forgiven you all your debt because you appealed to me. Were you not bound then to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you? And, angry, the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt“. Before God’s love who pardons gratuitously our debt of 350 tons of gold, it is more than fair, than just that we should forgive our brother who has a small debt of 30 grams of gold. God’s forgiveness is without any limit. The only limit for the gratuity of God’s mercy comes from ourselves, from our incapacity to forgive our brothers! (Mt 18, 34). This is what we say and ask for in the Our Father: “Forgive us our offences as we forgive those who offend us” (Mt 6, 12-15).

The community: an alternative space of solidarity and fraternity. The society of the Roman Empire was hard and heartless, without any space for the little ones. They sought some refuge for the heart and did not find it. The Synagogues were very demanding and did not offer a place for them. In the Christian communities, the rigour of some concerning the observance of the Law in the daily life followed the same criteria as society and as the Synagogue. Thus, in the communities, the same divisions which existed in society and in the Synagogue, between rich and poor, dominion and submission, man and woman, race and religion, began to appear. The community instead of being a place of acceptance became a place of condemnation. By uniting the words of

Jesus, Matthew wants to enlighten the journey of the followers of Jesus, in order that the communities may be an alternative place of solidarity and of fraternity. They should be Good News for the poor.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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



Lectio: Friday, August 17, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,
your Spirit made us your children,
confident to call you Father.
Increase your Spirit within us
and bring us to our promised inheritance.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 19,3-12

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

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

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

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

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

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

3) Reflection

- Context. Up to chapter 18 Matthew has shown how the discourses of Jesus have marked the different phases of the progressive constitution and formation of the community of disciples around their Master. Now in chapter 19, 1 this small group withdraws from the territory of Galilee and arrives in the territories of Judaea. The call of Jesus that involves his disciples advances more until the decisive choice: the acceptance or rejection of the person of Jesus. Such a phase takes place along the road that leads to Jerusalem (chapters 19-20), and finally with the arrival in the city and to the Temple (chapters 21-23). All the encounters that Jesus experiences in the course of these chapters take place along this journey from Galilee to Jerusalem.

- The encounter with the Pharisees. Passing through Trans-Jordanian (19, 1) the first encounter is with the Pharisees and the theme of the discussion of Jesus with them becomes a reason for reflection for the group of the disciples. The question of the Pharisees concerns divorce and places Jesus in difficulty, particularly, the more solid and stable reality for every Jewish community. The intervention of the Pharisees wants to accuse Jesus because of his teaching. It is a question of a true process: Matthew considers it as "testing him", "a way of tempting him". The question is really a crucial one: "Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatsoever?" (19, 3). The awkward malicious attempt of the Pharisees to interpret the text of Dt 24, 1 to place Jesus in difficulty does not escape the attention of the reader: "Suppose a man has taken a wife and consummated the marriage, but she has not pleased him and he has found some impropriety of which to accuse her, he has, therefore, made out a writ of divorce for her and handed it to her and then dismissed her from his house". This text had given place, throughout the centuries, to innumerable discussions: to admit divorce for any reason whatsoever; to request a minimum of bad behaviour, a true adultery.

- It is God who unites. Jesus responds to the Pharisees having recourse to Gn 1, 17: 2, 24, which presents the question about the primary will of God, the Creator. The love that unites man to woman, comes from God and because of its origin, it unifies and cannot be separated. If Jesus quotes Gn 2, 24: "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and

becomes attached to his wife and they become one flesh” (19, 5), it is because he wants to underline a particular and absolute principle: it is the creating will of God that unites man and woman. When a man and a woman unite together in marriage, it is God who unites them; the term “coniugi” - couple – comes from the verb joined together, to unite, that is to say, that the joining together of the two partners sexually is the effect of the creative word of God. The response of Jesus to the Pharisees reaches its summit: marriage is indissoluble from its original constitution. Jesus continues this time drawing from Mt 2, 13-16: to repudiate the wife is to break the covenant with God and according to the prophets this covenant has to be lived, above all, by the spouses in their conjugal union (Ho 1-3; Is 1, 21-26; Jr 2, 2; 3, 1.6-12; Ez 16; 23; Is 54, 6-10; 60-62). The response of Jesus appears as a contradiction to the Law of Moses which grants the possibility to grant a writ of divorce. To motivate his response Jesus reminds the Pharisees: if Moses gave this possibility it is because you were so hardhearted (v. 8), more concrete, because of your indocility to the Word of God. The Law of Gn 1, 26; 2, 24 had never been modified, but Moses was obliged to adapt it to an attitude of indocility. The first marriage was not annulled by adultery. To contemporary man and particularly, to the ecclesial community the word of Jesus clearly says that there should be no divorces; and, just the same, we see that there are; in pastoral life the divorced persons are accepted, to whom the possibility of entering into the Kingdom is always open. The reaction of the disciples is immediate: “If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry” (v. 10). The response of Jesus continues to sustain the indissolubility of matrimony, impossible for the human mentality but possible for God. The eunuch of whom Jesus speaks is not the one who is unable to generate but the one, who separated from his wife, continues to live in continence, he remains faithful to the first conjugal bond: he is an eunuch as regards all other women.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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



Lectio: Saturday, August 18, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

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

2) Gospel Reading

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

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today is very brief; only three verses. The Gospel describes how Jesus accepts the children.
- Matthew 19, 13: *The attitude of the disciples concerning the children.* People brought little children to Jesus, for him to lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples scolded the mothers. Why? Perhaps because this was according to the severe norms of the Law of purity, the small children in the conditions in which they lived were considered unclean, impure. If they touched Jesus, he would become impure. Because of this, it was important to avoid that they should get close to him and that they touch him. Because it already had happened one time, when a leper touched Jesus. Jesus became unclean, impure and could no longer enter the city. He had to remain in deserted places (Mk 1, 4-45).
- Matthew 19, 14-15: *The attitude of Jesus: he accepts and defends the life of the children.* Jesus reproved the disciples and said: *Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs*". Jesus does not care about transgressing the norms which prevent fraternity and acceptance to be given to the little ones. The new experience of God, the Father has marked the life of Jesus and gives him new eyes to perceive and to value the relationship between persons. Jesus gets on the side of the little ones, of the excluded and assumes their defence. It impresses when we see together everything which the Bible says regarding the attitudes of Jesus in defence of the life of the children, of the little ones:
 - a) *To give thanks for the Kingdom present in the little ones.* Jesus' joy is great when he sees that the children, the little ones understand the things of the Kingdom which he

announced to the people. “Father, I thank you!” (Mt 11, 25-26) Jesus recognizes that the little ones understand more about the things of the Kingdom, than the doctors!

b) To defend the right to shout or cry out. When Jesus, entered the Temple, he upset the tables of the money changers, and the children were those who shouted: “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Mt 21, 15). Criticized by the high priests and the Scribes, Jesus defends them and in his defence he recalls the Scriptures (Mt 21, 16).

c) To identify oneself with the little ones. Jesus embraces the little ones and identifies himself with them. Anyone who accepts a little one accepts Jesus (Mk 9, 37). “In so far as you have done it to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me”. (Mt 25, 40).

d) To accept and not to scandalize. One of the hardest words of Jesus is against those who are a cause of *scandal* for the little ones, that is, who are the cause why the little ones no longer believe in God. Because of this, it would have been better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around their neck (Lk 17, 1-2; Mt 18, 5-7). Jesus condemns the system, both the political one as well as the religious one, which is the reason why the little ones, the humble people, lose faith in God.

e) To become like children. Jesus asks his disciples to become like children and to accept the Kingdom as children do. Without this, it is impossible to enter into the Kingdom (Lk 9,46-48). It indicates that the children are professors of the adults. That was not normal. We are accustomed to the contrary.

f) To accept and to touch. (Today’s Gospel). The mothers with their children who get close to Jesus to ask him to bless the children. The Apostles react and drive them away. Jesus corrects the adults and accepts the mothers with the children. He *touches* the children and embraces them. “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them!” (Mk 10, 13-16; Mt 19, 13-15). According to the norms of that time, both the mothers and their small children, practically, lived in a state of legal impurity. Jesus does not allow himself to be drawn by this.

g) To accept and to take care. Many are the children and the young people whom he accepts, takes care of and rises from the dead: the daughter of Jairus, who was 12 years old (Mk 5, 41-42), the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mk 7, 29-30), the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7, 14-15), the epileptic child (Mk 9, 25-26), the son of the Centurion (Lk 7, 9-10), the son of the public officer (Jn 4,50), the boy with five loaves of bread and two fishes (Jn 6,9).

4) Personal questions

- Children: what have you learnt from children throughout the years of your life? And what do children learn about God, about Jesus and his life, from you?
- Which is the image of Jesus which I give to children? A severe God, a good God, distant or absent?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, give me back the joy of your salvation,

sustain in me a generous spirit.
I shall teach the wicked your paths,
and sinners will return to you. (Ps 51,12-13)



Lectio: Sunday, August 19, 2012

Jesus, the bread of life John 6:51-58

Ordinary Time

Let us invoke the presence of God

Shaddai, God of the mountain,
You who make of our fragile life
the rock of your dwelling place,
lead our mind
to strike the rock of the desert,
so that water may gush to quench our thirst.
May the poverty of our feelings
cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night
and may it open our heart to hear the echo of silence
until the dawn,
wrapping us with the light of the new morning,
may bring us,
with the spent embers of the fire of the shepherds of the Absolute
who have kept vigil for us close to the divine Master,
the flavour of the holy memory.

1. LECTIO

a) The text:

51 I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.' 52 Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' 53 Jesus replied to them: In all truth I tell you, if



you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person. 57 As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me. 58 This is the bread which has come down from heaven; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.

b) A moment of silence:

Let us allow the voice of the Word to resonate within us.

2. Meditatio

a) Some questions:

- I am the bread of life... Jesus, flesh and blood, bread and wine. These words work a change on the altar, as Augustine says: «If you take away the words, all you have is bread and wine; add the words and it becomes something else. This something else is the body and blood of Christ. Take the words away, all you have is bread and wine; add the words and they become sacrament». How important is the word of God for me? If the word is pronounced over my flesh can it make me become bread for the world?

b) Let us enter into the text:

v. 51. "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world". John's Gospel does not recount the institution of the Eucharist, but rather the meaning it assumes in the life of the Christian community. The symbolism of the washing of the feet and the new commandment (Jn 13:1-35) point to the bread broken and the wine poured. The theological content is the same as that in the synoptic Gospels. John's ritual tradition can, however, be found in the "eucharistic discourse" that follows the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves (Jn 6:26-65). This text brings to light the deep meaning of Christ's existence given for the world, a gift that is the source of life and that leads to a deep communion in the new commandment of membership. The reference to the ancient miracle of the manna explains the paschal symbolism where the idea of death is taken up and overcome by life: «Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die» (Jn 6:49-50). *The bread of heaven* (cfr Es 16; Jn 6:31-32) figuratively or in reality is not meant so much for the individual as for the community of believers, even though everyone is called to partake personally of the food given for all. Anyone who eats the living bread will not die: the food of the revelation is the place where life never ends. From the bread, John goes on to use another expression to point to the body: *sarx*. In the Bible this word denotes a human person in his or her fragile and weak reality before God, and in John it denotes the human reality of the divine Word made man (Jn 1:14a): the bread is identified with the very flesh of Jesus. Here it is not a question of

metaphorical bread, that is of the revelation of Christ in the world, but of the eucharistic bread. While revelation, that is *the bread of life* identified with the person of Jesus (Jn 6:35), is the gift of the Father (the verb *to give* is used in the present, v. 32), the eucharistic bread, that is the body of Jesus will be offered by him through his death on the cross prefigured in the consecration of the bread and wine at the supper: *«and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world»* (Jn 6:51).

v. 52. Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’. Here begins the drama of a way of thinking that stops at the threshold of the visible and material and dares not cross the veil of the mystery. This is the scandal of those who believe without believing... of those who pretend to know but do not know. Flesh to eat: the celebration of the Passover, the perennial rite that will go on from generation to generation, a feast for the Lord and a memorial (cfr Es 12:14), whose meaning is Christ. Jesus’ invitation to do what he has done “in memory” of him, is paralleled in the words of Moses when he prescribes the paschal anamnesis: *“This day must be commemorated by you, and you must keep it as a feast ”* (Ex 12,14). Now, we know that for the Jews the celebration of the Passover was not just a remembrance of a past event, but also its ritualisation, in the sense that God was ready to offer again to his people the salvation needed in new and different circumstances. Thus the past intruded into the present, leavening by its saving power. In the same way the eucharistic sacrifice “will be able” to give to the centuries *“flesh to eat”*.

vv. 53. Jesus said: “In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you”. John, like the synoptic Gospels, uses various expressions when speaking of Christ’s giving of himself in death, not wishing thus to convey a separation of parts, but the totality of the person given: the spiritualised corporeity of the risen Christ, fully permeated by the Holy Spirit in the Paschal event, will become source of life for all believers, especially through the Eucharist, that unites closely each one of them with the glorified Christ seated at the right hand of the Father, and making each one partake of his own divine life. John does not mention bread and wine, but directly what is signified by them: flesh to eat because Christ is presence that nourishes and blood to drink – a sacrilegious act for the Jews – because Christ is the sacrificed lamb. The sacramental liturgical character is here evident: Jesus insists on the reality of the flesh and of the blood referring to his death, because in the act of sacrificing the sacrificial victims the flesh became separated from the blood.

54. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. The Passover celebrated by Jesus, the Jew, and by the early Christians acquires a new soul: that of the resurrection of Christ, the final exodus of perfect and full freedom (Jn 19: 31-37), which in the Eucharist finds the new memorial, symbol of the Bread of life that sustains during the journey in the desert, sacrifice and presence that sustains the people of God, the Church, that, having crossed the waters of regeneration, will not tire of making memory, as he said, (Lk 22:19; 1Cor 11:24) until the eternal Passover. Attracted and penetrated by the presence of the Word made flesh, Christians will live their Pesach throughout history, the passage from the slavery of sin to

the freedom of children of God. In conforming themselves to Christ, they will be able to proclaim the wonderful works of his admirable light, offering the eucharist of his corporeity: living sacrifice, holy and pleasing in a spiritual cult (Rom 12:1) that befits the people of his victory, a chosen race, a royal priesthood (cfr 1Pt 2:9).

vv. 55-56. *For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person.* This promise of the life of Christ influences greatly the life of believers: «*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person*» (Jn 6:56). The communion of life that Jesus has with the Father is offered to all who eat the sacrificed body of Christ. This is not to be understood as the magic concession of a sacramental food that automatically confers eternal life to those who eat it. This giving of the flesh and blood needs explanation to make it intelligible and to provide the necessary understanding of God's action, it needs faith on the part of those who take part in the eucharistic banquet, and it needs first God's action, that of his Spirit, without which there can be no listening or faith.

v. 57. *As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me.* The stress is not placed on the cult as the peak and foundation of love, but on the unity of the body of Christ living and working within the community. There is no liturgy without life. «A Eucharist without fraternal love is equal to self condemnation, because the body of Christ, that is the community, is despised». Indeed, in the eucharistic liturgy the past, present and future of the history of salvation find an efficient symbol for the Christian community, which expresses but never substitutes for the experience of faith that must always be present in history. Through the inseparable Supper and Cross, the people of God have come into the ancient promises, the true land across the sea, across the desert, across the river, a land of the milk and honey, of freedom capable of obedience. All the great ancient plans find in this hour (cfr Jn 17:1) their fulfilment; from the promise made to Abraham (Gn 17:1-8) to the Passover of the Exodus (Ex 12:1-51). This is a decisive moment that gathers the whole past of the people (cfr DV 4) and the first most noble Eucharist ever celebrated of the new covenant is offered to the Father: the fruitful fulfilment of all expectations on the altar of the cross.

v. 58. *"This is the bread which has come down from heaven; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever"*. When Jesus pronounces the words: «This is my body», and, «This is my blood», he establishes a real and objective relationship between those material elements and the mystery of his death, which finds its crowning glory in the resurrection. These are creative words of a new situation with common elements in human experience, words that will always and truly realise the mysterious presence of the living Christ. The elements chosen were meant to be and are symbol and instrument at the same time. The element of bread, which because of its relationship to life has by itself an eschatological significance (cfr Lk 14:15), is easily seen as an indispensable food and a universal means of sharing. The element of wine, because of its natural symbolism, connotes the fullness of life and the expansion of the joy of a person (cfr Ps 103:15). In the existential Semite view, the effectiveness of the system of signs is taken for granted. It makes distinctions that make it

possible to comprehend mysteries by faith where the senses fail. By referring and going back to the desert and the manna, this different “Pasch”, the material object and the sign come together, but concupiscence, which is from the flesh, transforms the sign into matter, while the desire, which is from the spirit, transforms the matter into sign» (P. Beauchamp, *L'uno e l'altro testamento*, Paideia Ed., Brescia 1985, p. 54). In fact, the manna from heaven comes from God in an invisible form and thus lacks identity. This lack of evidence is seen clearly in the etymology of the word “manna”: «What is it?» (Ex 16:15). This says what it is, a name given to almost nothing, a sign and not a thing, a signed sign. It is proven in the moment it disappears, because one is tempted to remedy that which disappears, to make provision of manna so as not to run short. This is the price of what disappears to the senses. The alternation is the time of the desert. The manna is bread that obeys the laws of him who gives it. The law, that the manna signifies, is to expect everything from him: what is required is belief. Because of its lack of substance, manna creates the desire for more solid support; but in the place called “sepulchres of greed” the thing, deprived of sign, brings death (Nm 11:34). In the desert that which urges people to go ahead with confidence is this seeing the manna either as a sign or as a thing in itself and thus either believe or die.

c) Let us meditate:

Jesus fulfils the true Pesach of human history: «Before the festival of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end. While they were at supper...» (Jn 13:,1). To pass over: the new Pasch is precisely this passing over of Christ from this world to the Father through the blood of his sacrifice. The Eucharist is the memorial, bread of the desert and saving presence, covenant of fidelity and communion written in the person of the Word. The history of salvation that for Israel is made up of events, names and places, leads to a reflection of faith over an experience of life that makes the name of Yahweh not just one name among many but the only Name. Everything begins from an encounter, a dialogical event between God and humanity that translates into a covenant of alliance, old and new. The sea of rushes is the last frontier of slavery and beyond it lies the spacious territory of freedom. In this watery sepulchre the old body of Israel is laid to rest and the new and free Israel rises. This is where Israel's identity is born. Every time that this passage through the waters of birth is evoked more than just as a historical event to be remembered, the eschatological event will arise, capable of a divine fullness that becomes present, sacramental sign of God's faithful initiative today for the new generations, in expectation of the final liberation that the Lord will provide. It is the gasp of a people that on the eve of the Pesach finds its deep identity individually and as a people, the eve when the son of the living God gives himself wholly in the form of food and drink.

3. Oratio

Psalm 116

What return can I make to Yahweh

for his generosity to me?
I shall take up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of Yahweh.
I shall fulfil my vows to Yahweh,
witnessed by all his people.
Costly in Yahweh's sight
is the death of his faithful.
I beg you, Yahweh!
I am your servant,
I am your servant
and my mother was your servant;
you have undone my fetters.
I shall offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of Yahweh.
I shall fulfil my vows to Yahweh,
witnessed by all his people,
in the courts of the house of Yahweh,
in your very heart, Jerusalem.

4. Contemplatio

When we think of you, Lord, we do not recall events that took place and were fulfilled long ago, but we come into contact with your reality ever present and alive, we see your constant passage among us. You intervene in our life to restore our likeness to you, so that we may not be disfigured by the stones of the law, but may find our fullest expression in your face as Father, revealed in the face of a man, Jesus, the promise of fidelity and love even unto death. It is not necessary at all to go out of ordinary existence so as to meet you because the care you take of your creatures unfolds over our human affairs like a scroll in the proximity of an experience. You, Creator of heaven and earth, indeed do hide in the folds of history and, even though at first obscurely and implicitly, you allow us to meet you in your transcendence, which is never absent from ordinary events. When our reflection on life brings us to an acknowledgement of your liberating presence, this meeting can only be celebrated, sung, expressed by sacred symbols, relived festively in great joy. Thus we do not come to you alone, but as a people of the covenant. The wonder of your presence is always purely gratuitous: in the members of the Church, where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus (Mt 18:20), in the pages of Sacred Scripture, in evangelical preaching, in the poor and suffering (Mt 25:40), in the sacramental actions of ordained ministers. But it is in the eucharistic sacrifice that your presence becomes real; in the Body and Blood there is the whole of the humanity and divinity of the risen Lord, present substantially.



Lectio: Monday, August 20, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 19,16-22

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

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

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today speaks to us about a young man who asks Jesus which is the way to eternal life. Jesus indicates to him the way of poverty. The young man does not accept the proposal of Jesus because he is very rich. A rich person is protected by the security of the riches which he possesses. He has difficulty to open the hand of his security. Attached to the advantages of his goods, he lives concerned to defend his own interests. A poor person does not have this concern. But there are some poor people who have the mentality of the rich. Many times, the desire for riches creates in them a great dependence and renders the poor, slaves of consumerism, because they seek riches everywhere. They no longer have time to dedicate themselves to the service of neighbour.
- Matthew 19, 16-19: The commandments and eternal life. A person approaches Jesus and asks him: "Master, what good deed should I do to possess eternal life?" Some

manuscripts say that it was a young man. Jesus responds abruptly: “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one alone who is good!” Then he responds to the question and says: “If you wish to enter into life keep the commandments”. The young rich man reacts and asks: “Which commandments?” Jesus very kindly enumerates the commandments which the young man already knew: “You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honour father and mother, love your neighbour as yourself”. The response of Jesus is very significant. The young man had asked what to do to obtain eternal life. He wanted to live close to God! But Jesus recalls only the commandments which refer to respect for the life close to others! He does not mention the first three commandments which define the relationship with God. According to Jesus, we will be well with God only if we are well with our neighbour. It is not worth it to deceive oneself. The door to reach God is our neighbour.

In Mark, the question of the young man is different: “Good Master what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answers: “Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God alone.” (Mk 10, 17-18). Jesus deviates the attention from himself toward God, because what is important is to do God’s will, to reveal the project of the Father.

- Matthew 19, 20: What does it serve to observe the commandments? The young man responds: “I have always observed all these things. What more do I need to do?” What follows is strange. The young man wanted to know the way which leads to eternal life. Now, the way of eternal life was and continues to be: to do God’s will, expressed in the commandments. In other words, the young man observed the commandments without knowing for what purpose. If he had known it he would not have asked the question. It is like for many Catholics who do not know why they are Catholics. “I was born a Catholic and this is why I am Catholic!” It is as if was a custom!

- Matthew 19, 21-22: The proposal of Jesus and the response of the young man. Jesus answers: “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven; then come follow me”. But on hearing these words the young man went away very sad because he was very rich. The observance of the commandments is only the first degree of a stairway that goes beyond, much farther and much higher. Jesus asks more! The observance of the commandments prepares the persons to be able to reach the point of giving oneself completely to the neighbour. Mark says that Jesus looked at the young man with love (Mk 10, 21). Jesus asks for very much, but he asks for it with much love. The young man did not accept the proposal of Jesus and goes away, “because he was very rich”.

- Jesus and the option for the poor. A two-fold slavery marked the situation of the people at the time of Jesus: the slavery of the politics of Herod, supported by the Roman Empire and maintained by a whole system which was well organized for exploitation and repression, and the slavery of the official religion, maintained by the religious authority of the time. For this reason the clan, the families, the community, were disintegrating and the majority of the people were excluded, marginalized, homeless, without either a religion or a society. So, for this reason, there were diverse movements which, like Jesus, tried to build up life in the communities: Essens, Pharisees and later on, the Zelots. But in

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

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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



Lectio: Tuesday, August 21, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,

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

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 19,23-30

Jesus said to his disciples, 'In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven.'

When the disciples heard this they were astonished. 'Who can be saved, then?' they said. Jesus gazed at them. 'By human resources', he told them, 'this is impossible; for God everything is possible.'

Then Peter answered and said, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What are we to have, then?'

Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, when everything is made new again and the Son of man is seated on his throne of glory, you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much, and also inherit eternal life.

'Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today is the immediate continuation of yesterday's Gospel. It gives the commentary of Jesus regarding the negative reaction of the young rich man.
- Matthew 19, 23-24: The camel and the eye of the needle. After the young man left, Jesus comments his decision and says: "In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven". Two observations concerning this affirmation of Jesus: a) the proverb of the camel and of the eye of the needle was used to say that something was impossible and unthinkable, humanly speaking. b) The expression "that someone rich enters the kingdom of Heaven", is a question, in the first place, not of entrance into Heaven after death, but of entering into the community around Jesus. And even now this is true. It is very difficult for the rich to enter and to feel at home in the communities which try to live the Gospel according to the demands of Jesus and which try to be open to the poor, the migrants and to those excluded by society.
- Matthew 19, 25-26: The fear of the disciples. The young man had observed the commandments, but without understanding the reason for the observance. Something similar was happening with the disciples. When Jesus called them, they did exactly the

same thing which Jesus had asked the young man: they left everything and followed Jesus (Mt 4, 20.22). But they were astonished at this affirmation of Jesus concerning the impossibility for someone rich to enter the Kingdom of God. This was a sign that they had not understood well the response which Jesus had given to the young rich man: “Go, sell all you possess, give it to the poor and then come and follow me!” Because if they had understood, they would not have remained so surprised by the requests of Jesus. When wealth or the desire for riches occupies the heart and the look, the person does not succeed to understand the sense of life and of the Gospel. God alone can help! “This is impossible for man, but for God all is possible!” "

- Matthew 19, 27: The question of Peter. The background of the misunderstanding of the disciples appears in the question asked by Peter: “Look, we have left everything and have followed you. What are we to have then?” In spite of the beautiful generosity of abandoning everything, they still have the old mentality. They have abandoned everything in order to get something in exchange. They still had not understood well the sense of service and of gratuity.

- Matthew 19, 28-30: The response of Jesus. "In truth I tell you, when everything is made new again and the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much and also inherit eternal life. Many, who are first, will be last, and the last, first". In this response, Jesus describes the new world, the foundation of which had been placed by his work and that of the disciples. Jesus stresses three important points: (a) The disciples will sit on twelve thrones next to Jesus to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (cfr. Rev 4, 4). (b) In exchange they will receive many things which they had abandoned: houses, brothers, sisters, mother, children land and will inherit eternal life. (c) The future world will be the reverse of the present world. There, the last ones will be the first ones and the first ones will be the last ones. The community around Jesus is the seed and the manifestation of this new world. Up until now the small community of the poor continues to be the seed and manifestation of the Kingdom.

- Every time that in the history of the people of the Bible a new movement arises to renew the Covenant, it begins by re-establishing the rights of the poor, of the excluded. Without that, the Covenant will not be reconstructed. This is the sense and the reason for the insertion and the mission of the community of Jesus, in the midst of the poor. It draws from the roots and it inaugurates the New Covenant.

4) Personal questions

- To abandon houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children fields, for the sake of Jesus: how does this take place in your life? What have you already received in exchange?

- Today, the majority of poor countries is not of a Christian religion, while the majority of the rich countries are. How can the saying be applied today that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle?

5) Concluding Prayer

Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death
I should fear no danger,
for you Lord, are at my side.
Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me. (Ps 23,4)



Lectio: Wednesday, August 22, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
may we love you in all things and above all things
and reach the joy you have prepared for us
beyond all our imagining.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 20,1-16a

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

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

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

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

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

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents a parable which is found only in Matthew's Gospel. It is not in the other Gospels. Like in all parables, Jesus tells a story about daily elements, daily things of the life of the people. He presents a picture of the social situation of his time, in which the auditors recognize themselves. But, at the same time, in the story of this parable, there are things which never take place in the reality of the life of the people. And this, because speaking about the master, Jesus thinks about God, about his Father. And this is why in the story of the parable; the master does things which are surprising which never take place in the daily life of the auditors. But, in this strange attitude of the master, it is necessary to find the key to understand the message of the parable.
- Matthew 20, 1-7: The five times that the landowner goes out to look for labourers. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard". This is how the story begins and it speaks for itself and does not need too many comments. In what follows, the landowner goes out four times to call other workers to go and work in his vineyard. Jesus refers to the terrible lack of work at that time. Now some details of the story: (a) the landowner himself goes out personally five times to contract workers. (b) When he contracts the workers, he fixes the salary only for the first group: one denarius a day. To those of nine o'clock in the morning he says: I will give you what is just, fair. With the others, he does not fix anything. He contracted them only to work in the vineyard. (c) At the end of the day, when it was the time to pay the workers, the landowners orders the administrator to carry out this service.
- Matthew 20, 8-10: The strange way of fixing the accounts at the end of the day. When it was evening, the landowner of the vineyard told his administrator: Call the workers and pay them, beginning from the last ones to the first ones. Here, at the time of drawing the accounts, something strange takes place, which does not happen in normal life. It seems that things are inverted. The administrator begins to pay those who were contracted just an hour before. The salary is the same for all: one denarius as it was agreed with the first ones who were contracted at the beginning of the day. When the first came, they expected to get more but they too received one denarius each. Why does the landowner act like that? Would you do the same? It is precisely in this surprising gesture of the landowner that the key of understanding this parable is hidden.
- Matthew 20, 11-12: The normal reaction of the workers before the strange attitude of the landowner. The last ones also receive their salary as those who were contracted first. The story says that these began to grumble against the landowner and said: "The men who came last have done only one hour and you have treated them the same as us, though

we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat". This is the normal reaction of a good sense. I think that all of us would have had the same reaction and would have said the same thing to the landowner. Would we have not?

- Matthew 20, 13-16: The surprising explanation of the landowner who gives the key of the parable. The response of the landowner is the following: "My friend, I am not being unjust to you. Did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you; have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?" These words give the key which explains the attitude of the landowner and indicates the message which Jesus wants to communicate to us: (a) The landowner was not unjust, because he acts according to what he had agreed with the first group of workers: one denarius a day. (b) It is the sovereign decision of the landowner to give to the last ones the same amount that he had agreed upon with those of the first hour. These do not have the right to complain and claim anything. (c) Acting with justice, the landowner has the right to do the good that he wants with the things that belong to him. The worker, on his part has this same right. (d) The last question touches on the central point: Why should you be envious because I am generous? God is different and his thoughts are not our thoughts (Is 55, 8-9).

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

4) Personal questions

- Those of the eleventh hour arrive, they have advantages and receive priority in regard to entrance into the Kingdom of God. When you wait in line for two hours, and a person arrives, and without saying anything she places herself before you. Would you accept this? Can these two situations be compared?

- God's action surpasses our calculations and our human way of acting. He surprises us and some times is uncomfortable. Has this happened to you in your life? What lessons have you drawn from this?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

I make my home in the house of Yahweh

for all time to come. (Ps 23,6)



Lectio: Thursday, August 23, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 22,1-14

Jesus began to speak to them in parables once again, "The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come. Next he sent some more servants with the words, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, my banquet is all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding." But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them. The king was furious. He despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the main crossroads and invite everyone you can find to come to the wedding."

So these servants went out onto the roads and collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. When the king came in to look at the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And the man was silent. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

For many are invited but not all are chosen.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the parable of the banquet which we also find in the Gospel of Matthew and of Luke, but with significant differences, which result from the point of view of each Evangelist. The background which leads both Evangelists to repeat this parable is the same. In the communities of the first Christians, both those of Matthew and those of Luke, the problem of living together between the converted Jews and the converted pagans, continued to be very alive. The Jews had ancient norms which prevented them from eating together with the pagans. Even entering into the Christian

communities, many Jews kept the ancient custom of not sitting at the same table with the pagans. Thus, Peter had conflicts in the communities of Jerusalem, because he had entered the house of Cornelius, a pagan, and for having eaten together with him (Ac 11, 3). This same problem existed, though in a diverse way, in the communities of Luke and of Matthew. In Luke's community, in spite of the difference in race, of class and of gender, they had a great ideal of sharing and of communion (Ac 2, 42; 4, 32; 5, 12). For this reason, in Luke's Gospel (Lk 14, 15-24), the parable insists on the invitation addressed to all. The master of the feast, angry and upset because the first guests, who were invited, did not arrive, sends his servants to call the poor, the cripple, the blind, and invites them to participate in the banquet. But there is still place. Then, the master of the feast orders that all be invited, until his house is full. In Matthew's Gospel, the first part of the parable, (Mt 22, 1-10) has the same objective as that of Luke's Gospel. It succeeds in saying that the master of the feast orders to let the "good and the bad" enter (Mt 22, 10). But at the end, he adds another parable (Mt 22, 11-14) concerning the wedding garment, which insists on that which is specific of the Jews, the need of purity in order to be able to present oneself before God.

- Matthew 22, 1- 2: The invitation addressed to all. Some manuscripts say that the parable was told for the chief priests and for the elders of the People. This affirmation can serve even as a key for the reading, because it helps one to understand some strange points which appear in the story which Jesus is telling. The parable begins like this: "The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding". This initial affirmation recalls the most profound hope: the desire of the people to be with God always. Several times the Gospel refers to this hope, suggesting that Jesus, the son of the King, is the bridegroom who comes to prepare the wedding (Mk 2, 19); Rev 21, 2; 19, 9).

- Matthew 22, 3-6: The invited guests do not want to come. The king invites in a more insisting way, but the guests do not want to come. "But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business; and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them". In Luke what prevents them from accepting the invitation are the duties of daily life. The first one says: "I have bought a piece of land and must go to see it." The second one: "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!" (cf. Lk 14, 18-20). According to the norms and customs of the time, those persons had the right and even the duty not to accept the invitation they had received (cf. Dt 20, 5-7).

- Matthew 22 7: An incomprehensible war! The reaction of the king before the refusal is surprising. "Then the king was furious and he despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town". How is such a violent reaction to be interpreted? The parable was told for the chief priests and for the elders of the people (Mt 22, 1), for those responsible for the nations. Many times, Jesus had spoken to them about the need for conversion. He even shed tears over the city of Jerusalem and said: "If you too had only recognized on that 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 round 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". (Lk 19, 41-44). The violent reaction of the king in the parable probably refers to the fact of the prevision of Jesus. Forty years later, Jerusalem was destroyed (Lk 19, 41-44; 21, 6;).

- Matthew 22, 8-10: The banquet was not cancelled. For the third time, the king invites the people. He tells his servants: "The wedding banquet is ready, but those invited were unworthy; go to the main crossroads and invite everyone you can find to come to the wedding.

Going out on the streets, those servants collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests." The bad who were excluded because they were considered to be impure from participation in the worship with the Jews, are now invited, specifically, by the king to participate in the feast. In the context of that time, the bad were the pagans. They also, are invited to participate in the wedding feast.

- Matthew 22, 11-14: The wedding garment. These verses tell us that the king went into the wedding hall and saw someone who was not wearing a wedding garment. And the king asked: "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And he was silent. The story says that the man was bound hands and feet and thrown into the darkness outside. And the story concludes: "Many are invited but not all are chosen". Some scholars think that it is a question of a second parable which was added to lessen the impression which one has after the first parable, which speaks about "the good and the bad" who enter into the feast (Mt 22, 10). Even if one admits that it is not the observance of the Law which gives us salvation, but rather faith in the gratuitous love of God, that, in no way, diminishes the need for purity of heart as a condition to be able to appear before God.

4) Personal questions

- Who are the persons who are normally invited to our feasts? Why? Who are the persons who are not invited to our feasts? Why?
- Which are the reasons which today prevent many persons from participation in society and in the Church? Which are some of the reasons that persons give to exclude themselves from the duty to participate in the community? Are those reasons just?

5) Concluding Prayer

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



Lectio: Friday, August 24, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what you promise
make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - John 1,45-51

The next day, Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?' Philip replied, 'Come and see.'

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming he said of him, 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception.' Nathanael asked, 'How do you know me?' Jesus replied, 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree.' Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.' Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.' And then he added, 'In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man.'

3) Reflection

- Jesus returned to Galilee. He met Philip and called him telling him: "Follow me!" The purpose of the call is always the same: "to follow Jesus". The first Christians sought to preserve the names of the first disciples, and of some they even kept their family names and the name of their place of origin. Philip, Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida (Jn 1, 44). Nathanael was from Cana. Today many forget the names of the persons who were at the origin of their communities. To remember the names is a way of preserving the identity.
- Philip meets Nathanael and speaks to him about Jesus: "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth". Jesus is the one to whom all the history of the Old Testament refers.
- Nathanael asks: "From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?" Probably, even in his question there was some of the rivalry which existed among the small villages of the same region: Cana and Nazareth. Besides, according to the official teaching of the

Scribes, the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, in Judah. He could not come from Nazareth in Galilee (Jn 7, 41-42). Andrew gives the same answer which Jesus had given to the other two disciples: “Come and see for yourself!” It is not by imposing, but rather by seeing that persons are convinced. Once again the same way: to meet, to experience, to share, to witness, to lead toward Jesus!

- Jesus sees Nathanael and says: “Truly, he is an Israelite in whom there is no deception”. And affirms that he already knew him when he was under the fig tree. How could Nathanael be an “authentic or true Israelite” if he did not accept Jesus as the Messiah? Nathanael “was under the fig tree”. The fig tree was the symbol of Israel (cf. Mi 4, 4; Zc 3, 10; 1 Kg 5,5). An authentic Israelite is the one who knows how to detach himself from his own ideas when he perceives that they are not in agreement with God’s project. The Israelite who is not ready to bring about this conversion is neither authentic nor honest. Nathanael is authentic. He was waiting for the Messiah according to the official teaching of the time (Jn 7, 41-42.52). This is why at the beginning, he did not accept a Messiah coming from Nazareth. But the encounter with Jesus helped him to understand that God’s project is not always as people imagine or desire that it be. He recognizes, acknowledges his deception or mistake, he changes his idea, accepts God as Messiah and confesses: “Rabi, you are the Son of God: you are the King of Israel !” The confession of Nathanael is only at the beginning: The one who will be faithful will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man. He will experience that Jesus is the new bond of union between God and us, human beings. It is the dream of Jacob which has become a reality (Gen 28, 10-22).

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

Upright in all that he does,

Yahweh acts only in faithful love. (Ps 145,17)



Lectio: Saturday, August 25, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

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

beyond all our imagining.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 23,1-12

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

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel is part of a long criticism of Jesus against the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23, 1-39). Luke and Mark mention only a few lines of this criticism against the religious heads of the time. It is only the Gospel of Matthew which has a longer presentation of this. This very severe text makes us foresee the polemics which existed in the communities of Matthew with the communities of the Jews of Galilee and Syria of that time.
- In reading this text, which is strongly contrary to the one of the Pharisees, we have to be very attentive so as not to be unjust against the Jewish People. We Christians, for centuries, have had attitudes against the Jews and, for this reason, against the Christians. What is important in meditating these texts is to discover their objective. Jesus condemns the lack of coherence and of sincerity in the relationship with God and with the neighbour. He is speaking about hypocrisy, that of yesterday as well as that of today, of our hypocrisy!
- Matthew 23, 1-3: *The basic error: they say, but they do not do.* Jesus addresses himself to the multitude and to the disciples and criticizes the Scribes and the Pharisees. The reason for attacking them is the incoherence between their words and their acts. They speak but they do not do. Jesus recognizes the authority and the knowledge of the Scribes "*The Scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses! You must, therefore, do and observe what they tell you, but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach*".

- Matthew 23, 4-7: *The fundamental error is manifested in diverse ways.* The fundamental error is incoherence: “*They say, but they do not do*”. Jesus enumerates the diverse points which reveal this incoherence. Some Scribes and Pharisees imposed heavy laws upon the people. They knew the Laws well, but they did not practise them; neither did they use their knowledge to lessen the weight imposed upon the people. They did everything possible to be seen and praised, they wore special tunics for prayer and they liked the first places and to be greeted in the public squares. They wanted to be called “Teacher”. They represented a type of community which maintained, legitimized and nourished the difference of social classes. It legitimized the privileges of the great and the inferior position of the little ones. Now, if there is something which displeases Jesus, it is appearances which deceive.
- Matthew 23, 8-12: *How to overcome the fundamental error.* How should a Christian community be? All the community functions should be assumed as a service: “*The greatest among you must be your servant!*” You should call nobody Teacher (Rabbi), nor Father, nor Guide; because the community of Jesus has to maintain, legitimize and nourish not the differences, but rather the fraternal spirit. This is the fundamental Law: “*You are all brothers and sisters!*” The fraternal spirit comes from the experience that Jesus is Father, and makes of all of us brothers and sisters. “*Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.*”
- *The group of the Pharisees!* The group of the Pharisees was born in the II century before Christ, with the proposal of a more perfect observance of the Law of God, especially regarding the prescriptions on purity. They were more open to novelty than the Sadducees. For example, they accepted faith in the Resurrection and faith in the angels, something which the Sadducees did not accept. The life of the Pharisees was an exemplary witness: they prayed and studied the Law during eight hours a day; they worked eight hours in order to be able to survive; they dedicated eight hours to rest. This is the reason why people respected them very much. And in this way, they helped people to keep their own identity and not to lose it, in the course of centuries.
- *The so-called Pharisaic mentality.* With time, the Pharisees took hold of power and no longer listened to the appeals of the people, nor did they allow them to speak. The word “*Pharisee*” means “*separated*”. Their observance was so strict and rigorous that they separated themselves from the rest of the people. This is why they were called “*separated*”. From this comes the expression “*pharisaic mentality*”. It is typical of the persons who think to obtain justice through the rigid and rigorous observance of the Law. Generally, they are persons who are afraid, who do not have the courage to assume the risk of liberty and of the responsibility. They hide themselves behind the Law and the authority. When these persons obtain an important function, they become harsh and insensitive and indifferent to hide their own imperfection.
- *Rabbi, Guide, Teacher, Father.* These are four titles that Jesus prohibits people to use. Today, in Church, the priests are called “Father”. Many study in the University of the Church and obtain the title of “Doctor” (Teacher). Many persons receive spiritual direction and take advice from persons who are called “Spiritual directors” (Guides).

What is important is to take into account the reason which impelled Jesus to prohibit the use of these titles. If these were used by persons in order to affirm their position of authority and their power, these persons would be in error and would be criticized by Jesus. If these titles were used to nourish and deepen the fraternal spirit and service, they would not be criticized by Jesus.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

I am listening.

What is God's message?

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



Lectio: Sunday, August 26, 2012

The disciples' heart tested by the Word of the Lord. The challenge: to keep faith in the Father and the Son or to side with the evil one. John 6: 60-69

Ordinary Time

1. Opening prayer

Lord, your Word is sweet, it is like a honeycomb, it is not hard nor is it bitter. It may burn like fire, it may be like the hammer that breaks rock, it may be the sharp sword that pierces and separates the soul... but, Lord, your Word is sweet! Grant that I may listen to it that it may be gentle music, a song and an echo to my ears, my memory and my intellect. I offer my whole being to you and ask you to grant that I may listen faithfully, sincerely, strongly. Lord, grant that I may keep my ears and heart fixed on your lips, your voice, so that not one word may be in vain. Pour forth your Holy Spirit to be like living water watering my field so that it may bear fruit, thirty, sixty and a hundredfold. Lord, draw me, grant that I may come to you, because, you know... where shall I go, to whom on this earth if not to you?

2. Reading

a) Placing the passage in its proper context:

These are the concluding verses of the great chapter six of John's Gospel, where the Evangelist presents his "Eucharistic theology". This conclusion is the climax of the chapter, because the Word leads us deeper into and towards the centre of things; from the crowd at the start of the chapter, to the Jews who discuss with Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum, to the disciples, to the twelve, even to Peter, the only one who stands for each one of us, alone, face to face with the Lord Jesus. Here we hear the reply to Jesus' teaching, to the Word sown abundantly in the heart of his listeners. Here we verify whether the soil of the heart produces thorns and weeds or green shoots that produce ears and finally good corn in the ears.

b) An aid to the reading of the passage:

v. 60: Some disciples condemn the Word of the Lord and thus also Jesus himself who is the Word of God. God is not seen as a good Father who speaks to his children, but as a hard master (Mt 25: 24), with whom it is not possible to enter into dialogue.

vv. 61-65: Jesus unveils the incredulity and hardness of heart of his disciples and reveals his mysteries of salvation: his ascension into heaven, the gift of the Holy Spirit and our participation in the divine life. But these mysteries can only be understood and accepted by the wisdom of a docile heart, capable of listening, and not by means of physical intelligence.

v. 66: This verse reveals the first great betrayal by many disciples who have failed to understand the true teaching of Jesus. Instead of turning their gaze on the Master, they turn their backs on him and thus interrupt communion and no longer walk with him.

vv. 67-69: Jesus now addresses himself to the twelve, his most intimate friends, and places before them a final and absolute choice, whether to stay with him or go away. Peter answers on behalf of all and proclaims the faith of the Church in Jesus as Son of God and in his Word, which is the true source of life.

c) The text:

60 Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, "Do you take offence at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? 63 It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But there are some of you that do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it



was that would betray him. 65 And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

66 After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him.

67 Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

3. A moment of silent prayer

I have received the Gift, the grace, I have listened to the Word of the Lord, now I do not wish to murmur (v. 61), I do not wish to be scandalised (v. 61), nor do I wish to be confused by incredulity (v. 64). I do not wish to betray my Master (v. 64), I do not wish to withdraw and not walk with him any longer (v. 66)... I wish to remain with the Lord at all times! In the silence of my heart, I repeat endlessly to him: "Lord to whom shall I go if not to you?!". Behold, Lord, I come...

4. A few questions

to open my heart and plough my interior soil with a plough capable of pulling up the roots of hardness and incredulity.

a) What kind of disciple am I? Am I really willing every day to learn at the school of Jesus, to receive his teaching, which is not the doctrine of human beings but the wisdom of the Holy Spirit?

b) "This is a hard saying, who can listen to it?" Is it really the Word of the Lord that is hard or is it my heart that wants only to close itself and no longer listen?

c) "Jesus knowing in himself...". He knows my heart and knows what is in each person (Jn 1: 48; 2: 25; 4: 29; 10: 15). How do I react to his gaze, to his voice that calls my name, to his coming into my life, to his constant knocking (Ap 3: 20)? What choices do I make?

d) "It is the Spirit that gives life". However, do I allow myself to be led like Mary (Lk 1: 38) and Simeon (Lk 2: 27), do I allow the Lord to take me where he wills, where he waits for me, or do I always want to decide for myself the direction of my life?

e) Do I answer Jesus' personal invitation "Come to me! Come and follow me!" every day, every moment, in the most diverse situations of my life, in various circumstances, in the presence of others? To whom do I go? Where do I turn to? Whose footsteps am I following?

5. A key to the reading

I ask the Scriptures to be my guide, to enlighten each step, each movement, because I wish to go to Jesus. I ask the verbs he uses, the expressions he repeats, the silence of the unsaid words, to reveal to me the way... to find him and not someone else.

• The Word of the Lord and the love relationship with it

In this passage, John presents to me the Word of the Lord as meeting point, the holy place for an appointment with Him. I realise that this is the place of my decision, of ever

deeper separations in my heart and in my conscience. I realise also that the Word is a Person, it is the Lord himself, present before me, given to me, open to me. The whole of the Bible, page after page, is an invitation, sweet yet at the same time strong, to meet the Word, to get to know the Promised one, the Bride who is really the Word that comes from the kiss of love, from the mouth of the Lord. The meeting accorded is not superficial, empty, nor is it fleeting or sporadic, but intense, full, constant, uninterrupted, because it is like the meeting between the bride and groom. Thus does the Lord love me and give himself to me. It is, therefore, important to listen carefully and lovingly so that not one word may be in vain (1 Sam 3: 19); it is important to listen with the heart, with the soul (Ps 94: 8; Bar 2: 31); it is important to obey in practice for a lifetime (Mt 7: 24-27; Ja 1: 22-25); it is important to make a true and final decision that will choose the Word of the Lord even to making it my sister (Pr 7: 1-4) or my bride to be taken into my home (Wis 8: 2).

• **Murmuring is closing one's heart**

The theme of murmuring, of rebelling, shakes me up and creates a crisis in me; when I read the Bible, even when I just recall it, I realise that murmuring against the Lord and his actions in our lives is the most terrible and destructive thing that could possibly live in my heart, because it takes me away from Him, it separates me strongly and makes me blind, deaf and insensitive. It makes me say that He does not exist while all the time He is very near; that He hates me when He loves me with an eternal and faithful love (Dt 1: 27)! It is the greatest and most profound foolishness! In Exodus, Numbers and the Psalms, I come across a people of God that weeps, complains, gets angry, murmurs, closes itself, rebels, turns away (Es 16: 7ff; Num 14: 2; 17, 20ff; Ps 105: 25)); a hopeless, lifeless people. I understand that this kind of situation comes about when there is no longer dialogue with the Lord, when the contract with Him is broken, when, instead of listening to Him and asking questions of Him, there is only murmuring, a kind of continuous droning in the soul, in the mind, that makes me say: "Can God supply food in the dessert?" (Ps 77: 19). If I murmur against my Father, if I stop believing in his Love for me, in his tenderness, that He showers me with every good thing, I am lifeless, I am without nourishment for the every-day journey. Or if I get angry, if I become jealous because He is good and gives His love to all, without reserve, and I act like the Pharisees (Lk 15: 2; 19: 7), then I am entirely alone and besides no longer being His child I am no longer even brother or sister of anyone. In fact, there is a close relationship between murmuring against God and murmuring against brothers and sisters (Phil 2: 14; 1 Pt 4: 9). I learn all this when I follow the trail of this word...

• **The Gift of the Son of man: the Holy Spirit**

It seems that I see a road full of light, traced by the Lord Jesus and almost hidden in these verses that are so compact and overflowing in spiritual richness. The starting point lies in a true and deep listening to his Words and in welcoming them. From here we pass on to the purification of the heart, which from a heart of stone, hard and closed, becomes, through the tenderness of the Father, a heart of flesh, soft, a heart that He can hurt,

mould, take into His hands and hold tight, as a gift. Yes, all this is accomplished by the Words of Jesus when they come to me and enter into me. It is only thus that I can continue on my journey, overcoming murmurings and scandal, until I am able to see Jesus with new eyes, eyes renewed by the Word, eyes that do not rest on superficial things, on the hardness of the rind, but eyes that learn, every day a little more, to go beyond and to look on high. "Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?" (v. 62). This is the welcoming of the Spirit, gift of the Risen One, gift of the One who ascended at the right hand of the Father, gift from on high, perfect gift (Ja 1: 17). He had said: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me" (Jn 12: 32) and He draws me with the Spirit, He makes me His own with the Spirit, He sends me in the Spirit (Jn 20: 21s), He strengthens me thanks to the Spirit (Acts 1: 8). If I take a long look at the pages of the Gospels, I can see how the Spirit of the Lord is the strength that dwells in each person, each reality, because He is the eternal love of the Father, the very life of God in us. I pay attention and dwell on the verbs and the expressions used, on the words that follow and enlighten each other, enriching each other. I feel that I am really immersed in living Waters that gush and gurgle, I feel that I receive a new baptism and I thank the Lord with my whole heart. "He will baptise you in the Holy Spirit and fire" (Mt 3: 11), so cries John and, as I read, this Word comes true in me, inside me, in my whole being. I feel the Spirit speaking in me (Mt 10: 20); who, with His power, drives away from me the spirit of evil (Mt 12: 28); who fills me, as He did Jesus (Lk 4:1), John the Baptist (Lk 1: 15), the Virgin Mary (Lk 1: 28. 35), Elisabeth (Lk 1: 41), Zachary (Lk 1: 67), Simeon (Lk 2: 26), the disciples (Acts 2: 4), Peter (Acts 4: 8) and so many others. I feel and meet the Spirit who teaches me what to say (Lk 12: 10); who really gives new birth to me so that I may never die (Jn 3: 5); who teaches me all things and reminds me of all that Jesus said (Jn 14: 26); who guides me towards truth (Jn 16: 13); who gives me strength to witness to the Lord Jesus (Acts 1: 8), to His love for me and for everyone.

• **The struggle of faith: in the Father or in the evil one?**

This passage of John's Gospel challenges us to a great struggle, a hand-to-hand fight between the spirit and the flesh, between the wisdom of God and human reason, between Jesus and the world. I can see that Job was right when he said that human life on earth is a time of temptation and a struggle (Job 7: 1), because I too experience the evil one who tries to discourage me by creating doubts concerning the divine promises and urging me to turn away from Jesus. He would like to send me away, tries by every means to harden my heart, to close me, to break my faith, my love. I hear him roaming around like a roaring lion seeking whom to devour (1 Pt 5: 8), like a tempter, a creator of divisions, an accuser, like a scoffer mocking and repeating all the time: "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Pt 3: 3f). I know that it is only with the arms of faith that I can win (Eph 6: 10-20; 2 Cor 10: 3-5), only in the strength that comes to me from the Words of my Father; hence I choose them, love them, study them, scrutinise them, learn them by heart, repeat them and say: "Even if a whole army surrounds me, I will not be afraid; even if enemies attack me, I will still trust in God!" (Ps 26: 3).

• Profession of faith in Jesus, Son of God

The appearance of Simon Peter at the end of this passage is like a pearl set on a precious jewel, because it is he who proclaims truth, light and salvation through his profession of faith. I gather other passages from the Gospels, other professions of faith that help my incredulity, because I too wish to believe and then know, I too wish to believe and be firm (Is 7: 9): Mt 16: 16; Mk 8: 29; Lk 9: 20; Jn 11: 27).

6. A moment of silent prayer: Psalm 18

**A hymn of praise to the Word of the Lord,
who gives wisdom and joy to the heart**

The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes.

Ref. Lord, you have the words of eternal life!

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover by them is thy servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Ref. Lord, you have the words of eternal life!

But who can discern his errors?
Clear thou me from hidden faults.
Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord,
my rock and my redeemer.

Ref. Lord, you have the words of eternal life!

7. Closing prayer

Lord, thank you for your words that have re-awakened in me spirit and life; thank you because you speak and creation goes on, you overwhelm me, you still print your image in me, your unique likeness. Thank you because, lovingly and patiently, you wait for me even when I murmur, when I allow myself to be scandalised, when I fall into incredulity or when I turn my back to you. Forgive me, Lord, for all these faults and continue to heal me, to make me strong and happy in following you, you alone! Lord, you ascended to where you were before, but you are still with us and do not cease to draw each one of us to you. Draw me, Lord, and I shall run, because I have truly believed and known that you are the Holy One of God! But, please Lord, when I run to you, let me not run alone, let me be always open to the companionship of my brothers and sisters; and together with them I shall find you and shall be your disciple all the days of my life. Amen.



Lectio: Monday, August 27, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what you promise
make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 23,13-22

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

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

'Alas for you, blind guides! You say, "If anyone swears by the Temple, it has no force; but anyone who swears by the gold of the Temple is bound." Fools and blind! For which is of greater value, the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? Again, "If anyone swears by the altar it has no force; but anyone who swears by the offering on the altar, is

bound." You blind men! For which is of greater worth, the offering or the altar that makes the offering sacred? Therefore, someone who swears by the altar is swearing by that and by everything on it. And someone who swears by the Temple is swearing by that and by the One who dwells in it. And someone who swears by heaven is swearing by the throne of God and by the One who is seated there.

3) Reflection

- During the next three days, we will meditate on the discourse pronounced by Jesus in which he criticizes the doctors of the Law and the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites. In today's Gospel (Mt 23, 13-22), Jesus pronounces against them four times the expression "Alas for you..." (Mt 23, 23-26), and in the Gospel of day after tomorrow, he uses this same expression two other times (Mt 23, 27-32). These are expressions against the religious heads of the times and these are very hard words. In meditating them, I should not only think of the doctors and the Pharisees of the time of Jesus, but also, and above all in the hypocrisy found in me, in us, in our family, in the community, in our Church, in today's society. Let us look into the mirror of the text to discover the errors in ourselves.
- Matthew 23, 13: *The first "Alas for you..." against those who close the door of the Kingdom because in this way you will not enter and, you do not even let those who want to enter.* How do they close the Kingdom? They do it by presenting God as a severe judge, leaving very little space for the mercy of God; by imposing, in the name of God, laws and norms which have nothing to do with the commandments of God, by presenting a false image of the Kingdom and by killing the desire to serve God and the Kingdom. A community which organizes itself around this false god "does not enter into the Kingdom", and it is not even an expression of the Kingdom, and prevents its members from entering into the Kingdom.
- Matthew 23, 14: *The second 'Alas for you...' is against those who use religion to enrich themselves. You devour the property of widows, though you make a show of lengthy prayers. The more severe will be the sentence you receive because of this*". Jesus allows the disciples to live the Gospel, because he says that the labourer has the right to his salary (Lk 10,7; cf. 1 Co 9, 13-14), but to use prayer and religion as a means to enrich themselves, that is hypocrisy and does not reveal the Good News of God. It transforms religion into a market. Jesus drives out the merchants from the Temple (Mk 11, 15-19) quoting the prophet Jeremiah: *"My house will be called a House of Prayer for all people; but you have turned it into a bandits' den!"* (Mk 11, 17; cf. Is 56, 7; Jr 7, 11). When Simon the magician wanted to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter curses him (Ac 8, 18-24). Simon received the "most severe condemnation" of which Jesus speaks about in the Gospel today.
- Matthew 23, 15: *The third expression of 'Alas for you...' is against those who do proselytism you travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte, and anyone who becomes one you make twice as fit for hell as you are.*" There are persons who become missionaries and proclaim the Gospel not to radiate the Good News, but to attract persons for their group and their church. John once prohibited a person to use the name of Jesus because he was not part of his group. Jesus answered: *"Do not prohibit him, because*

anyone who is not against us is for us (Mk 9, 39). The document of the Plenary Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America, which was held in March 2008 in Aparecida, Brazil, bears the title: *“Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our people may have life in Him”*. That is, the purpose of the mission is not to do in such a way that people become Catholic, but rather that people may have life, and life in abundance.

- Matthew 23, 16-22: *The fourth ‘Alas for you...’ is against those who swear. “You say, if anyone swears by the Temple, it has no force, but anyone who swears by the gold of the Temple is bound”*. Jesus makes a long disquisition to show the incoherence of so many oaths that people made or that the official religion ordered to take: to swear for the gold of the Temple or for the offering which was on the altar. The teaching of Jesus given in the Sermon on the Mountain is the best commentary of today’s Gospel: *“But I tell you do not swear at all, either by heaven since that is God’s throne, or by earth, since that is his footstool, or for Jerusalem since that is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need say is Yes if you mean yes, No, if you mean No; anything more than this comes from the Evil One”* (Mt 5, 34-37).

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh!

Sing to Yahweh, all the earth!

Sing to Yahweh, bless his name!

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



Lectio: Tuesday, August 28, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,

help us to seek the values

that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.

In our desire for what you promise

make us one in mind and heart.

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

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 23,23-26

Jesus said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You pay your tithes of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law—justice, mercy, good faith! These you should have practised, those not neglected. You blind guides, straining out gnats and swallowing camels!

'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance. Blind Pharisee! Clean the inside of cup and dish first so that it and the outside are both clean.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today presents two other times that this expression was used: 'Alas for you...' when Jesus speaks against the religious leaders of his time. The two 'Alas for you...' of today denounce the lack of coherence between word and attitude, between exterior and interior. Today we continue our reflection which we begun yesterday.
- Matthew 23, 23-24: The fifth 'Alas for you...' against those who insist on the observance and forget mercy. You pay your tithes of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice, mercy and fidelity". This fifth 'Alas for you...' of Jesus is against the religious leaders of that time and can be repeated against many religious of the following century even up to our time. Many times, in the name of Jesus, we insist on details and we forget mercy. For example, Jansenism reduces lived faith to something arid, insisting on the observance and penance which led people away from the way of love. The Carmelite Sister Teresa of Lisieux grew in the Jansenism environment which marked France at the end of the XIX century. Beginning from a personal painful experience, she knew how to recover the gratuity of love of God, a force which should animate the observance of the norms from within; because without love, the observance makes an idol of God.
- Matthew 23, 25-26: The sixth 'Alas for you...' against those who clean things on the outside and are dirty inside. "You clean the outside of the cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance. In the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus criticises those who observe the letter of the Law and transgress the spirit of the Law. He says: "You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You shall not kill, and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say to you anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court. Anyone who calls his brother 'Fool' will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him 'Traitor' will answer for it in hell fire. You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery, but I say this to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5, 21-22. 27-28). It is not sufficient to observe the letter of the Law. It is not sufficient not to kill, not to rob, not to commit adultery, not to swear in order to be

faithful to what God asks of us. The one who observes fully the Law of God is the one who, besides observing the letter, goes deeply to the root and pulls out from within “the desires of extortion and intemperance” which may lead to murder, theft, and adultery. The fullness of the law is realized in the practice of love.

4) Personal questions

- There are two expressions of ‘Alas for you...’ two reasons to receive the criticism from Jesus. Which of these two applies to me?
- Observance and gratuity: Which of these applies to me?

5) Concluding Prayer

Proclaim God’s salvation day after day,
declare his glory among the nations,
his marvels to every people! (Ps 96,2-3)



Lectio: Wednesday, August 29, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what you promise
make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 6,17-29

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

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

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

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

3) Reflection

- Today we commemorate the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist. The Gospel gives a description of how John the Baptist was killed, without a process, during a banquet, victim of the corruption and arrogance of Herod and of his court.
- Mark 6, 17-20. The cause of the imprisonment and murdering of John. Herod was an employee of the Roman Empire, who commanded in Palestine since the year 63 before Christ. Caesar was the Emperor of Rome. He insisted above all, in an efficient administration which would provide revenue for the Empire and for him. The concern of Herod was his own promotion and his security. This is why he repressed any type of corruption. He liked to be called the benefactor of the people, but in reality he was a tyrant (cf. Lk 22, 25). Flavio Giuseppe, a writer of that time, informs that the reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was the fear that Herod had of a popular uprising or revolt. The denunciation of John the Baptist's against the depraved morality of Herod (Mk 6, 18), was the drop which made the glass overflow, and John was imprisoned.
- Mark 6, 21-29: The plot of the murderer. The anniversary and banquet of the feast, with dancing and orgy were the occasion for the murdering of John. It was an environment in which the powerful of the kingdom met together and in which the alliances were formed. In the feast participated "the great of the court, two officials and two important persons from Galilee". This was the environment in which the murdering of John the Baptist was decided. John, the prophet, was a living denunciation of that corrupt system, and this is why he was eliminated under the pretext of a personal vengeance. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of one man who had no control of self. In the enthusiasm of the feast, of the celebration and of wine, Herod makes a promise by oath to a young girl, a dancer. Superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to keep the promise made by oath. For Herod, the life of the subjects was worthless. This is how Mark gives an account of the fact as it happened and leaves the communities the task of drawing the conclusion.

- Between lines, the Gospel today gives much information on the time in which Jesus lived and on the way in which the power was exercised on the part of the powerful of that time. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod, the Great, from the year 4 before Christ until the year 39 after Christ, 43 years! During the whole time of the life of Jesus on earth there was no change of Government in Galilee! Herod was absolute lord of everything, and did not render an account to anyone, he did as he pleased. In him there was arrogance, lack of ethics, absolute power, without any control on the part of the people!

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

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

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

In you, Yahweh, I take refuge,
I shall never be put to shame.
In your saving justice rescue me,
deliver me, listen to me and save me. (Ps 71,1-2)



Lectio: Thursday, August 30, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us enduring joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what you promise
make us one in mind and heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 24,42-51

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

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

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today speaks about the coming of the Lord at the end of time and exhorts us to be watchful, to watch. At the time of the first Christians, many persons thought that the

end of this world was close at hand and that Jesus would have returned afterwards. Today many persons think that the end of the world is close at hand. And therefore, it is well to reflect on the meaning of vigilance, of watching.

- Matthew 24, 42: Watch. "So stay awake! Watch, because you do not know the day when your master is coming". Concerning the day and the hour of the end of the world, Jesus had said: "But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, no one but the Father!" (Mk 13, 32). Today, many people live concerned thinking about the end of the world. Have you seen when walking through the streets of the city that it is written on the walls: "Jesus will return!" And how will this coming be? After the year 1000, basing themselves on the Gospel of John, people began to say (Rev 20, 7): "1000 years have gone by, but 2000 will not pass by!" This is why, as the year 2000 approached, many were worried. There were even some people who were anguished because of the proximity of the end of the world, so much so that they committed suicide. Others, reading the Apocalypse of John, even were able to foretell the exact hour of the end. But the year 2000 came and nothing happened. The end of the world does not arrive! Many times, the affirmation "Jesus will return" is used to frighten people and oblige them to belong to a given church! Others, because they have waited so long and have speculated so much concerning the coming of Jesus, are not aware of his presence among us, in the most common things of life, in the facts of every day.

- The same problems existed in the Christian communities of the first centuries. Many persons of the communities said that the end of this world was close at hand and that Jesus would have returned. Some of the community of Thessalonica in Greece, basing themselves on the preaching of Paul said: "Jesus will return!" (1 Th 4, 13-18; 2 Th 2, 2). And this is why, there were even persons who no longer worked because they thought that the coming of the end was so close at hand, within a few days or a few weeks so, "Why work, if Jesus will return afterwards?" (cf. 2 Th 3, 11). Paul responds that it was not so simple as they imagined. And to those who had stopped working he would say: "Anyone who does not want to work, has no right to eat!" Others remained looking up at the sky, waiting for the return of Jesus in the clouds (cf. Ac 1, 11). Others rebelled because he delayed coming back (2 P 3, 4-9). In general the Christians lived with the expectation of the imminent coming of Jesus. Jesus was coming to realize or carry out the Final Judgement to end with the unjust history of this world and to inaugurate the new phase of history, the definitive phase of the New Heaven and the New Earth. They believed that this would have taken place within one or two generations. Many persons would still be alive when Jesus would have appeared again, glorious in Heaven (1Th 4, 16-17; Mc 9, 1). Others, tired of waiting would say: "He will never come back!" (2 P 3,).

- Up until now the coming of Jesus has not arrived! How can this delay be understood? It is because they are not aware that Jesus has already returned and lives in our midst: "I am with you always, till the end of time." (Mt 28, 20). He is already at our side, in the struggle for justice, for peace, for life. The fullness has not as yet been attained, but a guarantee of the Kingdom is already in our midst. This is why, we expect with a firm

hope the full liberation of humanity and of nature (Rm 8, 22-25). And while we wait and struggle, we say with certainty: "He is already in our midst" (Mt 25, 40).

- Matthew 24, 43-51: The example of the householder and of his servants. "Consider this: if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house." Jesus says this very clearly. Nobody knows anything regarding the hour: "Concerning this day and this hour, nobody knows anything, neither the angels, or the Son, but only the Father

What is important is not to know the hour of the end of this world, but rather to be capable to perceive the coming of Jesus who is already present in our midst in the person of the poor (cf. Mt 25, 40) and in so many other ways and events of our daily life. What is important is to open the eyes and to keep in mind the commitment of the good servant of whom Jesus speaks about in the parable.

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

Day after day I shall bless you, Lord,
I shall praise your name for ever and ever.
Great is Yahweh and worthy of all praise,
his greatness beyond all reckoning. (Ps 145,2-3)



Lectio: Friday, August 31, 2012

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise you.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading – Matthew 25, 1-13

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

3) Reflection

- Today is the Feast of Saint Edith Stein who in Carmel took the name of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. For this reason, the Gospel today narrates the parable of the ten virgins who had to welcome the bridegroom when he arrived to the wedding.
- Matthew 25, 1^a: The beginning: “At that time”. The parable begins with these two words: “At that time”. It is a question of the coming of the Son of Man (cfr. Mt 24, 37). Nobody knows when this day, this time will come, “not even the angels in Heaven nor the Son himself, but only the Father” (Mt 24, 36). The fortune tellers will not succeed in giving an estimate. The Son of Man will come as a surprise, when people less expect him (Mt 24, 44). It can be today, it can be tomorrow, that is why the last warning of the parable of the ten Virgins is: “Keep watch!” The ten girls should be prepared for any thing which may happen. When the Nazi Policemen knocked at the door of the Monastery of the Carmelite Sisters of Echt in the Province of Limburgia, in the Netherlands, Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was prepared. She took on the Cross and followed the way to martyrdom in the extermination camp out of love for God and for her people. She was one of the prudent virgins of the parable.
- Matthew 25, 1b-4: The ten virgins ready to wait for the bridegroom. The parable begins like this: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like this: ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom”. It is a question of the girls who have to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding feast. Because of this, they have to take the lamps with them, to light the way, and also to render the feast more joyful with more light. Five of them were prudent and five were foolish. This difference is seen in the way in which they prepare themselves for the role that they have to carry out. Together with the lighted lamps, the prudent ones had taken some oil in reserve, preparing themselves in this way

for anything which could happen. The foolish ones took only the lamps and they did not think to take some oil in reserve with them.

- Matthew 25, 5-7: The unforeseen delay of the arrival of the bridegroom. The bridegroom was late. He had not indicated precisely the hour of his arrival. While waiting the attendants went to sleep. But the lamps continue to burn and use the oil until gradually they turned off. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, there was a cry: “Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him!” All the attendants woke up, and began to prepare their lamps which were burning out. They had to put in some of the oil they had brought in reserve so that the lamps would not burn out.

- Matthew 25, 8-9: The different reactions before the delay of the bridegroom. It is only now that the foolish attendants become aware that they should have brought some oil in reserve with them. They went to ask the prudent ones: “Give us some of your oil, our lamps are going out”. The prudent ones could not respond to this request, because at that moment what was important was not for the prudent ones to share their oil with the foolish ones, but that they would be ready to accompany the bridegroom to the place of the feast. For this reason they advised them: “You had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves”.

- Matthew 25, 10-12: The fate of the prudent attendants and that of the foolish ones. The foolish ones followed the advice of the prudent ones and went to buy some oil. During their brief absence the bridegroom arrived and the prudent ones were able to accompany him and to enter together with him to the wedding feast. But the door was closed behind them. When the others arrived, they knocked at the door and said: “Lord, Lord, open the door for us!” and they received the response: “In truth I tell you, I do not know you”.

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

4) Personal questions

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

5) Concluding Prayer

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



