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Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 1, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

All-powerful and ever-living God,
direct your love that is within us,
that our efforts in the name of your Son
may bring mankind to unity and peace.
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 4,35-41

With the coming of evening that same day, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let us cross over to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind they took him, just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with him. Then it began to blow a great gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, 'Master, do you not care? We are lost!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Quiet now! Be calm!' And the wind dropped, and there followed a great calm. Then he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith?' They were overcome with awe and said to one another, 'Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.'

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today describes the storm in the lake and Jesus who sleeps in the boat. Sometimes our communities feel like a small boat lost in the sea of life, without much hope of arriving to the port. Jesus seems to be sleeping in our boat, since no divine power seems to appear to save us from the difficulties and the persecution. In view of this desperate situation, Mark puts together several episodes which reveal how Jesus is present in the midst of the community. In the parables the mystery of the Kingdom is revealed which is present in the things of daily life (Mk 4, 1-34). Now he begins to reveal the Mystery of the Kingdom present in the power which Jesus exercises in favour of the disciples, in favour of the people and, above all, in favour of the excluded and marginalized. Jesus overcomes, dominates the sea, a symbol of chaos (Mk 4, 35-41). A creating power acts in him! Jesus conquers and drives out the devil (Mk 5, 1-20). The power of life acts in him! He is the victorious Jesus! There is no reason for the communities to be fear (Mk 5, 21-43). This is the reason for this passage of the storm calmed by Jesus on which we are meditating today in the Gospel.
- Mark 4, 35-36: The starting point: "Let us cross over to the other side". It had been a heavy day, with much work. Once the discourse on the parables was finished (Mk 4, 1-34), Jesus said: "Let us cross over to the other side!" They take him on the boat just as he was, the boat from which he had made the discourse of the Parables. Because he was extremely tired, he went to sleep on the stern, his head on the cushion! This is the first picture or image which Mark presents. A beautiful painting, but very human!
- Mark 4, 37-38: The desperate situation: "Do you not care? We are lost!" The Lake of Galilee is surrounded by mountains. Sometimes, through the cracks in the rocks, the wind blows on top of the lake and provokes sudden storms. A very strong wind, the agitated sea, the boat full of water! The disciples were experienced fishermen. If they think that they are

going to sink then the situation is really dangerous. Jesus does not even wake up, he continues to sleep. This profound sleep is not only a sign of great fatigue; it is also the expression of a calm peaceful trust which he has in God. The contrast between the attitude of Jesus and that of the disciples is very great!

- Mark 4, 39-40: The reaction of Jesus: “Have you still no faith?” Jesus wakes up, not because of the waves, but because of the desperate cry of the disciples. First, he addresses himself to the sea and says: “Quiet now!” And the wind dropped and there followed great calm. Then he spoke to the disciples and said: “Why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith?” The impression that one has is that it is not necessary to calm down the sea, since there was no danger. It is like when you go to a house and the dog, at the side of his master, begins to bark. One should not be afraid because the dog is with the master who controls the situation. The episode of the storm which was calmed recalls Exodus, when the people, without fear, passed through the water of the sea (EX 14, 22). It recalls the Prophet Isaiah who told the people: “If you go across the water I will be with you!” (Is 43, 2) Jesus does the exodus again and carries out the prophecy announced by Psalm 107 (106), 25-30.

- Mark 4, 41: The disciples did not know: “Who can this be?” Jesus calms the sea and says: “Have you still no faith?” The disciples did not know what to respond and they ask themselves: “Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him”. Jesus appears as a stranger to them! In spite of the fact of having been with him for such a long time, they do not know well who he is. Who can this be? With this question in mind, the communities follow the reading of the Gospel. Even today, this is the same question which leads us to continue reading the Gospel. It is the desire to know always better the significance of Jesus for our life.

- Who is Jesus? Mark begins his Gospel saying: “The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk 1, 1). At the end, at the moment of his death, the soldier declared: “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mk 15, 39). At the beginning and at the end of the Gospel, Jesus is called the Son of God. Between the beginning and the end, there are many other names of Jesus which appear. The following is the list: Messiah or Christ (Mk 1, 1; 8, 29; 14, 61; 15, 32); Lord (Mk 1, 3; 5, 19; 11, 3); Beloved Son (Mk 1, 11; 9, 7); the Holy one of God (Mk 1, 24); Nazarene (Mk 1, 24; 10, 47; 14, 67; 16, 6); Son of Man (Mk 2, 10.28; 8, 31.38; 9, 9.12.31; 10, 33.45; 13, 26; 14, 21.21.41.62); Bridegroom (Mk 2, 19); Son of God (Mk 3, 11); Son of the Highest God (Mk 5, 7); Carpenter (Mk 6, 3); Son of Mary (Mk 6, 3); Prophet (Mk 6, 4.15; 8, 28); Teacher (frequent); Son of David (Mk 10, 47.48; 12, 35-37); Blessed (Mk 11, 9); Son (Mk 13, 32); Shepherd (Mk 14, 27); Son of the Blessed One (Mk 14, 61); King of the Jews (Mk 15, 2.9.18. 26); King of Israel (Mk 15, 32),

Each name, title or attribute is an attempt to express what Jesus signifies for persons. But a name, no matter how beautiful it is, never reveals the mystery of a person, much less of the person of Jesus. Besides this, some of these names given to Jesus, including the more important ones and the more traditional, are questioned, doubted by Mark the Evangelist. Thus, as we advance in the reading of the Gospel, Mark obliges us to revise our ideas and to ask ourselves, once again: “In last instance, who is Jesus for me, for us?” The more we advance in the reading of the Gospel of Mark, the more these titles and criteria fall. Jesus does not fit into anyone of these names, in no schema, in no title. He is the greatest! Little by little, the reader gives up and ceases to want to frame up Jesus in a known concept or in an idea made up beforehand, and accepts him as he is presented. Love seduces, but not the head, NO!

4) Personal questions

- The waters of the sea of life, have they threatened you sometimes? Who saved you?

- Which was the agitated sea at the time of Jesus? Which was the agitated sea at the time when Mark wrote his Gospel? Which is, today, the agitated sea for us?

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 Divina: Sunday, February 2, 2014

Luke 2,22-40

The presentation of the Child in the Temple

Ordinary Time

1. Opening prayer

O God, our Creator and Father, you willed that your Son, generated before the dawn of the world, should become a member of the human family. Rekindle in us an appreciation for the gift of life, so that parents may participate in the fruitfulness of your love, old people may pass on to young ones their mature wisdom, and children may grow in wisdom, piety and grace, all giving praise to your holy name. Through Christ our Lord.

2. Reading: Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.



And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

- that the Word of God may dwell in us and that we may allow it to enlighten our lives;
- that before we pass any comments, the very light of the Word may shine and dominate with the mystery of the living presence of the Lord.

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Why should Jesus, Son of the Most High, and his mother Mary, conceived without sin, obey the prescriptions of Moses? Maybe because Mary was not yet aware of her innocence and holiness?
- b) Is there special significance in the words and attitudes of Simeon and the prophetess Anna? Do not their actions and joy perhaps recall the style of the ancient prophets?
- c) How can we explain this "sword" that pierces: is it a rending of the consciences before the challenges and richness of Jesus? Or is it only the inner pains of the Mother?
- d) Can this scene mean anything to parents today: for the religious formation of their children; for the plan that God has for each of their children; for the fears and sufferings that parents carry in their hearts when they think of the time when their children grow up?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish go deeper into the text.

- a) As laid down in the law of Moses/of the Lord. This is a kind of refrain repeated several times. Luke mixes two prescriptions without making any distinction. The purification of the mother was foreseen in Leviticus (12:2-8) and was to take place forty days after the birth. Until then, the woman could not approach sacred places, and the ceremony was accompanied by the gift of a small animal. But the consecration of the first-born was prescribed in Exodus 13:11-16, and was considered a kind of "ransom" in memory of the saving action of God when he liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. For this also the offering was a small animal. In all of this scene, the parents seem to be in the process of presenting/offering their son as was done with sacrifices and Levites, while through the persons of Simeon and Anna it seems rather God who offers/presents the son for the salvation of people.
- b) Simeon and Anna: these are figures full of symbolical value. Their role is one of recognition, that comes from both the enlightenment and action of the Spirit and a life lived in expectation and faith. Simeon especially is defined as *prodekòmenos*, that is, one entirely absorbed in waiting, and one who goes forward to welcome. He, too, appears to be obedient to the law, the law of the Spirit, who leads him towards the child in the temple. The canticle he proclaims manifests his pro-existentia, he has lived in order to come to this moment and now he withdraws so that others may see the light and the salvation to come for Israel and the pagans. Anna completes the picture, by her very age (symbolical value: 84 equals 7x12, the twelve tribes of Israel; or $84 - 7 = 77$, double perfection), but above all by her way of living (fasting and praying) and by her proclamation to all who "looked forward". She is led by the Spirit of prophecy, docile and purified in her heart. Besides, she belongs to the smallest of the tribes, that of Aser, a sign that the small and fragile are those more disposed to recognise Jesus, the Saviour. Both of these old persons – who look like an original couple – are symbols of the best of Judaism, of faithful and meek Jerusalem, that awaits and rejoices and that from now on allows the new light to shine.
- c) A sword will pierce: generally these words are interpreted as meaning that Mary will suffer, a drama made visible of the Our Lady of Sorrows. Rather, we need to see the Mother

as a symbol of Israel. Simeon feels the drama of his people who will be deeply torn by the living and sharp word of the redeemer (cf Lk 12:51-53). Mary represents the path: she must trust, but will go through times of pain and darkness, struggles and painful silences. The story of the suffering Messiah will be painful for all, even for the Mother. One does not follow the new light of the whole world without paying the cost, without being provoked to make risky choices, without being always born again from on high and in newness. But these images of the "sword that pierces", of the child who will "trip" and shake hearts from their lethargy, are not to be separated from the meaningful action of the two old persons: the one, Simeon, takes the child in his arms to show that faith is a meeting and an embrace, not an idea of theorem; the other, Anna, takes on the role of proclaiming and enkindles a bright light in the hearts of all who "looked forward" to him.

d) Daily life, an epiphany of God: finally, it is interesting to note that the whole episode emphasises the situation of the most simple and homely: the young couple with the child in their arms; the old man who rejoices and embraces, the old lady who prays and proclaims, those listening who appear to be indirectly involved. At the end of the passage, we also get a glimpse of the village of Nazareth, of the growth of the child in a normal context, the impression of a child extraordinarily gifted with wisdom and goodness. The theme of wisdom woven into the fabric of normal life and growth in a village context, leaves the story as if in suspense, and it will be taken up again precisely with the theme of the wisdom of the boy among the doctors in the temple. Indeed, this is the episode that follows immediately (Lk 2:41-52).

6. Psalm 122

I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"
Our feet have been standing within your gates,
O Jerusalem!
Jerusalem, built as a city which is bound firmly together,
to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
"May they prosper who love you!
Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers!"
For my brethren and companions' sake I will say,
"Peace be within you!"
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good.

7. Final Prayer

Father, we praise you and we bless you because through your Son, born of woman by the working of the Holy Spirit, born under the law, has ransomed us from the law and you have filled our life with light and new hope. May our families welcome and remain faithful to your designs, may they help and sustain in their children the new dreams and enthusiasm, wrap them in tenderness when they are fragile, educate them in love for you and for all creatures. All honour and glory to you, Father.

Lectio Divina: Monday, February 3, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,

help us to love you with all our hearts

and to love all men as you love them.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

on God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 5, 1-20

They reached the territory of the Gerasenes on the other side of the lake, and when he disembarked, a man with an unclean spirit at once came out from the tombs towards him. The man lived in the tombs and no one could secure him any more, even with a chain, because he had often been secured with fetters and chains but had snapped the chains and broken the fetters, and no one had the strength to control him. All night and all day, among the tombs and in the mountains, he would howl and gash himself with stones.

Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and fell at his feet and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? In God's name do not torture me!' For Jesus had been saying to him, 'Come out of the man, unclean spirit.' Then he asked, 'What is your name?' He answered, 'My name is Legion, for there are many of us.' And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the district.

Now on the mountainside there was a great herd of pigs feeding, and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us to the pigs, let us go into them.' So he gave them leave. With that, the unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs, and the herd of about two thousand pigs charged down the cliff into the lake, and there they were drowned.

The men looking after them ran off and told their story in the city and in the country round about; and the people came to see what had really happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there -- the man who had had the legion in him -- properly dressed and in his full senses, and they were afraid. And those who had witnessed it reported what had happened to the demoniac and what had become of the pigs. Then they began to implore Jesus to leave their neighbourhood.

As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed begged to be allowed to stay with him. Jesus would not let him but said to him, 'Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you.' So the man went off and proceeded to proclaim in the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, we meditate on a long text on the expulsion of a devil which was called *Legion* and which oppressed and tortured a person. Today there are many people who use the texts of the Gospel which speak of the expulsion of the devils or impure spirits in order to frighten others. This is a sin! Mark does the opposite. As we will see, he associates the action of power of evil to four things: a) With the *cemetery*, the place of the dead. Death which kills life! b) With the *pork* which was considered an unclean animal. The impurity which separates from God! c) With the *sea*, which was considered as a symbol of the chaos which existed before creation. Chaos which destroys nature . d) with the word *Legion*, a name given to the army of the Roman Empire. The empire which oppresses and exploits people. Well, Jesus overcomes the power of evil in these four points. The victory of Jesus had a very great outreach for the community of the years 70's, the time in which Mark wrote his Gospel. These communities lived being persecuted by the *Roman Legions*, the ideology of which manipulated the popular beliefs concerning the devils in order to frighten people and to obtain submission from them.

- *The power of evil oppresses, ill-treats and alienates persons.* The initial verses describe the situation of the people before the arrival of Jesus. In the way of describing the behaviour of the possessed person, Mark associates the power of evil to the cemetery and to death. It is a power without any purpose, threatening, without control and destructor which makes everybody afraid. It deprives the person of conscience, of self control and of autonomy.

- *In the presence of Jesus the power of evil disintegrates itself, and breaks into fragments.* In the way of describing the first contact between Jesus and the possessed man, Mark stresses the total lack of proportion that exists! The power which at the beginning seemed to be very strong, melts and is broken, fragmented before Jesus. The man falls on his knees, asks not to be expelled from that district and finally says its name is *Legion*. With this name, Mark associates the power of evil with the political and military power of the Roman Empire which dominated the world through its *Legions*.

- *The power of evil is impure and has no autonomy nor consistency.* The devil has no power in its movements. He only manages to enter into the pigs with the permission of Jesus! Once he has entered into the pigs, they charged down the cliff into the sea. There were 2000! According to the people the pig was a symbol of impurity, the impurity which prevented the human being to enter into relationship with God and to feel accepted by Him. The sea was the symbol of chaos which existed before creation and which according to the belief of the time, threatened life. This episode of the pigs which threw themselves into the sea is strange and difficult to understand, but the message is sufficiently clear: before Jesus the power of evil has no autonomy nor consistency. The one who believes in Jesus has already overcome the power of evil and should not be afraid, should have no fear!

- *The reaction of the people of the place.* On the advice of the herdsmen who took care of the pigs, the people of the place ran to see the man who had been liberated from the power of evil, now "*in his full senses*". But the Legion entered the pigs! And for this reason they ask Jesus to leave. For them, in fact, the pigs were more important than the human person who had just returned to be himself. The same thing happens today: the neo-liberal system gives very little importance to persons. What is important for it is gain!

• *To announce the Good News means to announce “what the Lord has done for you!”*. The man who was liberated wanted to “follow Jesus”, but Jesus tells him: “Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you”. Mark addressed this phrase of Jesus to the communities and to all of us. For the majority of us “to follow Jesus” means: “Go to your house, to your people, announce to them what the Lord has done for you!”

4) Personal questions

- Which point of this text pleased or struck you the most? Why?
- The man who was cured wanted to follow Jesus. But he should remain at home and tell everybody what Jesus has done for him. What has Jesus done for you which can be told to others?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh, what quantities of good things
you have in store for those who fear you,
and bestow on those who make you their refuge,
for all humanity to see. (Ps 31,19)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 4, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
help us to love you with all our hearts
and to love all men as you love them.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
on God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 5, 21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered round him and he stayed by the lake. Then the president of the synagogue came up, named Jairus, and seeing him, fell at his feet and begged him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is desperately sick. Do come and lay your hands on her that she may be saved and may live.' Jesus went with him and a large crowd followed him; they were pressing all round him.

Now there was a woman who had suffered from a haemorrhage for twelve years; after long and painful treatment under various doctors, she had spent all she had without being any the better for it; in fact, she was getting worse. She had heard about Jesus, and she came up through the crowd and touched his cloak from behind, thinking, 'If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved.'

And at once the source of the bleeding dried up, and she felt in herself that she was cured of her complaint. And at once aware of the power that had gone out from him, Jesus turned round in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' His disciples said to him, 'You see how the crowd is pressing round you; how can you ask, "Who touched me?"' But he continued to look all round to see who had done it. Then the woman came forward, frightened and trembling because she knew what had happened to her, and she fell at his feet and told him the whole truth. 'My daughter,' he said, 'your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free of your complaint.'

While he was still speaking some people arrived from the house of the president of the synagogue to say, 'Your daughter is dead; why put the Master to any further trouble?' But Jesus overheard what they said and he said to the president of the synagogue, 'Do not be afraid; only have faith.' And he allowed no one to go with him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. So they came to the house of the president of the synagogue, and Jesus noticed all the commotion, with people weeping and wailing unrestrainedly. He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and crying? The child is not dead, but asleep.' But they ridiculed him. So he turned them all out and, taking with him the child's father and mother and his own companions, he went into the place where the child lay. And taking the child by the hand he said to her, 'Talitha kum!' which means, 'Little girl, I tell you to get up.' The little girl got up at once and began to walk about, for she was twelve years old. At once they were overcome with astonishment, and he gave them strict orders not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, we meditate on two miracles which Jesus worked in favour of two women. The first one for a woman who was considered impure because of the haemorrhage which she was suffering from for the past 12 years. The other one, for a girl, twelve years old, who had expired a short time before. According to the mentality of the time, anybody who would touch the blood or a corpse was considered impure. Blood and death were factors of exclusion! Because of this, those two women were marginalized persons, excluded from the participation in the community.

- *The starting point. Jesus arrives in the boat.* The people join him. Jairus, the head of the Synagogue, asks help for his daughter who is dying. Jesus goes with him and the people accompany him, pushing on all sides. This is the starting point of the two cases of healing which follow: the cure of the woman and the resurrection of the 12 year old girl.

- *The situation of the woman.* Twelve years suffering from haemorrhage! For this reason she lived excluded, because at that time, blood rendered persons impure, and the one who touched them became impure also. Mark says that the woman had spent all she had with doctors. And instead of becoming better, she got worse. A situation without a solution!

- *The attitude of the woman.* She heard people speak about Jesus. Hope sprang in her. She told herself: “If I can just touch his clothes, I will be saved”. The catechism of the time said: “If I touch his cloak, he will become impure”. The woman thinks exactly the contrary! This is a sign that women did not agree with all this that religious authority taught. The woman gets in through the crowd, in the midst of the people, and without being noticed, she touches Jesus, because everybody touched him and pushed him. At that same moment she noticed in her body that she had been cured.

- *The reaction of Jesus and that of the disciples.* Jesus also aware of the power that had gone out from him asked: “*Who touched my clothes?*”. The disciples said to him: “You see how the crowd is pressing round you; how can you ask, who touched me?” So here appears the clash between Jesus and the disciples. Jesus had a sensibility which the disciples did not perceive. The disciples reacted like everybody else and they did not understand the different reaction of Jesus. But Jesus did not pay attention and continued to investigate, to inquire.

- *Healing through faith.* The woman became aware that she had been discovered. It was a difficult and dangerous moment for her. Because according to the belief of the time, an impure person, who like herself got in among the people, contaminated everyone who touched her. And all would become impure before God (Lv) (Lk 15, 19-30). For this reason the punishment was the possible stoning. But the woman had the courage to assume the consequences of what she had done. But the woman “*frightened and trembling*” fell at Jesus’ feet and told him the whole truth. Jesus says the last word: “*My daughter, your faith has restored you to health, go in peace and be free of your complaint*”.

(a) “*Daughter*”, with this word Jesus accepts the woman into the new family, into the community, which was gathering together around him. (b) What she thought became a reality. (c) Jesus acknowledges that without the faith of that woman, he would not have been able to work the miracle.

- *The news of the death of the little girl.* At that moment some people arrived from the house of Jairus to inform him that his daughter had died. It was no longer necessary to disturb Jesus. For them, death was the great barrier. Jesus will not be able to overcome death! Jesus listens, looks at Jairus, and applies what he had just seen, that is, that faith is capable to realize what the person believes. And he says: “*Do not be afraid, only have faith!*”

- *In Jairus’ house.* Jesus allows only three of his disciples to go with him. Seeing the commotion of the people weeping and wailing because of the death of the child, he said: “The child is not dead, she sleeps!” People around laughed . People know how to distinguish when a person is sleeping and when the person is dead. It is the same laughter of Abraham and of Sarah, that is of those who are unable to believe that nothing is impossible for God (Gn 17, 17; 18, 12-14; Lk 1, 37). For them also, death was a barrier which nobody could overcome, go beyond! The words of Jesus had a very profound meaning. The situation of the persecuted communities at the time of Mark seemed to be a situation of death. They had to hear: “She is not dead! You are sleeping! Wake up!” Jesus does not pay attention to the laughter and enters into the room where the child is, alone, with the three disciples and the parents of the child.

- *The resurrection of the child.* Jesus takes the child by the hand and says: “*Talita kum!*” She rises. Great commotion! Jesus keeps calm and asks that they give her something to eat. Two women are cured! One is twelve years old, of life, the other one twelve years of haemorrhage,

twelve years of exclusion! The exclusion of the child begins at twelve years of age, because her menstruation begins, she begins to die! Jesus has the greatest power and resurrects: "Get up!"

4) Personal questions

- Which is the point in this text which pleased you or struck you the most? Why?
- One of the women was cured and once again integrated so that she could live in the community. A child was raised from her death bed. What does this action of Jesus teach us for our life in the family and for our community today?

5) Concluding Prayer

Of you is my praise in the thronged assembly,

I will perform my vows before all who fear him.

The poor will eat and be filled,

those who seek Yahweh will praise him,

'May your heart live for ever.' (Ps 22,25-26)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 5, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
help us to love you with all our hearts
and to love all men as you love them.
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 6,1-6

Jesus went to his home town, and his disciples accompanied him.
With the coming of the Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, 'Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?' And they would not accept him.
And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is despised only in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house'; and he could work no miracle there, except that he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith. He made a tour round the villages, teaching.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today speaks of the visit of Jesus to Nazareth and describes the mental obstinacy of the people of Nazareth, who do not want to accept him. (Mk 6, 1-6). Tomorrow

the Gospel describes the openness of Jesus toward the people of Galilee, shown through the sending out of his disciples on mission (Mk 6, 7-13).

- Mark 6, 1-2^a: Jesus returns to Nazareth. At that time Jesus went to his home town, and his disciples accompanied him. “With the coming of the Sabbath, he began teaching in the Synagogue”. It is always good to return to one’s own home town and to find the friends. After a long absence, Jesus also returns and, as usual, on Saturday, he goes to the Synagogue to participate in the meeting of the community. Jesus was not the coordinator of the community, but even if he was not he takes the floor and begins to teach. This is a sign that persons could participate and express their own opinion.

- Mark 6, 2b-3: Reaction of the people of Nazareth before Jesus. The people of Capernaum had accepted the teaching of Jesus (Mk 1, 22), but the people of Nazareth did not like the words of Jesus and were scandalized. For what reason? Jesus, the boy whom they had known since he was born, how is it that now he is so different? They do not accept God’s mystery present in Jesus, a human being, and common as they are, known by all! They think that to be able to speak of God, he should be different from them! As we can see, not everything went well for Jesus. The persons who should have been the first ones to accept the Good News were precisely those who had the greatest difficulty to accept it. The conflict was not only with foreigners, but also, and especially with his own relatives and with the people of Nazareth. They refused to believe in Jesus, because they could not understand the mystery of God embracing the person of Jesus. “From where do all these things come to him? And what wisdom is this which has been given to him? And these miracles which are worked by him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Jude and Simon? His sisters too, are they not here with us?” And they would not accept him, they do not believe in Jesus!

- The brothers and the sisters of Jesus. The expression “brothers of Jesus” causes much polemics among Catholics and Protestants. Basing themselves on this text and in others, the Protestants say that Jesus had more brothers and sisters and that Mary had more sons! The Catholics say that Mary had no other sons. What should we think about all this? In the first place, the two positions, that of Catholics and that of the Protestants, both have arguments taken from the Bible and from the tradition of their respective Churches. Therefore, it is not convenient to discuss this question with arguments drawn only from reason. This is a question of profound convictions, which have something to do with the faith and with the sentiments both of Catholics and of Protestants. An argument taken only from reason cannot succeed to change the conviction of the heart! On the other hand, it irritates and draws away! Even when I do not agree with an opinion of another, I should always respect it! And we, both Catholics and Protestants, instead of discussing on texts, we should unite to struggle in defence of life, created by God, a life which has been so disfigured by poverty and injustice, by the lack of faith. We should remember other phrases of Jesus: “I have come in order that they may have life and life in abundance” (Jn 10, 10). “That all may be one, so that the world may believe that you, Father, has sent me” (Jn 17, 21). “Who is not against us, is for us” (Mk 10, 39.40).

- Mark 6, 4-6. Reaction of Jesus before the attitude of the people of Nazareth. Jesus knows very well that “nobody is a prophet in his own country”. And he says: “A prophet is despised only in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house”. In fact, where there is no acceptance or faith, people can do nothing. The preconception prevents this. Even if Jesus wanted to do something, he cannot, and he is amazed at their lack of faith. For this reason, before the closed door of his community “he began to make a tour round the villages, teaching”. The experience of this rejection led Jesus to change his practice. He goes to the other villages and, as we shall see in tomorrow’s Gospel, he gets the disciples involved in the mission instructing them as to how they have to continue the mission.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus had problems with his relatives and with his community. From the time when you began to live the Gospel better, has something changed in your relationship with your family, with your relatives?
- Jesus cannot work many miracles in Nazareth because faith is lacking. And today, does he find faith in us, in me?

5) Concluding prayer

How blessed are those whose offence is forgiven,
whose sin blotted out.

How blessed are those to whom Yahweh imputes no guilt,
whose spirit harbours no deceit. (Ps 32,1-2)

How blessed are those whose offence is forgiven,
whose sin blotted out.

How blessed are those to whom Yahweh imputes no guilt,
whose spirit harbours no deceit. (Ps 32,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 6, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
help us to love you with all our hearts
and to love all men as you love them.
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 6,7-13

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits. And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff -- no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses. They were to wear sandals but, he added, 'Don't take a spare tunic.' And he said to them, 'If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the dust under your feet as evidence to them.' So they set off to proclaim repentance; and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.

3) Reflection

• Today's Gospel continues what we have already seen in the Gospel yesterday. The passage through Nazareth was painful for Jesus. He was rejected by his own people (Mk 6, 1-5). The community which before had been his community, now, it is no longer such. Something has changed. Beginning at that moment, as today's Gospel says, Jesus began to go round the villages of Galilee to announce the Good News (Mk 6, 6) and to send the Twelve on mission. In the years 70's, the time when Mark wrote his Gospel, the Christian communities lived in a difficult situation, without any horizon. Humanly speaking, here was no future for them. In the year 64, Nero began to persecute the Christians. In the year 65, the revolt or uprising of the Jews in Palestine against Rome broke out. In the year 70, Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Romans. This is why the description of the sending out of the disciples, after the conflict in Nazareth, was a source of light and of courage for the Christians.

- Mark 6, 7. The objective of the Mission. The conflict grew and closely affected Jesus. How does he react? In two ways: 1) Before the mental obstinacy of the people of his community, Jesus leaves Nazareth and began to go round the neighbouring villages (Mk 6, 6). 2) He extends the mission and intensifies the announcement of the Good News calling other persons to involve them in the mission. “He summoned the Twelve, and began to send them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits”. The objective of the mission is simple and profound. The disciples participate in the mission of Jesus. They cannot go alone, they have to go in pairs, two by two, because two persons represent the community better than one alone and they can mutually help one another. They receive authority over unclean spirits, that is, they have to be a help for others in suffering and, through purification, and they have to open the door for direct access to God.
- Mark 6, 8-11. The attitudes which they should have in the Mission. The recommendations are simple: “And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff; no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses; they were to wear sandals and not to take a spare tunic. And he told them: If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away, shake off the dust under your feet, as evidence to them”. So they set off. It is the beginning of a new stage. Now, not only Jesus, but the whole group will announce the Good News of God to the people. If the preaching of Jesus caused conflict, much more now, there will be conflict with the preaching of the whole group. If the mystery was already great, now it will be greater since the mission has been intensified.
- Mark 6, 12-13. The result of the mission. “So they set off to proclaim repentance, and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.” To announce the Good News, produces conversion or a change in persons, it alleviates persons in their suffering; it cures illnesses and casts out devils.
- The sending out of the disciples on Mission. At the time of Jesus there were several other movements of renewal. For example, the Essens and the Pharisees. They also sought a new way of living in community and they had their own missionaries (cf. Mt 23, 15). But these, when they went on mission, they had prejudices. They took with them a haversack and money to take care of their own meals, because they did not trust the food that people would give them, which was not always ritually “pure”. On the contrary to other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus received diverse recommendations which helped to understand the fundamental points of the mission of announcing the Good News, which they received from Jesus and which is also our mission:
 - a) They should go without taking anything. They should take nothing, no haversack, no money, no staff, no bread, no sandals, not two tunics. That meant that Jesus obliged them to trust in hospitality. Because one who goes without taking anything, goes because he trusts people and thinks that he will be well received. With this attitude they criticized the laws of exclusion, taught by the official religion, and showed, by means of the new practice, that they in the community had other criteria.
 - b) They should eat what people ate or what the people gave them. They could not live separated providing their own food, but they should accept to sit at the same table (Lk 10, 8). This means that in contact with the people, they should not be afraid of losing the purity as it was taught at that time. With this attitude they criticized the laws of purity which were in force and showed, by means of the new practice, that they had another type of access to purity, that is, intimacy with God.
 - c) They should remain in the first house that welcomed them. They should live together in a stable way and not go from house to house. They should work like everybody else and live from what they received in exchange, “because the labourer deserves his wages” (Lk 10, 7). In other words, they should participate in the life and in the work of the people, and the

people would have accepted them in the community and would have shared the food with them. This means that they had to have trust in sharing.

d) They should take care of the sick, cure the lepers and cast out devils (Lk 10, 9; Mc 6, 7-13; Mt 10, 8). They had to carry out the function of “Defender” (goêl) and accept within the clan, in the community, those who were excluded. With this attitude they criticized the situation of disintegration of the community life of the clan and they aimed at concrete ways of getting out. These were the four fundamental points which had to give impulse to the attitude of the missionaries who announced the Good News of God, in the name of Jesus: hospitality, communion, sharing and acceptance of the excluded (defender, goêl). If these four requirements were respected, they could and should cry out to the four ends of the world: “The Kingdom of God has come!” (cf. Lk 10, 1-12; 9, 1-6; Mk 6, 7-13; Mt 10, 6-16). Because the Kingdom of God revealed by Jesus is not a doctrine, nor a catechism, nor a law. The Kingdom of God comes and becomes present when persons, motivated by their faith in Jesus, decide to live in community to give witness and to manifest to all that God is Father and Mother and that, therefore, we human beings are brothers and sisters among us. Jesus wanted that the local community would again be an expression of the Covenant, of the Kingdom, of the love of God the Father, who makes all of us brothers and sisters.

4) Personal questions

- Do you participate in the mission as a disciple of Jesus?
- Which point of the mission of the apostles is more important for us today? Why?

5) Concluding prayer

Great is Yahweh and most worthy of praise in the city of our God,
the holy mountain,
towering in beauty,
the joy of the whole world. (Ps 48,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Friday, February 7, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
help us to love you with all our hearts
and to love all men as you love them.
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 6,14-29

King Herod had heard about him, since by now his name was well known. Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.' Others said, 'He is Elijah,' others again, 'He is a prophet, like the prophets we used to have.' But when Herod heard this he said, 'It is John whose head I cut off; he has risen from the dead.'

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 her an 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 bodyguard 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

- The Gospel today describes how John the Baptist was victim of the corruption and of the arrogance of the Government of Herod. He died without being judged by a tribunal, in the course of a banquet given by Herod with the great men of the kingdom. The text gives much information about the time of the life of Jesus and on the way in which the powerful of the time exercised power. From the beginning of the Gospel of Mark we perceive or see a situation of suspense. He had said: "After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God!" (Mk 1, 14). In today's Gospel, almost suddenly, we know that Herod had already killed John the Baptist. Therefore, the reader asks himself: "What will he do now with Jesus? Will he suffer the same destiny? Rather than drawing up a balance of the opinions of the people and of Herod on Jesus, Mark asks another question: "Who is Jesus?" This last question grows throughout the Gospel until it receives the definitive response from the centurion at the foot of the Cross: "Truly, this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15, 39)

- Mark 6, 14-16. Who is Jesus? The text begins with a balance on the opinions of the people and of Herod on Jesus. Some associated Jesus to John the Baptist and to Elijah. Others identified him with a Prophet, that is, with someone who spoke in the name of God, who had the courage to denounce the injustices of the powerful and who knew how to animate the hope of the little ones. Persons tried to understand Jesus starting from the things that they themselves knew, believed and hoped. They tried to make him fit into familiar criteria of the Old Testament with its prophecies and its hopes, and of the Tradition of the Ancient, with their laws. But these criteria were not sufficient. Jesus could not fit in those criteria. He was much greater!

- Mark 6, 17-20. The cause for the killing of John. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod, the Great, from the year 4 BC up to the year 39 after Christ. In all, 43 years! During the whole life time of Jesus, there had been no changes in the government of Galilee! Herod Antipas was the absolute Lord of everything; he listened to no one and did whatever he pleased! But the one, who really commanded in Palestine, from the year 63 BC, was the Roman Empire. Herod, in order not to be removed from office, tried to please Rome in everything. He insisted above all, in an efficient administration which would provide income for the Roman Empire. The only thing that concerned or worried him was his security and promotion. This is why he repressed any type of subversion. Falvio Giuseppe, a writer of that time, says that the reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was the fear that Herod had of a popular revolt. Herod liked to be called benefactor of the

people, but in reality he was a tyrant (Lk 22, 25). The denouncement of John against him (Mk 6, 18), was the drop which filled up the cup, and John was thrown into prison.

- Mark 6, 21-29: The plot of the murdering. The anniversary and the banquet of the feast, with dancing and orgies! This was an environment in which the alliances were plotted. To the feast attended and were present “the great of the court, the officials and important persons from Galilee”. In this environment the murdering of John the Baptist was plotted. John, the prophet, was a living denouncement in this corrupt system. This is why he was eliminated under the pretext of a problem of personal vengeance. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of a man who did not control himself! Under the enthusiasm of the feast and of the wine, Herod swore lightly to give something to the young dancer. And superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to maintain his oath. For Herod, the life of his subjects counted nothing had no value. He used them as he wanted and decided what to do with them just as he decided where to place the chairs in his house. Mark gives an account of how things happened and lets the community draw the conclusions.

4) Personal questions

- Do you know the case of persons who have died victims of corruption and of the dominion of the powerful? And do you know persons in our community and in our Church victims of authoritarianism and of an excess of power?
- Herod, the powerful who thought to be the owner of life and death of the people, was a great superstitious person, and feared John the Baptist. He was a coward before the great, a corrupt man before the girl. Superstition, cowardice, and corruption distinguished the exercise of the power of Herod. Compare this with the religious and civil power today in the various levels of society and of the Church.

5) Concluding prayer

This God, his way is blameless;
the word of Yahweh is refined in the furnace,
for he alone is the shield of all who take refuge in him. (Ps 18,30)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 8, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
help us to love you with all our hearts
and to love all men as you love them.
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 6,30-34

The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught.
And he said to them, 'Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while';
for there were so many coming and going that there was no time for them even to eat.
So they went off in the boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves.
But people saw them going, and many recognised them; and from every town they all hurried
to the place on foot and reached it before them.
So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were
like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today is in great contrast with that of yesterday. On one side, the banquet of death, wanted by Herod with the great of his kingdom in the Palace of the Capital, during which John the Baptist was murdered, (Mk 6, 17-29); on the other side, the banquet of life promoted by Jesus with the hungry people of Galilee, in the desert (Mk 6, 30-44). The Gospel today presents only the introduction of the multiplication of the loaves and describes the teaching of Jesus.
- Mark 6, 30-32. The welcome given to the disciples. “At that time, the Apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. And he said to them: “Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while”. These verses show how Jesus formed his disciples. He was not concerned only about the content of the preaching, but also of rest for the disciples. He invited them to go to a lonely place so as to be able to rest and review what they had done.
- Mark 6, 33-34. The welcome given to the people. The people perceive that Jesus had gone to the other side of the lake, and they followed him trying to go to him by foot, to the other shore. “So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd, and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd and he set himself to teach them at some length”. Seeing that crowd Jesus was sad, “because they were like sheep without a shepherd”. He forgets his rest and begins to teach them. In becoming aware that the people have no shepherd, Jesus began to be their shepherd. He begins to teach them. As the Psalm says: “The Lord is my Shepherd! I lack nothing. In grassy meadows he lets me lie. By tranquil streams he leads me to restore my spirit. He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name. Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death I should fear no danger, for you are at my side. Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me. You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies.” (Ps 23, 1.3-5). Jesus wanted to rest together with his disciples, but the desire to respond to the needs of the people impels him to leave rest aside. Something similar happens when he meets the Samaritan woman. The disciples went to get some food. When they returned they said to Jesus: “Master, eat something!” (Jn 4, 31), but he answers: “I have food to eat that you do not know about” (Jn 4, 32). The desire to respond to the needs of the Samaritan people leads him to forget his hunger. “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work” (Jn 4, 34). The first thing is to respond to the people who look for him. Then he can eat.
- Then Jesus began to teach them many things. The Gospel of Mark tells us many things that Jesus taught. The people were impressed: “A new teaching! He taught them with authority! It was unlike that of the Scribes!” (Mk 1, 22.27). Teaching was what Jesus did the most (Mk 2, 13; 4, 1-2; 6, 34). This is what he usually did (Mk 10, 1). For other fifteen times Mark says that Jesus taught. Was it perhaps because Mark was not interested in the content? It depends on what people understand when they speak about content! To teach is not only a question of teaching new truths in order to say something. The content which Jesus gave did not only appear in his words, but also in his gestures and in his way of relating with persons. The content is never separated from the person who communicates it. Jesus was a welcoming person (Mk 6, 34). He wanted the good of the people. The goodness and the love which came from his words formed part of the content. They were his temperament. A good content, without goodness and kindness would be like milk poured on the floor. This new way which Jesus had of teaching manifested itself in a thousand ways. Jesus accepts as disciples not only men, but also women. He does not only teach in the synagogue, but also in any place where there were people to listen to him: in the synagogue, in the house, on the shore, on the mountain, on the plain, in the boat, in the desert. It was not the relationship of pupil-teacher, but of disciple to Master. The professor teaches and the pupil is with him during the time of

the class. The Master gives witness and the disciple lives with him 24 hours a day. It is more difficult to be a Master than a teacher! We are not pupils of Jesus, we are his disciples! The teaching of Jesus was a communication that came from the abundance of his Heart in the most varied forms: like a conversation by which he tries to clarify the facts (Mk 9, 9-13), like a comparison or parable that invites people to think and to participate (Mk 4, 33), like an explanation of what he himself thought and did (Mk 7, 17-23), like a discussion which does not necessarily avoid polemics (Mk 2, 6-12), like a criticism that denounces what is false and mistaken (Mk 12, 38-40). It was always a witness of what he himself lived, an expression of his love! (Mt 11, 28-30).

4) Personal questions

- What do you do when you want to teach others something about your faith and of your religion? Do you imitate Jesus?
- Jesus is concerned not only about the content, but also about rest. How was the teaching of religion that you received as a child? Did the catechists imitate Jesus?

5) Concluding prayer

How can a young man keep his way spotless?

By keeping your words.

With all my heart I seek you,

do not let me stray from your commandments. (Ps 119,9-10)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 9, 2014

Salt of the earth and light of the world

Listen to the Word of Jesus,

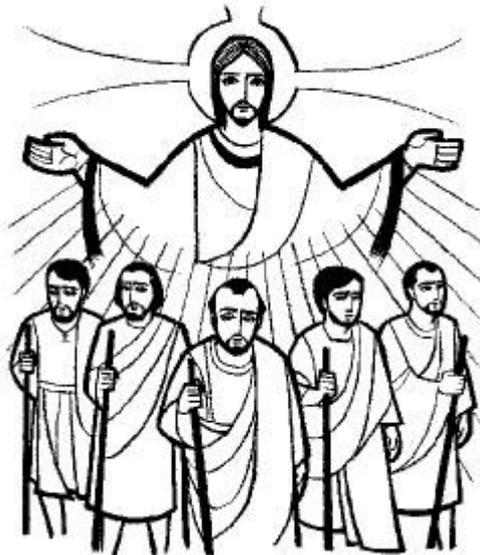
beginning with today's experience

Matthew 5, 13-16

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.

the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection.

Thus, the cross that seemed to be

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) Key for the reading of both parables:

If you have a chance to read Matthew 5, 1-12 which meditated on the eight Beatitudes. The Beatitudes constitute the beginning of the Sermon on the Mountain and describe the eight doors of entry into the Kingdom of God, by a life in community (Mt 5, 1-12). This Sunday we meditate the continuation (Mt 5, 13-16) which presents two well known parables, of the light and of the salt, with which Jesus describes the mission of the community. The community has to be salt of the earth and light of the world. Salt does not exist for itself, but to give flavour to food. Light does not exist in itself, but to illuminate the road. We, our community, do not exist for ourselves, but for others and for God.

Almost always when Jesus wants to communicate an important message, he has recourse to a parable or to a comparison, taken from daily life. In general, he does not explain the parable, because it is a question of things that we all know from experience. A parable is a provocation, Jesus provokes the audience to use its own personal experience to understand the message which he wants to communicate. In the case of the Gospel of this Sunday, Jesus wants that each one of us analyzes the experience that he has of salt and light to understand the mission that is ours as Christians. In this world, is there someone, perhaps, who does not know what salt is or what light is? Jesus begins with two very common and universal things to communicate his message.

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

Matthew 5, 13: The Parable of the salt

Matthew 5, 14-15: The Parable of the light

Matthew 5, 16: Application of the parable of the light.

c) The text:

13 'You are salt for the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled under people's feet. 14 'You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. 16 In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.

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.

i) Which is the part of the text which struck you most? Why?

ii) In the first place, before trying to understand the meaning of Jesus' words about the salt, try to reflect within yourself on the experience that you have of the salt in your life and try to discover this: "According to me, salt, for what is it good?"

iii) Starting then from this personal experience concerning the salt, try to discover the meaning of Jesus' words for your life and for the life of the community, of the Church. Am I being salt? Is our community being salt? Is the Church being salt?

iv) For you, what meaning does light have in your life? Which is your experience concerning light?

v) Which is the meaning of the parable of the light starting from the application which Jesus himself makes in the parable?

5. For those who desire to deepen more on this theme

a) Context of the discourse of Jesus:

Literary context. The four verses of the Gospel of this Sunday (Mt 5, 13-16) are found among the eight Beatitudes (Mt 5, 1-12) and the explanation of how the Law transmitted by Moses is to be understood (Mt 5, 17-19). Then follows the new reading which Jesus makes of the commandments of the Law of God (Mt 5,20-48). Jesus asks to consider the purpose of the Law which according to him is contained in the words: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5, 48). Jesus asks us to imitate God! At the origin of this new teaching of Jesus is found the new experience which he has of God the Father. Observing the Law in this way, we will be Salt of the earth and Light of the world.

Historical Context. Many converted Jews continued to be faithful in the observance of the law, just as they had done during their childhood. But now, having accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and, at the same time, being faithful to the teaching received from their parents and the Rabbi, they were cutting themselves out from their Hebrew past, they were expelled from the Synagogues, from the ancient teachers and even from their parents (Mt 10, 21-22). And in their own Christian community, they heard the converted pagans say that the Law of Moses had been surpassed and that it was not necessary to observe it. They were between two fires. On one side, the ancient teachers and companions, excommunicated them. On the other side, the new companions criticized them. All this caused tension and uncertainty in them. The openness of some criticized the closeness of others and vice-versa. This conflict

brought about a crisis which led them to close up in their own position. Some wanted to go ahead, others wanted to place the light under the table. And many asked themselves: “But definitively, which is our mission?” The parables of the salt and the light help us to reflect on the mission.

b) Commentary on the text:

Matthew 5, 13: *The parable of the salt*

Using images of daily life, with simple and direct words, Jesus makes known which is the mission and the reason of being of the Community: to be salt! In that time, because of the great heat, people and animals needed to eat much salt. The salt was delivered in great blocks by the suppliers and these blocks were placed in the public square to be consumed by the people. The salt which remained fell on the ground, was no longer good for anything and it was stepped on by everyone. Jesus recalls this usage to clarify the mission which the disciples have to carry out. Without salt nobody could live, but what remained of the salt was good for nothing.

Matthew 5, 14-16: *The Parable of the Light*

The comparison is obvious. Nobody lights a candle to place it under the bushel. A city on a mountain top cannot remain hidden. The community must be light, has to illuminate. It must not be afraid to show the good that it does. It does not do it to make it seen, but what it does can and should be seen. Salt does not exist for itself. Light does not exist for itself. This is the way a community should be: it cannot close itself in self.

c) To broaden the vision on the Beatitudes:

I. The parables in the context of the community of that time

Among the converted Jews there were two tendencies. Some thought that it was no longer necessary to observe the Laws of the Old Testament, because we have been saved by faith in Jesus and not by the observance of the Law (Rom 3, 21-26). Others thought that they, being Jews, had to continue to observe the laws of the Old Testament (Ac 15, 1-2). In each one of these two tendencies there were some more radical groups. Before this conflict, Matthew seeks a balance to unite both extremes. The community has to be a space where this balance can be reached and where it can be lived. The community has to be the centre of irradiation of this lived experience and show everyone the true meaning and the objective of the Law of God. The communities cannot go against the Law, nor can they close themselves up in themselves in the observance of the law. Like Jesus, they have to take a step ahead and show in practice the objective which the law wants to attain, that is the perfect practice of love. Living in this way they will be: “Salt of the Earth and Light of the World”.

II. The various tendencies in the communities of the first Christians

* The Pharisees did not recognize the Messiah in Jesus and accepted only the Old Testament. In the communities there were persons who sympathized with the mentality of the Pharisees (Ac 15, 5).

* Some converted Jews accepted Jesus as Messiah, but did not accept the freedom of Spirit with which the communities lived in the presence of the risen Jesus (Ac 15, 1).

* Others, whether converted Jews or Pagans, thought that with Jesus the end of the Old Testament had been attained and that, therefore, it was not necessary to maintain and to read the books of the Old Testament. From now on, only Jesus and the life in the Spirit! James criticizes this tendency (Ac 15,21).

* There were Christians who lived fully their life in community in the freedom of the Spirit that they no longer considered neither the life of Jesus nor the Old Testament. They wanted only the Christ of the Spirit! They said: "Jesus is cursed!" (I co 12,3).

* The great concern in the Gospel of Matthew is that of showing that these three unities: (1) the Old Testament, (2) Jesus of Nazareth and (3) the life in the Spirit, cannot be separated. The three form part of the same and unique project of God and communicate to us the central certainty of faith: the God of Abraham and of Sarah is present in the community thanks to the faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

6. Prayer: Psalm 27

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

Lectio Divina: Monday, February 10, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
watch over your family
and keep us safe in your care,
for all our hope is in you.
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 6,53-56

Having made the crossing, Jesus and his disciples came to land at Gennesaret and moored there.

When they disembarked people at once recognised him, and started hurrying all through the countryside and brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he was.

And wherever he went, to village or town or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched him were saved.

3) Reflection

- The text of today's Gospel is the final part of the whole passage of Mark 6,45-56 which presents three different themes: a) Jesus goes to the mountain alone to pray (Mk 6, 45-46). b) Immediately after, he walks on the water, goes toward the disciples who are struggling against the waves of the sea (Mk 6, 47-52). 3) Now, in today's Gospel, when they were already on the shore, the people look for Jesus so that he can cure their sick (Mk 6, 53-56).

- Mark 6, 53-56. The search of the people. "At that time, Jesus and his disciples having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When they disembarked, the people at once recognized him". The people were numerous looking for Jesus. They came from all parts, bringing their sick. The enthusiasm of the people who look for Jesus and recognizing him follow him is surprising. What impels people to search for Jesus is not only the desire to encounter him, to be with him, but rather the desire to be cured of the sicknesses. "And hurrying all through the countryside they brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he went.

And wherever he went to village or town or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all those who touched him were saved". The Gospel of Matthew comments and enlightens this fact quoting the figure of

the Servant of Yahweh, of whom Isaiah says: “Yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing, ours the sorrows he was carrying”. (Is 53, 4 and Mt 8, 16-17)

- To teach and to cure, to cure and to teach. Right from the beginning of his apostolic activity, Jesus goes through all the villages of Galilee, to speak to the people about the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1, 14-15). There, wherever he finds people to listen to him, he speaks and transmits the Good News of God, he accepts the sick, in all places: in the Synagogues during the celebration of the Word, on Saturday (Mk 1, 21; 3, 1; 6, 2); in the informal meetings in the house of friends (Mk 2, 1.15; 7, 17; 9, 28; 10, 10); walking on the street with the disciples (Mk 2, 23); along the beach, sitting in a boat (Mk 4, 1); in the desert where he took refuge and where people looked for him (Mk 1, 45; 6, 32-34); on the mountain from where he proclaimed the Beatitudes (Mt 5, 1); in the squares of the villages and of the cities, where the people took their sick (Mk 6, 55-56); in the Temple of Jerusalem, on the occasion of pilgrimages, every day without fear (Mk 14, 49)! To cure and to teach, to teach and to cure that is what Jesus did the most (Mk 2, 13; 4, 1-2; 6, 34). This is what he used to do (Mk 10, 1). The people were amazed (Mk 12, 37; 1, 22.27; 11, 18) and they looked for him, as a crowd.

- In the origin of this great enthusiasm of the people was, on the one hand, the person of Jesus who called and attracted and, on the other side, the abandonment in which people lived, they were like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mk 6,34). In Jesus, everything was revelation of what impelled him from within! He not only spoke of God, but he also revealed him. He communicated something of what he himself lived and experienced. He not only announced the Good News. He himself was a proof, a living witness of the Kingdom. In him was manifested what happens when a human being allows God to reign in his life. What has value, what is important, is not only the words, but also and above all the witness, the concrete gesture. This is the Good News which attracts!

4) Personal questions

- The enthusiasm of the people of Jesus, looking for the sense of life and a solution for their ills. Where does this exist today? Does it exist in you, does it exist in others?
- What attracts is the loving attitude of Jesus toward the poor and the abandoned. And I, how do I deal with the persons excluded by society?

5) Concluding prayer

How countless are your works, Yahweh,
all of them made so wisely!

The earth is full of your creatures.

Bless Yahweh, my soul. (Ps 104,24.35)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 11, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,

watch over your family

and keep us safe in your care,

for all our hope is in you.

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 7,1-13

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, keep the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them to keep, concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So the Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?'

He answered, 'How rightly Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites in the passage of scripture: This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. Their reverence of me is worthless; the lessons they teach are nothing but human commandments. You put aside the commandment of God to observe human traditions.' And he said to them, 'How ingeniously you get round the commandment of God in order to preserve your own tradition! For Moses said: Honour your father and your mother, and, Anyone who curses father or mother must be put to death. But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother: Anything I have that I might have used to help you is Korban (that is, dedicated to God)," then he is forbidden from that moment to do anything for his father or mother. In this way you make God's word ineffective for the sake of your tradition which you have handed down. And you do many other things like this.'

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today speaks about the religious traditions of that time and of the Pharisees who taught this tradition to the people. For example, to eat without washing the hands, as they said, to eat with impure hands. Many of these traditions were separated from life and had lost their significance. But even if this was the state of things, these were traditions kept and taught, either because of fear or because of superstition. The Gospel presents some instructions of Jesus concerning these traditions.
- Mark 7, 1-2: Control of the Pharisees and liberty of the disciples. The Pharisees and some Scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, observed how the disciples of Jesus ate the bread with impure hands. Here there are three points which deserve to be made evident: a) The Scribes were from Jerusalem, from the capital city! This means that they had come to observe and to control what Jesus did. b) The disciples do not wash the hands before eating! This means that being with Jesus impels them to have the courage to transgress the norms which tradition imposed on the people, but that no longer had any sense, any meaning for life. c) The fact of washing the hands, which up until now continues to be an important norm of hygiene, had assumed for them a religious significance which served to control and discriminate persons.

- Mark 7, 3-4: The Tradition of the Ancients. “The Tradition of the Ancients” transmitted norms which had to be observed by the people in order to have the purity asked by the Law. The observance of the law was a very serious aspect for the people of that time. They thought that an impure person could not receive the blessings promised by God to Abraham. The norms on purity were taught in order to open the way to God, source of peace. In reality, instead of being a source of peace, the norms constituted a prison, slavery. For the poor, it was practically impossible to observe the hundreds of norms, of traditions and of laws. For this reason they were considered ignorant and damned persons who did not know the law (Jn 7, 49).

- Mark 7, 5: The Scribes and the Pharisees criticize the behaviour of the disciples of Jesus. The Scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus: Why do your disciples not behave according to the tradition of the Ancients and eat the bread with impure hands? They think that they are interested in knowing the reason for the behaviour of the disciples. In reality, they criticize Jesus because he allows the disciples to transgress the norms of purity. The Pharisees formed a type of confraternity, the principal concern of which was to observe all the laws of purity. The Scribes were responsible for the doctrine. They taught the laws relative to the observance of purity.

- Mark 7, 6-13 Jesus criticizes the incoherence of the Pharisees. Jesus answers quoting Isaiah: This people approaches me only in words, honours me only with lip service, while their hearts are far from me (cf. Is 29, 13). Insisting on the norms of purity, the Pharisees emptied the content of the commandments of God’s Law. Jesus quotes a concrete example. They said: the person, who offers his goods to the Temple, cannot use these goods to help those in greater need. Thus, in the name of tradition they emptied the fourth commandment from its content, which commands to love father and mother. These persons seem to be very observant, but they are so only externally. In their heart, they remain far away from God; as the hymn says: “His name is Jesus Christ and is hungry, and lives out on the sidewalk. And people when they pass by, sometimes do not stop, because they are afraid to arrive late to church!” At the time of Jesus, people, in their wisdom, were not in agreement with everything they were taught. They were hoping that one day the Messiah would come to indicate another way to attain purity. In Jesus this hope becomes a reality.

4) Personal questions

- Do you know any religious tradition today which does not have too much sense, but which continues to be taught?

- The Pharisees were practicing Jews, but their faith was divided, separated from the life of the people. This is why Jesus criticizes them. And today, would Jesus criticize us? In what things?

5) Concluding prayer

Our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the world!

I look up at your heavens, shaped by your fingers,

at the moon and the stars you set firm-

what are human beings that you spare a thought for them,
or the child of Adam that you care for him? (Ps 8,1.3-4)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 12, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,

watch over your family

and keep us safe in your care,

for all our hope is in you.

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 7,14-23

Jesus called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean. Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!'

When he had gone into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, 'Even you -- don't you understand? Can't you see that nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean, because it goes not into the heart but into the stomach and passes into the sewer?' (Thus he pronounced all foods clean.)

And he went on, 'It is what comes out of someone that makes that person unclean. For it is from within, from the heart, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.'

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today is the continuation of the themes on which we meditated yesterday. Jesus helps the people and the disciples to understand better the significance of purity before God. For centuries, the Jews, in order not to contract impurity, observed many norms and customs bound to food, to drink, to the dress, to hygiene of the body, to contact with persons of other races and religions, etc. (Mk 7, 3-4), for them it was forbidden to have contact with pagans and to eat with them. In the years 70's the time of Mark, some converted Jews said: "Now

that we are Christians we have to abandon these ancient customs which separate us from converted pagans!” But others thought that they had to continue with the observance of these laws of purity (cf. Col 2, 16.20-22). The attitude of Jesus, described in today’s Gospel, helps us to overcome this problem.

- Mark 7, 14-16: Jesus opens a new way to try to get people closer to God. He says to the crowds: “Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean” (Mk 7, 15). Jesus overturns things: what is impure does not come from outside to the inside, as the Doctors of the law taught, but what comes from inside to the outside. Thus, nobody ever needed to ask himself if this or that food is pure or impure. Jesus places what is pure and impure on another level, not on the level of ethic behaviour. He opens a new way to reach God, and in this way realizes the most profound design of the people. .

- Mark 7, 17-23: In the house, the disciples asked for an explanation. The disciples did not understand well what Jesus wanted to say with that affirmation. When they reached the house, they ask for an explanation. The question of the disciples surprises Jesus. He thought that they had understood the parable. In the explanation to the disciples he goes to the very bottom of the question of impurity. He declares that all food is pure! That is, no food which from outside enters into the human being can make him become impure, because it does not go to the heart, but to the stomach and ends in the septic tank. But what makes one become impure, says Jesus, is what comes out from within the heart to poison human relationships. And then he enumerates some: prostitution, murder, adultery, ambition, theft, etc. Thus in many ways, by means of the word, of the life together, of living close by; Jesus helps persons to attain purity in another way. By means of the word he purified the lepers (Mk 1, 40-44), cast out unclean spirits (Mk 1, 26.39; 3, 15.22 etc), and overcame death which was the source of all impurity. But thanks to Jesus who touches her, the woman excluded and considered impure is cured (Mk 5, 25-34). Without fear of being contaminated, Jesus eats together with persons who were considered impure (Mk 2, 15-17).

- The laws of purity at the time of Jesus. The people of that time were concerned very much about purity. The laws and the norms of purity indicated the necessary conditions to be able to place oneself before God and to feel well in his presence. One could not get before God just in any way, because God is holy. The Law said: “Be holy because I am holy!” (Lv 19, 2). One who was not pure could not get close to God to receive the blessings promised to Abraham. The laws of what was pure and impure (Lv 11 to 16) were written after the time of slavery in Babylonia, toward the year 800 after the Exodus, but had its origin in the ancient mentality and customs of the people of the Bible. A religious and mystical vision of the world led people to appreciate things, the persons and the animals, beginning from the category of purity (Gn 7, 2; Dt 14, 13-21; Nm 12, 10-15; Dt 24, 8-9).

In the context of the Persian domination, the V and IV centuries before Christ, before the difficulties to reconstruct the Temple of Jerusalem and for the survival of the clergy, the priests who governed the people of the Bible increased the laws relative to poverty and obliged the people to offer sacrifices of purification for sin. Thus after child birth (Lv 12, 1-8), menstruation (Lv 15, 19-24) the cure of a haemorrhage (Lv 15, 25-30), women had to offer sacrifices to recover purity. Lepers (Lv 13) or people who had contact with impure things or animals (Lv 5, 1-13) they also had to offer sacrifices. Part of this offering remained for the priests (Lv 5, 13).

At the time of Jesus, to touch a leper, to eat with a tax collector or publican, to eat without washing the hands, and so many other activities, etc. everything rendered the person impure, and any contact with this person contaminated the others. For this reason, it was necessary to avoid “impure” persons. People lived with fear, always threatened by so many impure things which threatened life. They were obliged to live without trust, not trusting any thing or anybody. Now, all of a sudden, everything changes! Through faith in Jesus, it was possible to have purity and to feel well before God without being it necessary to observe all those laws and those norms of the “Ancient Tradition”. It was liberation! The Good News announced by Jesus took away all fear from the people, and they no longer had to be all the time in a defensive situation, and he gives them back the desire to live, and the joy of being children of God, without the fear of being happy!

4) Personal questions

- In your life, are there any traditions which you consider sacred and others which you do not? Which ones? Why?
- In the name of the Tradition of the Ancients, the Pharisees forgot the Commandment of Jesus. Does this also happen today? Where and when? Does it also happen in my life?

5) Concluding prayer

The upright have Yahweh for their Saviour,
their refuge in times of trouble;
Yahweh helps them and rescues them,
he will rescue them from the wicked,
and save them because they take refuge in him. (Ps 37,39-40)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 13, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
watch over your family
and keep us safe in your care,
for all our hope is in you.
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 7,24-30

Jesus left that place and set out for the territory of Tyre. There he went into a house and did not want anyone to know he was there; but he could not pass unrecognised. At once a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him and came and fell at his feet.

Now this woman was a gentile, by birth a Syro-Phoenician, and she begged him to drive the devil out of her daughter. And he said to her, 'The children should be fed first, because it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.' But she spoke up, 'Ah yes, sir,' she replied, 'but little dogs under the table eat the scraps from the children.' And he said to her, 'For saying this you may go home happy; the devil has gone out of your daughter.'

So she went off home and found the child lying on the bed and the devil gone.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we see how Jesus is attentive to a foreign woman, belonging to another race and to another religion, even though this was forbidden by the religious law of that time. At the beginning Jesus did not want to help her, but the woman insists and obtains what she wanted: the cure of her daughter.
- Jesus is trying to open the mentality of the disciples and of the people beyond the traditional vision. In the multiplication of the loaves, he had insisted on sharing (Mk 6, 30-44), he had declared all food pure (Mk 7, 1-23). In this episode of the Canaanite woman, he exceeds, goes beyond the frontiers of the national territory and accepts a foreign woman who did not belong to the people and with whom it was forbidden to speak. These initiatives of Jesus, which come from his experience of God the Father, were foreign to the mentality of the people of that time; Jesus helps the people to get out of their way of experiencing God in life.
- Mark 7. 24: Jesus gets out of that territory. In the Gospel yesterday (Mk 7, 14-23) and of the day before (Mc Mk 7, 1-13), Jesus had criticized the incoherence of the "Tradition of the Ancients" and had helped the people and the disciples to get out of the prison of the laws of purity. Here, in Mark 7, 24, he leaves Galilee. He seems to want to get out from the prison of the territory and of the race. Finding himself outside, he does not want to be recognized. But his fame had reached there before. People had recourse to Jesus.
- Mark 7. 25-26: The situation. A woman arrives close to Jesus and begins to ask for help for her daughter who is sick. Mark says explicitly that she belongs to another race and to another religion. That means that she was a pagan. She throws herself at the feet of Jesus and begins to plead for the cure of her daughter who was possessed by an unclean spirit. For the pagans it was not a problem to go to Jesus. But for the Jews to live with pagans was a problem!
- Mark 7. 27: The response of Jesus. Faithful to the norms of his religion, Jesus says that it is not convenient to take the bread of the children and give it to little dogs! This was a hard phrase. The comparison came from the life in the family. Up until now, children and dogs are numerous especially in poor neighbourhoods. Jesus affirms one thing: no mother takes away the bread from the mouth of her children to give it to the dogs. In this case the children were the Hebrew people and the little dogs, the pagans. At the time of the Old Testament, because

of rivalry among the people, the people used to call other people “dogs” (1 S 17, 43). In the other Gospels, Jesus explains the reason for his refusal: “I have been sent only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel!” (Mt 15, 24). That is: “The Father does not want me to take care of this woman!”

- Mark 7, 28: The reaction of the woman. She agrees with Jesus, but she extends the comparison and applies it to her case: “Jesus, it is true, but the little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the children!” It is as if she said: “If I am a little dog, then I have the right of little dogs, that is: the crumbs that fall from the table belong to me!” She simply draws conclusions from the parable that Jesus had told and shows that even in the house of Jesus, the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the children. And in the “house of Jesus”, that is, in the Christian community, the multiplication of the bread for the children was so abundant that there were twelve baskets full left over (Mk 6, 42) for the “little dogs”, that is, for her, for the pagans!

- Mark 7, 29-30: The reaction of Jesus: “Because of what you have said, go. The devil has gone out of your daughter!” In the other Gospels it is made more explicit: “Great is your faith! May it be done as you wish!” (Mt 15, 28). If Jesus accepts the request of the woman, it is because he understands that now the Father wanted him to accept her request. This episode helps to understand something of the mystery which envelopes the person of Jesus and his life with the Father. Observing the reactions and the attitudes of the persons, Jesus discovers the will of the Father in the events of life. The attitude of the woman opens a new horizon in the life of Jesus. Thanks to her, he discovers better the project of the Father for all those who seek life and to liberate themselves from the chains which imprison their energy. Thus, throughout the pages of the Gospel of Mark, there is a growing opening toward the people. In this way, Mark leads the readers to open themselves before the reality of the world which surrounds them, and to overcome the preconceptions which prevented a peaceful living together among the people. This opening toward pagans appears very clearly in the final order given by Jesus to the disciples, after his Resurrection: “Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Gospel to all creation” (Mk 16, 15).

4) Personal questions

- Concretely, what do you do to live peacefully with persons of other Christian Churches? In the neighbourhood where you live, are there persons of other religions? Which? Do you normally speak with persons of other religions?

- Which is the opening that this text demands from us today, in the family and in the community?

5) Concluding prayer

Blessed are those who keep to what is just,

whose conduct is always upright!

Remember me, Yahweh, in your love for your people.

Come near to me with your saving power. (Ps 106,3-4)

Lectio Divina: Friday, February 14, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
watch over your family
and keep us safe in your care,
for all our hope is in you.
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 7,31-37

Returning from the territory of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Lake of Galilee, right through the Decapolis territory. And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside to be by themselves, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.'

And his ears were opened, and at once the impediment of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they proclaimed it. Their admiration was unbounded, and they said, 'Everything he does is good, he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'

3) Reflection

In today's Gospel, Jesus cures a deaf-mute. This episode is not known very much. In the episode of the Canaanite woman, Jesus goes beyond the frontiers of the national territory and accepts a foreign woman who did not belong to the people and with whom it was forbidden to speak. In today's Gospel we notice this same opening.

- Mark 7, 31. The region of the Decapolis. "At that time, returning from the territory of Tyre, Jesus went to Sidon toward the Lake of Galilee, right through the Decapolis territory". Decapolis literally means: Ten cities. This was a region of ten cities in the south east part of Galilee, and its population was pagan.

- Mark 7, 31-35. To open the ears and to loosen the tongue. A deaf-mute man was brought before Jesus. People wanted Jesus to place his hands on him. But Jesus goes far beyond this request. He leads the man aside from the crowd, put his finger into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle, looking up to Heaven, he sighed deeply and said: "Éffata!", that is, "Be opened!" At that same moment, his ears were opened, and at once the impediment of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. Jesus wants the people to open the ears and to loosen the tongue!

- Mark 7, 36-37: Jesus wants no publicity. "And he ordered them not to tell anyone about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they proclaimed it. Their admiration was unbounded and they said: "Everything he does is good, he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak". He prohibits that the cure be diffused, but in fact that does not happen. Those who have experienced what Jesus has done, go and tell others, whether Jesus wants it or not! The persons who were present at the cure began to proclaim what they have seen and summarize the Good News as follows: "Everything he does is good, he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak!" This affirmation of the people makes us remember creation, when it was said: God saw that everything was good!" (Gn 1, 31). And this also recalls the prophecy of Isaiah,

where he says that in the future the deaf will hear and the dumb will speak (Is 29, 28; 35, 5. cf. Mt 11, 5).

- The recommendation not to tell anybody. Sometimes, the attention which Mark's Gospel attributes to the prohibition of Jesus to diffuse the cure is exaggerated, as if Jesus had some secret that he wants to keep. In the majority of cases in which Jesus works a miracle, he does not ask for silence. Rather, once he even asked for publicity (Mk 5, 19). Sometimes, he orders not to diffuse the cure (Mk 1, 44; 5, 43; 7, 36; 8, 26), but obtains the contrary result. The more he prohibits it, the more the Good News is diffused (Mk 1, 28.45; 3, 7-8; 7, 36-37). It serves nothing to prohibit! The interior force of the Good News is so great that it diffuses by itself.

- Growing openness in the Gospel of Mark. Throughout the pages of Mark's Gospel, there is a growing openness toward the other populations. Thus Mark leads the readers to open themselves toward the reality of the world around and to overcome the preconceptions which prevent the peaceful living together among the different populations. When he passed through the Decapolis, a pagan region, Jesus responded to the request of the people of the place and cured a deaf-mute man. He is not afraid to be contaminated with the impurity of a pagan, because in curing him, he touches his ears and his tongue. In what regards the authority, two Jews and the disciples themselves have difficulty to hear and to understand that a pagan who was deaf and dumb can now hear and speak thanks to Jesus who touched him. It recalls the song of the servant "The Lord God has opened the ears, and I listen to him" (Is 50, 4-5). In driving the merchants out of the Temple, Jesus criticizes the unjust trade and affirms that the temple should be a house of prayer for all peoples (Mk 11, 17). In the parable of the wicked tenants, Mark refers to the fact that the message will be taken away from the chosen people, the Jews, and will be given to others, the pagans (Mk 12, 1-12). After the death of Jesus, Mark presents the profession of faith of a pagan at the foot of the Cross. In quoting the Roman centurion and how he recognizes the Son of God in Jesus, he is saying that the pagan is more faithful than the disciples and more faithful than the Jews (Mk 15, 39). The openness for the pagans appears very clearly in the final order given by Jesus to the disciples, after his Resurrection: "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation" (Mk 16, 15).

4) Personal questions

- Jesus shows a great openness toward persons of another race, another religion and of other customs. We Christians, today, do we have the same openness? Do I have this openness?
- Definition of the Good News: "Everything Jesus does is good!" Am I good News for others?

5) Concluding prayer

Sing a new song to Yahweh!

Sing to Yahweh, all the earth!

Sing to Yahweh, bless his name! (Ps 96,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 15, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,

watch over your family

and keep us safe in your care,

for all our hope is in you.

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 8,1-10

And now once again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat. So Jesus called his disciples to him and said to them, 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. If I send them off home hungry they will collapse on the way; some have come a great distance.'

His disciples replied, 'Where could anyone get these people enough bread to eat in a deserted place?' He asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' And they said to him, 'Seven.'

Then he instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and began handing them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them among the crowd. They had a few small fishes as well, and over these he said a blessing and ordered them to be distributed too. They ate as much as they wanted, and they collected seven basketfuls of the scraps left over.

Now there had been about four thousand people. He sent them away and at once, getting into the boat with his disciples, went to the region of Dalmanutha.

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today speaks about the second multiplication of the loaves. The thread of union of several episodes in this part of the Gospel of Mark is the food, the bread. After the banquet of death (Mk 6, 17-29), comes the banquet of life (Mk 6, 30-44). During the crossing of the Lake the disciples are afraid, because they have understood nothing of the bread multiplied in the desert (Mk 6, 51-52). Then Jesus declares that all food is pure (Mk 7, 1-23). In the conversation of Jesus with the Canaanite woman, the pagans ate the crumbs which fell from the table of the children (Mk 7, 24-30). And here, in today's Gospel, Mark speaks about the second multiplication of the loaves (Mk 8, 1-10).

- Mark 8, 1-3: The situation of the people and the reaction of Jesus. The crowds, which gathered around Jesus in the desert, had no food to eat. Jesus calls the disciples and presents the problem to them: "I feel pity for this people, because for three days they have been following me and have not eaten. If I send them away to their homes without eating, they will faint on the way; and some come from very far!" In this concern of Jesus there are two important things: a) People forget the house and the food and follow Jesus to the desert! This is a sign that Jesus aroused great sympathy, up to the point that people followed him in the desert and remain with him three days! b) Jesus does not ask them to solve the problem. He only expresses his concern to the disciples. It seems to be a problem without a solution.

- Mark 8, 4: The reaction of the disciples: the first misunderstanding. The disciples then think of a solution, according to which someone had to bring bread for the people. It does not even

occur to them that the solution could come from the people themselves. They say: “And how could we feed all these people in the desert?” In other words, they think of a traditional solution. Someone has to find the money, buy bread and distribute it to the people. They themselves perceive that, in that desert, to buy bread, this solution is not possible, but they see no other possibility to solve the problem. That is, if Jesus insists in not sending the people back to their homes, there will be no solution to feed them!

- Mark 8, 5-7: The solution found by Jesus. First of all, he asks how much bread they have: “Seven!” Then he orders the people to sit down. Then, he takes those seven loaves of bread, gives thanks, broke them and gave them to the disciples to distribute them; and they distributed them to the crowds. And he did the same thing with the fish. Like in the first multiplication (Mk 6, 41), the way in which Mark describes the attitude of Jesus, recalls the Eucharist. The message is this: the participation in the Eucharist should lead to the gift and to the sharing of the bread with those who have no bread.

- Mark 8, 8-10: The result: Everyone ate, they were satisfied and bread was left over! This was an unexpected solution, which began within the people, with the few loaves of bread that they had brought! In the first multiplication, twelve baskets of bread were left over. Here, seven. In the first one, they served five thousand persons. Here four thousand. In the first one there were five loaves of bread and two fish. Here, seven loaves of bread and a few fish.

- The time of the dominant ideology. The disciples thought of one way, Jesus thinks in another way. In the way of thinking of the disciples there is the dominant ideology, the common way of thinking of persons. Jesus thinks in a different way. It is not by the fact of going with Jesus and of living in a community that a person is already a saint and renewed. Among the disciples, the old mentality always emerges again, because of the “leaven of Herod and of the Pharisees” (Mk 8, 15), that is, the dominant ideology, had profound roots in the life of those people. The conversion requested by Jesus is a deep conversion. He wants to uproot the various types of “leaven”.

- * the “leaven” of the community closed up in itself, without any openness. Jesus responds: “The one who is not against is in favour!” (Mk 9, 39-40). For Jesus, what is important is not if the person forms part or not of the community, but if he/she is generous, available or not to do the good which the community has to do.

- * the “leaven” of the group which considers itself superior to others. Jesus responds: “You do not know what spirit animates you” (Lc 9, 55).

- * the “leaven” of the mentality of class and of competition, which characterizes the society of the Roman Empire and which permeated the small community which was just beginning. Jesus Responds: “Let the first one be the last one” (Mk 9, 35). This is the point on which he insists the most and it is the strongest point of his witness: “I have not come to be served, but to serve” (Mc 10, 45; Mt 20, 28; Jo 13, 1-16).

- * the “leaven” of the mentality of the culture of the time Jesus responds: “Allow the little ones to come to me!” which marginalized the little ones, the children. (Mk 10, 14). He indicates that the little ones are the professors of adults: “anyone who does not accept the Kingdom of God as a child, will not enter in” (Lk 18, 17).

As it happened in the time of Jesus, also today, the Neo-liberal mentality is reviving and arises in the life of the communities and of the families. The reading of the Gospel, made in community, can help us to change life, and the vision and to continue to convert ourselves and to be faithful to the project of Jesus.

4) Personal questions

- We can always meet misunderstandings with friends and enemies. Which is the misunderstanding between Jesus and the disciples on the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves? How does Jesus face this misunderstanding? In your house, with your neighbours or in the community, have there been misunderstandings? How have you reacted? Has your community had misunderstandings or conflicts with the civil or ecclesiastical authority? How did this happen?
- Which is the leaven which today prevents the realization of the Gospel and should be eliminated?

5) Concluding prayer

Lord, you have been our refuge from age to age.

Before the mountains were born,

before the earth and the world came to birth,

from eternity to eternity you are God. (Ps 90,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 16, 2014

The new "justice"

This was said to the ancients, but I tell you...

Mt 5:17-37

Ordinary Time

1. LECTIO

a) Opening prayer

"Speak, Lord, that your servant is listening. " Speak to us now, Lord! We want to make room for your Word, to allow the words of the Gospel permeate our lives so that you become the light the strength of our way, vivify and transform our attitudes. We all want to mature in the way of listening to your words so that our hearts are transformed.

In us, there is a desire reading and understand why we are expecting for your bounty and generosity to be guided in comprehending of your Word.

Let your word to our hearts cannot find any obstacles or resistance. That your word of life does not flow in vain or in the dried desert of our lives. Enter in our empty hearts with the power of your Word, come to take the place among our thoughts and feelings, come to live with us in the light of your truth.



b) Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 5:17-37)

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away,

not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter

will pass from the law,

until all things have taken place.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments

and teaches others to do so

will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments

will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses

that of the scribes and Pharisees,

you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

“You have heard that it was said to your ancestors,

You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you,
whoever is angry with brother
will be liable to judgment;
and whoever says to brother, 'Raqa,'
will be answerable to the Sanhedrin;
and whoever says, 'You fool,'
will be liable to fiery Gehenna.

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar,
and there recall that your brother
has anything against you,
leave your gift there at the altar,
go first and be reconciled with your brother,
and then come and offer your gift.

Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court.
Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge,
and the judge will hand you over to the guard,
and you will be thrown into prison.

Amen, I say to you,
you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.

"You have heard that it was said,
You shall not commit adultery.

But I say to you,
everyone who looks at a woman with lust
has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If your right eye causes you to sin,

tear it out and throw it away.

It is better for you to lose one of your members
than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna.

And if your right hand causes you to sin,
cut it off and throw it away.

It is better for you to lose one of your members
than to have your whole body go into Gehenna.

“It was also said,

Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.

But I say to you,

whoever divorces his wife -- unless the marriage is unlawful --
causes her to commit adultery,

and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

“Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors,

Do not take a false oath,

but make good to the Lord all that you vow.

But I say to you, do not swear at all;

not by heaven, for it is God’s throne;

nor by the earth, for it is his footstool;

nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Do not swear by your head,

for you cannot make a single hair white or black.

Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’

Anything more is from the evil one.”

c) Moment of silence

The silence creates an internal atmosphere of intimacy and at the same time increase the spiritual taste of your Word.

2. MEDITATIO

a) Key to the reading

Mt 5-7: The context in the "Sermon on the mount"

Jesus addressed to the crowds who are in hurry to listen to his teaching. They are amazed with his authority. He speaks to them with strong demand and points out that we are children of God and brothers and sister to each others. In the attempt to give the full meaning of the precept of the Jewish law.

The evangelist, in locating the first discourse of Jesus on the mountain, wished to draw the attention to the readers the image of Moses giving the Law on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:9). This teaching takes place as Jesus is seated, a position that recalls the attitude of the Jewish rabbi who interprets Scripture to his disciples. It is difficult to capture the richness of the themes that run through long speech, as some scholars prefer to call it "the evangelical words of Jesus"(cf. 7:28).

Our liturgical text is preceded by a prologue in which the Beatitudes are presented as the fulfillment of the Law (Mt 5.3 to 16). The message of Jesus in this teaching focuses on happiness in the biblical sense, which places man in right relationship with God and, therefore, with total life: happiness tied to the reality of the kingdom of heaven. In a second part Jesus develops the theme of "justice" of the kingdom of heaven (5.17 to 7.12).

Mt 5.17: Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets.

In these first statements Jesus presents himself as the one who come to "fulfills the law": "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I came not to abolish but to fully fulfill them " (v.17). Jesus declares that he is the fulfillment of the law.

The consequences of such words are thus understood by the reader: only through him what we can enter the kingdom of heaven, even the smallest of the commandments makes sense through Him. It's like saying that Jesus is the measure to enter the kingdom of heaven: in Him, anyone, great or small, depends on the choice of letting ourselves be led by one who fulfills the Law and the Prophets. Henceforth the law, the teaching of the prophets, the justice the salvation must bond with Him.

The reader knows that in the Old Testament these truths were seen like separate and distinguished among them: the Law contained the will of God; justice expressed the human engagement in order to observe the contents of God's will in the Law; the Prophets, exegetes of the Law, were the witnesses of the implementation of the fidelity of God in the history. In the person of Jesus these three truths are unified: they find their meaning and value. Jesus declares openly that he has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. What do these affirmations of Jesus mean? What is the meaning of "the Law and the Prophets"? We cannot be thinking of Jesus carrying out prophecies (from a point of view of the content, or in the

literal sense) of the Law and the Prophets, but rather the instructions of the Law and the Prophets. But in particular way what means “to abolish”, “to fulfill” the instructions of the Law and the Prophets? The answer is placed at two levels.

The first one regards the instruction of Jesus, than it does not change the contents of the Law and the Prophets and whose function was didactic-instructive; indeed, Mathew considers the Prophets like the witnesses of the commandment of love (Os 6,6 // Mt 9,13; 12,7). That Jesus accomplishes the instructions of the Law and the Prophets can mean that “manifest them in their meaning”, “brings to complete expression” (U. Luz); it is from excluding the meaning of “to invalidate”, “to abolish”, “not to observe”, “to break(to smash)”.

The second level is referred to the involved acting of Jesus: does the law itself changes or not? In this case to fulfill the Law could mean that Jesus, with its behavior, adds something that lacks or brings to fulfillment, it perfects the instructions of the Law. In more concrete terms: Jesus in His life, with its obedience to the Father, “accomplished” the requirements demanded from the Law and the Prophets; after all, He observes the Law completely. More meaningfully: through His dead and resurrection Jesus has fulfilled the Law. To us it seems that the emphasis is placed on the behavior of Jesus: with obedience and practice He has fulfilled the Law and the Prophets.

Mt 5,19: Jesus who teaches the will of the Father and the fulfillment of the Law.

To the reader the use of the verbs “to act and to teach” doesn’t escape: the precepts of the Law for “who will observe them and will teach them”. Such aspects pick in full load the total image of Jesus in the thought of Mathew: Jesus who teaches the will of God and the achievement of the Law is the obedience son of the Father(3,13-4,11). Here the behavior model that appears to us from this Gospel page. Sure, the emphasis is on the implementation of the Law through obedience, but that does not exclude a fulfillment by means of His instruction. We do not forget that to Mathew it is important the conformity of the practice with the instruction of Jesus: he is master in obedience and the practice. However the praxis as it infers from the warning to watch itself from the pseudo prophets in 7,20 is priority: “From their fruits you will recognize them”. It is interesting to notice that Mathew uses this verb to complete, to fulfill, only for Jesus: only him completes the Law, only His person introduces the characteristics of the fullness. Here roots its authoritative invitation, that becomes a “shipment”, a task to complete the Law in fullness: “I say to you...” (vv. 18.20).

Mt 5,20 Jesus fulfills justice.

Such implementation is distinguished from the ways to comprise it and to live it in the Judaism; in Jesus a new specificity of the justice is introduced: “I say to you in fact: if your justice will not exceed that one of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter in the kingdom of heaven” (v. 20). The scribes are the theologians and the official interpreters of Writing (5,21-48), the Pharisees, instead, are the actively engaged lays of that time, excessively taken from the practice of mercy (6,1-18). Justice practiced from these two groups is not sufficient, cannot serve from model: it prevents to enter in the kingdom of heaven. The addressees of this warning, in the end, are the disciples; it is addressed to us. Sure the will of God it is drowned to the Law, but he is Jesus who incarnates a new way to put the justice in practice. Jesus asks one “greater justice”, than, what does it refers to? That one of the Scribes and the Pharisees has been aligned to the justice of the men, that one preached from Jesus, instead, demands one justice more substantial, significantly greater to

that one practiced from the Judaism. In what consists this “more” our text doesn’t precise immediately, it is necessary to read the continuation of the instruction of Jesus.

Mt 5,20 The radicalism of the justice preached from Jesus.

It is not about to stand out in radical way some commandments of the Law; it is rather primary that the commandment of the love is to the center of these single commandments. The “most quantitative one” guides to strengthen the qualitative aspect in front of God: the commandment of love. The believing community is called to subordinate to the commandment of love, seen as central, the various commandments of Law. There is no tension between the single garnishments and the commandment of love. The instructions of Jesus become binding, online with the instructions from the old testament. For Jesus there is no opposition between the single prescription of the Law and the commandment of love: they are to be considered in a harmonious relationship because in their entirety it is offered the will of God to us (U. Luz).

Mt 5,23-25: How to relate between siblings?

Between the radical requirements inborn in inviting to follow him, Jesus faces the argument of the relations fraternity. It isn’t enough to define all the engagement to the external action of not to kill: “You have heard that it was said from the old ones: You will not kill...” (v. 21); it is essential to break off such narrow norm therefore, but also radical: not to kill! The fifth commandment recommended the respect of life (Es 20,13; Dt 5,17). A deepening or a completely new horizon in the spirit of the Decalogue comes forward now. If it is not concurred to kill a person physically it wants to say that it is allowed to make it in other ways: hatred, the offense, the gossip, the depreciation, the anger, the insult. In the completely new perspective of the Speech of the Mountain, every lack of love towards the next one involves the same guiltiness of the homicide. In fact the temper, the anger, the depreciation are rooted in an undivided heart of love. For Jesus s’ it does not break the single Law just by killing, but also with all those actions that they try to destroy or “to make useless” the other.

Jesus doesn’t deal the issue of who is right or who is wrong but who “offends the brother or slanders him in public does not have more space in front of God, because homicide” (Bonhoeffer, Sequela 120). From here the severity that denies value to the offer, the cult, the prayer and the Eucharistic celebration. Who has separated himself from the brother also has separated himself from the relation with God. It needs, then, of a previous reconciliation with the brother that has something against him: Against you, not you against him. Innovation in this word, even if not easy is one to share. To my brother that has “something against me” I answer coming upon him: “first, go to reconcile yourself”, without increasing the distance. It is not alone a question of asking forgiveness: it is urgent to reconstruct the fraternal relations because the good of the brother is my good. Jesus says: “Go ”before”... In the first place, before praying, before donating, before that the other makes the first step, is the movement of my heart, of my body towards the other. Such going towards the other it has the purpose of the resetting of the laceration; a movement that stretches to the reconciliation.

b) Some questions

To put the meditation and practice.

1. In your life, do you always open to Jesus' request for a greater justice? Are you aware that they are not yet in full justice?
2. In the practice of justice, do you match it with the act of God? Do not you know that justice live in the human relations has been given to us? A confirmation you may find it the word of the Apostle Paul: "My righteousness is not having as one arising from the law, but that which comes from faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God based on faith"(Phil 3:9).
3. The expression of Jesus "but I say to you" it is for us an imperative or a theoretical commandment? Are we aware that the more and more great justice is nothing else that the continuous availability to be confronted with the existence of Christ, the only one just (fair)?
4. Our justice is engaged to imitate something of the justice of God, of his gratuity, his creativity? God renders us just, free us from the paralysis of the sin; once rendered free, we mutually transmit this liberation, practicing a justice that it does not judge, but always leaves opened, indeed it creates for the other spaces of a possible return to one authentic life

3. ORARIO

a) Psalm 119 (1-5, 17-18, 33-34)

The Psalm invites to us to obey to the law of God with all the personal effort. Such possibility is not only an external obligation but a gift granted to the man that put its confidence in God. The practical of the new justice in order to enter in the Kingdom of heaven cannot only come from an individualistic commitment, but from a familiar and constant dialogue with the Word of God.

Happy those whose way is blameless, who walk by the teaching of the LORD.

Happy those who observe God's decrees, who seek the LORD with all their heart.

They do no wrong; they walk in God's ways.

You have given them the command to keep your precepts with care.

May my ways be firm in the observance of your laws!

Be kind to your servant that I may live, that I may keep your word.

Open my eyes to see clearly the wonders of your teachings.

LORD, teach me the way of your laws; I shall observe them with care.

Give me insight to observe your teaching, to keep it with all my heart.

b) Final prayer

The Word that we have listened and meditated on has appeared to us quite strong, oh my Lord, and has put in crisis our attitude: "Go to reconcile yourself!". In the first place, before

being in front of the altar, before introducing our things and donate them to you with love, before that it is the brother to take the initiative, help our heart to complete that movement that recomposes the conflict, the laceration, therefore to recompose the lost harmony.

4. CONTEMPATIO

Saint John Chrysostom invites us with force and firmness: “When you refuse to pardon your enemy you, damage yourself, not him. What you are preparing is a punishment for you in the day of the judgment” (Speeches 2,6). Let yourself be transformed by God’s love of, in order to change your life, to convert yourself, to find again the way of life.

Lectio Divina: Monday, February 17, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord God,

forgive us that in our weak faith

we ask sometimes for signs and wonders.

We know that you are our Father,

but it is not always easy for us

to recognize your loving presence.

Give us eyes of faith to see the sign

that you are with us in Jesus and his message.

We say so reluctantly, for it is painful:

purify our trust in you and in Jesus

that we may become more mature Christians,

who love you through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 8,11-13

The Pharisees came up and started a discussion with him; they demanded of him a sign from heaven, to put him to the test. And with a profound sigh he said, 'Why does this generation demand a sign? In truth I tell you, no sign shall be given to this generation.' And, leaving them again, he re-embarked and went away to the other side.

3) Reflection

- Mark 8, 11-13: The Pharisees ask for a sign from Heaven. Today's Gospel narrates a discussion of the Pharisees with Jesus. Jesus also, as it happened with Moses in the Old Testament, had fed the hungry people in the desert, by multiplying the bread (Mk 8, 1-10). This is a sign that he presented himself before the people as a new Moses. But the Pharisees were not capable to perceive the meaning of the multiplication of the loaves. They continued to discuss with Jesus, and ask for a sign, "from Heaven". They had understood nothing of all that Jesus had done. "Jesus sighed profoundly", probably feeling disgust and sadness before so much blindness. And he concludes saying: "No sign will be given to this generation". He left them and went toward the other side of the lake. It is not worthwhile to show a beautiful picture to one who does not want to open the eyes. Anyone who closes the eyes cannot see!

- The danger of dominating ideology. Here we can clearly perceive how the "yeast of Herod and the Pharisees" (Mk 8, 15), the dominating ideology of the time, made persons lose their capacity to analyze events objectively. This yeast came from far and had taken profound roots in the life of the people. It went so far as to contaminate the mentality of the disciples and manifested itself in many ways. With the formation which Jesus gave them, he tried to uproot this "yeast".

- The following are some examples of this fraternal help which Jesus gave to his disciples.

a) The mentality of a closed group. On a certain day a person not belonging to the community used the name of Jesus to drive out devils. John saw it and forbade this fact: "We have forbidden this because he was not one of ours" (Mk 9, 38). John thought he had the monopoly on Jesus and wanted to prevent others to use the name of Jesus to do good. John wanted a community closed in itself. It was the yeast of the "Elected People, the separated People!" Jesus responds: "Do not stop him! Anyone who is not against us is for us!" (Mk 9, 39-40).

b) The mentality of a group which considers itself superior to others. Certain times, the Samaritans did not want to offer hospitality to Jesus. The reaction of some of the disciples was immediate: "May fire descend from Heaven and burn them up!" (Lk 9, 54). They thought that because they were with Jesus, everyone had to welcome him, to accept him. They thought they had God on their side to defend him. It was the yeast of the "Chosen People, the Privileged People!" Jesus reproaches them: "Jesus turned and rebuked them" (Lk 9, 55).

c) The competitive mentality of and of prestige. The disciples discussed among themselves about the first place (Mk 9, 33-34). It was the yeast of class and of competitiveness, which characterized the official religion and the society of the Roman Empire. It was already getting into the small community around Jesus. Jesus reacts and orders to have a contrary mentality: "If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last" (Mk 9, 35).

d) The mentality of those who marginalize the little ones. The disciples scolded little children. It was the yeast of the mentality of that time, according to which children did not count and should be disciplined by adults. Jesus rebukes the disciples: "Let the little children come to me!" (Mk 10, 14). The children become the teachers of the adults: "Anyone who does not welcome the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it". (Lk 18, 17).

- As it happened in the time of Jesus, today also the Neo liberal mentality of the dominating ideology arises once again and appears even in the life of the community and of the family. The prayerful reading of the Gospel, made in community, can help to change in us the vision of things and to deepen in us conversion and the fidelity which Jesus asks from us.

4) For Personal Confrontation

- Before the alternative: to have faith in Jesus or to ask for a sign from heaven, the Pharisees want a sign from heaven. They were not capable to believe in Jesus. The same thing happens to me. What have I chosen?

- The yeast of the Pharisees prevented the disciples to perceive the presence of the Kingdom in Jesus. Have some remains of this yeast of the Pharisees remained in me?

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, you are generous and act generously,

teach me your will. (Ps 119,68)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 18, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,

when we do not see clear in life,

when suffering comes our way,

we tend to blame you or people.

Help us to realize clearly

how much of the evil around us

comes from within ourselves,

from our greed for riches and power,

from our self-complacency and selfishness.

Speak to us your word of forgiveness

and change us from a silent majority of evil

into solidarity of love,

by the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 8,14-21

The disciples had forgotten to take any bread and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. Then he gave them this warning, 'Keep your eyes open; look out for the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.'

And they said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread.' And Jesus knew it, and he said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not understand, still not realise? Are your minds closed? Have you eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear? Or do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' They answered, 'Twelve.' 'And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' And they answered, 'Seven.' Then he said to them, 'Do you still not realise?'

3) Reflection

- Yesterday's Gospel spoke of the misunderstanding between Jesus and the Pharisees. Today's Gospel speaks of the misunderstanding between Jesus and the disciples and shows that the "yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod" (religion and government), had, in such a way, taken possession of the mentality of the disciples to the point of hindering them from listening to the Good News.
- Mark 8, 14-16: Attention to the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod. Jesus warns the disciples: "Look out for the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod". But they did not understand the words of Jesus. They thought that he spoke like that because they had forgotten to buy bread. Jesus says one thing and they understood another. This 'clash' was the result of the insidious influence of the "yeast of the Pharisees" in the mentality and in the life of the disciples.
- Mark 8, 17-18a: The question of Jesus. In the face of this almost total lack of perception in the disciples, Jesus rapidly asks them a series of questions, without waiting for an answer. Hard questions which express very serious things and reveal the total lack of understanding on the part of the disciples. Even if it seems unbelievable, the disciples reached the point in which there was no difference between them and the enemies of Jesus. First Jesus had become sad seeing the "hardness of heart" of the Pharisees and of the Herodians (Mk 3, 5). Now, the disciples themselves have "hardened their heart" (Mk 8, 17). First, "those outside" (Mk 4, 11) did not understand the parables because "they have eyes and do not see, listen but do not understand" (Mk 4, 12). Now, the disciples themselves understand nothing, because "they have eyes and do not see, listen, but do not understand" (Mk 8, 18). Besides, the image of the "hardened heart" evoked the hardness of heart of the people of the Old Testament who always drifted away from the path. It also evoked the hardened heart of Pharaoh who oppressed and persecuted the people (Ex 4, 21; 7, 13; 8, 11.15.28; 9, 7...). The expression "they have eyes and do not see, listen but do not understand" evoked not only the people without faith criticized by Isaiah (Is 6, 9-10), but also the adorers of false gods, of whom the Psalm says: "they have eyes and see nothing, have ears and hear nothing" (Ps 115, 5-6).
- Mark 8, 18b-21: The two questions regarding the bread. The two final questions refer to the multiplication of the loaves: How many baskets did they gather the first time? Twelve! And

the second? Seven! Like the Pharisees, the disciples also, in spite that they had collaborated actively in the multiplication of the loaves, did not succeed in understanding the meaning. Jesus ends by saying: “Do you still not understand?” The way in which Jesus asks these questions, one after the other, almost without waiting for an answer, seems to cut the conversation. It reveals a very big clash. Which is the cause for this clash?

- The cause of the clash between Jesus and the disciples. The cause of the clash between Jesus and the disciples was not due to ill will on their part. The disciples were not like the Pharisees. They also did not understand, but in them there was malice. They used religion to criticize and to condemn Jesus (Mk 2, 7.16.18.24; 3, 5. 22-30). The disciples were good people. Theirs was not ill will. Because even if they were victims of the “yeast of the Pharisees and of the Herodians”, they were not interested in defending the system of the Pharisees and the Herodians against Jesus. Then, which was the cause? The cause of the clash between Jesus and the disciples had something to do with the Messianic hope. Among the Jews there was an enormous variety of Messianic expectations. Secondly, the diverse interpretations of the prophecies, there were people who expected a Messiah King (cfr. Mk 15, 9.32). Others, a Messiah, Saint or Priest (cfr. Mk 1, 24). Others, a Messiah, a subversive Warrior (cfr. Lk 23, 5; Mk 15, 6; 13, 6-8). Others, a Messiah, Doctor (cfr. Jn 4, 25; Mk 1, 22-27). Others, a Messiah, Judge (cfr. Lk 3, 5-9; Mk 1, 8). Others, a Messiah, Prophet (6, 4; 14, 65). It seems that nobody expected a Messiah, Servant, announced by the Prophet Isaiah (Is 42, 1; 49, 3; 52, 13). They did not expect to consider the messianic hope as a service of the people of God to humanity. Each one according to their own interests and according to their social class, expected the Messiah, but wanting to reduce him to their own hope. This is why the title Messiah, according to the person or social position, could mean very different things. There was a great confusion of ideas! And precisely in this attitude of Servant is found the key which turns on a light in the darkness of the disciples and helps them to convert themselves. It is only in accepting the Messiah as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, that they will be capable to open the eyes and to understand the Mystery of God in Jesus.

4) For Personal Confrontation

- Which is for us today the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod? What does it mean today for me to have a “hardened heart?”
- The yeast of Herod and the Pharisees prevents the disciples to understand the Good News. Perhaps, today the propaganda of the Television prevents us from understanding the Good News of Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

I need only say, 'I am slipping,'

for your faithful love, Yahweh, to support me;

however great the anxiety of my heart,

your consolations soothe me. (Ps 94,18-19)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 19, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
you have promised to remain for ever
with those who do what is just and right.
Help us to live in your presence.
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 8,22-26

Jesus and his disciples came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to him a blind man whom they begged him to touch.

He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Then, putting spittle on his eyes and laying his hands on him, he asked, 'Can you see anything?'

The man, who was beginning to see, replied, 'I can see people; they look like trees as they walk around.'

Then he laid his hands on the man's eyes again and he saw clearly; he was cured, and he could see everything plainly and distinctly. And Jesus sent him home, saying, 'Do not even go into the village.'

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today gives an account of the cure of a blind man. This episode of a cure constitutes the beginning of a long instruction of Jesus to the disciples (Mk 8, 27 to 10,45) and then ends with the cure of another blind man (Mk 10, 46-52). In this broader context, Mark suggests to the readers that those who are truly blind are Peter and the other disciples. All of us are blind! They do not understand the proposal of Jesus when he spoke about the suffering and the cross. Peter accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but not as a suffering Messiah (Mk 8, 27-33). He was also affected by the propaganda of the time which only spoke of a messiah, of a glorious king. Peter seemed to be blind. He understood nothing, but wanted Jesus to be as he wanted.
- The Gospel today indicates how difficult it was to cure the first blind man. Jesus had to cure this man in two different stages. The cure of the disciples was also difficult. Jesus had to give a long explanation concerning the significance of the Cross to help them understand, because what really produced blindness in them was the Cross.
- In the year 70, when Mark wrote, the situation of the communities was not easy. There was much suffering, many crosses. Six years before, in 64, the Emperor, Nero had decreed the first great persecution, and many Christians were killed. In the year 70, in Palestine, the Romans were destroying Jerusalem. In the other countries, a great tension between the converted Jews and the non-converted Jews was beginning. The greatest difficulty was the Cross of Jesus. The Jews thought that a crucified person could not be the Messiah who was so awaited by the people, because the law affirmed that all the crucified persons should be considered persons condemned by God (Dt 21, 22-23).
- Mark 8, 22-26: The cure of a blind man. They brought a blind man, asking Jesus to cure him. Jesus cured him, but in a different way. First of all he took him outside the village. Then he put some spittle on the eyes, he placed his hands on him and asked: Do you see something? The man answered: I see men; in fact, they seem like trees that walk! He could see only in part. He exchanged trees for persons, or persons for trees! Only in a second

moment Jesus cures the blind man and prohibits him to enter the village. Jesus did not want an easy propaganda.

- As it has been said, this description of the cure of the blind man acts as an introduction to the long instruction of Jesus to cure the blindness of the disciples, and at the end he finishes with the cure of another blind man, Bartimaeus. In reality the blind man was Peter. We are all blind. Peter did not want the commitment of the Cross! And we, do we understand the significance of suffering in life?

- Between the two cures of the blind men (Mk 8, 22-26 and Mk 10, 46-52), is found a long instruction on the Cross (Mk 8, 27 to 10, 45). It seems a catechism, made of phrases of Jesus himself. He speaks about the Cross in the life of the disciple. The long instruction consists of three announcements of the Passion. The first one is that of Mark 8, 27-38. The second is of Mark 9, 30-37. The third one is in Mark 10, 32-45. Between the first one and the second, there is a series of instructions which indicate the type of conversion that should take place in the life of those who accept Jesus, Messiah Servant (Mk 9, 38 to 10, 31):

Mk 8, 22-26: the cure of a blind man

Mk 8, 27-38: first announcement of the Cross

Mk 9, 1-29: instructions to the disciples on the Messiah Servant

Mk 9, 30-37: second announcement of the Cross

Mk 9, 38 to 10, 31: instructions to the disciples on conversion

Mk 10, 32-45: third announcement of the Cross

Mk 10, 46-52: the cure of the blind man Bartimaeus

The whole of this instruction has as a background the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. From the beginning to the end of this long instruction, Mark tells us that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem, where he is going to suffer his death (Mk 8, 27; 9, 30.33; 10, 1.17.32). The full understanding of the following of Jesus is not obtained by theoretical ideas, but by the practical commitment, walking like him along the way of service, from Galilee up to Jerusalem. Any one who insists in keeping the idea of Peter, that is, of a glorious Messiah without the cross, will understand nothing and will never be able to have the attitude of a true disciple. He will continue to be blind, exchanging persons for trees (Mk 8, 24). Because without the cross it is impossible to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Jesus.

The journey of the following is the road of the gift of self, of abandonment, of service, of availability, of acceptance of conflict, knowing that there will be resurrection. The cross is not an accident on the way, but forms part of this road. Because in a world organized beginning from egoism, love and service can exist only crucified! Anyone who makes of his life a service to others, disturbs, bothers those who lived attached to privileges, and suffer.

4) Personal questions

- All believe in Jesus. But some understand him in one way, others in another. Today, which is the most common Jesus according to the way of thinking of people? How does propaganda interfere in the way of seeing Jesus? What do I do so as not to be drawn by the deceit of the propaganda?

- What does Jesus ask the persons who want to follow him? Today, what prevents you from recognizing and assuming the project of Jesus?

5) Concluding prayer

Lord, who can find a home in your tent,
who can dwell on your holy mountain?
Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly,
who speaks the truth from the heart. (Ps 15,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 20, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord God, merciful Father,
your Son came to set all people free,
to make the poor rich in faith and hope,
to make the rich aware of their poverty.
Unite us all in one trust in you
and in one common concern for one another;
give us all your attitude and that of Jesus,
of not distinguishing between ranks and classes and sexes
but of seeking together the freedom
brought us by Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 8,27-33

Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' And they told him, 'John the Baptist, others Elijah, others again, one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he asked them, 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ.' And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of man was destined to suffer grievously, and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter tried to rebuke him.

But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel speaks about Peter's blindness who does not understand the proposal of Jesus when he speaks about suffering and of the Cross. Peter accepts Jesus as Messiah, but not a suffering Messiah. He is influenced by the "yeast of Herod and the Pharisees", that is, by the propaganda of the government of that time in which the Messiah was a glorious Messiah. Peter seemed to be blind. He was not aware of anything, but wanted Jesus to be as he wished. To understand well the importance and weight of this blindness of Peter it is well to consider it in its literary context.

- Literary context: The Gospel of Mark transmits to us three announcements of the Passion and death of Jesus: the first one in Mark 8, 27-38; the second one in Mark 9, 30-37 and the third one in Mark 10, 32-45. This whole which goes up to Mark 10, 45, is a long instruction of Jesus to the disciples to help them to overcome the crisis produced by the Cross. The instruction is introduced by the healing of a blind man (Mk 8, 22-26) and at the end it is concluded with the healing of another blind man (Mk 10, 46-52). The two blind persons represent the blindness of the disciples. The healing of the first blind man was difficult. Jesus had to do it in two stages. The blindness of the disciples was also difficult. Jesus had to give a long explanation concerning the meaning of the Cross to help them understand why the cross was producing blindness in them. Let us consider closely the healing of the blind man:

- Mark 8, 22-26: The first healing of a blind man. They took a blind man before Jesus, asking Jesus to cure him. Jesus cures him, but in a different way. First, he takes him outside the village. Then he put some of his saliva on the eyes of the blind man and, laid his hands on him and asked him: Can you see anything? The man answered: I see persons; they look like

trees that walk! He could only see one part. He exchanged trees for persons, or persons for trees! Jesus cures him only in the second time. This description of the cure of the blind man introduces the instruction to the disciples, in reality the blind man is Peter. He accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but a glorious Messiah. He saw only one part! He did not want the commitment of the Cross! The blindness of the disciples is also cured by Jesus, in different stages, not all at once.

- Mark 8, 27-30: The discovery of reality: Who do people say I am? Jesus asks: “Who do people say I am?” They answered expressing the different opinions: “John the Baptist”. “Elijah or one of the Prophets”. After having heard the opinions of others, Jesus asks: “And you who do you say I am?” Peter answers: “The Lord, the Christ, the Messiah!” That is, the Lord is the one whom the people are expecting! Jesus agrees with Peter, but forbids him to speak about that with the people. Why? Because at that time all expected the coming of the Messiah, but each one in his own way: some expected the king, others the priest, doctor, warrior, judge, prophet! Nobody seemed to be expecting the Messiah, Servant and Suffering, announced by Isaiah (Is 42, 1-9).

- Mark 8, 31-33: First announcement of the Passion. Then Jesus began to teach saying that he is the Messiah Servant and affirms that, as Messiah Servant announced by Isaiah, he will soon be condemned to death in carrying out his mission of justice (Is 49, 4-9; 53, 1-12). Peter is horrified; he calls Jesus apart to rebuke him. And Jesus said to him: “Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do.” Peter thought he had given the right answer. In fact, he had said the correct word: “You are the Christ!” But he does not give it the correct sense. Peter does not understand Jesus. He was like the blind man. He exchanged people for trees! The response of Jesus was very hard: “Get behind me, Satan!” Satan is a Hebrew word which means accuser, the one who leads others away from the way to God. Jesus does not allow anyone to lead him away from his mission. Literally the text says: “Get behind me, Satan!” Peter has to follow Jesus. He must not change things and intend that Jesus follows Peter.

4) For Personal Confrontation

- We all believe in Jesus. But some believe that Jesus is in one way, others in another way. Which is today the most common image that people have of Jesus? Which is the response which people today would give to Jesus’ question? And I, what answer do I give?
- What prevents us today from recognizing the Messiah in Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

I will praise Yahweh from my heart;
let the humble hear and rejoice.
Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh,
let us acclaim his name together. (Ps 34,2-3)

Lectio Divina: Friday, February 21, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Lord our God,
we believe in you with all our being.
Let this faith never be a lifeless belief
in abstract truths outside ourselves,
but a deep personal commitment
to your Son Jesus Christ.
Give us the courage, we pray you,

to live for our brothers and sisters
and if need be to lose our life for them
and for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who lives with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 8,34-9,1

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

What gain, then, is it for anyone to win the whole world and forfeit his life? And indeed what can anyone offer in exchange for his life?

For if anyone in this sinful and adulterous generation is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

And he said to them, 'In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel speaks about the conditions necessary to follow Jesus. Peter does not understand the proposal of Jesus when he speaks about suffering and of the cross. Peter accepts Jesus as Messiah, but not a Suffering Messiah. Before this misunderstanding of Peter, Jesus describes the announcement of the Cross and explains the significance of the cross for the life of the disciples (Mk 8, 27 to 9, 1).

- Historical context of Mark: In the years 70's, when Mark writes, the situation of the communities was not easy. There was much suffering, there were many crosses. Six years before, in 64, the Emperor Nero had decreed the first great persecution, killing many Christians. In the year 70, in Palestine, the Romans were destroying Jerusalem. In the other countries an enormous tension between converted Jews and non converted Jews was beginning to arise. The greatest difficulty was the Cross of Jesus. The Jews thought that a crucified person could not be the Messiah, because the law affirmed that any crucified person should be considered a cursed person by God (Dt 21, 22-23).

- Mark 8, 34-37: Conditions to follow Jesus. Jesus draws the conclusions which are valid for the disciples, for the Christians of the time of Mark and for us who are living today: If anyone wants to follow me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me! At that time the cross was death penalty which the Roman Empire attributed to the marginalized. To take up the Cross and follow him meant, definitively, to accept to be marginalized by the unjust system which legitimized injustice. The Cross was not the fruit of fatalism of history, nor demanded by the Father. The Cross is the consequence of the freely assumed commitment by Jesus to reveal the Good News of the One who is Father and that, therefore, all have to be accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Because of this revolutionary announcement, he was persecuted and he was not afraid to give his own life. There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's brother. Immediately, after Mark inserts two separate phrases of the text.

- Mark 8, 38-9, 1: Two phrases: a requirement and an announcement. The first one (Mk 8, 38) is the requirement not to be ashamed of the Gospel, but to have the courage to profess it. The second one (Mk 9, 1), is an announcement about the coming or the presence of Jesus in the facts of life. Some thought that Jesus would have come afterwards (1 Th 4, 15-18). But in fact, Jesus had already come and was already present in the persons, especially in the poor.

But they were not aware of this. Jesus himself had said: “Every time that you helped the poor, the sick, the homeless, the imprisoned, the pilgrim it was me!” (cfr, Mt 25, 34-45).

4) For Personal Confrontation

- Which is the cross that weighs down on me and which makes my life heavy? How do I bear it?
- To gain or to lose life; to gain the whole world or to lose the soul; to be ashamed of the Gospel or to profess it publicly. How does this take place in my life?

5) Concluding Prayer

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

Lectio Divina: Saturday, February 22, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Almighty God,

you have given us the witnessing of the apostles

as the firm rock on which we can rely.

Where Peter is, there is the Church.

But we see today that the bark of Peter is rocked;

we are often like capricious children

unused to our newfound freedom.

Make us use this freedom responsibly

and do not allow us to lose our composure.

Reassure us that you are always with us

and keep us optimistic about the future,

for it is your future

and you are our rock for ever.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 16, 13-19

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

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents us three points: the opinion of the people concerning Jesus (Mt 16, 13-14), the opinion of Peter regarding Jesus (Mt 16, 15-16) and the response of Jesus to Peter (Mt 16, 17-19).
- Matthew 16, 13-14: *The opinion of the people regarding Jesus.* Jesus asks for the opinion of the people regarding his person. The responses are diverse: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Not one of them gives the right answer. Today, also, the opinion of the people regarding Jesus is very varied.
- Matthew 16, 15-16: *The opinion of Peter regarding Jesus.* Immediately, he asks the opinion of the disciples. Peter becomes the spokesperson and says: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" The response is not new. Before, the disciples had already said the same thing (Mt 14, 33). In the Gospel of John, the same profession of faith is made by Martha (Jn 11, 27). It means that in Jesus the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled.
- Matthew 16, 17-19: *The response of Jesus to Peter.* The responses come from several places: "Blessed are you, Simon. Jesus proclaims Peter "Blessed!" because he had received the revelation from the Father. Here, also, the response of Jesus is not new. Previously, he had praised the Father for having revealed the Son to little ones and not to the wise (Mt 11, 25-27) and had made the same proclamation of blessed to the disciples because they were seeing and hearing things that before nobody knew (Mt 13, 16).

- Peter is Rock (Pietra). Peter has to be Rock, that is, should be the stable foundation for the Church in such a way that it can resist against the gates of hell. With these words of Jesus, Matthew encourages the communities which were persecuted by Syria and Palestine. Even if weak and persecuted, the communities have a stable foundation, guaranteed by the words of Jesus. The rock as the basis of faith reminds the people the words of God to the People in exile: "Listen to me, you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh. Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father and Sarah who gave you birth. When I called him he was the only one but I blessed him and made him numerous. (Is 51, 1-2). It indicates a new beginning.

- *Peter, Rock.* Jesus gives a name to Simon and calls him Rock (Peter). In two ways, Peter and Rock (Pietra), in two ways: he is *rock-foundation*, (Mt 16, 18) and is *rock (pietra) a stumbling obstacle*, (Mt 16, 23). In our Catholic Church we insist very much on Peter – rock-foundation and we forget Peter- stumbling rock or obstacle. On the one hand Peter was weak

in his faith, doubtful, and tries to deviate or withdraw Jesus, he was afraid in the garden, he fell asleep and fled, he did not understand what Jesus was saying. On the other side, he was like the little ones whom Jesus called Blessed. Being one of the twelve, he became their spokesman. Later, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, his image grew and he became a symbol of the Community. Peter is firm in faith not because of his own merits, but because Jesus prays for him, in order that his faith would not fail (Lk 22, 31-34).

- Church, Assembly. The word Church, in Greek *eklésia*, appears 105 times in the New Testament, almost exclusively in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles. In the Gospels it appears three times, only in Matthew. The word literally means “convoked” or “chosen”. It indicates the people who gather together, convoked by the Word of God and, who try to live the message of the Kingdom which Jesus brings. The Church or the community is not the Kingdom, but it is an instrument and a sign or indication of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is greater. In the Church, in the community, it should appear in the eyes of all what happens when a human group allows God to reign and allows him to take possession of our life.

- *The keys of the Kingdom.* Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom. This same power of uniting or binding and of separating or loosening 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 the most is reconciliation and pardon or forgiveness. It is one of the more important tasks of the coordinators of the communities. Imitating Peter, they should bind and loose, that is, do in such a way that there be reconciliation, reciprocal acceptance, construction of the fraternal spirit.

4) Personal questions

- Which are the opinions in our community regarding Jesus? These differences in the way of living and of expressing faith, do they enrich the community or do they make the journey and communion more difficult? Why?
- Who is Jesus for me? Who am I for Jesus?

5) Concluding Prayer

Turn your ear to me, make haste.

Be for me a rock-fastness,

a fortified citadel to save me.

You are my rock, my rampart;

true to your name, lead me and guide me! (Ps 31,2-3)

Lectio Divina: Sunday, February 23, 2014

*... But I tell you: Love your enemies
Matthew 5: 38-48*

Ordinary Time

1. Opening prayer

Come, Lord,

May your breath blow as the spring breeze

that makes life bloom

and opens up love;

or let it be as the hurricane that unleashes

unknown strength

and raises latent energies.

May your breath pass in our eyes

to open them up to farther and wider horizons,

drawn by our Father's hand.

May your breath pass on our saddened faces

to restore a smile again;

may it graze our tired hands to give them new life

and make them able to work joyfully

for the Gospel's sake.

May your breath pass since dawn

holding fast all our days in a generous impulse.

May your breath pass as night approaches

to keep us safe in your light

and in your enthusiasm.

May it pass and remain throughout all our life

to renew it and give it the true and profound dimensions:

which are outlined in the Gospel of Jesus.

2. READING



a) A key to the reading:

The seventh Ordinary Sunday, unfortunately rarely celebrated, as it is inserted in the short period of time between Christmas and Lent confronts us with one of the sharpest Gospel passages, challenging and comforting at the same time, that a Christian can meet: the closing words or "antithesis" of the Sermon on the Mount.

The first reading from Leviticus (19.1-2, 17-18), is a piece of the "law of holiness." It relates directly to the second part of the Gospel text, with the command to love our neighbor and closely parallels with the last sentence of the words of the Lord.

The second reading (1 Cor 3.16 to 23) shows a further development of the theme of the Gospel: the path of Christian holiness, as far as humanly paradoxical and difficult to understand and put into practice, becomes possible by virtue of our mutual belonging to God. We are consecrated to Him and He has given himself completely to us through love; making us capable of loving like He does, of loving because of him and in him.

Our passage belongs to the so called "Sermon on the Mount" and is the first of the great speeches of Jesus that characterizes the first Gospel and includes chapters 5 to 7. This long speech, beginning with the most known and always provocative Beatitudes, can be read in the light of Jesus' statement on the full completion of the Law: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I came not to abolish them but to fulfill them..."

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (5,17.20).

Our passage belongs to the second section of the sermon, the one exposing the "new ethic", which comes to give fullness and perfection to the ethic based on the law given by Moses. This new ethic is characterized by statements beginning with the words: "But I tell you";

these statements lead us from the words of the Law or from a way to apply it to a new ethic law, which does not abolish the old Law, but gives it a new interpretation, in the light of our human interiority, in which God dwells as our Master and living example. In this way Jesus comes under our eyes and is presented to us by the Evangelist as a imitator of Moses, one who has in himself the same authority as the great leader of the Jewish people.

The verses of the Gospel this Sunday are the last verses of this section with the two last “anti-thesis” or “hyper-thesis”, which are strictly bound and have the strength to express the highest moral wisdom, based on the most pure and deep faith in God as Father and almighty and merciful Lord.

In light of the other readings of this Sunday's celebration, the strong ethical demands of Jesus that we hear today are to be seen not as the result of a heroic attitude, but rather as the result of a full Christian life of high quality

and more conforming to the “image of the Son” (Rom 8:29).

b) The text: Matthew 5: 38-48

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' ³⁹ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

3. Moment of Silence

So that the Word of God may penetrate in our hearts and enlighten our life.

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

We start from the premise that the Sermon on the Mount is not a "law according to cases", that is the enumeration of "ethical cases" with the solution best suited to each. On the contrary, as it has been well expressed by the scholar J. Ernst: "Considered as ethical rules, such requests (those inserted in the Sermon on the mount) are totally meaningless. Their significance is to be found in the role they play as signs and directions. In fact they want to draw our attention in a drastic way on the new era of salvation, which began with Jesus. The commandment of love has now acquired an ultimate radical stress.

Matthew 5.38: Jesus' exhortation starts from the "law of retaliation" (eye for an eye), which is a rule born from the civil law to prevent immoderate revenges, especially if hyperbolic; revenges that are to be limited according to a criterion of just balance between the evil committed and the evil given back and, above all, these revenges must be ruled within a judicial sphere.

Matthew 5.39 a: Jesus clear intent is not the condemnation of the ancient "eye for an eye" with all its rigors. He intends to suggest to us an approach for practical life, in accordance with the infinite goodness and mercy of our heavenly Father as a general attitude of life, made possible by the proclamation of the kingdom. The disciples of Jesus must be guided by a criterion that exceeds, by virtue of an overflowing love, the natural inclination to demand the absolute respect of one's rights. Those who belong to Jesus must live according to generosity: spending one's life for others, forgetting their own interests, free from meanness, being benevolent, forgiving, giving proof of greatness of soul. This is a practical, and really radical way to interpret the beatitude of the meek (Matt. 5, 5).

5.39 b-42: Here are a few examples of magnanimity (that is to have a "animus magnus – a soul wide opened") that should characterize the Christian, who is called to give more than it is required or claimed by him. Of course, this is not an absolute law, which would upset the socially accepted way of life, but it is a way to show the spirit of love even towards those who have done something bad.

The underlying message contained in these so well known examples corrects deeply the message contained in the "law of retaliation" (eye for an eye) and cannot be properly understood, except in the light of it.

The believer is called to interpret every situation, even those presenting very serious difficulties, in terms of the love of God which he has already received, making a radical leap in the approach: no more retaliation or revenge, nor the defense of himself and of his rights, even though appropriate, but the search for the good of everyone, even those who do evil. In this way one becomes free from the chain of revenge or even violence, which could become endless, to get justice by oneself, risking to fall into the spiral of evil under the influence of excessive zeal. It is on God's justice, which is always better, that we have to rely.

St. Paul expresses this very well: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written:

"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. "(Rom 12:17-21).

The interpretation of these living standards can be found in the general attitude and in several specific episodes of the Passion of Jesus: when he reacts with calmness and firmness to the beatings during the process held by the Jews (Jn 18:23), when he doesn't flee from being arrested and prevents Peter to fight for him (Jn 18:4 to 10), when he forgives those who crucified him (Luke 23:34) and takes the thief in paradise (Luke 23:40-43). And we know that the key to understanding the passion of Jesus is God's love for humanity (Jn 13:1, 15:13).

A hero of nonviolence, Martin Luther King, wrote: "The oceans of history are made turbulent by the flow of always insurrecting revenge. Man never raised above the commandment of the lex talionis: "Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." In spite of the fact that the law of revenge does not solve any social problem, people continue to pursue his disastrous leadership. The story echoes the noise of the ruin of nations and individuals who have followed this self-destructive path. Jesus from the cross stated eloquently a higher law. He knew that the old law eye for an eye would make all blind, and did not try to overcome evil with evil: he won the evil with good. Crucified by hate he responded with aggressive love.

What a wonderful lesson! Generations will rise and fall, man will continue to worship the god of vengeance and prostrate before the altar of retaliation, but then more and more this noble lesson of Calvary will be an urgent warning that only goodness can eliminate the evil and only love can overcome hate. "(The power of love, Società Editrice Internazionale, Torino, 1994, p. 65).

Matthew 5:43: The Old-Testament commandment that Jesus quotes is the result of the combination of a quote from Leviticus (19:18) and the extrabiblical words "and hate your enemy" that come from a totally negative attitude towards the Gentiles, seen as enemies of God and, therefore, as enemies of the people of God and as such they had to be rejected in any way, in order to avoid the infection of their idolatry and immorality.

Matthew 5:44 a: The evangelist uses, significantly, the verb *agapao* to indicate the Christian duty to love the enemies far beyond any general rule and any kind of friendship. This is the most typical verb expressing God's attitude towards men and men's attitude towards God and his fellows: a radical will of free goodness and self-giving.

This precept, completely new and shocking in many ways, completes the previous teachings of Jesus and refers to the "superabundant justice" from which began the Sermon on the Mount. It is up to this very lofty goal that he wanted to bring his disciples: "Love your enemies."

The enemies we are talking about here, specifically, are the persecutors, pagans, idolaters, those who most directly contrasted the Christian ideal, thus constituting a threat to faith. However, they are the prototype and the symbol of each enemy. To them the Christian should use the same kindness that he has with his brothers in faith. Not only tolerance, love or friendship in general, but deep and disinterested love of self that the believer can only draw

from the heart of God and learn from his example, as seen in the creation and history of the universe.

Matthew 5.44 b: «" Love and pray, love up to pray. " It is the supreme gift that can be done to the enemy, because it puts in place the maximum internal energy: the power of faith. It's easier to offer a gesture of external aid or relief than to desire intimately, in one's heart and in truth, the good of the enemy, as much as to make it the theme and the intention of the prayer before God. If you pray for him, asking for him graces and blessings, it means that you desire and want what is good for him. This is to be sincere in love. Prayer is the Christian's reward to the blames of the enemy "(OP).

Matthew 5.45: Jesus explains why we should love our enemies. The filiation He is talking about in this passage does not cancel that by creation or adoption, but it is primarily the one of the similarity of our feelings with those of God.

The Christian must imitate in his everyday life the goodness of his heavenly Father.

So, when he loves his enemy, he becomes child of the Heavenly Father, because it is the result of the desire to love like He does.

Of course, the identity of the children of God is not static, but emerges from a dynamic process. Those who are children of God by Baptism, become fully his children living and growing in the same logic of the Father, also making gestures of love that reveal his likeness to God. Since God is good and fair, his sons are good and fair, able to regulate their own love not according to the merits of others, but according to the love and care that each living being receives constantly by God.

The more one lets himself be shaped by the grace of God, the more he can put into practice this commandment, and the more the Holy Spirit will bear witness to his spirit that he is the son of God (cf. Rom 8:16).

Matthew 5.46-47: the real difference between Christians and other men is the attitude and the capacity to love even those who would be "naturally" not lovely.

Matthew 5.48: Perfect (teleios, complete, accomplished - in this case, complete in love).

Again Jesus links the commandment of love for the enemy with his Father's example, with the actions that He accomplishes daily for the benefit of all and which are the fruit of his heart full of love, that He, the Son, knows deeply. This is the heart of Christian morality which is not a law to observe, but is a communion of life with this Father given by the Holy Spirit, "the law of the Spirit who gives life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2).

In this communion, the Christian absorbs the love of the Father, a love that aims to change enemies into friends, changing the bad and making them become good.

Isaac of Nineveh, commenting v. 45, states: "By the Creator there is no change, or intention that is before or after, in his nature, there is no hatred or resentment, or smaller or bigger place in his love, either after or first in his knowledge. In fact, if everyone believes that the creation has begun as a result of goodness and love of the Creator, we know that this plea does not change or decreases in the Creator, as a result of a disorder in his creation.

It would be odious and blasphemous to claim that in God exist hatred or resentment – not even for the demons - or to imagine any other weakness or passion ... On the contrary, God acts with us in ways that are advantageous for us; either causes of pain or relief for us, of joy or sadness, insignificant or glorious. All of them are oriented towards the same eternal Goods "(Discourse, Part 2, 38.5 and 39.3).

5. Questions for reflection:

to help us in our personal reflection and meditation.

- I stop, Do I know that these words are for me, today?

Do I know that Jesus speaks to me in the situation that I live in this particular moment in my life?

- Do I take very seriously the words of the gospel?

- How do I live these high and yet unavoidable ethical standards?

"I tell you: Do not resist an evil person "

"If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also"

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"

"Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

- I examine myself: What are my models of conduct when I am in difficult situations?

When I feel attacked or treated unfairly?

- And when I feel the lack of love of others or their aversion to me, how do I react?

Which pattern does my action follow in this situations?

- In my prayer do I put myself in front of the example of Jesus?

Am I able to watch at least a little to the Father who is a merciful Father of all beings in the universe and keeps all in existence?

- It's time to take another step forward in the way I act: I invoke the Holy Spirit, so that he may shape my interior according to the image of Jesus, making me able to love others like him and because of him!

6. ORAZIONE

The Word of God offers us a magnificent hymn for our prayer.

The beauty and timeliness of the famous "hymn to love" (1 Cor 13,1-9.12 b-13) become even stronger for us if, when we pray, we replace the word "charity" with the name of Jesus, who is divine love incarnate, and who is a true reflection of the Father's love for all His creatures:

If I speak in the tongue of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.

But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love

7. FINAL PRAYER

O God, in your Son, stripped and humiliated on the cross, you have revealed the strength of your love, open our hearts to the gift of your Spirit and provide that, accepting him, might be broken within us the chains of violence and hatred that bind us to the lifestyle of those who do not know you, so that through the victory of good over evil we may manifest our identity of God's children and bear witness to your Gospel of reconciliation and peace.

Lectio Divina: Monday, February 24, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
keep before us the wisdom and love
you have revealed in your Son.
Help us to be like him
in word and deed,
for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 9,14-29

As they were rejoicing the disciples they saw a large crowd round them and some scribes arguing with them.

At once, when they saw him, the whole crowd were struck with amazement and ran to greet him. And he asked them, 'What are you arguing about with them?' A man answered him from the crowd, 'Master, I have brought my son to you; there is a spirit of dumbness in him, and when it takes hold of him it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and goes rigid. And I asked your disciples to drive it out and they were unable to.' In reply he said to them, 'Faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you?'

How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.' They brought the boy to him, and at once the spirit of dumbness threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell to the ground and lay writhing there, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' 'From childhood,' he said, 'and it has often thrown him into fire and into water, in order to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.' 'If you can?' retorted Jesus. 'Everything is possible for one who has faith.' At once the father of the boy cried out, 'I have faith. Help my lack of faith!'

And when Jesus saw that a crowd was gathering, he rebuked the unclean spirit. 'Deaf and dumb spirit,' he said, 'I command you: come out of him and never enter him again.' Then it threw the boy into violent convulsions and came out shouting, and the boy lay there so like a corpse that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him up, and he was able to stand.

When he had gone indoors, his disciples asked him when they were by themselves, 'Why were we unable to drive it out?' He answered, 'This is the kind that can be driven out only by prayer.'

3) Reflection

- The Gospel today informs us that the disciples of Jesus were not able to cast out the devil from the body of a boy. The power of evil was greater than their capacity. Today, also, there are many evils which surpass our capacity to face them: violence, drugs, war, sickness, jobless people, terrorism, etc. We make great efforts in life, but it seems that instead of improving, the world becomes worse. What good is there in struggling? Keeping this question in mind, let us read and meditate on today's Gospel.

- Mark 9, 14-22: The situation of the people: despair without solution. Coming down from the mountain of the Transfiguration, Jesus met many people around the disciples. A parent was in despair, because an evil spirit had taken possession of his son. With great detail, Mark describes the situation of the possessed boy, the anguish of the father, the incapacity of the disciples and the reaction of Jesus. Two things strike us in a particular way: on one side, the confusion and the powerlessness of the people and of the disciples in the face of the phenomenon of possession, and on the other hand, the power of faith in Jesus before which the devil loses all his influence. The father had asked the disciples to drive out the devil from the boy, but they were not able to do it. Jesus becomes impatient and says: "Faithless generation! How much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me". Jesus asks information regarding the sickness of the boy. And from the response of the father, Jesus knows that the boy, "from childhood", was affected by a serious illness which endangered his life. The father asked: "But if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us!" The phrase of the father expresses a very real situation of the people: (a) they are faithless; (b) they are not in a condition to solve the problem, but (c) have such good will.

- Mark 9, 23-27: The answer of Jesus: the way of faith. The father answers: Lord, I believe! But help my lack of faith! The response of the father has the central place in this episode. It indicates that this should be the attitude of the disciple, that, in spite of his/her limitations and doubts, he/she wants to be faithful. Seeing that many people were coming, Jesus acted rapidly. He ordered the spirit to get out of the boy and not to return "again ever!" This is a sign of the power of Jesus on evil. It is also a sign that Jesus did not want any popular propaganda.

- Mark 9, 28-29: Deepening this with the disciples. In the house, the disciples want to know why they were not able to drive out the devil. Jesus answers: This is the kind of evil spirit that can be driven out only by prayer! Faith and prayer go together. One does not exist without the other. The disciples had become worse. Before they were capable of driving out the devil

(cfr. Mk 6, 7.13). Now, no more. What is lacking? Faith or prayer? Why is it lacking? These are questions which come from the text and enter into our head in a way that we can proceed also to a kind of revision of our life.

- The expulsion of the devils in the Gospel of Mark. During the time of Jesus many persons spoke of Satan and of the expulsion of the devils. People were afraid and, there were some persons who profited and took advantage of the fear of the people. The power of evil had many names: Demon, Devil, Beelzebul, Prince of Demons, Satan, Dragon, Domination, Power, Beast-wild animal, Lucifer, etc. (cfr. Mk 3, 22-23; Mt 4, 1; Rv 12, 9; Rm 8, 38;; Eph 1, 21). Today also, among us the power of evil has many names. It is enough to consult the dictionary and look for the word Devil or Demon. Today, also, many dishonest people enrich themselves, profiting of the fear which people have of the devil. Now, one of the objectives of the Good News of Jesus is, precisely, to help people to free themselves from this fear. The coming of the Kingdom of God means the coming of a stronger power. The strong man was an image which indicated the power of evil which maintained people imprisoned by fear (Mk 3, 27). The power of fear oppresses persons and makes them lose themselves. He does in such a way that they live in fear and death (cfr. Mk 5, 2). It is such a strong power that nobody can stop it (Mk 5, 4). The Roman Empire with its "Legion" (cfr. Mk 5, 9), that is, with its armies, was the instrument used to maintain this situation of oppression. But Jesus is the strongest man who overcomes, seizes and drives out the power of evil! In the Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul gives a list of all the possible powers or demons which could threaten us and he summarizes everything in this way: "I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord!" (Rm 8, 38-39). Nothing of all this! And the first words of Jesus after the Resurrection are: "Do not be afraid! Rejoice! Do not fear! Peace be with you!" (Mk 16, 6; Mt 28, 9-10; Lk 24, 36; Jn 20, 21).

4) Personal questions

- Have you ever lived an experience of powerlessness before some evil or violence? Was this an experience for you only or also for the community? How did you overcome it?
- Which is the type of evil today which can only be overcome with much prayer?

5) Concluding Prayer

The precepts of Yahweh are honest,
joy for the heart;
the commandment of Yahweh is pure,
light for the eyes. (Ps 19,8)

Lectio Divina: Tuesday, February 25, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,

keep before us the wisdom and love

you have revealed in your Son.

Help us to be like him

in word and deed,

for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 9,30-37

After leaving that place Jesus and his disciples made their way through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know, because he was instructing his disciples; he was telling them, 'The Son of man will be delivered into the power of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he said and were afraid to ask him.

They came to Capernaum, and when he got into the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' They said nothing, because on the road they had been arguing which of them was the greatest. So he sat down, called the Twelve to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all.'

He then took a little child whom he set among them and embraced, and he said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes a little child such as this in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel narrates the second announcement of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Like in the first announcement (Mk 8, 27-38), the disciples were terrified and they are afraid. They do not understand the words about the cross, because they are not capable to understand or to accept a Messiah who becomes the servant of the brothers. They continue to dream in a *glorious* Messiah and besides that, they show a great incoherence. When Jesus announces his Passion and Death, they discuss who among them will be the greatest. Jesus wants to serve, they only think in commanding! Ambition leads them to promote themselves at the cost of Jesus. Up until the present time, this same desire of self promotion exists in our communities.
- In the time of Jesus as well as in that of Mark, there was the "yeast" of a dominating ideology. Today also, the ideology of the propaganda of business, of consumerism, of the television novels, influence profoundly the way of thinking and of acting of people. At the time of Mark, the communities were not always capable to maintain a critical attitude before the invasion of the ideology of the Roman Empire. And today?
- Mark 9, 30-32: *The announcement of the Cross*. Jesus goes across Galilee, but he does not want people to know it, because he is busy with the formation of the disciples, and he speaks with them about the Cross. He says that according to the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 53, 1-10), the Son of Man has to be handed over and condemned to death. This indicates the orientation of Jesus toward the Bible, whether in the carrying out of his own mission, as in the formation given to his disciples. He drew his teaching from the prophecies. Like in the first announcement (Mk 8, 32), the disciples listen to him, but they do not understand what he says about the Cross. But they do not ask for any clarification. They are afraid to show their ignorance!

- Mark 9, 33-34: *The competitive mentality.* When they got home, Jesus asked: “*What were you arguing about on the road?*” They did not answer. It is the silence of the one who feels guilty, “*on the road, in fact, they had been arguing which of them was the greatest*”. Jesus is a good pedagogue. He does not intervene immediately. He knows how to wait for the opportune moment to fight against the influence of the ideology in those whom he is forming. The competitive mentality *and* of prestige, which characterized the society of the Roman Empire, was already penetrating into the small community which was just being formed! Behold the contrast: incoherence: Jesus is concerned with being the Messiah Servant and they think only in who is the greatest. Jesus tries to descend, they think of going up!

- Mark 9, 35-37: *To serve instead of commanding.* The response of Jesus is a summary of the witness of life which he himself was giving from the beginning: *If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all!* Because the last one does not win a prize nor obtain a reward. He is a useless servant (cfr. Lk 17, 10). Power must be used not to ascend and dominate, but to descend and serve. This is the point on which Jesus insists the most and of which he gives a greater witness (cf. Mk 10, 45; Mt 20, 28; Jn 13. 1-16). Then Jesus took a little child whom he set among them. A person, who only thinks to go up and to dominate, would not lend much attention to little ones and to children. But Jesus overturns everything! He says: “*Anyone who welcomes a little child such as this in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes not me but the one who sent me*”. He identifies himself with little ones. Anyone who welcomes the little ones in the name of Jesus welcomes God himself!

- A person is not a saint and is not renewed by the simple fact of “*following Jesus*”. In the midst of the disciples, and always again, the “yeast of Herod and of the Pharisees” (Mk 8, 15) could be observed. In the episode of today’s Gospel, Jesus appears as a teacher forming his followers. “*To follow*” was a term that formed part of the educational system of that time. It was used to indicate the relationship between the disciple and the teacher. The relationship teacher-disciple is different from that of professor-pupil. The pupils go to the class of the professor of a determinate subject. The disciples “follow” the teacher and live with him, twenty-four hours a day. In this “living together” with Jesus during three years, the disciples will receive their formation. Tomorrow’s Gospel will give us another quite concrete example of how Jesus formed his disciples.

4) Personal questions

- Jesus wants to lower himself and serve. The disciples want to ascend and to dominate. And I? Which is the most profound motivation of my “unknown I”?

- To follow Jesus and to be with him, twenty-four hours a day, and allow his way of living to become my way of living and of living together with others. Is this taking place in me?

5) Concluding Prayer

May the words of my mouth always find favour,

and the whispering of my heart,

in your presence, Yahweh,

my rock, my redeemer. (Ps 19,14)

Lectio Divina: Wednesday, February 26, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,

keep before us the wisdom and love

you have revealed in your Son.

Help us to be like him

in word and deed,

for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 9,38-40

John said to Jesus, 'Master, we saw someone who is not one of us driving out devils in your name, and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said, 'You must not stop him; no one who works a miracle in my name could soon afterwards speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel narrates quite a beautiful and actual example of the pedagogy of Jesus. It shows us how he helped his disciples to perceive and to overcome the "yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod".

- Mark 9, 38-40: *A closed mentality: He was not one of ours*" Someone who did not belong to the community used the name of Jesus to drive out the devils. John, the disciple, sees this and forbids it: *We have stopped him because he was not one of us*. In the name of the community he forbids that the other one can do a good deed! He thinks that being a disciple, he can have the monopoly on Jesus and, because of this, he wants to forbid that others to use the name of Jesus to do good. This was the closed and ancient mentality of the "chosen People, a separated People!" Jesus responds: *"You must not stop him; no one who works a miracle in my name could soon afterwards speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us."* (Mk 9, 40). It would be very difficult to find a more ecumenical affirmation than this affirmation of Jesus. For Jesus, what is important is not if the person forms part of the community or not, but rather if the person does or not the good which the community should do.

- *A picture of Jesus, formator of his disciples*. Jesus, the Master, is the axis, the centre and the model of formation given to the disciples. By his attitudes he is an example of the Kingdom;

he embodies the love of God and reveals it (Mk 6, 31; Mt 10, 30; Lk 15, 11-32). Many small gestures show this witness of life with which Jesus marked his presence in the life of the disciples, preparing them for life and for the mission. This was his way of giving a human form to the experience which he himself had of God, the Father. The following is a picture of Jesus, the Formator of his disciples:

- he involves them in the mission (Mk 6, 7; Lk 9,1-2; 10, 1),
 - when they return he reviews with them all that they have lived (Lk 10, 17-20)
 - he corrects them when they fail and want to be the first ones (Mk 9, 33-35; 10, 14-15)
 - he waits for the opportune moment to correct them (Lk 9, 46-48; Mk 10, 14-15)
 - he helps them to discern (Mk 9, 18-19)
 - he challenges them when they are slow (Mk 4, 13; 8, 14-21)
 - he prepares them to face the conflict (Jn 16, 33; Mt 10, 17-25)
 - he orders them to observe reality (Mk 8, 27-29; Jn 4, 35; Mt 16, 1-3)
 - he reflects with them on questions of the moment (Lk 13, 1-5)
 - he confronts them with the needs of the people (Jn 6, 5)
 - he teaches them that the needs of the people are above the ritual prescriptions (Mt 12, 7-12)
 - he meets alone with them so as to be able to instruct them (Mk 4, 34; 7, 17; 9, 30-31; 10, 10; 13, 3)
 - he knows how to listen even if the dialogue is difficult (Jn 4, 7-42)
 - he helps them to accept themselves (Lk 22, 32)
 - he is demanding and asks them to leave everything out of love for him (Mk 10, 17-31)
 - he is severe concerning hypocrisy (Lk 11, 37-53)
 - he asks more questions than gives responses (Mk 8, 17-21)
 - he is firm and does not allow himself to be deviated from the right path (Mk 8, 33; Lk 9, 54)
 - he prepares them for conflict and persecution (Mt 10, 16-25).
- Formation was not, in the first place, the transmission of truths to be remembered, but the communication of the new experience of God and of the life which radiates from Jesus for the disciples. The community itself which was forming around Jesus was the expression of this new experience. Formation led persons to have a different way of looking, to have different attitudes. It gave them a new conscience concerning the mission and concerning

themselves. It helped them to place themselves at the side of the excluded. And soon afterwards, it produced “conversion” as a consequence of the acceptance of the Good News (Mk 1, 15).

4) Personal questions

- What does it mean for me, today, in the XXI century, the affirmation of Jesus who says: *“Anyone who is not against us is for us?”*
- How does the formation of Jesus take place in my life?

5) Concluding Prayer

Bless Yahweh, my soul,
from the depths of my being, his holy name;
bless Yahweh, my soul,
never forget all his acts of kindness. (Ps 103,1-2)

Lectio Divina: Thursday, February 27, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,
keep before us the wisdom and love
you have revealed in your Son.
Help us to be like him
in word and deed,
for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 9,41-50

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not lose his reward.

'But anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone hung round his neck.

And if your hand should be your downfall, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life crippled, than to have two hands and go to hell, into the fire that never be put out.

And if your foot should be your downfall, cut it off; it is better for you enter into life lame, than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.

And if your eye should be your downfall, tear it out; it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell where their worm will never die nor their fire be put out. For everyone will be salted with fire.

Salt is a good thing, but if salt has become insipid, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel narrates some advice from Jesus on the relationship of adults with the little ones and the excluded. At that time, many persons were excluded and marginalized. They could not participate. Many of them would lose their faith. The text on which we are going to meditate now contains strange affirmations which, if taken literally, cause perplexity in people.

- Mark 9, 41: *A glass of water will be rewarded.* A phrase from Jesus is inserted here: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not lose his reward. Two thoughts: 1) "Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink". Jesus is going to Jerusalem to give his life. A gesture of great donation! But he does not forget the small gesture of donation of life of each day: a cup of water, an act of acceptance, to give alms, so many gestures. Anyone who rejects and despises the brick will never be able to construct a house! 2) "...because you belong to Christ": Jesus identifies himself with us who want to belong to him; this means that for him we have great value.

- Mark 9, 42: *Who is a cause of scandal for these little ones.* *Scandal*, literally, it is a stone along the road, a stone in the shoe; it is that which leads a person away from the right path. *To scandalize the little ones* is to be the cause why the little ones go away from the right path and lose their faith in God. Any one who does this receives the following sentence: "*It would have been better to be thrown into the sea with a great millstone hung round his neck!*" Because Jesus identifies himself with the little ones (Mt 23, 40-45). Today, in the whole world, many little ones, many poor people are leaving the traditional churches. Every year, in Latin America, approximately three million persons are going to other churches. They cannot believe what we profess in our church! Why does this happen? Up to what point are we to be blamed for this? Do we also merit having a millstone round our neck?

- Mark 9, 43-48: *To cut off your hand and your foot and to tear out your eye.* Jesus orders the person to cut off the hand, the foot, to tear out the eye, in the case in which they are cause of scandal. And he says: "*It is better to enter into life or into the Kingdom with one foot (hand, eye) than to be thrown into hell with two feet, (hands, eyes)*". These phrases are not to be taken literally. They mean that the person has to be rooted in his/her choice of God and of the Gospel.

The expression “hell” where their worm will never die nor their fire be put out”, is an image to indicate the situation of a person who remains without God. “geenna” was the name of a valley near Jerusalem, where the trash of the city was thrown and where a fire was always burning to burn the trash. This place full of stench was used by the people to symbolize the situation of the person who did not participate in the Kingdom of God.

- Mark 9, 49-50: *Salt and Peace*. These two verses help us to understand the severe words on scandal. Jesus says: “Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another!” The community, in which the members live in *peace with one another*, is like a bit of salt which gives flavour to all the meal. To live in peace and fraternally in the community is the salt that gives flavour to the life of the people of the neighbourhood. It is a sign of the *Kingdom*, a revelation of the Good News of God. Are we salt? The salt which does not give flavour is good for nothing!

- ***Jesus accepts and defends the life of the little ones. Several times, Jesus insists that little ones should be accepted. “Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me” (Mk 9, 37). Anyone who gives a cup of water to one of these little ones will not lose his reward (Mt 10, 42). He asks not to despise little ones (Mt 18, 10). And at the final judgment the just will be received because they would have given something to eat “to one of these little ones” (Mt 25, 40). If Jesus insists so much on acceptance of the little ones, it is because there are many simple people considered less, who are not accepted! In fact, women and children were not taken into account, did not count (Mt 14 21; 15, 38), they were despised (Mt 18, 10) and reduced to silence (Mt 21, 15-16). Even the Apostles prevented the children from getting close to Jesus (Mt 19, 13-14). In the name of the Law of God, misinterpreted by the religious authority of the time, many good people were excluded. Instead of welcoming the excluded, the law was used to legitimize the exclusion. In the Gospels, the expression “little ones” (in Greek it is said *elachisto, mikroi or nepioi*), sometimes it indicates “the children”, other times it indicates the sections excluded by society. It is not easy to discern. Sometimes the “little ones” in the Gospel means “the children”. This because *the children* belonged to the category of the “little ones”, of the excluded. Besides, it is not always easy to discern between what comes from the time of Jesus and that which comes from the time of the communities for which the Gospels were written. And even if things were like this, what is clear is the context of exclusion which reigned at the time and which the first communities kept from Jesus: he places himself on the side of the little ones, of the excluded, and takes up their defence.***

4) Personal questions

- In our society and in our community, today who are the little one and the excluded? How are they accepted on our part?

- “A millstone round the neck”. Does my behaviour deserve a millstone or a cord round the neck? And the behaviour of our community, what does it deserve?

5) Concluding Prayer

The Lord forgives all your offences,

cures all your diseases,

he redeems your life from the abyss,

crowns you with faithful love and tenderness. (Ps 103,3-4)

Lectio Divina: Friday, February 28, 2014

Ordinary Time

1) Opening prayer

Father,

keep before us the wisdom and love

you have revealed in your Son.

Help us to be like him

in word and deed,

for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Mark 10,1-12

After leaving Capharnaum, Jesus came into the territory of Judaea and Transjordan. And again crowds gathered round him, and again he taught them, as his custom was. Some Pharisees approached him and asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' They were putting him to the test. He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' They replied, 'Moses allowed us to draw up a writ of dismissal in cases of divorce.'

Then Jesus said to them, 'It was because you were so hard hearted that he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation he made them male and female. This is why a man leaves his father and mother, 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.'

Back in the house the disciples questioned him again about this, and he said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery too.'

3) Reflection

- Yesterday's Gospel indicated the advice given by Jesus on the relationship between adults and children, between the great and the little ones in society. Today's Gospel advises us how the relationship between man and woman should be, between wife and husband.
- Mark 10, 1-2: *the question of the Pharisees: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" The question is a malicious one. It wants to put Jesus to the test: "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?"* This is a sign that Jesus had a different opinion, because if this was not so the Pharisees would not have questioned him on this matter. They do not ask if it is lawful for the wife to divorce the husband. They never thought of that. This is a clear sign of the strong dominion of men and the marginalization of women in the society of that time.
- Mark 10, 3-9: *The answer of Jesus: man cannot divorce his wife.* Instead of responding, Jesus asks: *"What did Moses command you?"* The Law permitted a man to draw up a writ of dismissal in cases of divorce. This permission reveals the reigning machismo of the time. Man could divorce his wife, but the woman did not have the same right. Jesus explains that Moses acted that way because they were so hard hearted, but that the intention of God was different when he created the human being. Jesus goes back to the project of the Creator and denies to man the right of divorce his wife. He takes away the privilege of man regarding his wife and asks for the maximum equality between the two.
- Mark 10, 10, 12: *Equality of man and woman.* At home the disciples asked Jesus something on this point. Jesus draws the conclusions and reaffirms the equality of rights and duties between man and woman. He proposes a new type of relationship between the two. He does not allow the marriage in which man can command his wife as he wishes, nor vice-versa. The Gospel of Matthew adds a comment of the disciples on this point. They say: *"If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry"* (Mt 19, 10). They prefer not to marry, than to marry without having the privilege of continuing to command the woman and without having the right of being able to ask for the divorce in the case that they no longer like the woman. Jesus goes to the very depth of the question and says that there are only three cases in which a person is permitted not to get married: *"Not everyone can understand it but only those to whom it is granted. In fact 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.* (Mt 19, 11-12). The three cases are: "(a) impotence, (b) castration, and (c) for the Kingdom. Not to get married only because man does not want to lose dominion over woman, this is not permitted by the *New Law of Love!* Matrimony as well as celibacy should be at the service of the Kingdom and not at the service of egoistic or selfish interests. Neither one of these can be a reason to maintain man's dominion on woman. Jesus changed the relationship man-woman, wife-husband.

4) Personal questions

- In my personal life, how do I live the relationship man-woman?
- In the life of my family and of my community, how is this relationship man-woman lived?

5) Concluding Prayer

Yahweh is tenderness and pity,

slow to anger and rich in faithful love;

his indignation does not last for ever,

nor his resentment remain for all time. (Ps 103,8-9)